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HAUNTED BY ABJECTION: THE INTERPLAY OF POWER AND HORROR IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *ALIAS GRACE*

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Abstract

This paper is structured around two pivotal inquiries: First, what are the diverse manifestations of the abject within Alias Grace that gradually foster Grace Marks' murderous impulses, leading to her transformation into an abject figure? Second, how does the treatment process for this abject figure influence Dr. Jordan, her psychotherapist, reshape the third space created by Grace into an abject realm for him as well? Drawing on Julia Kristeva's framework, the paper aims to elucidate the fragmented identity of Grace Marks, situating her within the realm of the abject and exploring the "third space" she constructs for herself. In Kristeva's conception, abjection evokes horror, disgust, and fear, illuminating the dual experience of terror and the violent, reactive impulses that arise within the human psyche. This paper traces Grace's evolution from a victim of abject horror to an active agent of it, examining her transformation into an abject being who withdraws into a self-constructed psychological third space—one that oscillates between estrangement and a semblance of solace. The paper seeks to illuminate the profound power of horror in destabilizing human subjectivity and precipitating a descent into abjection, whereby individuals like Grace are both consumed by and transfigured into the abject. Through this lens, Alias Grace is examined as a narrative that intricately weaves the psychological and existential dimensions of abjection, unraveling human vulnerabilities and blurring the boundaries between victim and perpetrator.

Keywords: abjection, abject horror, metamorphosis, third space.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper undertakes a nuanced analysis of Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996) through the theoretical lens of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, as outlined in *Powers of Horror* (1980). Kristeva's notion of the abject—what provokes horror, disgust, and fear within the human psyche—enables both the emergence of horror and the violent reactions it engenders. In this framework, abjection organically produces both victim and perpetrator, positioning them as interchangeable under specific conditions. This paper seeks to complement the complex depiction of Grace Marks' fractured psyche, focusing on her transition from being a victim of abject horror to becoming its agent, ultimately transforming into an abject being herself. Central to this transformation is Grace's retreat into a self-constructed "third space," a psychological refuge where she appears to find solace. Through an in-depth character analysis, the research explores the presence of various forms of abjection in the novel, which progressively stimulate Grace's latent murderous rage. Additionally, this investigation probes the pervasive power of horror and its ability to overpower human vulnerabilities, leading individuals, such as Grace, to descend into a state of abjection where they ultimately embody the very horrors they once feared. By examining Grace's character, this paper aims to uncover how abjection operates as both a psychological and existential force, blurring the boundaries between victimhood and monstrosity, and shaping the trajectory of human descent into the abject.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva associates the abject with defilement, impurity, and disgust, positioning it as a lingering grey area that "cannot be assimilated" (1) with either subject or object. The abject holds only one object-like quality: that it is not a subject (1). Kristeva asserts that abjection drives the subject towards a volatile psychological state, where the subject becomes more inclined to adopt violent actions and transgress societal laws (Kristeva 85). Given that this research frequently employs the terms "abject" and "abjection," it is crucial to differentiate between the two. As Rina Arya explains in *Abjection and Representation* (2014), "abject" refers to an operation or process, while "abjection" denotes a condition or state (3).

The abject, as theorized within psychoanalytic and philosophical discourse, simultaneously imperils and preserves the subject's sense of self. It threatens by dissolving the borders that demarcate identity, yet paradoxically serves as a safeguard, as it can be cast out—displaced through ritual, language, or violence. Abjection thus becomes not merely a condition but a response: a state of psychic erosion in which the subject, retreating from coherence, inhabits a liminal "third space"—a precarious zone wherein identity is reconstructed to approximate stability, security, and control. These deeply human aspirations, however, are achieved only through direct confrontation with the abject, often by means of transgressive or violent acts that violate the moral, social, and ethical frameworks within which the subject is ostensibly contained.

