# Unheard Playful Voices: Margaret Atwood's Grace Marks as an (Reliably) Unreliable Narrator

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Abstract
*The unreliable narrator, a category with a question mark since the 1960s when it was identified by Wayne C. Booth, has been a challenge for many literary theorists including James Phelan, Monika Fludernik and Ansgar Nünning to name just a few. In the Czech Republic, Tomáš Kubíček attempted to address the issue of an unreliable narrator in his monograph Vypravěč, kategorie narativní analýzy [The Narrator, Categories of Narrative Analysis, 2007]. Drawing mostly on the theories of Nünning and Phelan, Kubíček provides his own definition, one that resolves several problematic issues with whichhis predecessors struggled. This paper aims to apply Kubíček's theory of the unreliable narrator to Margaret Atwood's historiographic metafiction Alias Grace (1996). Grace Marks, the novels homodiegetic narrator, has been frequently referred to as unreliable by numerous scholars, including Sharon R. Wilson and Coral Ann Howells. She appears to be an ideal subject for analyzing reliability, as she is a convicted criminal with (claimed) amnesia, therefore it seems natural that the reader should be wary of the facts she presents. However, in the light of Kubíček's theory, the matter of Grace's unreliability is not necessarily so obvious and simple. Obtaining a satisfactory answer to the question "Did Grace Marks commit the murders she was imprisoned for?" may be just as difficult as obtaining the answer to a question whether Atwood's novel presents an unreliable narrator or not.*

Keywords
Unreliable narrator, *Alias Grace*, Margaret Atwood, Tomáš Kubíček, historiographic metafiction

The unreliable narrator is a concept that has haunted narratologists for over half of a century, from Wayne C. Booth's rhetorical perspective (*The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 1961) to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (*Narrative Fiction*, 1983), Gerald Prince (*A Dictionary of Narratology*, 1987), Monika Fludernik ("Defining (In)sanity: The Narrator of the 'Yellow Wallpaper' and the Question of Unreliability," 1999), Ansgar Nünning ("Unreliable, Compared to What: Towards a Cognitive Theory of Unreliable Narration: Prolegomena and Hypotheses," 1999) and James Phelan together with Mary P. Martin ("The Lessons of 'Weymouth:' Homodiegesis, Unreliability, Ethics, and *The Remains of the Day*," 1999). All of these scholars developed their own theories of how to accurately define and recognize the unreliable narrator in a narrative. Some of these theorists saw the solution in introducing irony (Booth, Nünning), others in proposing the unique category of the implied author (Booth, Rimmon-Kenan, Phelan and Martin); some even claimed that any first person narrative must be seen as unreliable due to its subjectivity (Prince, Greta Olson's "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators," Tamar Yacobi's "Interart Narrative: (Un)reliability and Ekphrasis"). More recent concepts attempt to explain the unreliability of a narrator through cognitive and reader's response theories (Nünning, Rimmon-Kenan), or interpret a narrator's reliability through historical-cultural influences (Bruno Zerweck's "Historicizing Unreliable Narration: Unreliability and Cultural Discourse in Narrative Fiction"). Despite the wide range of

approaches, the unreliable narrator remains a vague and elusive category in narratology. In the Czech Republic, one scholar who attempts to provide an exhaustive solution for determining the reliability of a narrator is Tomáš Kubíček. For this paper I applied his theory of unreliability to Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, as this approach gives us an opportunity to interconnect the world of Anglophone literature with a Czech theoretical background.

