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‘There’s a Special Kind of Monster that is a Woman’: Locating Female Subjectivity in the Narrative of the Monstrous Murderess in Netflix’s *Alias Grace*

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In a 2018 interview with the *Irish Independent*, Amanda Knox, the infamous and wrongfully convicted killer in the 2007 murder of Meredith Kercher, commented on her gendered vilification by the public, “All wrongfully convicted people are portrayed as monsters but there’s a special kind of monster that is a woman.” This tendency to depict criminal women as monsters invoking the abject (Kristeva) in public discourse is not a new phenomenon but is, as shall be seen in the course of this paper, reiterated throughout the history of womanhood.

Without taking their innocence or guilt into consideration, it is important to note that the portrayal of these criminal women, according to Belinda Morrissey in *When Women Kill*, influence the “cultural conceptions of the feminine and female agency.” When women are accused and even convicted of “inhuman acts,” representations of these cases by hegemonic discourses of the media and law have a “vital role in maintaining notions of feminine evil” pertinent to the whole of womankind (7). In the examination of the representation of such transgressive women, it is evident that Victorian notions of violence, sexuality, and criminality persist even today.

The Victorian ideologies[1] regarding gender and violence are polarizing when women are positioned either as passive victims or villainous perpetrators. In other words, contemporary discourses tend to construct their narratives of (violent) women around nineteenth-century conceptions of the angel/whore dichotomy, presenting women

[1]The Victorian notions that typify (criminal) women as either victims or villains can be found in detail in Yvonne Jewkes’ criminological study *Media and Crime* (2004). Jewkes examines how modern media portrayals of criminal women are “embedded” in a Victorian framework which promotes “appropriate womanhood.” She identifies eight tropes built around such Victorian ideas used by the media in their narratives of offending women (107–38).

as either non-agents or 'bad' and 'mad' women[2]. This paper intends to trace the ways in which the problematic conceptions of gender, as outlined above, inform the Netflix television series *Alias Grace* (2017), an adaptation of Margaret Atwood's partly fictional 1996 novel of the same name. Set in 1843 Canada, the series probes into the real-life account of "celebrated murderess" and servant Grace Marks who was convicted, at the age of sixteen, for the murders of her employer, Thomas Kinnear, and his housekeeper, Nancy Montgomery.

The paper will also make brief references to the case of Amanda Knox as documented in the 2016 Netflix documentary *Amanda Knox.* Knox, a 20-year-old American college student in Italy, was wrongfully convicted of brutally murdering her roommate, Meredith Kercher, in 2007 in an alleged "drug-fuelled sex game" gone wrong. Established as an equally sensational and polarizing case, Knox's uninhibited sexuality was treated as irrefutable proof of her criminality by the courtroom and the media who whipped up a frenzy of moral panic across conservative Italy. The paper attempts to use Knox's case as a supplement to the case of Grace Marks, which is the subject of this paper, in order to foreground how nineteenth-century conceptions of femininity and sexuality continue to inform contemporary representations of (criminal) women like Amanda Knox.

At the time, Grace's crime generated polarizing views among journalists, lawyers and the public who debated whether she was a femme fatale or an unwilling victim coerced by her accomplice and fellow servant, James McDermott. These polarizing views and projections not only "...reflected the contemporary ambiguity about the nature of women" (Atwood 463) but also exposed how Grace's character was heavily constructed by patriarchal discourses to suit narratives supporting either her innocence or guilt. Morrissey notes that the "first activity" undertaken by legal and media discourses while approaching cases of women convicted for murder is to "construct a subjectivity for the protagonist" which is established through the usage of narratives (3).

However, discourses such as the ones originating from the media, law, and medicine produce "...stock stories[3] of subjectivity which act as constitutive models for individual narratives of subjectivity." In the gendered construction of stock stories, Morrissey contends that

[2]Morrissey makes note of the media's tendency to cast women convicted of murder as being inherently wicked and evil i.e. 'bad' or mentally ill i.e. 'mad.'