Georges Bataille, whose meditations on transgression precede and inform Julia Kristeva's seminal elaborations on abjection, posits that transgression emerges as an affective reaction to violence. "Human violence," he writes, "is the result not of a cold calculation but of emotional states—anger, fear, or desire" (Bataille 64). Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, the principal text under examination, dramatizes this nexus between emotional tumult and human subjugation, portraying how violence—psychological, structural, and embodied—disfigures identity and distorts agency. In Grace Marks, the novel's enigmatic protagonist and accused murderess, we encounter a subject irreparably shaped by horror and coercion. Her psychological degradation, induced by sustained

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exposure to violence, compels her to transgress the very codes meant to contain her. This paper investigates Grace's psychological metamorphosis, which unfolds through an ongoing confrontation with abject forces—traumas that fracture her cognitive coherence and unsettle her sense of self.

The abject, in Kristeva's formulation, marks a disruption of the symbolic order, where the subject is confronted with the collapse of meaning and the failure of language to organize experience. For Kristeva, crime is the apotheosis of abjection, as it tears the veil of legal and moral structures and exposes "the fragility of the law" (Kristeva 4). Grace, denied justice and stripped of subjecthood, commits murder—not as a calculated act of rebellion, but as a desperate assertion of control. In doing so, she ruptures conventional gender norms and desecrates the sanctity of social order, inscribing herself into a new subjectivity forged in the crucible of abjection.

Kristeva, operating at the intersection of psychoanalysis and linguistics, contends that such borderline states mark the collapse of language's communicative function. In her essay "Within the Microcosm: The Talking Cure," she describes borderline discourse as bearing the texture of "something alogical, unstitched, and chaotic" (Kristeva 42). Grace's speech mirrors this disruption. Her traumatic experiences fragment her cognition, rendering her unable to synthesize thought into coherent verbal expression. Language, once a vessel for meaning, becomes inert, hollow—an echo of her psychological disintegration. As Kristeva observes, abjection is the condition in which "meaning collapses" (2), and it is in this state that Grace resides, her discourse unraveling alongside the very structures—legal, moral, and linguistic—that once upheld her subjectivity.

Through Grace Marks, Atwood crafts a character whose descent into abjection is both personal and political—a descent marked by the failure of language, the erosion of law, and the corrosive force of violence. Her story is not simply one of madness or criminality, but of a subject negotiating the ruins of coherence, forging identity in a space where the symbolic order no longer applies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Crime fiction and psychological thrillers have long fascinated readers by laying bare the fragility and vulnerability of the human mind, often unraveling under the weight of its fears and insecurities. As Susan Walker observes in *"Atwood at Work Again,"* "Margaret Atwood is no mere writer... The spinoffs from the product of her imagination and intellect could fill a theme park" (2001). Atwood's *Alias Grace* exemplifies this intellectual artistry, drawing inspiration from Susanna Moodie's *Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush* (1853) to reimagine the story of a socially marginalized and mentally fragmented murderess. Through this revival, Atwood seamlessly blends historical fact with fiction, crafting a narrative that transcends the conventions of a mere crime or psychological thriller. Such a categorization would risk oversimplifying the novel's depth. Rather, *Alias Grace* serves as a profound critique of the social hypocrisies and entrenched systems of gender, class, and race that dominated 18th- and 19th-century Canada. These structures, Atwood suggests, continue to resonate today and necessitate ongoing critical engagement.

The second wave of feminism prioritized the reclamation of women's voices, particularly those marginalized or suppressed by dominant patriarchal narratives. Central to this feminist endeavor was the belief that women must be represented by women, allowing for nuanced, self-authored depictions of female experience. Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* is a direct response to this imperative. In a 1998 interview, Atwood critiques Susanna Moodie's depiction of Grace Marks, observing that Moodie renders her "the

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driving engine of the affair – a scowling, sullen teenage temptress" (1512). Although Atwood retains aspects of this portrayal, she reframes them by situating Grace within a richly contextualized socio-historical landscape that illuminates the forces shaping her subjectivity. As Fiona Tolan argues in "*Alias Grace: Narrating the Self*," the novel represents a feminist intervention aimed at "recover[ing] the lost histories of women and provid[ing] them with the voice they were denied in the past" (222). Atwood's narrative functions as a counter-discourse, privileging Grace's perspective over that of her male co-accused, McDermott, whose accusations had previously dominated the historical record.