In *Vypravěč, kategorie narativní analýzy*, Kubíček centers his theory in a structuralist approach, and therefore leans towards classical rather than postclassical narratology.[1] His theory of the unreliable narrator takes into consideration solutions proposed by Nünning and Phelan, but provides his own grasp of the concept. Kubíček deals with potential unreliability of both homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narratives, but in this paper I will apply his theory of unreliability of a homodiegetic narrator. The Czech scholar strictly differentiates between subjective narrative and unreliable narrative, claiming that these are by no means identical. Along these lines he deals with the theory of Monika Fludernik, who in her first two propositions of unreliability suggests that a narrator can be unreliable due to the lack of objectivity or ideological unreliability.[2] Because her theory of unreliability depends on an extratextual evaluation of the narrated and therefore is undesirably psychologized,[3] Kubíček rejects Fludernik's two propositions.[4] Phelan proposes that narrators can be unreliable in two different ways: when they omit certain facts and when they distort the facts. When facts are omitted, the narrator may still be partially reliable. When facts are distorted, the narrator may be categorically termed unreliable.[5] In Phelan's proposal Kubíček sees an attempt to stabilize the central position of the text[6] (see K, 125), as Phelan locates the signals of unreliability in the very structure of the literary work. According to Kubíček, Phelan argues that unreliability is not connected with the subjectivization of the narrative, but with textual signals within the work that form the basis for a strategy of disclosing the unreliability of narrator (125). Kubíček agrees with the validity of Phelan's proposal of partial unreliability and (intentional) unreliability, however, he insists that only such a narrator who purposefully misleads should be regarded in this way. Others who seem to be attempting to be dependable (even if they cannot be, e.g. due to limited knowledge) should be called partially reliable narrators (126). As I am going to focus solely on those parts of *Alias Grace* that are narrated by Grace Marks, I will be working with the part of Kubíček's theory that focuses on homodiegetic narrators; through this framework Grace's narrative will be scrutinized for textual signals of unreliability.

1 See Tomáš Kubíček, Jiří Hrabal and Petr A. Bílek, *Naratologie, strukturální analýza vyprávění* (Praha: Dauphin, 2013), 8.

2 See Monika Fludernik, "Defining (In)sanity: The Narrator of the 'Yellow Wallpaper' and the Question of Unreliability," in *Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext*, eds. Walter Grünzweig and Andreas Solbach (Tübingen: Gunter NarrVerlag, 1999), 75-95, as quoted in Tomáš Kubíček, *Vypravěč, kategorie narativní analýzy* (Brno: Host, 2007), 122.

3 See Tomáš Kubíček, *Vypravěč, kategorie narativní analýzy* (Brno: Host, 2007), 123. The text will be henceforth referred to as K.

4 Another part of Fludernik's theory of unreliability is the third proposition, which claims that an unreliable narrator is one who willingly and knowingly hinders the truth or is in any way guilty of factual inaccuracy. This is the proposition Kubíček considers partly relevant for his own theory. For further details, see Kubíček, 122-123.

5 See James Phelan, "Can Readers Infer What Authors Imply," lecture given at Modern Language Association, New Orleans, December 2001, as quoted in Kubíček, *Vypravěč*, 125.

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Kubíček claims that it is necessary to locate signals in a narrative that would lead to the disclosure of a narrator as unreliable, as s/he cannot be automatically considered untrustworthy based solely on projected moral flaws meant to be recognized by readers (127). Therefore, if Grace Marks is indeed unreliable, this cannot be proved merely because she is a convicted criminal and because she may be using her narrative to achieve acquittal. It thus becomes necessary to identify the textual signals that would classify both the degree of Grace's moral deviation as well as her narrative deception.

To illustrate differences in the unreliability of various types of homodiegetic narrators, Kubíček uses examples from Czech literature, e.g. the Vladimír Neff novel *Trampoty pana Humbla* (1967) and Arnošt Lustig's *Nemilovaná: Z deníku sedmnáctileté Perly Sch.* (1979). In *Trampoty pana Humbla* (The Troubles of Mr. Humble) Kubíček identifies signals of unreliability in the stylistic means the protagonist uses to presents himself: he obviously wishes to use the narrative as the defense of his good character. Instead, the textual signals within his statements prove the opposite, that he is a morally perverted and opportunistic man and therefore his strategy to defend himself works against him (126). With *Nemilovaná: Z deníku sedmnáctileté Perly Sch.* (Unloved: From the Diary of Pearl Sch.) Kubíček is able to deconstruct Ansgar Nünning's theory of unreliability and prove it flawed. Nünning connects his theory with the reader's competences and rethinks the concept in the "context of frame theory as a projection by the reader [in which] the invention of unreliable narrators can be understood as an interpretive strategy or cognitive process.[7] Kubíček mentions Nünning's detailed list of signals of unreliability to help the reader in identifying it. This list includes also cases of homodiegetic narrators who suffer from memory loss, have cognitive limitations or create gaps in their narrative (122). Kubíček uses this type of example in the deconstruction of Nünning's theory when he applies it to Perla Sch. Kubíček claims that although there are gaps in Perla's narrative, some facts are omitted, and moreover her perspective is that of an immature girl with limited abilities to recognize and evaluate some situations, she should not be labelled an unreliable narrator. He identifies Perla Sch. as partially reliable (128) due to the fact that she doesn't intentionally lie, only omits certain facts from her life (129). The reader also learns from the text about the facts which Perla does not disclose, but finding out what Perla has omitted does not change the meaning of the narrative. In other words, the reader does not identify a discrepancy between what Perla is saying and what really happened. As Kubíček argues, it is not possible to label Perla an unreliable narrator merely because she makes the fictional world of the novel her own subjective construct. This subjective construct of a world then necessarily reflects her structure of values, which may differ significantly from the reader's (128–129). Moreover, Perla clearly identifies the gaps in her narrative and therefore she reliably marks her own unreliability (130).

