

Research Article

(Il)legitimacy of Knowledge and Exclusion: A Study of Margaret Atwood's Select Novels

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ABSTARCT

This paper is a study of Canadian author Margaret Atwood's select fictional narratives reflecting how the 'scientific' knowledge tradition, in its practice, results in social exclusion of the individual subjects who do not conform to it. In order to explore the state of exclusion, it looks into how 'the postmodern condition' inherently brings with itself the idea of its own (il)legitimacy. This notion is explored on the basis of four considerations-Consensus, Speculativity, Doability and Narrativity-inherent in the discourses/disciplines. The postmodernist thinker Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) has been extensively referred to in understanding the (il)legitimacy of not only the scientific but also the non-scientific, but socially accepted forms of knowledge vis-à-vis Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000).

Keywords: (Il)legitimacy, Atwood's, Exclusion, Knowledge, Margaret, Novels

'Scientific knowledge' has been one of the much challenged and contested notions in the contemporary critical tradition. The current paper explores how in the changing postmodern condition this entity entwines within itself the notion of its own '(il)legitimacy'; and consequently, how the (il)legitimate status of the discourses/disciplines of knowledge excludes individual subjects. Through the literary analysis of select fictional narratives of Canadian author Margaret Atwood, the paper attempts at examining this state of '(il)legitimacy' resulting in the exclusion of individual subjects on the basis of four considerations-Consensus, Speculativity, Doability and Narrativity. These considerations, which also form the theoretical

framework of the paper, are extensively taken up by the postmodernist thinkers, particularly by Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). Acknowledging Lyotard's argument that all the scientific and rational knowledge has these four considerations inherent in it, the paper discusses the change(s) which the notion of knowledge has undergone, and how the issue of (il)legitimacy spontaneously creeps in, resulting in the exclusion of individuals. In the light of Atwood's two novels-*Alias Grace* (1996) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000)-the paper investigates how not only the scientific but also the non-scientific socially accepted forms of knowledge result in such exclusion.

Postmodernism designates a state of culture. Defining this state, Jean-Francois Lyotard writes, 'It designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature and arts' (Lyotard 1979). In this process of 'transformation' and 'alterations of the game rules', the entity of knowledge has also altered. The notion of knowledge has been put considerably under questioning by the postmodernist thinkers. It would be pertinent at this point to refer to Lyotard who writes, 'Knowledge [*savoir*] in general cannot be reduced to science, not even to learning [*connaissance*]. Learning is the set of statements which . . . denote or describe objects and may be declared true or false' (ibi.; 18). Elaborating on the same, he further writes:

What is meant by the term *knowledge* is not only a set of denotative statements, far from it. It also includes notions of "know-how", "knowing how to live", "how to listen" [*savoir-faire, savoir-vivre, savoir-ecouter*], etc. Knowledge, then, is a question of competence that goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth . . . (ibid.; 18-19)

It makes it clear that the term knowledge also incorporates the scientific knowledge within it. Further, that the postmodernism is the passage from the 'solid' (stable) to the 'liquid' times (Bauman 2000) is a notion which has been dug into much earlier by Lyotard in 1979 in his *Report* instead of Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (2000). Exploring the notion of scientific knowledge undergoing 'alterations', he suggests that it is no more the same at the present hour as it used to be before and around the mid-twentieth century. To him, 'It is widely accepted that knowledge has become the principal force of production over the last few decades' (Lyotard 1979). This sceptical attitude towards scientific knowledge has come into being since the latter half of the twentieth century. Because 'the nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within . . . the context of general transformation', (ibid.; 4) it has to essentially change. To him, 'This transition has been under way since at least the end of the 1950s' (ibid.; 3). In fact, the early signs of the "crisis" of the scientific knowledge . . . have been accumulating since the end of the nineteenth century' (ibid.; 39). Scientific knowledge, to Lyotard, incorporates the

spirit of scientificism dominant in the sensibility of the day. In context with the fast changing scenario of knowledge, Lyotard in his *Report* draws extensively on the problematic nature of 'legitimation' or 'illegitimation' of the discourses, disciplines and the beliefs which have gained currency in the contemporary times. Reflecting upon whether or not the discourse/discipline/belief called knowledge is a legitimate one, Lyotard raises questions: 'who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?' (ibid.; 9). Characters of Atwood are often in the talons of those in the 'deciding' position. The next part establishes the relationship between Atwood and the notion of (il)legitimacy.

