Chapter IV

The Novels of Later Phase

The present chapter aims at discussing the main aspects of Margaret Atwood’s novels of Later Phase. These novels have been critically analysed with reference to the title, story, plot-construction, characters, theme, imagery, symbolism and view of life. The following four novels have been taken for discussion:

1) *Alias Grace* (1996),
2) *The Blind Assassin* (2000),
3) *Oryx and Crake* (2003),

I

4.1. Introduction:

In the ninth novel, *Alias Grace* (1996), the novelist Margaret Atwood retells the story of Grace Marks, a real nineteenth-century Canadian woman who was accused of, and spent thirty years in jail for the murder of two people. It is based on reality. It used a genuine 19th century criminal case to weave a fictional exploration of the class, psychological and gender politics surrounding a female alleged murderer. It is also Atwood’s most sophisticated articulation of her longstanding philosophical and political concerns with power, culture and identity. The novel was nominated for the Booker Prize and short-listed for the Governor General’s Award.
4.1.1. Title:

From its title on, *Alias Grace* celebrates mask wearing as a subversive technique for both the domestic and murderess in the world of the novel and the postmodern subject as one who eludes any definitive identity. There are so many stories about Grace Marks in circulation. They are all different aliases for the protagonist. She is not only Grace Marks alias Mary Whitney at the trial but she is made to represent a wide range of Victorian construction of woman. Grace is victim and suffering saint, whore, madwoman, murderess and Dr. Jordan’s muse. With so many aliases the title signals a disturbing absence of the original behind the name. So Atwood has used the word alias in the title of this novel for a specific reason.

4.1.2. Story:

The novel, *Alias Grace* is a story about one of the almost-forgotten scandals in Canadian history where “few facts emerge as unequivocally known.” The Kinnear-Montgomery murders took place on July 23, 1843 and were extensively reported not only in Canadian newspapers but in those of the United States and Britain. The details were sensational: Grace Marks was uncommonly pretty and also extremely young. Kinnear’s housekeeper, Nancy Montgomery had previously given birth to an illegitimate child and was Thomas Kinnear’s mistress. Grace and her fellow servant James McDermott had run away to the United States together and were assumed by the press to be lovers. The trial was held in early November and only the Kinnear murder was tried. A trial for the Montgomery murder was considered unnecessary. James McDermott was hanged in front of a huge crowd on November 21. But Grace was
imprisoned in Kingston Penitentiary for thirty years until she was pardoned. Then she went to live in New York State where possibly she married and changed her name.

4.1.3. Plot-construction:

The strategies employed by Grace Marks and by Atwood in her structuring of this autobiographical fiction where the past is pieced together as her story will be discussed in relation to the motif of quilt making. Designs for quilt pattern blocks occur at the beginning of all fifteen sections of the novel; Grace is an excellent quilter herself, and the narrative ends with Grace’s own marriage-bed quilt, where the Tree of Paradise pattern that she is sewing may be her silent confession — though it continues to elude definitive interpretation:

I have to conclude that, although there undoubtedly was a truth—someone did kill Nancy Montgomery—truth is sometimes unknowable, at least by us.²

The quilt patterns appear with their names as section heading throughout the novel. These are important epigraphs and act as more than straightforward labels for the contents of the sections that follow them. They introduce the sections of the novel as separate patterns that are to be fitted into a whole quilt.

Graphically, the novel is a linear collection for quilt blocks: one of the marketing strategies used in its distribution, “a bookstore display featuring an Alias Grace quilt inspired by Margaret Atwood, reflected this aspect of its physical construction.”³ It is significant that while Atwood has indicated the block patterns associated with her written novel, she has not given complete instructions for making them up. In order to make a quilt from the patterns other hands must execute the blocks and combine
them into a whole. The novel, *Alias Grace*, presented as a collection of blocks. The pattern blocks of the novel are not all donated by Grace: some of them have been provided by Simon Jordan and his correspondents, and each of the characters contributes in some way to the collection. Scrapbook collections, another type of album are mentioned in the early stages of the account of Grace’s dealings with Simon and serve to accentuate the concept of the novel as an album quilt.

The novel begins with the first block entitled as Jagged Edge which contains one chapter only, a first-person monologue delivered by Grace Marks and her prison nightmare of Nancy Montgomery’s murder:

> Then up ahead I see Nancy, on her knees, with her hair fallen over and the blood running down into her eyes. Around her neck is a white cotton kerchief printed with blue flowers, love- in- a- mist, it’s mine. She’s lifting up her face, she’s holding out her hands to me for mercy----and then Nancy smiles, only the mouth, her eyes are hidden by the blood and hair, then she catters into patches of colour, a drift of red cloth petals across the stones.  

It is impossible to know whether this dream is a revelation from the unconscious or a storyteller’s conscious duplicity.

The second block, Rocky Road is a long poem written about Grace Marks and James McDermott. Third block — Puss in the Corner may represent a sexual game. The word puss can be known in its colloquial sense as a reference to woman as a sex object. In his first interview with Grace, Simon presents her with an apple and asks her what it makes her think of. She decides that this “must be a riddle.” The fourth block — A Young Man’s Fancy consists of a number letters and a third-person
narrative involving Simon as well as a monologue from Grace. In the fifth section of the novel named after the quilt pattern Broken Dishes, she recalls her childhood “only in scraps, like a plate that’s been broken.” Recollected fragments are arranged in a variety of different patterns. The last quilt, The Tree of Paradise contains little scraps of cloth from the clothes of the maker and her dead friends and like the wife’s collection. It is a record of the career of a “celebrated murderess.” Grace is pardoned, she is taken to New York where Jamie Walsh is waiting for her and he marries her.

4.1.4. Narration:

There is another level of variety in the narrative method, for although a good deal of Grace’s story is presented in first-person monologue, there are occasions when it is presented in the third-person monologue, When Simon tries “a more direct approach” in his interrogations, a third-person narrator presents the story from the point of view of his embarrassment when he “felt foolish, as if he’d committed a breach of etiquette” or “as if he was watching her undress, through a chink in the wall.”

Another significant narratological variation occurs when Grace comes to the account of the actual murders. The voice that she uses on this occasion is not her own. Not only does she speak in third-person dialogue, but, in addition, the words that she utters were scripted by others. They are those that were provided for her by her lawyer at the trial or by the newspaper reports of the time: the words that appeared in the governor’s wife’s album collection of “famous criminals.”

This simple variation between first and third person occludes the real Grace Marks and helps to maintain the sense of the novel and the
self-presentation of the central character. Throughout the novel, Grace is fascinated with her own interpretations of the meanings of quilt patterns. She ponders on the links between the names and the physical appearance of the patterns she observes in the blocks on which she works as she relates her story and in the quilts in the households where she works her as a servant. Thus Margaret Atwood explores darker territory in her novel *Alias Grace* where quilting helps define not merely the central character, Grace Marks, but the act of narration itself along with the novel’s structure.

