

“Alias Grace” by Margaret Atwood: The Perfect Fall Mystery

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Autumn is finally here, giving everyone the excuse they needed to curl up with a pumpkin spice latte and a book. I recommend some Starbucks and “Alias Grace” by Margaret Atwood as the perfect murder mystery coffee combination to keep you up at night .

In part nine of the novel, Atwood writes, “When you are in the middle of a story, it isn’t a story at all, but only a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard powerless to stop it. It’s only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or to someone else.”

Atwood never disappoints and “Alias Grace” is no exception. It’s the perfect combination of mystery, thriller, and historical fiction that will leave you confused and wanting more.

The novel takes place in mid-1800s Canada, centering around Grace Marks and her involvement in the murder of both her employer, Thomas Kinnear, and his house keeper, Nancy Montgomery. Grace is an unreliable narrator, as she doesn’t know whether she committed the murders – or maybe she does, and she’s just good at pretending she didn’t.

Grace began working as a maid for wealthy families when she was a child and was only 16 when she was convicted of the murders. Grace spent the better half of her life behind bars until she was deemed suitable for rehabilitation. It was during her adult years that Grace met Dr. Jordan, who wanted to study her psychology. From there, the two discussed her life, her possible involvement in the murders, and her feelings toward it all.

The inspiration for Alias Grace came about after Atwood read about Marks in the novel, “Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush,” by Susanna Moodie.

There is very little information about the real Grace Marks, but Atwood cultivated a compelling character and does an extraordinary job of showing her complexity. While the evidence points to Grace’s conviction, her demeanor, humility, and soft-spokenness argue for her innocence.

Alias Grace by Margaret Atwood is a novel written for cold days and warm candlelight. The novel is well-paced and, without sounding pretentious, is filled with societal commentary. I think that any book that can make you think about yourself and your moral compass is a book worth reading. Do you trust yourself enough to judge Grace Marks’s innocence?

As Atwood says in chapter 36, “If we were all on trial for our thoughts, we would all be hanged.”