To summarize Kubíček's concept of the unreliable homodiegetic narrator: he does not recognize as unreliable homodiegetic narrators who omit or hide parts of the story, or who do not report on events which are marginal and not important for the reader's understanding of the story. Only if later it is disclosed that the narrator has intentionally kept silent about a significant event toward a reader's understanding of the story should such a narrator should be labeled as unreliable (134). According to Kubíček, unreliability in case of a homodiegetic narrator is a structural element and is part of narrative work as a dominant semantic feature. Unreliability in this way is

7 Ansgar Nünning, "Unreliable, Compared to What? Towards a Cognitive Theory of Unreliable Narration: Prolegomena and Hypotheses," in *Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext*, eds. Walter Grünzweig and Andreas Solbach (Tübingen: Günter NarrVerlag), 54.

a functional and deliberate distortion of the facts presented or an omission of such facts about events and characters that are crucial for the understanding of the story (172). When Kubíček refers to unreliability he indicates a discordance between the "fictional world of the narrative" and the "fictional world of the story."[8] Unreliability is identified via textual signals and therefore is an immanent part of the text.

Atwood's Grace Marks has notoriously been referred to as an unreliable homodiegetic narrator. In the majority of cases, however, such a conclusion is reached because she admits that she may tell lies, or because Atwood uses the metaphor of quilting for Grace's narrative. Sharon R. Wilson interconnects Grace's potential unreliability with the fact that she weaves her narrative as a modern-day Scheherezade;[9] Gina Wisker concludes that neither of Grace's narratives can be trusted, as she admits that she may be lying;[10] Atwood herself identifies Grace as a storyteller with a strong urge to withhold information;[11] Coral Ann Howells ponders about Grace's versions of the truth in both *Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction: Refiguring Identifies* (2003) and *Margaret Atwood* (second edition, 2005). Nevertheless, none of these studies address the issue of Grace's unreliability in strictly narratological terms. The focus of this paper from here on is to provide a narratological analysis that would demonstrate how Grace's identification of herself as a potential liar is not enough evidence to mark her as an unreliable narrator.

The historical facts of the case show that Grace Marks was a young nineteenth century housemaid convicted of being an accomplice to her supposed paramour James McDermott in the murder of both their master Thomas Kinnear along with the housekeeper and Kinnear's lover Nancy Montgomery, who was pregnant with Kinnear's child. No one ever found out exactly what role Grace played in the murders, whether she participated actively in the killings or just helped McDermott with the logistics. During the investigation and the trial Grace provided several versions of her confession and kept claiming that she retained no memory of the murders, and therefore suffered from selective amnesia. Both Grace and McDermott were sentenced to death, but thanks to Grace's youth as well as doubts regarding her participation, her sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Grace spent almost thirty years in prison and in 1873, due to strong protests and petitions signed in her favour, she was acquitted. Popular belief has it that she changed her name and moved to the United States.

In *Alias Grace*, the fictional Grace Marks underwent treatment while staying at Kingston Penitentiary. There she was a subject in several sessions with young psychiatrist Simon Jordan (a fictional character with no historical counterpart), who tried to use psychoanalysis in order to retrieve the memories Grace claimed to have lost. The sessions of Grace and Dr. Jordan are central to the storyline of *Alias Grace*.