[3]Stock Stories are standard narratives and archetypes that are culturally based and targeted towards the general public.

these kind of narratives establish "performatives" such as the black widow, whore, witch, evil mother, angel, etc (7). Furthermore, these essentialized and monolithic "performatives" come into conflict with the multiple subjectivities of the individual self. Grace, in particular, is subjected to these stock narratives throughout the course of her trial. In the series, she recounts how she was a cause of anxiety in the public discourse, labelled as an "inhuman female demon" by some, while others characterized her as a "good girl."[4] Since these stock portrayals of Grace lack agency, Atwood revises her account in *Alias Grace* through a feminist lens to disrupt the historical legitimacy and male hegemony that inform such narratives.

Atwood's gynocentric narrative primarily functions as a metanarrative where the female criminal is contextualized and represented "...as a product of her social and cultural milieu" (Morrissey 21). Without contextualization of their crimes, female criminals are reduced to second-class citizens who "lack construction as fully human subjects," that is, women, unlike men, are judged differently with respect to their violent acts. Morrissey observes that male violence is "actualized," "frequently articulated," and even "glorified" (17). However, when women kill, questions of evil nature[5] and rationality surface along with the presentation of the murderess as a "non-agent."[6] In *Alias Grace* Reformist sympathisers seek Grace's (played by Sarah Gadon) release from imprisonment by bringing in Dr Simon Jordan (Edward Holcroft), an alienist, to interrogate her about the crime which she claims to have forgotten. Simon is brought in to assuage the belief that Grace is a hysteric, and her alleged insanity is hoped to guarantee her freedom from incarceration. These men who "...pleaded her youth, the weakness of her sex, and her supposed witlessness" (Atwood 463) attempt to control her narrative while foregrounding hysteria to justify the frailty of feminine reason.

[4]Like Grace Marks, Amanda Knox was subjected to stock stories by the media, courtroom, and the public who characterized her as a "seductress," "she-devil with an angel face," and a "Man-eater."

[5]Narratives of female criminals often lapse into a Lombrosian view of criminality where women are scrutinized for their appearance. Knox was subject to these flawed beliefs where her attractiveness and, in particular, her blue eyes typified her as a cold and detached femme fatale.

[6]Jewkes lists eight "standard narratives" of criminal women in the media such as 'bad wives,' 'mythical monsters,' and 'non-agents.' The narrative of the 'non-agent' renders the woman as a "...victim who is not responsible for her actions" (130). Similarly, Morrissey argues that victimization of the murderess insists on the "powerlessness of the oppressed" where "responsibility, culpability, agency, and often her rationality" is denied and can "reinforce the notion that female violence is unreal" (25). The Battered Woman Syndrome, for instance, can fall under the non-agentic category.

By using hysteria and emphasizing on her passivity to construct their arguments, the sympathisers effectively disempower Grace as they erase her agentic capacity. Furthermore, speculations of supernatural possession, insanity, and dissociative identity disorder briefly hinted at in the series have the potential to deny female agency and undermine the conception of Grace as an active human subject.[7] Theories speculate whether Grace was possessed by the deceased Mary Whitney's spirit. The hypnosis conducted by Dr DuPont in front of the Spiritualist circle takes on the supernatural quality of a seance. When Grace speaks, one of the women present argues that she is "A spirit that has taken hold of Grace…[as the] the spirits speak through others, in a trance." Such an argument brings forth questions about the author of the action of murder, that is, whether Grace was in control of her actions in a state of possession. Grace's body is perceived to be separate from Mary's spirit and actions; she is treated as a victim of possession, and not the author of her actions. Bodily possession erases any culpability in the murders as the possessed Grace lacks agency over her actions. Similarly, if Grace suffers from Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), she is perceived by the sympathisers to lack agency over her actions as she is inhabited by another personality, Mary, who confesses to being the author of these actions of murder. During hypnosis, Grace speaks as Mary, "But Grace doesn't know, she's never known. They almost hanged her, that would have been wrong… She forgot to open the window, so I couldn't get out." Grace alias Mary refers to the superstition of opening a window to let the soul of a person free post-death. When Mary dies, Grace forgets to open a window to let her spirit out, leading others to speculate that Mary's trapped spirit took control of Grace in that moment. In both theories of DID and Spiritual possession, Grace's body and mind is perceived as being separate from Mary's spirit or personality. This is further supported by Dr DuPont who states that they are "two distinct personalities, which both coexist within the same body, and yet have different sets of memories altogether. They are, for all practical purposes, two entirely separate individuals." Since Grace is perceived to be harbouring another "individual" within herself, one that subjects Grace's body to her (Mary's) control, Grace can be perceived as innocent of murderer within this hypothetical framework. However, this paper argues that these theories used to explain Grace's behaviour can, in fact, be agentic. Grace operates within these strictures of insanity to subvert constructions about her identity and image, and finds agency in the process. Therefore, in