In complicating conventional portrayals of female solidarity, *Alias Grace* critiques not only patriarchal oppression but also the internal hierarchies that exist within womanhood itself. Atwood departs from her earlier works by including women from various social strata—most notably Mary Whitney, Nancy Montgomery, and Grace Marks—who, while occupying similar class positions, exhibit divergent ideological orientations. Mary Whitney emerges as a radical figure, urging Grace to resist patriarchal and classist ideologies, whereas Nancy, despite her shared class background, exercises authority in ways that reinforce Grace's subjugation. Reingard M. Nischik, in *Engendering Genre: The Works of Margaret Atwood*, observes that Atwood's female protagonists typically reject male-defined narratives to assert autonomous identities (2009). Though Mary and Nancy do not survive to complete this arc, their deaths significantly influence Grace's evolving consciousness. Nischik also highlights the objectifying power of language, noting how men such as McDermott and Kinnear label both Grace and Nancy with terms like "whore" and "slut," thereby reducing them to sexualized stereotypes. This linguistic violence extends to interactions among women: Nancy insults Grace despite their shared status, and Grace, while outwardly deferential, privately denigrates Nancy in her conversations with Dr. Simon Jordan. Atwood thus exposes the pervasive internalization of patriarchal discourse among women, revealing how structures of gender, class, and respectability intersect to produce a complex web of complicity and resistance.

Madeleine Davies in her article, "Margaret Atwood's Female Bodies", argues that in Atwood's work, "female bodies become battlefields where anxieties relating to wider power structures are written onto female flesh" (58). Atwood's novels often critique the power dynamics within gender relations, and in *Alias Grace*, this is particularly evident. The animosity between Grace and Nancy is driven by their desire for Mr. Kinnear's approval, highlighting women's struggle for power over each other. Similarly, Atwood also critiques female exploitation, especially the maid-of-all-work's oppression by bourgeois men. Sandra Stanley in "The Eroticism of Class and the Enigma of Margaret Atwood's 'Alias Grace'" emphasizes the collective and individual journeys of Mary Whitney, Nancy Montgomery, and Grace, noting how Mary and Nancy sought social mobility by becoming "dirty girls" for their masters, ultimately leading to their deaths (Stanley 383). In contrast, Grace, after witnessing death and enduring abuse, becomes aware of her "discursive and symbolic position" (Stanley 378). She crafts a new identity, transcending her social class. Stanley's analysis explores Grace's role as a lower-class object of desire, yet it overlooks the deeper psychological development of her character and the impact she has on Dr. Simon Jordan, who fantasizes about her.

Abuse, whether physical or psychological, leaves lasting traumatic effects, and Grace had several such encounters throughout her life—her abusive father, her mother's death, and sexual and social exploitation. In the article, "Beyond the Unspeakable" Kristen Bon analyzes Grace's narration and psychological state through the lens of female trauma,

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interpreting *Alias Grace* as a metatheoretical study on trauma's impact. Bon attributes Grace's unreliable narration to amnesia caused by the traumatic experience of murdering Kinnear and Montgomery. She writes, "Her (Grace's) unstable identity highlights how trauma survivors often struggle with balancing multiple extremes and find themselves" (Bon 22). However, Bon's analysis does not acknowledge Grace's potential manipulation as a character. Additionally, Bon explores the recurring theme of quilt-making in *Alias Grace*, suggesting that "female trauma is perhaps most effectively relayed in the form of patchwork quilt" (Bon 74). She views Grace, Mary Whitney, and Nancy Montgomery as sharing a collective trauma, symbolized by the quilt, uniting their experiences of abuse. This theme of quilt-making has been widely discussed by scholars, each offering unique interpretations.