*Alias Grace* presents a complex net of narrative situations. Part of the novel is narrated by a homodiegetic narrator (Grace) and another section by a heterodiegetic extradiegetic narrator (with Simon Jordan as reflector). The text also includes authentic historical documents such as the confessions of Grace and McDermott, excerpts from Kingston Penitentiary behavior guidelines and clippings from newspapers reporting on

8 These terms are used in accordance with Tomáš Kubíček's *Vypravěč*, 172. In Czech "fikční svět vyprávění" and "fikční svět příběhu."

9 See Sharon R. Wilson, "Quilting as Narrative Art: Metafictional Construction in *Alias Grace*," in *Margaret Atwood's Textual Assassinations*, ed. Sharon Rose Wilson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 127.

10 See Gina Wisker, *Margaret Atwood's Alias Grace* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002), 30.

11 See Margaret Atwood, *In Search of Alias Grace* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1997), 34.

the case. Another part of the novel includes fictional "authentic" documents such as letters to and from Simon Jordan.

The homodiegetic narrator Grace constructs two narratives for two different audiences, one of which is the narratee,[12] the other Simon Jordan, to whom she tells a tale of her life. Her attitude toward these two audiences varies, or at least seems to, when it comes to reliability. With Simon, Grace clearly states that she is not always being truthful, a stance that she hides neither from the narratee, nor Simon. She tries to manipulate the young psychiatrist, feeding him information she wants him to know. As the narrative progresses, she emphasizes her dominion over him.

When she first meets Simon and recognizes that he is there to listen to her and possibly help her escape a prison sentence, Grace commences her narrative within narrative. At the beginning, the narratee witnesses her deliberate construction of the narrative designed for Simon and is otherwise given information and explanations Simon does not have access to, such as a different version of events, with explanations and insider information. However, as the story progresses, Grace begins to no longer differentiate between her narratives, continuing the recreation of her life story even in Simon Jordan's absence, with only the narratee as her audience.

First I will focus on the question of Grace's narrative reliability in her interaction with Simon. From their very first meeting, it is clear that she is performing for him and that she is carefully watching her actions, pretending to be something else than she really is, a fact not hidden from the narratee. For example during Simon's first visit Grace openly acknowledges: "I look at him stupidly. I have a good stupid look which I have practiced."[13] To the narratee, Grace admits she is not telling Simon everything; that she is wary in his presence, distrustful, but at the same time, she is toying with him. During their first meeting, Simon gives Grace an apple. Trying to practice psychoanalysis with her and to awaken her subconscious, he brings a variety of objects to the sessions, mostly fruit and vegetables that she may associate with certain memories from her past. Grace sees through Simon's attempts and playfully resists them. In the following conversation between Simon and Grace we can notice the difference between what Grace reveals to Simon and what to the narratee. Those parts of the conversation not in quotation marks can be construed as the narratee being addressed.

> *[Simon:] "What does apple make you think of?" [...] [Grace:] "I don't understand you." It must be a riddle. [Simon:] "I think you understand well enough." [Grace:] "My sampler." Now it is his turn to know nothing. [Simon:] "A what?" [Grace:] "Sampler. [...] A is for apple, B is for bee." [Simon:] "Nothing else?" I give him my stupid look. [Grace:] "Apple pie." [...][Simon:] "Is there any kind of apple you should not eat?" [Grace:] "A rotten one." (AG, 45)*

Even though she acts like she does not understand Simon's intention, Grace had deciphered what he wanted to hear right at the beginning, as she claims to the narratee: "The apple of the tree of knowledge is what he means. Good and evil, any child could guess it. I go back to my stupid look" (AG, 45). This toying with Simon is Grace's strategy of defying Simon's dominance over her. She is well aware of the fact that she is not his equal when it comes to education, social status or money, but she will have her

12 The term "narratee" is used in the present paper as defined by Wolf Schmid in *Narratology: An Introduction* (2010). A variety of other terms may be substituted for the same concept, e.g. addressee, implied reader or fictive reader. The simple term "reader," however, is not suitable in this context, as Grace's narrative is not aimed at a particular, concrete reader, but rather an abstract, narratological entity.