[7]The theory of spiritual possession functions similarly to the insanity defence where one is deemed unaccountable for one's actions. Moreover, mental illness was often misinterpreted as possession in the Victorian period where fascination with the occult was a common occurrence.

the hierarchical relationship of patient/doctor, where Grace is treated as an object of analysis by Simon, Atwood presents her as a conscious subject who negotiates for power. To understand these negotiations and strategies of resistance against Simon's gaze, it is necessary to first contextualize Grace and her actions.

In *Women, Murder and Femininity,* Lizzie Seal interprets murder as a culturally symbolic act resulting in the revelation of chief anxieties about social change (19). Seal's cultural reading of crime applies to the Montgomery-Kinnear murders which raised issues of the insubordination of lower classes, normative notions of femininity, and even immigration.[8] Similarly, Morrissey argues that murder in itself invokes the abject but when women in particular commit murder they become "the foci for evil" (24). Julia Kristeva notes that "the feminine is often aligned with the abject, the criminal" as the fear of women's power "...to generate life and to take it away, runs deep in male-dominated societies" (2). Moreover, female killers are treated as transgressive figures as they transgress beyond established boundaries for their gender and disrupt the male order. As transgressors, they occupy a liminal and ambivalent position making them "unfathomable" (Seal 18). The "unfathomable" murderess, therefore, functions as abjection as she resists being known, violates boundaries of normative femininity, and becomes the Othered deviant (Seal 18). The abject murderess, according to Seal, can "induce both horror and disgusted fascination" (18). Seal's reading of the murderess as abject explains the "celebrity" status conferred upon Grace and her fetishization by Dr Jordan, which will be examined later in this paper.

The vilification of the murderess as monster is another way of denying agency to women.[9] Morrissey observes that vilification, or the turning of such offending women into 'monsters' in the public discourse, is a means of coping with the trauma of absolving society from any participation in their creation. These women "...embody an unusually detestable wickedness which is not found in either the institutions or other citizens of their society. Hence, these women become foci for evil" (24). She argues that although the murderess is considered to have acted, her agentic capacity is not as a human woman but a *monster* (25).

[8]Similarly, the murder of Meredith Kercher gives insight into the deeply-rooted misogyny and treatment of female sexuality in Italy.

[9]Morrissey argues that agency is denied through three techniques: vilification, mythification, and victimism.

Grace is vilified precisely in this manner, and although her vilification provokes curiosity and fetishization that comes with being the abject, she is cast away from a society that refuses to acknowledge its part in her creation. In an interview at the *Toronto International Film Festival*, Sarah Polley, the screenwriter notes that *Alias Grace* is a case study of female anger that arises from a place of constant abuse—abuse that has its origins in the very society that seeks to ostracize her. In order to understand the genesis of Grace's anger, the show presents us with scenes of powerless female servants like Grace whose bodies and minds are under constant threat and surveillance by the men around them. The anger that builds up from the coalescing of various instances of oppression is embodied in the narrative of Grace's fellow servant and friend, Mary Whitney, whose name she later adopts as an alias during her time as a fugitive after the murders. Mary is exploited by her employer's son, who deceives her into sleeping with him under the pretext of them being engaged. When she reveals her pregnancy, he pays her five dollars and tells her to drown herself. Possessing limited options Mary resorts to a back-alley abortion which results in her death. When the women of the household become aware of her situation, they afford her no sympathy but instead declare her to be a "disgrace" and a "deceitful girl." This self-regulation of gender and policing of sexuality by the women of the household attests to their internalized oppression.