Economic dependence and reproductive responsibilities significantly hinder women's social growth, and the domestic duties of maid-of-all-work often lead to sexual and social exploitation. In *Alias Grace*, Grace is frequently depicted knitting or quilting during her sessions with Dr. Jordan. Although she learned to sew as a child, she was never compensated for her work and did not own a quilt of her own, which holds cultural significance. This theme of quilt-making caught Sharon Wilson's attention in her article, "Quilting as Narrative Art: Metafictional Construction in Alias Grace," where she explores Atwood's writing techniques through a feminist lens. Echoing Judith Butler, Wilson argues that gender is a social construct, as is feminist metafiction. She states, "Alias Grace uses postmodern techniques such as self-reflexiveness and intertextuality to foreground the issues of class, sexual politics, and other political issues, including those of the postcolonial condition" (Wilson 80).

Atwood's narrative technique renders Grace's narration both as that of a victim and a criminal, contributing to her portrayal as an unreliable narrator, a point emphasized by Joan Peters. Atwood's patchwork approach—integrating poetry, letters, official documents, and fiction—further complicates Grace's persona, suggesting unreliability. Peters Douglas analyzes in "Feminist Narratology Revisited: Dialogizing Gendered Rhetorics in Alias Grace" that Grace through feminist narratology and Bakhtin's dialogism, concluding that *Alias Grace* is "a woman-constructed story within a woman-constructed book," which can be classified as "narratologically a kind of metafictional metafiction" (Peters 318).While Atwood seeks to voice a marginalized murderess and leans toward portraying Grace's innocence and victimization, this research focuses on the intricate development of Grace Marks as she evolves from a victim of horrific abuse to a criminal, ultimately becoming an abject figure.

POWER DYNAMICS OF HORROR: THE METAMORPHOSIS OF GRACE MARKS INTO AN ABJECT BEING

In *Alias Grace*, Margaret Atwood uses Grace Marks's childhood as a foundational backdrop to explore her psychological trauma, which can be understood through Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. Grace's early years were marked by a turbulent family dynamic, notably the unhappy marriage between her parents. Grace suggests that her problems began with her very birth: "Perhaps mine (problems) began when I was born" (Atwood 118). This statement underscores the emotional neglect and insecurity that defined her upbringing. Grace's mother, having defied familial expectations to marry an Englishman, found herself trapped in a life of financial instability, a situation that compounded the emotional deprivation she experienced. Grace observes, "she'd begun life under Aunt Pauline's thumb and continued the same way, only my father's thumb was added to it"

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(Atwood 120). This duality of oppression is indicative of the abject horror that shaped Grace's early identity, as both her parents' failures to provide a secure, nurturing environment forced her to contend with the trauma of neglect and uncertainty.

Kristeva's theory of abjection revolves around the process through which a child transitions from the pre-mirror stage to the symbolic realm, marked by a growing awareness of the distinction between 'self' and 'other.' This recognition is crucial for the child's psychological development, relying heavily on maternal support. Kristeva asserts that if the mother struggles with her own identity, she cannot offer the nurturing required for the child's growth: "the problem she has with the phallus that her father or her husband stands for... is not such as to help the future subject leave the natural mansion" (Kristeva 13). Grace's mother, devoid of a strong familial bond and enduring emotional and financial hardship, was unable to provide the maternal security that would have been necessary for Grace's psychological development. Grace's father, equally inept in creating a stable environment, further exacerbated her sense of abjection. Kristeva explains that in such circumstances, the child may experience a repulsion toward the self: "otherwise the subject shall be, 'repelling, rejecting, repelling itself, rejecting itself. Ab-jecting'" (Kristeva 13). In Grace's case, the failure of both parents to create a safe, supportive space for her development contributed to her fractured identity.