### 4.1.5. Characters:

The central character — Grace Marks dominates this novel. At one point she enumerates the opinions of her as published in the provincial newspapers:

> I think of all the things that have been written about me — that I am an inhuman female demon, that I am an innocent victim of a blackguard forced against my will and in danger of my own life, that I was too ignorant to know how to act and that to hang me would be judicial murder, that I am fond of animals ---- that I am a good girl with a pliable nature and no harm is told of me, that I am cunning and devious, that I am soft in the head and little better than an idiot.\(^{11}\)

Actually we meet Grace, a model Prisoner in 1859, through the eyes of Dr. Simon Jordan, a young physician. She is the sixteen-year old who is accused of the murders of her employer, Mr. Kinnear and his housekeeper, Nancy. She narrates much of the story, sometimes allowing the readers into her private thoughts and exposing some of the contradictions in her story.
Grace is in prison at the time of the story and relates much of what has happened to her through her talks with Dr. Jordan. She is continually sewing during their interviews. That sewing allows her to keep her head down both literally and metaphorically. So that Simon cannot see the expression on her face unless she chooses to look up at him. Their relationship could be interpreted as a game of sexual power politics, where the doctor has the authority to affirm this female prisoner’s guilt or innocence in exchange for her true confession. Her Project of self-figuring represents to make her story “rich in incident, as a sort of return gift”\textsuperscript{12} to Simon.

Grace has been told by her lawyer to maintain the demeanor of stupidity in order to save her life. To avoid her punishment she keeps everything to herself. She chooses her words very carefully. She manages when Dr. Jordan’s insistent probing for the truth: “I approach her mind as if it is a locked box, to which I must find the right key; but so far, I must admit, I have not got very far with it.”\textsuperscript{13} Grace never says that she is innocent; she only claims not to remember, and forgetting is not the same as innocence. In the end, she does win her pardon and marries the once-young boy, Jamie who had a crush on her in his youth.

Many characters are baffled at the thought of Grace, a wild woman and possible murderess. Throughout the novel her path crosses that of another marginal character. Dr. Simon Jordan, an American is one of the up-and-coming young men of his day in the field of mental health and is an expert on amnesia and particularly for the unconscious mind. He has studied in Europe and is employed to free Grace to help her fill in the gaps in her memory and show her guiltless. Jordan takes an interest in Grace’s case several years after she has been imprisoned. He listens to her every
afternoon, as she sits sewing quilts for the prison governor’s wife. He wants to pry as many details from Grace's mind as he can, trying to determine if she is lying or truly suffers from amnesia.

Jordan is fascinated with her and her story. He listens intently to Grace’s account of her family’s passage from Ireland to Canada during which her mother died and was buried among the icebergs, and to the tale of her time in service with Mary Whitney. He probes into the unconventional domestic arrangements of Kinnear and Nancy. Because his professional objective is to wake the part of Grace’s mind. But Jordan eventually leaves without coming to any substantial conclusions. Instead, he runs away from Grace, from his landlady with whom he was having an affair, and from his mother who wants him to marry. He returns to Europe, where he finds life less burdensome. At the end of the novel, he returns home and is involved in the Civil War.

Mary Whitney is the best friend and mentor of Grace. She is the same age as Grace, but she has more experience both in her job and in the world in general. She teaches Grace about life with her ribald, humorous and radical politics. Servants, she tells Grace, have the better of their masters and mistresses who are feeble and ignorant creatures, though rich and cannot light a fire if their toes are freezing.

Mary as the older and more worldly-wise servant represents the voice of the people, an intruder through knowledge. Her discourse is mostly an inversion of class prejudice and a conservative call to maintain of class distance, but Grace calls Mary’s ideas “democratic”\textsuperscript{14} The two of them are very close until Mary begins her affair with Mr. George, the son of the house. Mary gets pregnant and is jilted. She has a bungled abortion and dies from it. The spirit of Mary stays with Grace, and under
hypnotism, the supposed spirit speaks out. Dying off early in the novel, Mary evaporates into a memory, a ghost, an inner voice and an alias for the murderess.

Thomas Kinnear is a well-to-do gentleman who lives outside of Toronto. He is a bachelor and a well known womanizer. For this reason, respectable women tend to shun him. He is also suspected of having ties with a revolutionary political group, therefore making many men wary of him. Kinnear lives with his housemaid, Nancy Montgomery, with whom he is having an affair. When Grace Marks comes to work for him, he flirts with her, arousing Montgomery's jealousy, although he sleeps with Montgomery, and she eats at the dinner table with him. Kinnear often reminds her that she is only his maid. He is found dead in his cellar, the victim of bullet wounds. He was seventy-three years old at the time of the murder. It is suggested that James McDermott killed him.

Nancy Montgomery is the housekeeper in Thomas Kinnear's home. When she meets Grace she tells her that she is looking for extra help. Grace finds Nancy friendly and decides to take the offer. When Grace arrives at Kinnear's, however, she finds Nancy to be less welcoming than Grace had hoped. Nancy is often harsh and puts on airs as if she were the mistress of the house. Nancy dresses very well, eats dinner with Mr. Kinnear, and as Grace finds out later, also sleeps with Kinnear. When Kinnear travels to Toronto for a day or two, however, Nancy warms up to Grace and even asks Grace to sleep with her. As soon as Kinnear returns, though, Nancy once again dismisses Grace. When Nancy discovers Kinnear flirting with Grace, she decides to fire Grace. Nancy is found dead later in the cellar with Mr. Kinnear, felled with an axe and finished
off by strangling and her throat has been cut, Grace’s scarf round her throat. It is unclear whether James McDermott or Grace has killed her.

4.1.6. Theme:

The strong sexuality is the main theme of this novel. Grace, for instance, is accused of using the promise of sexual favors to persuade James McDermott to kill Thomas Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery. In many ways sexuality drives this story and its characters. It is suggested that sexuality might have been the underlying cause behind the murders. James McDermott lusts for Grace. Grace lusts for Kinnear. And it is their opposite attractions that lead to the murders. Sex ultimately brings about the death of Mary Whitney. Dr. Jordan all but cracks under the pressure brought about by his sexual involvement and by his sexual fantasies.

Atwood recounts the details and circumstances of women in the nineteenth century. She portrays these women through the eyes of her own experiences in the twentieth century. The working-class women, according to Atwood's portrayal, have three options in life. They work as servants all their lives; they marry and are taken care of by a man; or they become prostitutes. Ironically it is the nineteenth-century concept of femininity that may have saved Grace from hanging and from completing her life sentence in jail. It was believed, during those times, that women were frail, moral, and incapable of vicious crimes such as murder.

Even though circumstantial evidence pointed to Grace's involvement in the murders, she avoids the death sentence and eventually wins an early release from the penitentiary. Grace Marks plays out her duplicity and class tensions among fellow servants and gentlemen of a higher class. In this way, the universal feminism of the novel focuses on the sexual exploitation of female domestics by privileged men as the dark
side of class power. Thus *Alias Grace* sets up tension between ladies and maids from the opening pages, without actually casting its gaze on ladies as key characters.