The writings of the acclaimed Canadian author Margaret Atwood can also be read along the postmodernist notion of '(il)legitimacy of knowledge' as her fiction can be interpreted from myriad angles. She reflects that, in the contemporary general scheme of things in the human civilisation, there exist an attractive number of beliefs which are taken to be 'true' and 'legitimate', and they are considered so because they are based on 'consensus'-the first consideration taken up in the paper. Secondly, since the element of speculativity regulates and (in)forms every discipline of knowledge which is creative (and interestingly, so is science), speculativity cannot be negated. Thirdly, since sciences are considered to be 'true' by virtue of their 'doable' nature partly, their (il)legitimacy is hardly ever questioned. Atwood appears to be concerned with this aspect as she has reflected in her writings that because of this assumption the individual characters are victimised and excluded. The fourth criterion behind taking the scientific knowledge as (il)legitimate is the element of narrativity inherent in the scientific discourses/disciplines. Very much like the narrative, literary and the analytico-critical traditions of knowledge, the 'scientific' traditions of knowledge also rely on the element of narrativity for their sustenance. Because of these considerations largely, it can be assumed that the idea of knowledge comes with problems of its own. And therefore, not all the practices/beliefs/discourses, as reflected in Atwood's writings, can be (and should be) held irrefutably as legitimate ones. Since her certain characters support the habit of questioning the legitimacy of certain beliefs, which the other characters consider as knowledge, they often have to face exclusion. Yet another ground behind attributing illegitimacy to science is the idea that scientific propositions are merely descriptive in nature. Though the realm of science is very wide, yet oftentimes certain scientific propositions are in the form of mere descriptive statements. Precisely, the realm of knowledge, as Lyotard observes, is 'heteromorphous classes of utterances' which are 'denotative, prescriptive, performative, technical, evaluative etc.' (Lyotard 1979). In the light of these considerations, the paper in the following parts takes up the four considerations individually in detail, and looks into how they bestow the scientific realms with (il)legitimacy, which thereupon culminates in excluding the individuals.

In the contemporary human civilisation there exist certain assumptions/beliefs which constitute the realm of knowledge; and often they are taken to be 'true' as well. However, for the poststructuralist thinkers this truthful status of knowledge is questionable on account of certain considerations. Lyotard enumerates some of them in his *Report*, one of which is consensus. Consensus is gained through the process of dissemination of what has been researched. Elaborating on how the scientific knowledge through the process of teaching comes to be acknowledged as knowledge, Lyotard notes:

Research appeals to teaching as its necessary complement: the scientists need an addressee who can in turn become the sender; he needs a partner. Otherwise, the verification of this statement would be impossible One's competence is never an accomplished fact. It depends upon whether or not the statement proposed is considered by one's peers to be worth discussion in sequence of argumentation and refutation. The truth of the statement and the competence of its sender are thus subject to the collective approval of a group of persons who are competent on an equal basis. Equals are needed and must be created. (Lyotard 1979)

The endorsement of the same is visible in the following instance from *Alias Grace* wherein the young doctor Jordan believes in the dissemination of what he has been researching and propounding. This is based on the measurement of the heads of the inmates of the Penitentiary. It is the practice of dissemination which establishes the scientific knowledge, and subsequently results in alienating individuals. Following the conversation in the novel, the narrator observes:

The doctor is writing a book; the Governor's wife likes to know people who are writing books, books with forward-looking aims, it shows that she is a liberal minded person with advanced views, and science is making such progress, and what with modern inventions and the Crystal Palace and world knowledge assembled, who knows where we will all be in next hundred years (Atwood 1996).