In her reading of Paul Benson's essay "Autonomy and Oppressive socialization," Diana Meyers writes in *Gender in the Mirror,* "oppressive socialisation...instils false beliefs which prevent people from discerning genuine reasons for acting" (15). While the women of the household are subjects of "oppressive socialization," Mary and Grace, on the other hand, present themselves as "autonomous people" who are "competent criticizers" of the system they inhabit by questioning these beliefs (Benson). However, this ability to competently criticize their society is not easily manifested as patriarchal cultures interfere with women's agentic skills by inflicting penalties for non-conforming behaviour while perpetuating their oppression. Grace has experienced this oppression on multiple levels: sexually by her father and later at the asylum where she is described in reports to have left in a "delicate condition." The exploitation of the female body persists not just with Grace but nearly all women depicted in the series. This mirroring of women's lives coupled with Grace's assumption of other female identities (alias Mary) illustrates how female bodies are easily substituted for one another.

After her mother's death, Grace takes up the responsibilities of a mother and looks after her younger siblings. When she leaves for

work her younger sister takes on the same role. Later at the Kinnear household, when Nancy is pregnant, it is implied that Kinnear seeks to make Grace his mistress replacing Nancy. This aspect of disposable bodies is explicitly seen when Simon uses his landlady Mrs Humphrey as a substitute for Grace during sex. In the converging and mirroring of female personas and identities—during hypnosis, spiritual possession, the substitution of bodies, madness, and even quilting a thread of commonality of oppression emerges uniting women into a resisting collective of rage—the kind of rage that could provoke one to murder.

Alias Grace begins with a scene where Grace is looking into a mirror. Traditionally, the motif of a woman looking into a mirror is ubiquitous in art history, film, photography, and other visual mediums. However, there is a discrepancy in the manner in which men and women are depicted with mirrors in films. The man-with-mirror imagery often includes self-portraits where the man is portrayed as "...gaining self-knowledge by contemplating his specular self" (Meyers 107). On the other hand, women are "...supposed to depend on their mirrors to know who they are...women-with-mirror figurations...do not read as metaphors for introspection" (115). However, in *Alias Grace*, the director, Mary Harron, and screenwriter, Sarah Polley, subvert this trope by foregrounding Grace's gaze instead of the gaze of the viewer and the male alienist Simon. By looking into a mirror and trying out various expressions in accordance with the projections people have thrust upon her, Grace manages to unsettle the viewer who is unable to deduce whether she is innocent or guilty:

> I think of all the things that have been written about me; that I am an inhuman female demon (*glares*), that I am an innocent victim of a blackguard forced against my will *(scared)*... That I was too ignorant to know how to act and that to hang me would be judicial murder *(innocence)*... That I am a good girl with a pliable nature and no harm is told of me *(widens eyes and blinks in innocence)*. That I am cunning and devious *(narrows eyes)*. That I am soft in the head and little better than an idiot *(takes a deep breath, as if exhausted)*… and I wonder: how can I be all these different things at once. (*Alias Grace*)

This performance which she indulges in debilitates all the essentialist descriptions that may categorise her as either a victim or a villain. Moreover, her "performance" highlights the construction of her character and identity, foreshadowing her identity and narrative as ambiguous, fluid, unreliable, and ultimately unknowable to the viewers. Her performance is an act of resistance against the viewer who attempts to deduce the truth and later becomes a resistance against Jor-

dan's futile attempts at psychoanalysis to assess if she is insane or 'evil.'