The psychic damage caused by the wholesale repression of ranges of emotion is explored again in *Alias Grace*. While *The Robber Bride* played out this theme with the interactions of the four major characters, *Alias Grace* follows this conflict into the individual psyche. There is never any popular doubt about the man’s guilt in such murder cases, though opinions over the woman are always sharply divided.

Not only the murder case but life in Victorian times is presented in the novel, *Alias Grace*. The novel is the most detailed portrait of a domestic’s life and work in the English Canadian novel. Traditionally, domestic servants in literature have been fixed as icons and stock characters or under-represented as silenced subjects, background fixtures mute as furniture. Social class and her occupation as servant are important in determining Grace’s story. Lives of servant girls form one more major theme in the novel as Atwood challenges classic accounts of nineteenth century Canadian life. Grace’s story is entwined with those of two other servants — Mary Whitney and Nancy who fall victim to the sexual hazards which regularly beset young women in service. Mary is seduced by her employer’s son and dies of a botched abortion while Nancy occupies a socially uncertain position as her employer’s mistress though the novel suggests he will cast her aside when he discovers her pregnancy.

4.1.7. Imagery:

Grace Marks is also very conscious of her own image in the popular imagination that she is quite capable for the role of criminal and mad woman:
My hair is coming out from under my cap. Red hair of an ogre. A wild beast, the newspaper said. A monster. When they come with my dinner I will put the slop bucket over my head and hide behind the door, and that will give them a fright. If they want a monster so badly, they ought to be provided with one. I never do such things, however. I only consider them.\textsuperscript{15}

Grace knows what the Victorian mad woman should look like her own story. Then she extends the war imagery to the bed. The bed is not a peaceful place, at least not for women, because it is the perilous and painful site of childbirth. It is also

where the act takes place between men and women that I will not mention to you, Sir--- some call it love, and others despair, or else merely an indignity which they must suffer through --- what we sleep in, and where we dream, and often where we die.\textsuperscript{16}

For Grace, talking about beds means talking about herself and about humanity.

\textbf{4.1.8. Metaphor:}

The main metaphor employed in this novel is that of the quilt. Atwood names each of her chapters after a specific quilt pattern. The names of the patterns offer clues on how to look at them. These names include Jagged Edge, Rocky Road, Secret Drawer, and Pandora's Box. The quilt names each suggest the tone of the chapter that is to follow. The use of the quilt metaphor is appropriate because Grace's skill in sewing is mentioned quite often throughout the story. While Grace relates the
events of her past to Dr. Jordan, her hands are often kept busy with piecing together the scraps of material to make the cover of a quilt. The quilt metaphor refers to the piecing together of information that has been gathered from different sources, which offer many different interpretations.

4.1.9. View of Life:

Thus, Margaret Atwood gives the realistic view of life through the mouth of Grace Marks that truth is not always absolute and there exist gaps between official versions and personal narratives. The truth is perhaps somewhere between the two. It is Atwood’s futuristic dream of a world where heart and head, the inner and outer, objective and subjective, science and arts strike a more fine balance.

II

4.2. Introduction:

Margaret Atwood’s tenth novel, The Blind Assassin published in 2000 is winner of the Booker Prize and the International Association of Crime Writers Dashiell Hammett Award. It presents a gripping tale which stretches across many decades from World War I, almost to the present moment covering crucial episodes History like the depression, the World Wars and the Spanish Civil war. It is a novel within a novel within another novel. The three narratives are interspersed with newspaper clippings, a letter and society announcements. As Neeru
Tandon and Anshul Chadra says: “It’s initially dizzying, then dazzling and ---finally---- very compelling to watch Atwood weave her brilliant tapestry.”

The novel is Atwood’s Gothic version of Canadian history in the twentieth century, told by an eighty-two-year-old woman, Mrs. Iris Chase Griffen, who dies of a heart attack in 1999 just as she finishes writing her memoir which she leaves in a locked steamer trunk in her kitchen as a legacy for her grand-daughter who is away travelling in India. This Iris’s autobiographical narrative is also the memoir of a survivor. As like a spider Iris spins out the black thread of her handwriting, weaving her devious way between the present and the past where “dead people persist in the minds of the living.” This novel is about secrets, lies and things that have been deliberately hidden.

**4.2.1. Title:**

The title of the novel refers to her who drove her beloved sister to suicide by telling her that Alex had been killed in Holland and then adding almost gratuitously that they had been lovers for a long time. Here she means Iris, the protagonist of the novel functions as her sister’s, father’s and lover’s assassin. Acting according to traditional female virtue, Iris has tried to spare her father by marrying Richard, but that proves to be the road to her father’s death and ultimately to Richard’s also. She emerges from the story as one of Atwood’s most memorable characters to date. By the third and fourth episodes, not only she but he has introduced the blind assassin who falls in love with the blue-blooded Sniflard princess “against all odds.” and manages to escape from Sakiel-Norn.
4.2.2. Story:

The novel, *The Blind Assassin* contains three interlocking but apparently unrelated stories, all written in different styles and with different narrators. Iris’s memoir is the frame narrative in which the other two stories are contained, and all three stories are finally locked up together in her steamer trunk, just as they are locked between the covers of the actual novel. Enclosed within Iris’s narrative is a modernist love story entitled *The Blind Assassin* written by Iris’s younger sister, Laura. And within that is embedded a pulp science fiction fantasy about a blind assassin told by the male lover of the unnamed woman in Laura’s novel. Every story happens through different representations of geographical and psychological space.

The first narrative of the novel is the fictional autobiography of a Canadian woman whose life spans over century. It is a self-reflexive memoir of Iris Chase’s life in Port Ticonderoga and Toronto, Canada, a tale of two sisters one of whom dies, the actual reason behind her death, their childhood in Avilion, their father’s escape to alcoholism, the problems in Chase industries, hide of Alex Thomas in the family, his love affair with two sisters, her marriage to Richard, Laura--- Richard’s victim of seduction and last Laura’s suicide. This story ends in tragedy because Iris alone knows who is the real culprit of Laura’s death.

The second narrative is also called *The Blind Assassin* supposed to have been written by Laura Chase. The manuscript was found after her death and published by Iris. It records the secret love affair of Alex and Laura. So the protagonists are identified only as ‘He’ and ‘She.’ As Iris writes,
As for the book, Laura didn’t write a word of it, but you must have known that for some time. I wrote it myself, during my long evenings alone, when I was waiting for Alex to come back….\textsuperscript{20}

The third narrative, \textit{The Blind Assassin} describes the risky affair in the thirties between a wealthy young woman and a man. During their meetings, the lover tells a science fiction which is set on the planet Zycron to entertain his girlfriend. This subplot is located in a fictional place, the city of Sakiel-Norn and the narrator of this sub plot happens to be the lover of Iris Chase who weaves a brilliant tale of blind carpet weavers, who have lost their sight due to overwork and later on assumes the role of assassin and mute virgins to be sacrificed at the altar of the pagan Gods.