The scepticist attitude against the knowledge constructed thus is consistently seen throughout *The Blind Assassin* in the character of Laura. Referring to the poem *Xanadu*, she questions certain notions like:

What was demon-lover, she wanted to know? Why was the sea sunless, why was the ocean lifeless? Why did the sunny pleasure-dome have caves of ice? What was Mount Abora, and why was the Abyssinian maid singing about it? Why were the ancestral voices prophesying war? (Atwood 2000: 410)

Because of this questioning nature Laura is often excluded in the novel. Even the answers of Coleridge himself seem to be based on consensus to her. Atwood's

characters suggest that over a period of time we-the readers-succeed in concocting our own answers in order to *know* the answers. Reflecting on Coleridge's ignorance in terms of *know ability* of the answers, Laura's sister Iris says, 'I didn't know the answers to any of these questions. I know all of them now. Not the answers of Samuel Taylor Coleridge – I'm not sure he had any answers . . .' (ibid.; 410). Hence, by juxtaposing both the modernist and the postmodernist views on knowledge, Atwood reflects how the 'research-and-dissemination-generated-knowledge', to borrow from Lyotard, results in the exclusion of individuals. Laura's reasoning goes pretty strangely against and beyond the modernist way of reasoning. Laura in the quote below asks her elder sister Iris:

"If you were dead, would this hairbrush still be yours?" she said . . . "Can the dead own things? And if not, what makes it 'yours' now? Your initials on it? Or your germs?"

"Laura, stop teasing!"

"I'm not teasing," said Laura . . . "I'm thinking." (ibid.; 519)

Similarly, there are several other incidents in the novel which refer to the questioning spirit of Laura about entities like Religion, God, Bible etc. This questioning is unsettling for the other characters. Narrating the instance, Atwood writes:

"Laura what are you doing?" Iris said. "That's the Bible!"

"I'm cutting out the parts I don't like."

[. . .]

"You shouldn't be doing this," I said.

"It's only paper," said Laura, continuing to snip. "Paper isn't important. It's the words on them that are important."

"You'll get in big trouble."

"No, I won't," she said. No one ever opens it. They only look in the front, for the births, the marriages and the deaths." (ibid.; 549-50)

The French Enlightenment writer Voltaire in his *The Age of Louis XIV* observes, "It is dangerous to be right in matters on which the established authorities are wrong" (goodreads.net). The situation is similarly dangerous for Laura also. She is excluded by the principal of her school. The principal decides 'not to really continue with Laura' (ibid.; 458) as 'she is calling God into question . . . in the Religious Knowledge class . . .' (ibid.; 459). This subject according to the principal is 'the only subject in which she appears to take any interest whatsoever' (ibid.; 459). 'Laura', the principal further adds, 'went so far as to produce an essay entitled, "Does God Lie?" It was very unsettling to the entire class' (ibid.; 459). On Iris's asking about Laura's views the principal says:

She cites – it’s right here – First Kings, chapter twenty-two – the passage in which God deceives King Ahab. “Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets.” Laura goes on to say that if God did this once, how do we know he didn’t do it more than once, and how can we tell the false prophecies apart from the true ones?

“Well, that’s a logical conclusion, at any rate,” I said. “Laura knows her Bible.”

“I dare say,” said the headmistress, exasperated. “The Devil can quote Scriptures to his purpose. She does proceed to remark that although God lies, he doesn’t cheat – he always sends a true prophet as well, but people don’t listen. In her opinion God is like a radio broadcaster and we are faulty radios, a comparison I find disrespectful, to say the least.”

[. . .]

“Laura likes to have answers,” I said. “She likes to have answers on important matters. I am sure you’ll agree that God is an important matter. I don’t see why that should be considered disruptive.”

“The other students find it so. They believe she’s – well, showing off. Challenging established authority.” (ibid.; 459-60)

In the novel, beliefs/discourses are apparently taken for granted by the majority of the characters unlike the sixteen years old Laura, whereas this taken-for-granted knowledge is questionable for Laura. The questioning of the established form of rationality brings to her certain kind of identities as well, which she finds rather insulting. She is marked as ‘*funny*’, ‘Bolshevik’, and ‘odd’ by her friends (emphasis in original). Also, by expressing such ideas ‘she attracts the wrong kind of attention’ (ibid.; 460). In another instance, Atwood shows that the idea of ‘willingly sacrificing lives in the war’ (ibid.; 181) is also questionable for Laura. Branding killing as ‘Supreme Sacrifice’ and then erecting memorials is also disturbing for her. Atwood writes:

“Why is it called a memorial?” said Laura.

“It’s for us to remember the dead,” said Reenie.

“Why?” said Laura. “What for? Do they like it?”

