



SEX, VIOLENCE, AND DEPLORABLE INSUBORDINATION: INCOMPREHENSIBLE CHARACTER OF ALIAS GRACE IN THE NOVEL BY MARGARET ATWOOD

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Abstract:

Alias Grace, a novel by Margaret Atwood demonstrates the most sensational murder case of the mid nineteen in which two person lost their life and the rest two were alleged in killing. Alias Grace was one of the accused with McDermott murdering her master Thomas Kinnear, and his housekeeper, Nancy Montgomery, in 1843. The novel fascinated me because of the complex nature of Grace and the multiple versions of the story she narrated in her defense. Alias Grace is a story about a character who has numerous secretes and placing them well as situation demands. Grace May be an outstanding story teller who is very good in the art of manipulative. Or, Grace may be regarded as an innocent young woman who has been falsely accused of murder. This paper will help reader to open some complex and hidden layers of this case.

Key Words: Dealing with Grace with her ambiguities in Alias Grace by Margaret Atwood, Investigating Historical Facts about Grace & Critical Study of Grace in the novel Alias Grace by Margaret Atwood

Introduction:

Margaret Atwood one of the most celebrated names among contemporary writes. She not only writes literary pieces but try to portrait real human life through her art. Atwood is mainly known for her writing on women issues and the problems which always make them a soft victim in patriarchal society. Some of them were as victimized as they leave the hope for life. It is so obvious to entitle her the milestone in feministic writing but sometimes we find her amazingly dealing with other subject also. Her novel Alias Grace (1996) depicts a story set up in middle nineteen century deals with the most sensational murder case. Though, she is not proclaimed to be into historical writing but the way she dealt with it; nobody can count her less than a historian.

In the novel Elias Grace follows Grace Marks, a countryside poor young Irish immigrant and a full time house servant in upper class Canada accompanied with a fellow servant James McDermott, were both alleged into a brutal killings of their employer Thomas Kinnear, and his housekeeper, Nancy Montgomery, in 1843. In the trail, both were found guilty in the murder of two person; James McDermott was hanged while Grace was sentenced to the life imprisonment.

Grace Marks is a very deceiving and intricate character. The reader never knows whether or not she is truly innocent or guilty. Throughout the novel, she kept denied being the part of the murder and says that was McDermott who forced her to be there. She also denied recalling anything happen to that place including murder. Grace knew the fact that there are no such strong evidences which prove her to be directly involved into the crime as McDermott proved to be. She had a feeling that if it had been proved so, she would have been given a death sentence as it was given to McDermott. McDermott himself confessed that the murder was not Grace's idea. But it does not prove her innocent and gives a clean chit to Grace's involvement into the crime. At some point of the novel, she looked so guiltless but at the other point we gets how manipulative she was. To understand her art of manipulation, we should go through her background. She was a

manipulative woman always tries to hide things and later on she had a friend that was foul-mouthed and not afraid to speak her mind. It leaves a question into the minds of reader whether she is innocent or equally guilty into the crime.

I believe, Grace might not be innocent because of the fact that she was cruel by nature. We may also address her as the victim of the circumstances. She was one of the children of a poor, drunken and an abusive father and a constant pregnant mother who died on a voyage. Her atrocious upbringing trained her in many ways and taught many lesson of cruelty. Grace was the older one so she was forced to take care of the younger ones. At the very tender age of twelve, she was sent to a wealthy family as a full time servant in Toronto where she had to hide her age and she did it so well. Her initial discourses held with Mary Whitney made her more sharp and cleaver. She was trained in the most vicious ways where she thought to kill her own father, as she confessed. Her first friend at the new place Mary Whitney helped her in many ways.

In the novel *Alias Grace*, Atwood restates the story of Grace Marks, a real nineteenth-century Canadian woman who was accused of and spent thirty years in jail for the murder of two people. Atwood began to write this novel when she really started thinking deep about the character. Was Grace Marks the cunning female demon many considered her to be--or was she simply a terrorized victim? She began researching, not only the murder case but also life in Victorian times. Every major element in the book was suggested by something in the writing about Grace and her times, however suspect such writing might be; in gaps left unfilled, but she was free to invent. Since there were a lot of gaps, there is a lot of invention. Grace was a very witty lady; she knew what will happen if she tells the whole story to Dr. Jordan so she did not tell the full story. "Just because he [Dr. Simon Jordan] pesters me to know everything, is no reason for me to tell him." (*Alias Grace*).