In Sakiel Norn, aristocrats called as the Snlfards are skilled metal workers and inventors of mechanical devices. It is renowned for its handicrafts, especially for weaving. But this labour caused them to go blind by the age of nine and their blindness is the measure of the cost of carpet; “This carpet blinded ten children … This blinded fifteen, this blinded twenty.”\textsuperscript{21} According to law the noblest Snlfards must sacrifice at least one of their daughters. Such girls must be killed by a blind carpet weaver.

But in the story, the blind assassin X moves through the palace and intends to kill the sacrificial maiden but falls in love when he touches her; Touch comes before sigh, before speech. It is the first language and the last, and it always tells the truth. This is how the girl who couldn’t speak and the man who couldn’t see fell in love.\textsuperscript{22}
There are two different endings of this story. According to ‘She’ the assassin and maiden escaped to the foothills and lived happily and in ‘His’ ending, however, not one escapes alive and he becomes the blind assassin of the mute sacrificial maiden. Within The Blind Assassin there is another story with happy ending. It is about lizard man of planet Xenor and peach women of planet Aa’A.

4.2.3. Plot-construction:

*The Blind Assassin* has its multidimensional plot structure, which is as complicated as any Victorian sensational novel. Margaret Atwood subtly braids all these stories together and gradually reveals their buried secrets. She co-relates these stories with the help of a torn photograph. In the Prologue and Epilogue of the novel and Iris memoir, there is a photograph of a man and woman on a picnic, showing just the hand of a third person in one corner, which evidently frames the whole novel. But actually, both are different photographs, one is tinted and other is black and white.

The novel is presented with a curious amalgamation of first person narrative, newspaper reports and a sub-plot which addresses some of the most important issues in the novel which are left unspoken. The novel contains fifteen main divisions with their unequal sub-chapters. The novel opens with Iris’s memoir and her account of Laura’s death over fifty years earlier:

Ten days after the war ended, my sister Laura drove a car off a bridge. The bridge was being repaired: she went right through the Danger sign. The car fell a hundred feet into the ravine, smashing through the treetops feathery with new
leaves and then burst into flames … Nothing much was left of her but charred smithereens.\textsuperscript{23}

Then, within the first thirty pages three more deaths are recorded, not in Iris’s voice but through newspaper obituaries on the deaths of Iris’s husband Richard Griffen in 1947, of their daughter Aimee twenty-five years after that, and then in 1998 the death of Iris’s sister-in-law Winifred Prior. As Howells has noted, “Death overshadows \textit{The Blind Assassin} where so many characters first enter the text through their obituary notices and lives are shaped and mangled by two world wars.”\textsuperscript{24} Certainly Iris’s death occurs at the end and there are other deaths in the novel, but it is that multiple-death arouses curiosity. With several chapters of Laura’s novel and episodes from the science fiction tale, Iris’s voice again speaking in the present on the day when she begins to think about writing her memoir. Thus Atwood by adding structural complexity to the novel and interweaving multiple narrations reconsiders the act of storytelling itself.

### 4.2.4. Characters:

The characters within Iris’ memoir are superb recalling her life over the past seventy years is a long, tedious process, but characters make this novel an unforgettable piece of literature. The main characters include Iris and Laura Chase and their parents, Alex Thomas, Richard, Winifred, Aimee and Sabrina are minor characters. Iris Chase Griffen, the primary narrator, is the sister of suicidal Laura and the author of the original Blind Assassin manuscript. Iris is aptly named: first, because she is in some ways the eye, the ‘seer’; second, she indeed understands elements of the ‘chase.’ In fact, this wild goose chase of a novel moves through multiple narratives and triple-tiered storytelling.
The novel always focuses on Iris’ relationship with her sister. They both grow up together in intense closeness as motherless girls under the care of their housekeeper Reenie and their war-damaged alcoholic father. Iris’ identity is defined by her gender, her class and her role as good sister to Laura. As the eldest daughter of an old Anglo-Canadian family it is her duty to marry well in order to restore the family fortunes and to safeguard Laura’s interests. The novel moves along, chronicling Iris’ life, the young Iris is presented as so vapid, so unaware, so stupid and the older Iris realize this, it is something for which she is quite apologetic and sad. The older Iris is very sympathetic, a sad and sorry woman, who demands and deserves respect and caring.

Iris Chase emerges from the story as one of Atwood’s most memorable characters to date. She is a woman of ascetic life and acetic wit, sharp and bitter as old wine. In her childhood she was her father’s substitute boy. Iris has moved through her life in a fog of other’s expectations, incapable of identifying her own needs and responsibilities. She is a victim to whom fate has not been kind, but whose ills — like those of many victims of circumstance are largely of her own making, even if her contribution was often one of complacency.

Now Iris is a woman near the end of her life, reflecting on the path she’s taken to old age. For her nothing is more difficult than to understand the dead but nothing is more dangerous than to ignore them. She has lived fifty years with the secret meaning of Laura’s death, and her story. Now she is constructing her story as the more personal memorial to preserve her memories of her love affair with Alex Thomas not only for Alex but also for herself.
Laura Chase is the younger glamorous, strange sister, the artist and empathy a temple girl with no illusions about god’s mercy. She is the girl who will never fit into the world’s regulations and structures. She is spiritual, curious, uncompromising. She is not a woman with the organizational power or love of self-advertisement to write an autobiography or a novel — but she is both heroic soul and sacrificed female. Other who claims they don’t understand her always uses her. Richard uses her for his lust and Iris her own sister uses her by posting her story under Laura’s name. Thus, throughout her life Laura becomes a helpless victim and confines to an asylum.

But actually Richard whisks her out because Laura gets pregnant from him. Laura has more courage and dignity than Iris. Laura herself was more devoted to Alex; “I had to make the sacrifice. I had to take the pain and suffering onto myself. That’s what I promised God. I knew if I did that, it would save Alex.” She just escapes from asylum just to meet Alex:

Because the war’s over…and Alex will be back soon. If I wasn’t here, he wouldn’t know where to find me. He wouldn’t know about Bella Vista, ----I went to Halifax. The only address he’ll have for me is yours. He’ll get a message through to me somehow. When Iris tells Laura about Alex’s death, she kills herself by driving off a bridge. Here Iris functions as her sister’s assassin. Iris presents Laura as a tragic heroine whose story unfolds with dramatic irony:

In a painting she’s be gathering wildflowers, though in real life she rarely did anything of the kind. The earth-faced god
crouches behind her in the forest shade. Only we can see him. Only we know he will pounce.\textsuperscript{27}

Her telling represents a tangle of emotions where guilt at having failed her sister is mixed with self-justification.