“It’s not for them, it’s more for us,” said Reenie. “You’ll understand when you’re older.” Laura was always being told this and discounted it. She wanted to understand now. [. . .]

“What is the Supreme Sacrifice?”

“The soldiers gave their lives for the rest of us. . . .”

“Why did they give their lives? Did they want to?”

"No, but they did it anyway. That's why it's a sacrifice," said Reenie.

"They gave their lives to God, because that's what God wants. It's like Jesus who died for all of our sins . . ." (ibid.; 182-3)

The above illustrations show that in the course of the novel, Laura is excluded because she does not concede to the prevalent social norms. Owing to it, she faces social exclusion. Similar is the plight of another character named Alex, an orphan and Laura's close friend. He faces exclusion because of being an orphan. He doesn't know who his father is, and those who do not know who their father is are 'unreliable' for Laura's domestic help Reenie. She takes him to be an illegitimate child. Michael W. Smith in Foreword to *Too Small to Ignore: Why the Least of these Matters Most* writes, "Children, the smallest, weakest members of our human family, often pay the greatest price for our fallen world's sins. Yet they are the lowest priority among big institutions in our world" (Stafford xi). The novel showcases that when the society adheres to the preconceived notions, it tends to exclude those who do not conform to it. Since Alex does not conform to these norms, he is excluded. The predicament of both Alex and Laura are alike as both are denied acceptance in the society:

"Who is he anyway?" said Reenie . . .

"He is an orphan," said Laura, "He was adopted, from an orphanage. A Presbyterian minister and his wife adopted him."

"An orphan!" said Reenie. "He could be anybody!"

"What's wrong with orphans?" I said, I knew what was wrong with them in Reenie's books: they didn't know who their fathers were, and that made them unreliable, if not downright degenerate. *Born in a ditch* was how Reenie would put it. *Born in a ditch, left on a doorstep*.

"They can't be trusted," said Reenie. "They worm their way in. They don't know where to draw the line." (ibid.; 218)

Exclusion of Alex, because of being an orphan, persists throughout the novel. Reenie, the housemaid, observes, 'He is not the same as anyone . . . You can tell that at a glance. He's most likely some half-breed Indian, or else a gypsy. He's certainly not from the same pea patch as the rest of us (ibid.; 221-2). Lyotard's questions like 'Who has the right to decide for society? Who is the subject whose prescriptions are norms for those they obligate?' (Lyotard 1979: 30) seem very apt. In reply to such stances, he himself observes, 'The name . . . is the people, the sign of the legitimacy is the people's consensus, and their mode of creating norms is deliberation' (ibid.; 30). To him, 'Knowledge. . . reduplicates itself ("lifts itself up," *hebsich auf*; is sublated) by citing its own statements in a second-level discourse (autonomy) that functions to legitimate them' (ibid.; 30).

This analysis brings our focus to another aspect-of speculativity-which helps in understanding the (il)legitimacy inherent in the discourses/disciplines of knowledge. To Lyotard, 'There is no creative scientific capacity without the speculative spirit' (ibid.; 33). Psychiatry-a domain of scientific knowledge-also relies on the element of speculativity in order to sustain its status as a domain of scientific knowledge. During the mid-nineteenth century, when people had unquestioning faith in all what would come in the garb of science, Psychiatry was in its years of infancy. Because of coming with the scientific spirit added to it, it was hardly ever questioned. A similar manifestation is seen in *Alias Grace*, wherein the generalisations drawn by Dr. Jordan, a young practitioner of Psychiatry in the novel, are arbitrary and speculative in nature. That the individuals with so and so physical features and measurements tend to be criminal in nature is one such generalisation propounded by the young psychiatrist. Recalling the incident Laura observes:

But this doctor will not hurt me, the Governor's wife promised it. All he wants is to measure my head. He is measuring the heads of all the criminals in the Penitentiary, to see if he can tell from the bumps on their skulls what sort of criminals they are, whether they are pick-pockets or swindlers or embezzlers or criminal lunatics or murderers, she did not say Like you, Grace. And then they could lock those people up before they had a chance to commit any crimes, and think how that would improve the world (Atwood 1996).