Grace's early role within her family was not that of a child to be nurtured, but rather one forced into caretaking responsibilities. She reflects, "I wanted her to be stronger, so I would not have to be so strong myself" (Atwood 120), a statement that illustrates the emotional burden placed upon her at a young age. This premature maturity nurtured a latent anger, born of the injustices and demands imposed on her. Grace's reflection on being "another mouth to feed" (Atwood 123) is one of the earliest manifestations of her resentment, which at times took darker forms. In a brief but chilling moment, she contemplates harming her siblings, a thought she attributes to external influences: "but it was only a thought, put into my head by the Devil, no doubt. Or more likely by my father" (Atwood 124). Here, Grace's tendency to deflect responsibility reflects the overwhelming power her father holds over her psyche, as well as her attempt to preserve her own fragile sense of self in a hostile environment. Her relationship with her mother was similarly strained, as she internalized her mother's helplessness, thus accepting the maternal role but never receiving the nurturing she needed.

Kristeva's notion of abjection also highlights the role of the mother in the formation of the self, suggesting that when a mother fails to provide a secure foundation, the child's journey toward identity is obstructed. This is evident in Grace's emotional paralysis following her mother's death. As Grace observes, "I did not cry. I felt as if it was me and not my mother that had died" (Atwood 139). Her inability to grieve can be understood as an extension of her struggle to confront the loss of both her mother and her own fragmented sense of self. Grace's choice to use "the second-best sheet" for her mother's burial, a decision that seems absurd and callous, reflects the deep emotional conflict and turmoil she experiences (Atwood 139). Moreover, her dislocation from traditional mourning practices—choosing water over earth for her mother's burial—further alienates her from the familiar rituals that might have facilitated the grieving process. This disruption intensifies Grace's abject horror and manifests in hallucinations of her mother's spirit: "I thought it was my mother's spirit... angry at me because of the second-best sheet" (Atwood 141), signaling her inability to process her grief and the unresolved trauma that continues to haunt her.

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As Grace navigates the oppressive environment of her family, her psychological turmoil deepens, particularly as she faces the pressure to support the household following her father's insistence that she find work. Grace becomes increasingly resentful of her father, remarking, "the older I became, the less I was able to please him" (Atwood 149). Kristeva notes that in the absence of maternal love, the paternal figure may offer solace, but for Grace, her father's presence is destabilizing. She describes him as "a ghost that existed and resided in her home" (Kristeva 6), a symbol of the emotional absence that suffuses her existence. The deteriorating relationship culminates in moments of violent fantasy, where Grace contemplates the possibility of killing her father: "...it could smash his skull open, and kill him dead" (Atwood 149). These dark thoughts represent the abject internalization of her trauma, manifesting as violent imaginings that encapsulate her rage and feelings of helplessness. Her experience with prostitution—considering it as a last resort for survival—further highlights her desperation and growing awareness of her exploitation. Grace's journey, however, takes a pivotal turn when she encounters Mary, a character who serves as both a foil and catalyst for her self-realization. Mary, who rebels against societal conventions, inspires Grace to begin challenging the oppressive structures of her life. Mary's confrontation with Grace's father over her wages signals a shift in Grace's perception of her own agency: "Mary told him he wasn't to come any more" (Atwood 181). This moment, though small, marks the beginning of Grace's resistance to the patriarchal forces that have long governed her life, offering a glimpse of empowerment amidst the suffocating oppression. Through Grace's evolving understanding of her traumatic past, Atwood powerfully demonstrates that even in the face of profound abjection, resilience and self-assertion are possible.

In *Alias Grace*, Margaret Atwood explores the harsh realities of abortion in the eighteenth century through the tragic fate of Mary Whitney, whose desperate attempt to terminate her pregnancy results in her death. Mary seeks help from a doctor "that whores went to" (Atwood 202), a choice marked by societal stigma and the absence of legal and medical support for women in her situation. This botched procedure leaves Mary dead in her bed, her eyes "wide open and staring" (Atwood 204). Grace, who discovers her lifeless body, is deeply impacted by the trauma of witnessing death and is haunted by the psychological repercussions of Mary's fate. This tragic event serves as a pivotal moment in Grace's life, reflecting the broader themes of loss and the vulnerability of women in a patriarchal society that fails to protect them.

Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection provides a critical lens for understanding Grace's psychological response to Mary's death. Kristeva argues that abjection confronts individuals at their most vulnerable, forcing them to confront their deepest fears and insecurities: "The abject confronts us... within our personal archaeology" (Kristeva 13). Grace's life, already steeped in trauma, is further disturbed by the privileges enjoyed by Nancy Montgomery, which disrupt her fragile sense of self and order. This growing resentment culminates in Grace perceiving murder as a means of reclaiming agency, with Kristeva asserting that individuals facing abjection may engage in extreme actions to create a "false sense of assimilation" (Kristeva 10). When Grace murders Nancy, she internalizes the abject horrors she has long faced, attempting to assert control over her environment by responding violently to perceived threats.

Kristeva's analysis of the phobic individual illuminates Grace's desire to distinguish herself from the abject. She notes, "The phobic has no other object than the abject" (Kristeva 6). For Grace, exclusion from both a stable family and society fuels her desire for a

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better life. Nancy's relationship with Mr. Kinnear represents a direct challenge to Grace's aspirations, which drives her to violent action. Through the murder, Grace temporarily escapes the oppressive gender roles and limitations that define her existence. In this moment, the abject horror surrounding her transforms into an internalized identity, enabling her to momentarily assert control over her circumstances. The act of murder provides Grace with a distorted sense of freedom, as she attempts to reclaim agency in a world that has systematically denied her autonomy.

The psychological toll of her traumatic past manifests in Grace's complex relationship with Dr. Simon Jordan, who becomes another figure representing her abject existence. Her fear of doctors is rooted in her past experiences, having lost both her mother and Mary to medical failures. This fear triggers what Kristeva describes as a "narcissistic crisis" (Kristeva 14), highlighting Grace's fragmented self-perception. Jordan's initial role as a therapist is complicated by his growing obsession with Grace, as he finds himself captivated by the abject nature of her existence. His respectful approach—knocking before entering and attempting to create a safe environment—gradually shifts into an entanglement of their psychologies. Atwood portrays Grace as a "very hard nut to crack" (Atwood 61), a challenge that forces Jordan to confront his own psychological distress as he becomes more deeply immersed in her complex mental state.

As Jordan becomes more captivated by Grace's narrative, he ceases to take notes, overwhelmed by the emotional pull of her story. His fascination with her and the abject nature of her life leads him to describe her as "something fox-like and alert" (Atwood 103), evoking a visceral reaction. Despite warnings from other psychologists about Grace's potential deceit—"Grace Marks was a sham" (Atwood 81)—Jordan persists in his efforts to uncover the truth behind her trauma. His growing emotional entanglement with Grace becomes evident as he reflects, "to look at her is to believe that suffering does indeed purify" (Atwood 103), suggesting that her suffering, much like his own, has a purifying effect on both of them. This shared experience of abjection binds them together, though it also drives Jordan to a state of psychological collapse.

Grace, on the other hand, continues to manipulate her narrative, consciously shaping her story to avoid confronting her abject memories. When recounting the murder, she claims to recall little beyond a "loud noise" (Atwood 361, 368), demonstrating the ways in which abject memories are inaccessible even to the abject subject herself. Kristeva defines the abject as "a burden both repellant and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate" (Kristeva 6). Grace's avoidance of her traumatic memories, particularly the details surrounding Nancy's bloodied and beheaded body, prevents Jordan from uncovering the full truth. This manipulation of her narrative obscures his therapeutic efforts and demonstrates the profound psychological barriers she faces in processing her past.

The toll of Grace's stories on Jordan's mental health becomes increasingly apparent as he becomes more immersed in her traumatic narrative. Kristeva describes the abject as "a weight of meaninglessness" (Kristeva 2), and Jordan finds himself burdened by the gruesome realities of Grace's life. As his isolation deepens—evidenced by diminishing correspondence with friends and family—he becomes more detached, masking his distress with comments such as, "Well, Grace… I can see you are tired" (Atwood 372). This reflects his own exhaustion from absorbing the emotional weight of her confessions. His sense of detachment grows as he dreams of his past as a medical student, where he once dissected

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cadavers. The grotesque imagery of death, intertwined with his obsession with Grace, blurs the lines between life and death, further destabilizing his mental state.