Iris’ Grandfather, Benjamin built the button factory in the early 1870 and her grandmother, Adelia who was married off rather than married. Iris’ father, Norval was the eldest of three brothers. Two younger brothers Edger and Percival were killed in the war. Norval is a serious gentleman. He always wanted boys to carry on the family business. He returns from military service with one good eye and one good leg from the World War I and becomes alcoholic. Her mother was a religious woman. She died of miscarriage and remains helpless victim throughout her life.

In their teenage life, Iris and Laura meet Alex Thomas in the button factory picnic. He is an orphan and adopted by a Presbyterian minister and his wife. He is an European immigrant and a labour organizer. Suspected of violence, he is secretly sheltered by Laura and Iris when they are too young to understand his position and their own sexual pull. They supplied him food and drink; “Mornings and evenings were the times of our visits. We raided the pantry, salvaged and leftovers. We smuggled up raw carrots, bacon rinds, half-eaten boiled eggs, pieces of bread folded over, with butter and Jam inside.”\textsuperscript{28} After his departure Laura gives a torn photograph to Iris in which she cuts herself out of it and she has another one is which she cuts Iris’ photo. This is her love for Alex. In Attic, Alex tried to make sexual relationship with Iris. They both have secret love affair and Aimee is Daughter of Iris Alex not of Iris and Richard.
At the age of nineteen Iris’ father sells her to Richard in marriage. He is the owner of a successful firm called Royal Classic Knitwear. Iris marries Richard because of her father’s hope that she can in this way save the now-failing button factory. But this proved to be a bitter pill saturated in sweetness. She feels no emotional attachment with him as he has a yen for young girls. He seduced Laura and says that he did nothing without Laura’s consent. Iris says: “I suppose when he married me he figured he’d got a bargain – two for the price of one. He picked us up for a song.” Iris leaves his house with Aimee. And after that Richard is discovered dead in the sail boat, Water Nixie because his political carrier is ruined by the scandal of Laura’s book.

After Richard’s death, his sister Winifred blames Iris and takes Aimee away from Iris. Iris’ daughter, Aimee died of drugs is self-neglected, alienated from her mother. Throughout her life Aimee is hoping that her real mother is somehow Laura. She was resentful of Iris for having dragged her away from her former and considerably more affluent life. Iris says: “She was already deciding that I was unsatisfactory as a mother” Richard takes advantage of long distance and develops sympathy for himself by giving gifts to Aimee.

Winifred, Richard’s sister is an over ambitious, cunning, socialite and perfect manipulator. She is thirty years old and arranges parties, dinners and social events for Richard. She takes the helpless bridal Iris in her hand and arranges all her shopping according to her taste. Richard consults Winifred about everything because she is the one who encourages him. Iris recalls:

They’d both decided that Richard was the man of the future, and that the woman standing behind him — was her. It
certainly wasn’t me. Our relative positions were now clear, hers and mine … she was necessary to Richard, I on the other hand could always be replaced. My job was to open my legs and shut my mouth.31

There is open war between two after Richard’s death and Winifred does the worst thing to Iris.

Margaret Atwood is more a poet than a fictional writer and her initial orientation a poet has enriched her style. Her language in her novels is more closely aware of its urge toward the poetic. In *The Blind Assassin* the protagonist Iris seems influenced by John Keats; “It’s the first week of October. Season of woollen garments taken out of mothballs; of nocturnal mists and dew and slippery front steps, and late-blooming slugs.”32 The novel reveals a skilled use of metaphors and similes. In this novel she is striking in her metaphors, “But long ago I made a choice between classicism and romanticism. I prefer to be upright and contained — an urn in daylight.”33

4.2.5. Theme:

Iris memoir seems as the tragedy of a woman sold into a loveless marriage by her bankrupt father to preserve the family’s social and economic status. She loses the man she loves, her reputation and even the love of her daughter that fathered perhaps by the only man she loved. Thus she becomes a victim of patriarchal society where her father sells her and her sister to the devil, Richard. She feels helpless, tired and useless. Her story has to cope with the fact of her own survival, with a failing body and diminished powers in a world. Like Margaret Atwood’s other novels in *The Blind Assassin*, there is also domination and subordination highlighted through the novel. If Iris is a victim of patriarchal society, she is also an assassin.
4.3. Introduction:

Margaret Atwood’s eleventh novel *Oryx and Crake* is a novel with dystopian elements. It was first published by McClelland and Stewart in 2003 and was also shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction that same year. Like *The Handmaid’s Tale*, it is often categorized as science, but Atwood herself prefers to label it speculative fiction and adventure romance because it does not deal with things that have not been invented yet and goes beyond the realism she associates with the novel form.

4.3.1. Title:

The strangeness of the novel is signalled in its title. The odd title refers to two main characters, whose names derive from animal species, now endangered, but extinct in the near future of the novel. They are the names taken by the heroine and the superhero from the non-human species world, for an oryx is “a gentle water-conserving East African herbivore”\(^{34}\) and “the red-necked crake is a rare Australian bird.”\(^{35}\) They are the names of dead animals, taken from the video game Extinctathon, which Snowman and his best friend Crake played as schoolboys and at which Crake became a grandmaster.

4.3.2. Story:

The story is told from the perspective of the sidekick, who kills the superhero and survives, obsessed by Crake’s ghost. Atwood is exploring fictions of masculinity, with Crake the personification of the urge toward male mastery through reason and science and Jimmy representing an alternative feminine allegiance to the life of emotion and imagination.
From another perspective Atwood is exploring the different identities of the artist figure, with Crake as amoral creative genius or as magician aspiring to be God, while Jimmy is the word man, a storyteller with a sense of moral responsibility.

*Oryx and Crake* lacks some of the subtler imaginative power of Atwood’s previous novel set in a dystopian future, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which was full of convincing detail and had an individual heroine. Critically *Oryx and Crake* examines developments in science and technology. It does not depend on imagining new scientific or technological discoveries; it merely extrapolates on the basis of technologies that are available today and carries current social and economic developments.

### 4.3.3. Setting and Narration:

Set in the near future and describing man’s self-made downfall, *Oryx and Crake* falls squarely in the tradition of the scientific romance and its twentieth-century offspring. Atwood makes a powerful case that the genetic alteration of plants, animals and people is a reckless bid to sustain a vast consumer society while nature disintegrates under the human load. For the first time Atwood has chosen a male narrator, for the story is told not in the first person but through third-person indirect interior monologue, which shifts restlessly between the narrative present and Jimmy/Snowman’s memories of his own and other people’s stories in a series of associative leaps, and the context is provided by an omniscient narrator who functions as his shadowy double.

### 4.3.4. Plot-construction:

The novel contains main fifteen chapters having unequal sub-stories; and opens with Jimmy camping by a sea-shore where ruined
towers stand in water risen from the melted poles. Beautiful naked folk of questionable humanity are frolicking round the smelly, hairy, all too human Jimmy, perhaps the last of his kind living in a tree. He has wrapped himself in old bed-sheets. His blank face is looking at his dead watch that shows zero hour. Through Snowman’s memory narrative Atwood asserts that human beings have become radically separated from their natural environment, and that condition of alienation finds its parallel in patterns of social breakdown. Traditional structures of government and law have been superseded by a new system of social privilege based on the idealization of science. Atwood’s new world is wonderfully vivid, and the unveiling of future history makes for a strong narrative drive. She has made use of the digital aesthetics as her narrative tool for this novel.