13 Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (London: Virago Press, 1997), 43. The novel will be henceforth referred to as AG.

supremacy when it comes to information. During their first meeting she recognizes Simon's intentions with her as a medical case and knows that she is meant to be his trophy patient: "He wishes to go home and say to himself – I stuck in my thumb and pulled out the plum, what a good boy am I. But I will not be anybody's plum" (AG, 46). Grace is portrayed as a proud woman and she is determined to resist Simon's attempts to recover her supposedly lost memory and to feed him selective and probably false information. The informational dominance which Grace exercises over Simon is demonstrated on several occasions throughout the novel, especially further into their sessions when Grace seems to have Simon trained like one of Pavlov's dogs:

> *As he was looking forlorn […] I suspected that not all was going well with him, I did not say I could not remember [the dream]. Instead I said that I had indeed had a dream. And what was it about, said he, brightening up considerably, and fiddling with his pencil. (AG, 281)*

Grace lets the narratee see how she manipulates Simon with her narrative, adjusting it for various reasons, including to gratify him.

The aforementioned examples show that Grace is a capricious storyteller, which would make her a straightforward example of an unreliable narrator. But one should not be too quick to label her in this way. Another significant exchange takes place during Grace's first meeting with Simon. She openly tells him "I perhaps will tell you lies," (AG, 46) while Simon's response is: "Perhaps you will tell lies without meaning to, and perhaps you will tell them deliberately. Perhaps you are a liar." (AG, 46) Grace's unreliability is therefore established very openly, which is something what Kubíček calls "reliably unreliable," or "partial reliability," as is the case with Perla Sch. (K, 130). It is clear both to the narratee and to Simon what the psychiatrist should expect from Grace, and Simon openly accepts this. At first Grace does not want to give him the satisfaction of cracking her open and putting her on display (AG, 357); later she wants to please him when he looks like something is bothering him, telling him about a dream she never had so he could write it down in his notebook and feel good about himself.

If we apply Kubíček's theory here, the case of Grace Marks is very similar to the case of Perla Sch. Also Perla shows the narratee both that she is not revealing everything and that there are gaps in her knowledge and omissions (intentional or unintentional) in her narrative. According to Kubíček, Perla clearly marks her own unreliability and therefore her narrative is partially reliable. From his first meeting with Grace, Simon is informed of the nature of the tale she is going to tell him and she provides him with numerous signals that she is fabulating, distorting and omitting some facts; for example, at every stage of her narrative, she claims to remember a ridiculous amount of minute details. When describing her life in Ireland, she recalls the exact layout of their house and is capable of recreating entire conversations her mother had with Grace's Aunt Pauline on many occasions (AG, 118). When she describes her voyage from Ireland to Canada, she provides a detailed account consisting of the "memories" an adult person would have rather than those of a child of eleven or twelve; she recounts organizational issues of the crew on the ship, including a list of details she saw such as a "greasy ladder (that led) into what they called the hold, which was built all through with beds" (AG, 131). She relates how on the ship she once gave biscuits to a Catholic woman for whom Grace is able to retell the entire life story (AG, 136). She remembers that exactly after a week and a half the ship was struck by a gale (AG, 136). From later parts of her life she recounts the exact layout of the house at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's (AG, 170), as well as all the songs her co-worker and best friend, Mary Whitney, ever sang to her (AG, 177) and exact details of outfits she wore on some occasions, including the colour of the

ribbons (AG, 237). She recounts to the tiniest detail the layout of Mr. Kinnear's house, the exact number of animals on property, she even claims to remember the name of the dog that died before she came there (AG, 246-247). Such a detailed account of the events that happened ten to twenty years ago can be interpreted as a signal that Grace has kept her word and indeed is telling Simon lies.

As for the murders, the most important part of Grace's narrative which is crucial for the interpretation of her as a literary character, Grace keeps silent. She does not tell Simon a single thing regarding the story that he wants to hear the most. This too could be expected, as from the beginning she claimed to have no memory of those events. Therefore, if Kubíček's theory of unreliability is applied, it is in her interaction with Simon Jordan that Grace is disclosed as a partially reliable narrator, or rather, reliably unreliable, as she does not hide the fact that she may be lying and adjusting the story. It is a game about which the rules are known from the beginning and therefore the semantic construction of the narrative is not changed.