She presents herself as being extremely perceptive and her awareness proves that she is not naïve or ignorant as declared by others. She knows that she is brought to the Governor's house regularly under the pretext of doing work but is actually an "object of curiosity" for the women of the Spiritualist circle. Grace is a thinking subject who is aware of the categorizations that the people around her use to confine her. When she is called a "celebrated murderess" she logically deconstructs this label by questioning "what is there to celebrate about a murder?" Moreover, by questioning the Spiritualist circle's absurd need to celebrate murder she turns their gaze back upon them highlighting their perverse interests while countering their assumption of her as a perverse individual. She also exposes their lack of shame in deriving pleasure from the spectacle of a murder and the delight they take in perceiving her misery as justice for her "sin." Her interactions with Simon and Jamie Walsh (her future husband) testify to her treatment as a spectacle by the men around her who use her painful account not just for voyeurism and pleasure, but also, in the case of Simon, to further his career. She writes in her letter to Simon, "He [Jamie] likes to picture the sufferings I have endured...You were as eager as Mr Walsh to hear about my sufferings in life." This voyeuristic aspect that both men share testifies to the pleasure they derive from hearing her suffering, treating her as a fetishized object while also presenting themselves as heroes in her narrative who have rescued her from her miserable situation. Her lawyer shares this view comparing her to Scheherazade[10] who seeks to "amuse" the Sultan. The misogyny that informs such views where men present themselves as saviours or sovereigns who arbitrarily determine the authenticity of Grace's version of events continues even when she displays her intellect. As a thinking woman, Grace poses a threat and must be contained.

Building on Freudian psychoanalytic theory of castration anxiety, Laura Mulvey posits that the "woman as icon" always threatens to evoke (castration) anxiety. The "male unconscious" therefore attempts to investigate the female figure and "demystify her mystery" by turning "...the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous" (438). The tendency to turn the dangerous female into a reassuring fetish is seen when Grace questions the Biblical authenticity behind the painting of *Susanna and the Elders.* Grace's knowledge, while a source of fascination for Kinnear, posi-

[10]The female storyteller from *One Thousand and One Nights* who tells a story everyday to the Sultan in order for him to spare her life.

tions her as a dangerous female, one who is capable of challenging him and his ideas. Therefore, in order to contain the threat that she presents to his masculinity, he objectifies her several times over the course of the television series. At times, his fetishization and objectification of her is more overt, such as using a telescope to fixate his gaze upon her. In another instance, while she is cleaning the floor, the camera takes on his voyeuristic gaze which fixates on her exposed legs and posterior, turning Grace into an erotic object. Sometimes, his tendency to objectify her as a means of minimizing the threat[11] that she embodies is more covert, as seen in the instance with the painting of *Susanna and the Elders*.

Thomas Kinnear is fascinated by Grace's curiosity and knowledge, and condescendingly jokes that she is the "...most learned maidservant… I will have to put on a display like the mathematical pig in Toronto" (*Alias Grace*). By being compared to the "mathematical pig" she is not only treated as an object of curiosity but is also positioned as something absurd and unnatural, giving the implication that female intellectuality is a mythical construct. The comparison alludes to the exhibitionist role of women who "...are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact" (Mulvey 436). This fetishization by Kinnear is significant when placed in the context of the painting which depicts Susanna being subjected to the lecherous gaze of two men as she bathes in the garden. When she rejects their demand for sexual favours, it provokes a false accusation of promiscuity by the men who seek her imprisonment and death for her non-compliance. This is also true of Grace who is abused by the men around her including Jeremiah whose generosity towards Grace masks his underlying ambition. Therefore, women in patriarchal cultures stand as "...signifier[s] for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of the woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker of meaning" (Mulvey 433). Since she is the "bearer" of meaning, her female sexuality repeatedly imposed upon by men for their interests, Grace must resist by fashioning an identity and a narrative that is unknowable to the male Other. This resistant identity and narrative which emerges in her therapy sessions with Simon is not immediately manifested, or articulated, for Grace finds the very opportunity to speak as being "difficult." However, she soon takes advantage of the opportunity presented

[11]Turning the "dangerous female" into a fetish is just one of the many means of limiting female subjectivity. The infantilization of women, a tendency subverted by Grace in her interactions with Simon, is also another means of "reassuring" the male unconscious.

to her to tell her story and foreground her subjectivity. It is important to note that this opportunity to speak is brought about by a masculine subject who chooses to interview her at the request of her sympathisers. She is heard and represented through the intervention of Simon who represents the masculine authority of medical institutions.