Ultimately, Grace's manipulation of her own narrative and Jordan's emotional collapse illustrate the deep entanglement of their psychologies. Grace's ongoing connection with Jordan, despite her resistance to uncovering the full truth of her actions, becomes a mechanism for her continued survival. In the final stages of *Alias Grace*, Jordan's psychological unraveling becomes apparent when he decides to consult Grace's lawyer, Mr. MacKenzie, in an attempt to understand her better. Yet, his sense of detachment from reality intensifies, and he longs to escape his entanglement with Grace's story: "...and would have no responsibilities. No ties, no connections. He would be able to lose himself completely" (Atwood 426). This desire for anonymity reflects his deteriorating mental state, a consequence of his immersion in the abject world of Grace Marks. The novel concludes with Jordan's retreat from his role as a therapist, signaling his transformation into a subject of study for others, much like Grace herself.

CONCLUSION

Grace Marks serves as a powerful embodiment of a societal framework that perpetuates cycles of trauma, marginalization, and subjugation. In *Alias Grace*, Atwood deftly weaves a narrative that transcends the genre of crime fiction, positioning Grace not merely as a murderer but as a victim of systemic forces—gendered, class-based, and psychological—that mold her existence. From a young age, Grace's psyche was shaped by emotional deprivation and social inequities, compounded by the death of her mother, which thrust her into the role of caregiver for her siblings. The emotional neglect she experienced, coupled with the oppressive realities of class discrimination, created an environment ripe for the development of deep psychological scars. The cumulative impact of these abject experiences—loss, familial dysfunction, and social marginalization—created an internalized rage and a fixation on death, which, over time, festered into an overwhelming desire for liberation.

The violent acts that Grace commits can be interpreted as a desperate attempt to annihilate the patriarchal structures that oppress her—symbolized by the men who dominate her life. In her mind, murder becomes a form of emancipation, a means of escaping the suffocating grip of male authority and societal expectations. However, the tragic irony of Grace's actions lies in the outcome: rather than achieving liberation, she becomes a living embodiment of the abject. In seeking to extricate herself from the horrors that defined her existence, she inadvertently internalizes them, becoming indistinguishable from the very forces she sought to escape. Atwood's portrayal of Grace as both victim and perpetrator underscores the complexity of trauma and its capacity to distort the individual's sense of self. The act of murder, while morally indefensible, serves as a poignant commentary on the enduring effects of societal oppression and the need for urgent reflection and reform—a reflection that, within the novel's historical context, remains largely absent.

Dr. Simon Jordan's attempt to uncover Grace's truth further illuminates the insidious nature of the abject. As he immerses himself in the traumatic layers of Grace's psyche, he becomes entangled in the same forces that ensnared her, losing his bearings in the face of her psychological disarray. Grace's journey through her own "third space" of trauma and confusion reflects a broader commentary on the disorienting effects of prolonged exposure to abjection. In a powerful symbolic gesture, Grace fashions a piece of clothing from the gowns of Nancy Montgomery, Mary Whitney, and herself—three women

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whose fates are irrevocably bound by shared suffering and transgression. This act of weaving together their lives signifies not an escape from trauma, but an attempt to acknowledge and honor the bonds forged in the crucible of suffering. Atwood suggests that while the cycle of abjection may not be severed, it can be re-narrated, transforming shared pain into a form of survival and solidarity. Ultimately, *Alias Grace* stands as a meditation on the potent force of horror, which, when allowed to fester unchecked, consumes the vulnerable. Through Grace's journey, Atwood underscores that while horror can seem omnipotent, it is our responses to it—our capacity for introspection and transformation—that determine its power over us.

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