When we scrutinize the second narrative plan that focuses on the interaction between Grace and the narratee, we can see that at the beginning it is clear which information is for Simon and which is for the narratee. Grace discloses her secrets for the narratee, explaining her actions towards Simon as well as the lies she is feeding him by using expressions like "the truth is" (AG, 343) when addressing the narratee.

> *I told [Simon] I'd dreamt about flowers; and he wrote that down busily, and asked what sort of flowers. I said that they were red flowers, and quite large, with glossy leaves like a peony. But I did not say that they were made of cloth, nor did I say when I had seen them last; nor did I say that they were not a dream. (AG, 281)*

This dream is just one example in which Grace admits that she presents Simon with a fabricated information (unlike the narratee, whom she presents a true account of events). Another example is the song that young Jamie Walsh, a boy from a farm near Mr. Kinnear's house, once used to sing. Grace gives Simon a radically different version of the song while she tells the narratee that she knew she "remembered it wrong, and the real song said the pig was eat and Tom was beat, and then went howling down the street" (AG, 276). Grace continues with the confession to the narratee by saying that "[she] didn't see why [she] shouldn't make it come out in a better way" (AG, 276). Even in a moment when Grace is prevaricating with the narratee, she corrects herself and gives the narratee the true version, for example when she describes the beautiful, pink sunrise (AG, 275), only to admit a sentence later that "in fact I have no idea of what kind of a sunrise there was. In prison they make the windows high up [...] so you cannot see out of them" (AG, 275). Therefore Grace's signal towards the narratee is clear: she is lying to Simon, keeping certain facts from him but not from the narratee, to whom she indicates her veracity via numerous textual signals.

However, as the novel progresses, the division between the story for Simon and story for the narratee becomes blurred, with some of the later parts of Grace's life narrated even in Simon's absence, but as if he had been there listening. "Corrections" aimed at the narratee, such as those about the flowers in the dream or the song, become less and less frequent, giving the impression that they are not needed, and therefore Grace is telling the truth. Some chapters, e.g. 39, continue with Grace's story, but it is not clear if Simon is present or not, therefore it is no longer transparent to which communicative plan the chapter belongs. As the line between the two narratives begins to fade, moments of discrepancy between the fictional world of the narrative and the fictional world of the story occur, namely the discord between what Grace claims about

herself and what she really seems to be like as well as what actions she is capable of taking. This discrepancy problematizes her narrative reliability in the communicative plan with the narratee.

Although Grace tries to come across as a modest, religiously superstitious, chaste and moral woman, she allows the narratee to see when she pretends and distorts the facts by commenting on the techniques she uses in front of other characters, apart from Simon. Her acting for Simon is justified by her distrust of doctors in general, but her misrepresentation in front of people who are trying to do their best to help her is not. When staying at the house of the Kingston Penitentiary Governor as a servant and maid to his wife, Grace is very careful about her facial expressions, indicating her incessant pretending. She never smiles because if she did, the women at the Governor's house would not perceive her as a romantic, tragic character (AG, 27). Tellingly, she adds that if she started laughing, she would not be able ever to stop (AG, 27). She does not provide an explanation or an interpretation of her urge to laugh. The questions arise as to whether Grace considers her situation funny or absurd, or whether madness is lurking behind her contained behavior. Her urge to laugh at being imprisoned for especially gruesome murders adds a sinister hue to her portrayal which contrasts with the image of a pure and sensitive woman Grace projects. She recounts how she learned to hide her true emotions and to appear repentant: "I've learnt how to keep my face still, I made my eyes wide and flat […] and I said I had repented in bitter tears, and was now a changed person" (AG, 29). If repentance is an act, then having no regrets would be her true state of mind. So far, though, she has come across as a reliable narrator, as she guarantees the narratee an insight into her mind. Nevertheless, Grace is also shown to be constructing a certain image of herself in the communicative plan with the narratee.