While the veracity of her words is dependent on the belief of a male listener, she slowly manages to avoid being constructed by his encumbering gaze by adopting covert and subliminal strategies of observation, deflection, and manipulation. Grace is aware of how her previous attempts to speak were manipulated. So, she omits some details while deliberately staying evasive in her interactions with Simon. Here, knowledge is power and Grace has monopoly over it by refusing to share it with Simon: "just because you *pestered* me to tell you everything, there's no reason to tell you." Her usage of the word "pestered" alludes to her position of power where Simon is reduced to an annoying pest that will not be indulged. Later, when Simon asks her to describe her daily schedule, she is appalled by his evident lack of knowledge of the domestic sphere. She alerts him of the privileged position that he occupies: "men such as yourself do not have to clean up the messes you make...you are like children." She, in this way, turns back his paternalistic gaze upon him by infantilizing Simon and other men with his privilege, exposing their dependence on women.

Although she is his patient, subject to examination, unbeknownst to Simon he is the one being observed, scrutinised, and manipulated by Grace. Her scrutinization of him is evident when Simon looks more distraught with every interview and is caught off-guard when she says, "I wonder what is causing your lack of sleep?" observing that he was "...getting thinner…prey to some nagging sorrow." Simon is further positioned as being vulnerable in Grace's presence as she learns personal things about him without his knowledge. She assumes a position of power as she grows more resilient while Simon loses confidence in his ability as a doctor. With each interview, Simon loses any semblance of power that he assumed in the therapist/patient relationship. Conversely Grace, who traditionally is the powerless subject under the therapist's gaze, moves to a state of power by withholding the knowledge that Simon desperately seeks even though she is acutely aware of what he desires: "It is knowledge of me you crave, Doctor, forbidden knowledge…you want to open up my body and peer inside. In your hand, you want to hold my beating female heart." When Simon presents her with an apple and other such objects in an attempt at Freudian free association, she stays evasive, aware of his intentions to gain an insight into her mind. By withholding her opinions and thoughts from him, she deliberately resists: "He wishes to go

home and say to himself: 'I stuck in my thumb and pulled out a plum. What a good boy am I.' But I will not be anybody's plum." As much as Grace wishes to narrate her story, she refuses to comply with his treatment of her as some trophy to be won, some plum, the archetypal fruit of knowledge that would emerge in his understanding and, consequently, gain mastery of her mind and body. Her insistence on ambiguity as seen in her multiple narratives, gaps in her memory, and withholding of information restore some control to her life.

Simon's changing feelings towards Grace, from paternal to increasingly erotic, demonstrate how his sympathy mutates into an erotic fixation resulting in counter-transference which Grace cleverly exploits. His erotic dreams about embracing a half-dressed Grace while repeatedly whispering "murderess, murderess" indicate that her status as "murderess" is fetishized by him. Simon, as we see later, is still haunted by the memory of Grace and his inability to resolve his feelings for her subjects him to a "nervous exhaustion."

Instead of engaging in a traditional form of communication that exudes male hegemony, Grace appropriates the feminine discourse of quilting to tell her story. The quilt metaphor is not only an effective means of (re)conceptualizing history from a female point of view but it also functions as a device of concealing knowledge from men (Michael 426). While Grace is meant to be confessing the truth in her sessions with Simon, we see her instead engaged in quilting. Quilting may seem like an innocuous activity, but Grace appropriates it to narrate her truth which is unreadable and unknowable to Simon. By appropriating quilting as a tool for storytelling, she finds agency in the construction of her narrative.[12] She subtly alters these quilts to suit her ideas. After her exoneration, she makes a quilt for herself based on the Tree of Paradise pattern but includes a border of snakes and three triangles to the pattern. Each triangle is of symbolic value to Grace as she adds a red piece taken from her first menstruation petticoat lent to her by her best friend Mary Whitney, a faded-yellow piece from her penitentiary dress, and a pink piece from Nancy's dress that Grace wore during her trial. In this manner, she stitches together pieces of clothing that represent important events and people in her life, thereby constructing an alternative discourse. This discourse is inclusive of all the three women, all of whom are written out or misrepresented in tra-

[12]These means of constructing subjectivity through private narratives, if exposed, can also become tools to further characterize women and take away their autonomy. For instance, Knox kept a private diary in prison but it was leaked to the press and with it, salacious details of all her sexual partners became public knowledge, further vilifying her in the public eye.

ditional male narratives due to their gender and class. Conscious of the struggles of women like her, Grace transposes this perpetual battle for power onto her quilts, making it a discourse of the Othered: "…women have chosen to sew such flags, and then to lay them on the tops of beds…for a warning." By referring to the quilts as flags and "warning" signals, she likens them to an army displaying their flags before going out to war, painting them as rebels.