Throughout the novel Grace Marks gives the testimony of her innocence, which the psychiatrist Dr. Jordan hardly counts on. Instead he measures her head, gives her things at random, on the basis of which he produces generalised propositions. Such half-baked practices assumed to be knowledge leave Grace Marks excluded throughout her life in a penitentiary. Lyotard notes:

All of the discourses of learning are taken up not from the point of view of their immediate truth value, but in terms of the value they acquire by virtue of occupying . . . a certain position in the Encyclopaedia recounted by speculative discourse. That discourse cites them in the process of expounding itself what it knows, that is, in the process of self-exposition. True knowledge, in this perspective, is always indirect knowledge; it is composed of reported statements that are incorporated into the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy. (ibid.; 35).

Other than the fact about knowledge that (a) it is based on consensus, and (b) it involves speculative nature in it, the third consideration behind its being 'illegitimate' is the notion of 'doability'. Fredrich Jameson reflects in the Foreword, on the notion that 'doing-ness' is deeply associated with sciences, and that sciences are doable unlike literature and criticism. In part, it is the 'doing-ness' alone that gives

rise not only to the notions like 'all-what-is-scientific-is-*knowledge*' but also to the production of more and more knowledge. Elaborating on how all what inheres 'doability' in it, succeeds in establishing itself as science, and subsequently as knowledge, Fredric Jameson notes:

Justification of scientific work is not to produce an adequate model or replication of some outside reality, but rather simply to produce more word, to generate new and fresh scientific *énoncé* or statements, to make you have 'new ideas' . . . or, best of all again to "make it new" (emphasis in original) (Lyotard 1979).

But interestingly all what Dr. Jordan is doing, appears to be the replication of some outer reality. The employment of articles like carrot, potato and onion to establish the truth about the 'abnormal' appears to be of this order. Atwood writes:

So I said, Sir, you are without any item today.

And he said, Item, Grace?

Any potato or carrot, I said. Or onion. Or beet, I added (Atwood 1996).

The generalisations using such things Dr. Jordan draws seem arbitrary and random as they are not substantiable. In this regard Lyotard notes:

Science is the subset of learning. It is also composed of denotative statements, but imposes two supplementary conditions on their acceptability: the object to which they refer must be available for repeated access, in other words, they must be accessible in explicit conditions of observations; and it must be possible to decide whether or not a given statement pertains to the language judged relevant by the experts. (ibid., 18)

The last consideration-the element of narrativity-is inevitable from the discussions on the scientific discourse/disciplines. Psychiatry too, being a scientific realm, involves narrativity in its pronouncements. Jameson reflecting on narrativity in the Foreword to Lyotard's *Report* observes, 'The formal problem involved might be expressed this way: how to do without narrative by means of narrative itself?' (Lyotard 1979) Jameson clearly distinguishes the scientific knowledge from the narrative one. He writes, 'Narrative knowledge is here opposed to 'scientific' or abstract knowledge . . .' (ibid., 19). Reflecting on the notion of the 'crisis of narratives' in the domain of science, literature and the arts; Lyotard observes, 'Science has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables' (ibid., 23). But then science, in Lyotard's view, 'produces a discourse of legitimation with respect to its own status . . .' (ibid., 23). He notes, 'Truisms are fallacious. In the first place, scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in

addition to, and in competition and conflict with, another kind of knowledge, which I will call narrative in the interest of simplicity' (ibid.; 7). But in pronouncing/proclaiming that sciences also have element of narrativity inherent in them, Lyotard does not mean that entire tradition of scientific knowledge is essentially and entirely narrative. Instead, it 'gives rise to (the) institutions', which the characters of Atwood are victim of. He writes:

Unlike narrative knowledge, scientific knowledge is no longer a direct and shared component of the social bond. But it is indirectly a component of it, because it develops into a profession and gives rise to institutions, and in modern societies language games consolidate themselves in the firm of institutions run by qualified partners (the professional class). (ibid.; 25)

In both *The Blind Assassin* and *Alias Grace*, there exist characters who are 'professionals' and are engaged in 'scientific' construction of the two disciplines-History and Psychiatry-respectively. In the former, the narrator is occupied in producing alternate versions of history, whereas in the latter, the professional psychiatrist Dr. Jordan and the lawyer Mr. MacKenzie seems to reinforce the practices that are in the 'interest' of science. While in conversation with Dr. Jordan, the lawyer says, 'I am glad to be of help in the interest of science; and as you have heard, I am sure, we lawyers always welcome a chance to show off' (Atwood 1996). The self-proclaimed 'professional' historian protagonist of the novel within the novel *The Blind Assassin* observes on altering history:

'I thought it amused you. Listening to me perform. Juggling the adjectives. Playing the zany for you.'

