

Alias grace: point of view, characterization and title



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BUSTER**

Alias Grace, written by Margaret Atwood, is a well-written novel filled with many components that enhance the theme and the story as a whole. Atwood reveals the story of Grace Marks to the reader in a variety of ways, including various points of view. This allows the author to reveal the character of Grace Marks in many different layers based on the accounts of others and Grace herself. Atwood also characterizes Grace Marks as an untrustworthy narrator, leaving the reader to question whether or not they trust her perspective of the events that occurred.

The title, Alias Grace, also adds meaning to the story because it makes the reader question, who is the real Grace Marks? Margaret Atwood uses the components – point of view, characterization and the title – as a method to help the reader better understand and appreciate the stories theme of searching for the truth. The effectiveness of point of view Throughout the novel, Margaret Atwood effectively uses different points of view to give the reader a better understanding of the main character, Grace Marks. The first-person point of view is used by Atwood in Grace’s interior monologues.

Atwood writes, “. . . it struck me at once how very solitary I was, as I had no friends here except Nancy, if she could be called a friend . . . I did not know where my family was, which was the same as having none” (Atwood 301-2). The author’s use of first-person point of view in the above quote gives the reader a sense of the inner struggles Grace Mark’s endures as a woman in the Victorian time period. Atwood also uses this perspective to show Grace is also going through a journey to find the truth about herself and the murder because she is even doubtful of what happened.

The use of third person limited in Dr. Simon Jordan also adds to the search for the truth about who the real Grace is, because he acts as an outsider looking in. Atwood writes, “ The trouble is that the more she remembers, the more she relates, the more difficulty he himself is having. He can’t seem to keep track of the pieces. It’s as if she’s drawing his energy out of him” (Atwood 388). Dr. Jordan’s job is to find out who Grace truly is, but as Atwood writes, it is nearly impossible for him to do so because of how complex and secretive she is.

It leads the reader to question whether or not they will ever know the whole truth. Along with this point of view, the author writes in third-person objective through the form of newspaper accounts, poems, and letters, which exemplifies society’s view on Grace Marks. These excerpts tend to be filled with the sensationalism of scandal, violence and sex, which enhances the author’s views of the Victorian society. People of this time period are fascinated with such stories and try to make them as appealing as possible, even if they do not fully tell the truth.

Combined, the different points of view Atwood uses allows the reader to patch together the story of Grace Marks, although there are still pieces missing in the search for truth. Characterization of Grace Marks and her reliability as a narrator The characterization of Grace Marks plays a significant role in the reader’s ability to determine the truth about who she really is and what she has done. To begin with, Grace seems to be a very genuine and trustworthy person. The reader can see she is very proper and worried about how others perceive her.

It takes awhile for her to open up to Dr. Jordan, but eventually she begins to tell her story, in what seems to be an honest manner. Although it may appear as though Grace is revealing her entire story, Atwood informs the reader that Grace is a secretive person by writing, " I was always very careful about keeping the secrets of others, no matter what they might be" (Atwood 125). This approach adds to the characterization of Grace as a patch-work person because she is leaving out important parts of her story in order to protect herself and others.

As a result, the reader is left having to interpret the information they hear from Grace, Dr. Jordan and society, and piece it together to get a true picture of Grace Marks. Is she a murderer or a wrongfully accused person? All these factors make Grace Marks an unreliable narrator due to the ambiguity and secretive qualities of her character and add to the theme of searching for the truth. The significance of the novel's title *Alias Grace* is a fitting title for such a mysterious novel. *Alias* is defined as a false name used to conceal one's identity.

This definition can be best applied to Grace Marks' overall character. She is a vault waiting to be cracked, but due to her secretive and refined nature, she is unwilling to reveal her true self. Grace effectively uses the alias of Mary Whitney to hide who she truly is. Mary Whitney acts as a role model for Grace, which is exemplified when Grace says, " I try to think of what Mary Whitney would say, and sometimes I can say it" (Atwood 70). Grace feels she cannot do the things she wants to do because of her shortcomings and she wishes she has the qualities of Mary Whitney to carry out the things she is unable to do.

This supports the fact that Mary is Grace's alias for the things she would not normally do, such as the murders of her employers, running away using the name of Mary Whitney and standing up for herself against the prison guards. Overall, Mary's strength as a person has empowered Grace to become a strong-willed person who will stand up for herself, rather than the gentle and pure Grace Marks, which is why the title *Alias Grace* is so fitting. Margaret Atwood's effectively uses the various points of views, characterization of Grace Marks and the book's title, *Alias Grace*, to contribute to the compelling theme of searching for truth.

Each component plays an important role in bringing together the theme. The points of view show that every interpretation of Grace Marks, whether it is hers or others, still leaves questions unanswered. Grace Marks cannot even say who she really is because of her secretive characteristics and her ambiguity. By Atwood using the title of *Alias Grace*, the reader is immediately aware the truth about Grace Marks is completely concealed and thus the theme is established.