4.3.5. Characters:

Snowman, whose original name is Jimmy, is the main protagonist; the story is told from his perspective. The name Snowman is short for abominable Snowman, a reference to the Yeti, a mythical ape-like creature of the Himalaya. For the online-game Extinctathon, Jimmy temporarily also has the animal code name Thickney, which Crake chooses for Jimmy from an Australian bird known for inhabiting cemeteries. In Snowman’s memory, he was earlier called Jimmy; but that was long back. But still his earliest memory was of “a huge bonfire.” When he was just five or six, he was living with his father and mother in a research centre known as OrganInc Farms. His father was a genographer, one of the best in the field. He was one of the foremost architects of the pigoon project, along with a team of transplant experts
and the microbiologists who were splicing against infections. Pigoon was only a nickname: the official name was susmultiorganifier.

There is only Snowman as a reminder of earlier times. He has been frozen in time and he freezes times in his memory, capturing the world in his mind before everything else is annihilated. Snowman’s memories take us back to the time when he was Jimmy. He grew up in the early 21st century; he met and befriended Glenn, later known as Crake, a brilliant science student. Jimmy and Crake spend a lot of their free time playing online computer games. Using the codenames Thickney (Jimmy) and Crake (Glenn), they both play as teenagers. It is not until they are both in University that Jimmy discovers that Crake has worked his way up to become a Grandmaster.

As the children of scientists, Jimmy and Crake grow up cocooned in the material privilege of life in the Compounds, but already the dark side of this utopian illusion shows itself in family life. Jimmy’s mother has a nervous breakdown and then vanishes, Crake’s father committed suicide or possibly was murdered, and both boys are left to cope with the legacies of their parents’ failed idealism. Their emotional deprivation finds solace in the vicious computer games they play after school. The most sinister game of all is Extinctathon, entirely dedicated to death in its searches for the names and characteristics of extinct species. The difference between the two boys is marked by their responses to such shows: Crake finds such sites hilarious but they make Jimmy very uneasy.

The photograph of the seven-year old Oryx which Jimmy keeps secreted away clearly haunts him, representing an ethical possibility he both fears and desires. He refers to himself as having been caught by her glance that “went right into him and saw him as he truly was,” that said,
“I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want.”

For the first time, he knows genuine guilt, though complicated by the realization that he is also hopelessly hooked by his desire for her. Snowman’s abiding virtue is that he recognizes that his beloved remains forever elusive, beyond his capacity to know or hold in any net of words. Thus Oryx appears as a seductive trace.

Snowman, the narrator has close ties to both characters: Crake is his only friend; Oryx, the only woman he has ever loved. The relationship between Crake, Snowman and Oryx unmistakably suggests the Christian Trinity whose authority science has effectively displaced. Crake assumes the role of Father, creator of all triumphant over chaos; Snowman, that of sacrificial Son and Oryx that of Spirit, omnipresent, feminine Paraclete.

Crake is Jimmy’s boyhood friend; an excellent student in high school. It is he who introduces and initiates Jimmy into games like Extinctathon grandmasters and global sex-trotting sites, where they saw Oryx for the first time. Later Oryx joins Crake in his project. Crake loves Oryx and that he is aware of her relationship with Jimmy. Crake’s premeditated murder Oryx and subsequent suicide of his precious Crakers, also further undercut his credibility. Oryx is killed by Crake after she serves her purpose.

Crake, a ruthless genius and bio-scientist, rises to the top of his game and either goes mad or simply faces the facts and puts the world out of its misery. He becomes a brilliant geneticist and turns into a version of the mad scientist. His code-name for Extinctathon is from “the Red-necked crake, a small Australian bird and remains his name for the rest of his life.” The two boys, Crake and Snowman while grow into
adulthood, Crake becomes involved in a project in Rejooven EsenseBlyss Pluss Pill which goes wrong and enormous numbers of people are killed. Another project of Crake-Paradice becomes successful and he creates what can be called super humans, androids, who remain as the only survivors after the entire population is eliminated by BlyssPluss. Ultimately it is up to Snowman to bring back some semblance of equilibrium into a devastated world and lead the children of Crake into a new life.

As the modern youth sits before the computer anytime of the day, Jimmy and Crake would do the same. They had absolutely no sense of time. Atwood sarcastically says:

His time, what a bankrupt idea, as if he’s been given a box of time belonging to him alone, stuffed to the brim with hours and minutes that he can spend like money. Trouble is, the box has holes in it and the time is running out, no matter what he does with it.40

Crake never stops playing computer games, for as he reminds Jimmy when they are both adults. Thus Jimmy and Crake are the best friends from schooldays, later business partners and rivals in love, betayers and betrayed murderers both, and finally the dead and the living dead who are living in a decadent postmodern culture.

The novel’s one really duff note, oddly, is Oryx, its main female character. Her voice is silvery, like a music box. She is Jimmy’s wet dream —indeed, he first glimpses her as a child on an internet porn site: “She was small-boned and exquisite and naked like the rest of them, with nothing on her but a garland of flowers and a pink hair ribbon --- The act involved whipped cream and a lot of licking. The effect was both
innocent and obscene.” Oryx is a mysterious woman, the third protagonist and symbolically related to the waif-like girl from an online child-pornography site that begins to haunt Jimmy as an adolescent; Crake first hires her for sexual services and as a teacher to the Crakers, but she becomes Crake’s and Jimmy’s lover. After the catastrophe, she remains present to the Snowman as a haunting memory. Her name is from the Oryx, an African antelope: “It’s not even her real name, which he’d never known anyway; it’s only a word. It’s a mantra.”

Oryx’s role in the novel is much more enigmatic. Jimmy is struck and haunted by the eyes of a young girl, Oryx. Unknown to Jimmy, Crake is similarly affected by the sight of this young girl. Crake eventually finds this girl and hires her, as both a prostitute and a teacher of the Crakers. Eventually she becomes intimately involved in the lives of Jimmy and Crake; they both fall in love with her. But she admires Crake as a scientist and great man; only for fun and affection she turns to Jimmy. The two — Jimmy and Oryx hide their relationship from Crake and Jimmy is often plagued with the thought of Crake finding out about his betrayal. Thus she becomes the guardian of the animals and Crake the creator, God.