Grace emphasizes herself to be a merciful and kind-hearted human being, and a person who believes in bad luck and bad omens. She repeatedly finds cruelty in the actions of others, such as a popular pastime involving dogs running with hot coals tied to their tails (AG, 266) or laughing at the expense of a dead person (AG, 280). She abhors talk of killing, as when Jeremiah the peddler visits Mr. Kinnear's house (AG, 308). Grace states on many occasions that she could never harm another being, that "she had an aversion to shedding the blood of any living thing" (AG, 289) and that for superstitious reasons she would never "kill a spider" (AG, 251). This image of a soft-hearted, morally strong Grace does not correspond with the image of Grace strangling the bleeding Nancy with a handkerchief while the girl begged for her life and the life of her unborn baby for the sake of Mr. Kinnear, as a popular ballad about the murders illustrated (AG, 14). The contrast is so strong that it seems Grace must be innocent. However, when Grace describes how in a scrapbook she saw a morbid poem about rotting bones and graves with the inscription "I will always be with you in Spirit, Your loving 'Nancy,'" her initial reaction is fright (AG, 28). Still, when Grace overcomes the shock, she comments dryly:

> *Of course it was a different Nancy. Still, the rotten bones. They would be, by now. Her face was all black by the time they found her, there must have been a dreadful smell. It was hot then […] still she went off surprisingly soon, you'd think she would have kept longer in the dairy, it is usually cool down there. (AG, 29)*

Describing the decaying body of a woman she was convicted of murdering, Grace is surprisingly pragmatic. On the one hand, she seems frightened that Nancy is haunting her from the grave (the question then arises whether she would be scared if she were not responsible for Nancy's death); on the other hand, when Grace realizes that

she is not being visited by the victim, she describes in cold blood how surprising it was that Nancy rotted so quickly and what a horrible smell the body must have produced. Such a reaction is incongruous with the carefully crafted image of the soft and solemn Grace.

Being cold and matter-of-fact about Nancy's rotting corpse is not the only instance in which a discrepancy is created between the image Grace constructs and the impression that arises via textual signals. There are several more occasions that reveal Grace as detached or emotionless. For example, when Nancy instructs her to kill a chicken for dinner, Grace is in tears, describing herself as incapable of bearing "the thought of it," (see AG, 289) meaning performing what was requested of her. She asks young Jamie Walsh for help, and he kills the chicken neatly. What is curious is Grace's sudden change in sentiment towards the chicken. A minute ago Grace was in tears, unable to kill it, but when the miserable animal "lay kicking in the dirt [she] thought it was very pathetic" (AG, 289). Such an abrupt reversal can be read as a textual signal of Grace's unreliability when it comes to presenting herself as a tender hearted person. Other inconsistencies emerge: Grace feigns the tender heartedness, but refuses to feed the hungry horses because "it was not [her] duty to feed them" (AG, 251), nor would she tend to the mooing cow with painfully full udders because "[she] could not do everything at once" (AG, 251). It is not her inaction itself towards the animals that triggers suspicion, it is the emotionless manner in which she refers to it.

When Grace's communicative plan with the narratee is scrutinized, it is revealed that she keeps facts hidden not only from Simon, but from the narratee as well. When she describes her meeting Simon for the first time, the narratee knows that she understands more than she acknowledges. This particular scene, however, also discloses the fact that Grace is a selective narrator in her communication with the narratee. In the scene with the apple, in which Simon is trying to lure the answer from Grace that it reminds her of the Biblical tree of knowledge, the narratee realizes that Grace understands what he wants to hear. Once Grace tells Simon that she may tell him lies and he accepts this possibility, Grace takes the apple and puts it against her forehead (AG, 47). This simple gesture can be interpreted as her sign towards Simon indicating that she had understood what he meant before: apple + head = tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is a significant communicative act of Grace's towards Simon. Grace, however, does not mention Simon's reaction, without which the narratee cannot know whether Simon understood this particular gesture or not. The gesture aims to reveal to Simon that Grace is capable of figurative thinking and therefore he should be aware that whenever she teases him by her guileless answers to his questions about the fruit and vegetables he brings to sessions, she is just teasing and pretending. However, as Grace does not mention Simon's reaction to the gesture, the narratee does not know if Simon understood it or not, and therefore s/he does not know if Simon is aware of the fact that Grace is capable of figurative thinking. This proves that certain facts are kept from the narratee, just as they are with Simon and therefore such withholding of information can be read as another textual signal of Grace's unreliability in communication with the narratee.