Madness, like quilting, can be an effective instrument of rebellion. Grace's supposed madness is manifested when she is hypnotised by Dr DuPont. During hypnosis, Grace is able to unleash everything that she thinks, articulating her anger and presenting herself as a woman with desire when she speaks through her alter-self, Mary. By assuming Mary's persona, she exposes Simon's fantasies about her and acts as his interrogator, "…you want to know if I kissed him, if I slept with him…whether I did what you'd like to do." Her "madness" is a subversive tool of resistance against Simon's desire to know and analyse her. Furthermore, her apparent madness becomes a site of power as it absolves her of the murders and, therefore, warrants her exoneration under an insanity defence. Madness, like storytelling, serves as her means of escaping incarceration. Going by this reading, it can be deduced that Grace's hysteria may be a response in provocation to the Spiritualist circle who are aroused by her "celebrated" status. Her performance of madness during hypnosis can be read as a means of manipulation to secure her release. Hysteria, according to feminists like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, is perceived to be a frustrated response to an oppressive patriarchal culture that seeks to silence women. They argue that diseases such as hysteria are "caused by patriarchal socialization" where women from a young age are trained in the ideas of "docility," "submissiveness," and "renunciation" (295). Their argument is supported by Simon himself after Grace's alter-self has been revealed during hypnosis:

> I wonder if they (hypnosists) provide an opportunity for women to say what they think, and to express their true thoughts and feelings more boldly, and in more vulgar terms than they could otherwise feel permission to. I wonder about Grace's violent childhood and her experience as a young woman…. I wonder how much repressed rage she must have carried with her as a result.

His acknowledgement of her "repressed rage," originating due to patriarchal socialization and her violent experiences as a woman, creates a space for empathy. By taking her anger into account and the trauma that could have provoked her to murder, Simon deconstructs the mon-

strous labels assigned to her. This realization of his emerges after her hypnotization, which, as he recognizes, is empowering for women.

It can also be theorized that Grace has Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). Her split self demonstrates the indeterminacy that characterises her identity, which can neither be ascertained by Simon nor by the viewer. Her multiplicity is, therefore, wielded as an instrument of resistance against the viewer's attempts to define her. However, if she really does suffer from multiple personality disorder or some form of mental illness, Grace requires actual help. Even though her conviction as a hysteric may ultimately afford her freedom, it licenses her subjection to more constraints and torture at the asylum. Fiona Tolan observes this paradox regarding the empowering/disempowering dichotomy within madness for Grace in *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction,* "A schism appears between the empowering feminist concept of the hysteric as a voice of rebellion, and the contradictory reality of hysteria as a confirmation of masculine assumptions of feminine intellectual frailty" (238). This paradox contributes to the ambiguity surrounding Grace and her narrative(s). The series does not seek to provide answers or certainties regarding Grace's insanity and culpability. Even if Grace is insane, she presents herself as being acutely aware of the power it affords her and takes advantage of it. In this manner, Grace (taken to be sane or insane; guilty or innocent) resists against perception and the desire for closure by preserving the enigma that defines her identity and narrative(s).

The case study of Grace Marks demonstrates how patriarchal discourses of law and media can be limiting in their representation of women (who are convicted for murder, in particular) as victims or villains. Since these discourses are ineffective in the construction of a subjectivity that is actually representative of women, Atwood counters them by foregrounding the voice of her protagonist herself. As Morrissey notes, revisionist works by feminists provide agentic representations of women convicted of murder. They humanize and contextualize "...the murderess as anarchist or as iconoclast, forcing the media and law to cope with her outsider status" (29). In this sense, Grace can be read as an iconoclast, a criticizer of the society she inhabits, whose narratives of ambiguity serve as a means of emancipating herself from the confining space of the monstrous murderess.

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