Oryx is a very slippery subject who may remind Atwood’s readers of previous duplicitous heroines like Grace Marks or Zenia, women whose stories of sexual exploitation and abuse are not unlike hers. Jimmy also does not understand her at all. She is the uncanny figure in the novel, as with her multiple shifting identities she shimmers on the borders between fantasy and reality. But she refuses to accept all these definitions of her identity: “I don’t think this is me.” Like Grace and Zenia, her image can never be fixed and she remains a mysterious figure.
4.3.6. Theme:

Atwood’s novel, *Oryx and Crake* tells that old-fashioned dichotomies and polarities are no longer helpful in re-conceptualizing the nature of society, environment and technology. Many technological innovations end up being used in ways never foreseen by their inventors. The Internet is a perfect example of it. The novel talks about it operating within the culture, environment, bio-technology and technology dynamics. It focuses upon an endless transformation of our sense perceptions through digital technologies; it also refers to a cultural trans-coding where computers and culture constantly change one another.

The fictional narrative of Atwood does not have a glorious picture to offer. Hers is a cybernetic imaginary tale focusing her vision of the future of cityscapes, which are on the edge of time, groundless and lacking spatial stability. The technology-focused art is focused on the future. As the world is fast changing, Atwood tries to show that shortly the humanness from the human beings will disappear. Technology will bring about the cultural change. Human voice, human singing and human music like the classical pieces will have no place then. Hearing a piece of music, Snowman in the novel is taken a back. He could not figure it out as who made that music. He is wondering whether it is made by any animal:

> There is a distant, peaceful murmur from the village: human voices. If you can call them human. As long as they don’t start singing. Their singing is unlike anything he ever heard in his vanished life: it is beyond the human level, or below it.\textsuperscript{44}
Man’s eating culture is very much changed in the digital age. Cooking at home and eating together with mom and dad and the other family members is a bygone culture. Sadly, man’s preoccupations with technology facilitate him to eat only fast food items on the roadside hotels. Atwood digs at such practices in her novel, *Oryx and Crake*:

She was still eating the pizza in bed; with that she was having a Coke, and a side of fires. She’d finished with the mushrooms and now she was eating the artichoke hearts. She never ate the crust. She said it made her feel very rich to throw away food.\(^{45}\)

Jimmy’s reaction to this is quite pungent as an asshole custom.

Then Atwood’s novel brings out disturbing trends quite realistically. In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy goes to the Internet porn cites whenever he is bored. He corresponds with his lovers through e-mails. However, after seeing his mother’s execution on the Net, he loses interest in everything; it includes even sex. He feels awfully lonely like the modern citified man. He tries various means to drive away his loneliness. Atwood pictures his mood in the following lines:

He went back to Internet porn, found it had lost its bloom: it was repetitive, mechanical, devoid of its earlier allure. He searched the Web for the Hott Totts site, hoping that something familiar would help him to feel less isolated, but it was defunct. --- He knew he was faltering, trying to keep his footing. Everything in his life was temporary, ungrounded. Language itself had lost its solidity; it had become thin, contingent slippery, a viscid film on which he
was sliding around like an eyeball on a plate. An eyeball that could still see, however. That was the trouble.  

Digital technologists predict a wonderful future to the humans. They predict that the future bathroom in our homes will have digital mirrors, laser toothbrushes, video tiles and a smart shower. Surely, Atwood is able to see the fuller picture of the contemporary digital culture by standing outside the confusing complexity of the human situation. This is the power of literature and we cannot detach ourselves from our social and ethical concerns.

4.3.7. View of Life:

Margaret Atwood is putting across a relevant political message, easily summed up as: don’t trust the scientist and the big corporations to run the world. Because cultures and societies are always in transition, otherwise history would remain static. Atwood’s novel, *Oryx and Crake* presents exactly this issue. The novel does not begin with a cheery optimism; in fact, there is no scope for any optimism at all. The novel begins: “Snowman wakes before dawn. He lays unmoving, listening to the tide coming in; wave after wave sloshing over various barricades, wish-wash, wish-wash, the rhythm of heartbeat. He would so like to believe he is asleep.” His watch is his only talisman and it shows zero hour. A terrible terror runs through him and for the time being it is caused by the absence of official time.

Contemporary cultures have reached a highly advanced stage of technological development that naturally tends to look upon human beings as nothing more than bits of information within the total system of society. The novel suggests that our new technologies rob us of precisely those qualities that help us resist the dehumanizing forces through which
we amuse ourselves. Left with the problem of what to tell the childlike improved humans who pester him for answers, Jimmy casts Crake in the role of God, Oryx as Earth Goddess and himself as prophet. The novel makes it clear: Crake was against the notion of God, or of gods of any kind.

IV

4.4. Introduction:

Margaret Atwood has worn many literary hats — novelist, poet, essayist, critic and historian — but now she added another one: orator. Her most recent novel, *The Year of the Flood* (September 2009, *Oryx and Crake* follow up) is a dystopic masterpiece and a testament to her visionary power. The novel, has invoked a lot of argument about whether it is science fiction or speculative fiction. Science Fiction is based on postulated scientific discoveries or spectacular environmental changes, frequently set in the future or on other planets and involving space or time travel. In short, science fiction is about scientific possibilities. And a speculative story should be a stimulant, an irritant, a positive incitement to the more violent forms of controversy. A speculative fiction story has aspects about it which could actually happen. Margaret Atwood’s novel fits to this description.

4.4.1. Title:

In this fiction names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events and incidents either are the product of the novelist’s imagination
or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or
dead, events or locates is entirely coincidental. There is no explanation of
the word ‘Flood’ included in the title of novel. It may be a Dry Flood.
The waterless Flood is a plague sent by the Creator to cleanse the
polluted planet. A bioengineered world is decimated by flood and plague.

4.4.2. Story:

Margaret Atwood is a skilled gifted writer with the ability to use
her incredible gift in the creation of stories that leave a lasting
impression. The Year of the Flood is a re-telling of the apocalyptic events
in Atwood’s 2003 novel, Oryx and Crake, which involved a bio-
gineered species of semi-humans called crakes created to mend the
world. The story is told by two human women—Toby and Ren. The
novel incorporates her favourite stories about people wasting the
resources of the planet, war mongering for greed, cruelty to animals,
vegetarianism as good food, the abhorrence of the violence of nightclubs
and our thoughtless lifestyles, including the vanity of plastic surgery. It is
a warning to people as to what could happen if we continue our
permissive and destructive lifestyles. One must therefore takes as
scientific fact the story that the world was created in six days. “God
cannot be held to the narrowness of literal and materialistic
interpretations for His days are ones, and a thousand ages of our time are
like an evening to Him.”

4.4.3. Plot-construction:

The plot is complex having 77 total stories. The structure of the
novel has biblical overtones. The novel begins just after the catastrophe
and then tracks back in time over the corrupt and degenerate world that
preceded it. The psalms in between some chapters are amusing and perceptive. For instance,

  God gave unto the Animals
  A wisdom past our power to see
  Each knows innately how to live,
  Which we must learn laboriously.49

The end of the novel is extremely dissatisfying. It leaves too many unanswered questions. It is not appropriate, it feels completely abrupt. At the end of the novel there is optimism and the literary theme of rebirth, as there is a huddle of survivors, such as when Rome fell, to start the world again, hopefully with higher standards of behaviour.