Another textual signal indicating Grace's unreliability is her snaring herself in the web of events she presents as factual. When talking about her family back in Ireland, Grace says that she took care of her younger siblings, as her mother was perpetually pregnant. This means Grace spent a considerable part of her childhood in the presence of pregnant women, thus was accustomed to identifying signs of the condition. When Grace works in the house of Mrs. Alderman Parkinson and her best friend Mary Whitney becomes pregnant, Grace recognizes it immediately, as she had seen the signs often

enough. Grace even says she can recognize the "milky smell of it" (AG, 200). Yet, when Nancy Montgomery became pregnant and Grace was witnessing the very same symptoms and even the same excuses both Mary and Nancy used regarding the morning sickness or getting plumper around the waist (AG, 200, 316), she claims it took her a few days to guess what was going on (AG, 315-321). This discrepancy is obvious and can be interpreted as another textual signal of narrator's unreliability.

The reason why Grace claimed she had not recognized Nancy's symptoms for several days may stem from an ulterior motive. The relationship between Nancy and Grace was far from ideal. Moreover, Nancy was expecting her master's baby and Mr. Kinnear seems to be in love with Nancy enough to marry her, although she holds a much lower social position. Mary Whitney also had an affair with a man from higher society, a son of her employer, but she ended up as most women in her situation did - abandoned by her lover and left to her own resources. In Mary's case this led to a botched abortion and her bleeding to death. Grace expresses indignation over the fact that the frivolous, jealous and nasty Nancy, whom she dislikes, was to end happily married and satisfied, while Mary, whom she loved, had to die, even though they both had made the same mistake (AG, 321). To Grace it is outrageous that such injustice exists. Nancy's pregnancy may have been the motivation for the murder, so she wouldn't be rewarded for the same thing that had caused Mary's untimely demise. Therefore, Grace's obfuscation regarding when exactly she learned about the pregnancy may be of vital importance considering the murder plan. As Simon reminds Grace, James McDermott confessed that the murder plan originally came from her: "Before he was hanged, McDermott said that you were the one who put him up to it [...] He claimed you intended to murder Nancy and Mr. Kinnear by putting poison into their porridge" (AG, 299). If Grace had learned about the pregnancy several days later, as she claims, she would not have had time to plan the murders, as they occurred very shortly after Grace's claimed realization of Nancy's pregnancy. McDermott's testimony would then be an obvious lie. However, if she understood the nature of Nancy's condition right away, she would have had time to plan the murder, just like McDermott testified. Atwood is not trying to give a definitive answer as to whether Grace killed Nancy or not. She merely opens up possibilities with these textual signals that can identify Grace as an unreliable narrator. It is clear that in communication with the narratee Grace hides facts that are vital for the semantic construction of the narrative. Grace is trying to persuade the narratee (as well as Simon) that she is innocent and had nothing to do with the murders. If she is omitting the facts that may indicate that this is not true and she indeed is a murderess, then she deserves to be identified as an unreliable narrator.

After this analysis of the homodiegetic narrator in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* in the light of Tomáš Kubíček's theory of unreliability the conclusion that can be reached is that even though Grace Marks proves to be a partially reliable narrator in the communicative plan with the character of Simon Jordan, claiming her unreliability openly to him, she proves to be an unreliable narrator in communicative plan with the narratee. She may have claimed the possibility of her lying to Simon, but towards the narratee she claimed no such thing. On the contrary, she did her best to give the impression she is telling the narratee the truth, while she kept deliberately omitting and distorting certain facts, thus creating a discrepancy between the fictional world of the story and the fictional world of the narrative. As Kubíček claims, the unreliability of the narrator can be claimed if textual signals can be identified that enable the construction of a parallel meaning of the read text (K, 174). This happens in *Alias Grace*, as the effort of the narrator is to persuade the narratee that she did not kill Nancy Montgomery and is, in fact, innocent. Nevertheless, the textual signals that indicate the narrator's

unreliability suggest an alternative answer, unlocking a parallel meaning and marking the possibility that Grace Marks is in fact the celebrated murderess.

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