As it was the most sensationalized story of mid- nineties so Atwood showed a great interest in this. Susanna Moodie also wrote about this story in *Life in the Clearing*. Moodie was very much interested into prison life and she proudly stated that executions are exceptional in Canada and that there are men and women in the prisons who could not possibly have escaped the gallows in England. She recounts the story of Grace which was narrated by her lawyer, who heard it from James McDermott. Because of the lawyer's, Grace was treated with mercy and sentenced life imprisonment where she wished she too died. She started repenting for deliberately or non deliberately helping a person who murdered two innocent people. Moodie was so much interested into the story of Grace and this excitement leads her to meet her in the asylum in Toronto.

We find another turning point in the story when Grace was found to have had an illicit child and was found pregnant at the time of the murder. One of the statements where McDermott stated that Grace was the girl who enticed me to murder both with a sexual favor. He kept on saying this thing again and again. On the other hand Grace was totally ambiguous in her all statements. One of her statements she shifts the guilt to McDermott and says that he threatens me to be there. She also said that he used his manly power to overcome me and forced me to involve into the crime. There are several puzzles in the story and some of them are almost impossible to solve. Because of the complexity of the case, this has become the one of the most notorious cases of Canada in mid-nineteenth century.

Alias Grace is a book full of the happenings. It is a book which always draws a line between truth and deception, master and servant. The story itself moves around many forms of the tenses. The story starts in a flashback where a twelve year old girl crossing from Ireland to Canada to make her career as a full time servant. The very Victorian

culture is so much visible in this novel in the attitude of rich people towards poor; supremacy of an aristocracy class etc. Social division may be another angle to deal with this case. Point is to be noticed that Grace was in that tender age which may be liked by her master but if her master starts liking her Nancy (Nancy and her Master having an affair) would have to abandon her multiple position on and off record. This may be the reason why Nancy would have started hating her and probably Grace would have come to know about it so she made a plan not to happen this in this way. Now as she is aware of what is going to be happen, she needed a partner and McDermott was the right person for the partnership and the giving little physical favor would made that done like that. Grace and stable hand James McDermott complete a convoluted love quadrangle in the household that results in two dead and two convicted of murder in a sensational trial.

Actually the violence in the novel is muted and the events and incidents recounted or remembered later when Grace narrated the whole story in different versions to Dr. Simon Jordan who is interested in human mind and hoping to open a modern mental hospital and to raise the money with his report to Grace Mark. Dr. Simon tried to solve the mystery of the case but really not able to do it so. Grace was never stable on one part; she kept changing her role and association in both murders. Another doctor named Dr. Jerome DuPont hypnotizes Grace –a trained “Neuro-hynotist” whom she had previously known as Jeremiah the peddler- Grace’s body and personality has change. She says her name is Mary Whitney and that it was she who enticed McDermott and helped to murder Nancy. Many people watched the hypnotic session and talk to the transformed Grace Mark. Jordan asks if he helped to strangle Nancy and the voice answers, “it was my kerchief that strangled her... Such a pretty pattern it had on it” others join the questioning: “you killed her,” breathes Lydia.... ‘oh Grace,’morn the governor’s wife. ‘I thought better of you! All these years you have deceived us!’ the voice is gleeful. ‘Stop talking rubbish,’ (Alias Grace) she says. ‘You have deceived yourself! I am not grace! Grace knew nothing about it!’ the group is so shocked that efforts to get grace pardoned are halted; no lawyer or public officials would credit what they had seen.”(Alias Grace).

Alias Grace is a novel which takes us around 167 years back into Canadian countryside to find out the secret of the most notorious murder case of the Victorian time. The novel doesn’t investigate the case related documents and the facts but the very life of the contemporary time. Through the very complex version of Grace, we really not able to find out an appropriate way of leading to the judgments. It’s really very much dubious at the part of Grace because of the fact she was never stick to one point. Every major element in the book was suggested about Grace and her times, however suspect such writing might be; in gaps left unfilled, she was free to invent. Since there were a lot of gaps, there is a lot of invention.

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