4.4.4. Characters:

Margaret Atwood observes the crafting rules of good literature. The God’s Gardeners appear briefly in *Oryx and Crake*, but in *The Year of the Flood*, they are central. Several characters from the earlier novel appear. None of the male characters is developed at all; they play their roles, no more. Women are real people, but heartbreaking ones. Like all religions, the Gardeners have their own leader, Adam One. The main protagonists are Adam One, Jimmy, Crake, Toby, Ren, Amanda, Zeb, Lucerne and Bernice and plethora are minor characters. Adam One based on the Creator God, is the Voice of Reason and the head of the Gardeners who have their priorities right and are living as they should be, putting the planet first.

The boy, Crake, is in sympathy with the Gardeners but is different because he doesn’t trust nature. He and Jimmy have problems communicating with people, including their girl friends, which is another difficulty in the world today. Atwood shows the worst human trends like
sadism, brutality and thug-like behaviour through her character, Blanco the Bloat. When people cannot love, their basest emotions take over.

Ren’s story is narrated by herself. She is working as a pole dancer/prostitute for a pimp called Mordis: “He was a wiry guy with a shaved head and black, shiny alert eyes like the heads of ants, and he was easy as long as everything was cool…”50. She is in the Sticky Zone where girls were put for weeks in case they had something contagious: “The food came in through the safety-sealed hatch way, plus there was the mini fridge with snacks…”51. She is also working at AnooToo Spa, a clinic for cosmetic surgery and for convalescing patients.

Ren meets her friend Amanda when Amanda is texting on her purple phone and offering Ren her friendship. Amanda consults Adam One about where Ren should live and he tells her she must chose. Their friend Bernice takes her home but her father, Burt the Knob, is a worry because he manhandles little girls so she goes to Amanda’s. Her mother, Lucerne, is not keen but Ren feels she has gained a sister and the girls become firm friends.

Toby, one of the main protagonists, has her story told in the third person. Her nature is tougher, but she is tied to the limit. In the beginning of the novel she doesn’t know if the man she loves, Zeb, is dead or if she is the only one alive: “Sometimes she hears voices – human voices, calling to her in pain.”52 Atwood is good at creating atmosphere. Toby is working in the HelthWyzer Franchise and knows about healthy foods and vitamins. Of course they cost a lot of money. There is much tongue-in-cheek satire in the novel. Her ID is misplaced and she feels lost in a frightening world. She is rescued by the Gardeners who give her work as a furzooter. She has to put on a fake-fur animal suit and a signboard
around her neck and work the malls to protest about the unnecessary use of animal fur in clothing. After that she sells her own ova at a high price to infertile couples and becomes infected and made sterile. She gets a job at SecretBurgers and earns miserly wages but is given two free burgers a day: “The meat grinders weren’t 100% efficient: you might find a swatch of cat fur in your burger or a fragment of mouse tail. Was there a human finger nail, once?” A shot is at the fast food industry.

The boss at SecretBurgers is Blanco the Bloat and exploits the girls working for him. He’d been a bouncer in Scales, the brothel: “Bouncers had status; they strolled around in black suits and dark glasses, looking suave and tough, and they had women swarming all over them.” Atwood’s images mirror life as one knows it today. Toby is rescued from Blanco by Adam One and the Gardeners. She remembers “something fuzzy, softly intimate like being nuzzled by rabbits…she’d been touched in an impersonal but kindly way that was not sexual.” There is often a good side to life as well as the sordid. She is now guarded by angels.

4.4.5. Theme:

The theme of Christian values runs through the novel. The lack of respect to women is a recurrent theme. Margaret Atwood has wonderful insight into what it is to be a woman; insight into what haunts women’s dreams. When women talk about what scares them, it isn’t nuclear war — it’s the man in the dark alley who will grab her and rape her and never leave her alone. Toby’s Blanco is the embodiment of this fear. She sees him around every corner. She’s afraid to go visit a neighbor because he might find her on the street walking there. Setting this fear in another world makes it easier for female readers to take a step back and really see
the situation for what it is. Naturally he’s a strong, frightening man, but Toby let him disempowering her by simply rearing him for years.

4.4.6. Narration:

The style of novel is oral. It’s is like talking to people because it is also a lecture series. It is not like a textbook; it’s actually a voice. The people who are reading it are going to be hearing it more than reading it. The novel centers on the lives of Ren and Toby, female members of a fundamentalist sect of Christian environmentalists. The setting may be the upper Midwest of the Canada, but there is no geography, no history. The novel is less satirical in tone, less of an intellectual exercise, less scathing though more painful. It is seen very largely through the eyes of women, powerless women, whose individual characters and emotions are vivid and memorable.

4.4.7. View of Life:

The novelist is brilliant and would very likely be predisposed to love anything she has written. The Year of the Flood is no exception. The optimistic view for the world is expressed through the mouth of the main protagonist, Adam One. According to him the times and species have been changing at a rapid rate and the social compact is wearing as thin as environmental stability. A natural disaster will alter Earth. Now it has occurred, obliterating most human life. The novel ends not only on feminist but also on humanist and post-humanist concerns. She suggests to survive in an era of environmental destruction, excessive consumption, unregulated biotechnological experiments and pandemic viruses. One can see the roots of novel around us today.

The novel does end on a more hopeful note. There is an environmental message in the novel. The novelist describes two possible
futures: one with a healthy earth but no skyscrapers or plastic bags and one where we have ruined the world to make a profit. The novel is a matter of choice. We have got two possible futures: a really horrible one and a really good one. We are going to run out of oil. It is not a renewable resource. So we are very busy in creating all kinds of new technology that might save us.

The novel is about mistakes; about how thinking we own the Earth and its creatures could cause our own demise; about how sleeping with the wrong man just once can haunt one for years; about how loving the wrong man can hurt one for years. The novel is only a lament, a lament for what little was good about human beings — affection, loyalty, patience, courage — ground down into the dust by our overweening stupidity and monkey cleverness and crazy hatefulness.

The critical study of Atwood’s novels of later phase presents that Atwood has great skill as an established and reputed novelist. She has handled every subject with vitality. There is Snowman, her only one male storyteller in *Oryx and Crake*. Except this, only female protagonists narrate the stories of all her novels. The science fiction, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* express the result of new technologies and inventions on man, society and universe. These novels makes Atwood not only Canadian but also universal and humanistic novelist.

The preceding chapter deals with the conclusion of the present research work.
Notes and references:

1. Atwood, Margaret. *Alias Grace*, Author’s afterword, Canada: Seal Books, 2000, p. 558. All subsequent references are to this edition.


36 *Oryx and Crake*, p. 17.
46  Ibid., pp. 305-306.
47  Ibid., p. 3.
    All subsequent page references are to this edition.
49  Ibid., p. 281.
50  Ibid., p. 9
51  Loc.cit.
52  Ibid., p. 6
53  Ibid., p. 40
54  Ibid., p. 43
55  Ibid., p. 51