' . . . Why would that amuse me?'

'I'll take it back. I'll change it. I'll rewrite history for you. How's that?' (Atwood 2000)

The bond between narrativity and scientific discourses is inevitable as the latter cannot stand on its own without the help of the former. Lyotard has further elaborated the same in the following words:

The fact is that the Platonic discourse that inaugurates science is not scientific, precisely to the extent that it attempts to legitimate science. Scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is the true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all. Without such recourse it would be in position to presupposing its own validity and would be stooping to what it condemns: begging the question, proceeding on prejudice. But does it not fall into the same trap by using narrative as its authority? (ibid.; 29)

Lyotard maintains how drawing a parallel between the narrative (non-scientific) and the scientific knowledge 'helps us understand that the former's existence is no more-and no less-necessary than the latter's' (ibid.; 26). He writes:

Both are composed of statements; the statements are "moves" made by the players within the framework of generally applicable rules; these rules are specific to each particular kind of knowledge, and the "moves" judged to be "good" in one cannot be of the same type as those judged "good" in another, unless it happens that way by chance. (ibid.; 26)

Considerably, there is similarity in the "game rules" of the two kinds of knowledge-the scientific and the narrative knowledge. Considering both the ambits of knowledge, Lyotard observes, 'The people debate among themselves about what is just or unjust in the same way that the scientific community debates about what is true or false; they accumulate civil laws just as scientist accumulate scientific laws; they perfect their rules of consensus just as the scientists produce new 'paradigm' to revise their rules in light of what have learned' (ibid.; 30). It would be pertinent to note that by the term 'the people', Lyotard means the 'operators of scientific knowledge' (ibid.; 30).

Reflecting on the narrative knowledge Lyotard states, 'The narrative knowledge does not give priority to the question of its own legitimation and that it certifies itself in the pragmatics of its own transmission without having recourse to argumentation and proof' (ibid.; 27). Whereas, on the other hand, he observes:

The scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes that they are never subject to argumentation and proof. He classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology. Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children. At best, some attempts are made to throw some rays of light into this obscurantism, to civilise, educate, develop. (ibid.; 27).

But how a new statement acquires its validity/status as a 'true' statement is dealt with in the following manner by the thinker:

A statement of science gains to validity from the fact of being reported. Even in the case of pedagogy, it is taught only if it is still verifiable in the present through argumentation and proof. In itself, it is never secured from "falsification". The knowledge that has accumulated in the form of already accepted statements can always be accepted as valid only if it refutes the previous statement by precluding arguments and proofs (ibid.; 26).

The truthfulness of the scientific knowledge which the narrators of both the novels claim, is thus dependent upon dissemination of propositions based on consensus.

Also, this scientific knowledge comes with an element of narrativity and doability in it, which raises questions about its (il)legitimacy. The contemporary knowledge tradition, particularly in the recent half century, has put questions on the status of the institutionalised form of scientific knowledge tradition. The knowledge tradition in its journey has traversed a long path, thereupon originating different scientific disciplines. The paper has reviewed that the scientific knowledge tradition, which is built upon considerations of consensus, speculativity, doability and narrativity, is ordinarily taken to be true by the people. However, within the broad domain of scientific knowledge, it is through the discipline of Psychiatry, through which the social exclusion of individuals has been explored in this paper. It has attempted to reflect upon the ironic condition which the knowledge tradition comes with in the light of the Canadian author Margaret Atwood's two fictional narratives-*Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin*-as literary evidences. Literary modes of representation often provide snapshots of human life. In actual life issues are complicated by the compromises that are often made to continue relationships or maintain work conditions. In clear cut juxtaposition to these modes, fiction allows for issues to be intricately constructed in terms of metaphorical convolution and narrative resolution. Similarly, Atwood's novels have also bypassed the workiness of realities to creatively create an uncluttered space of liberation and truth. It is in this sense that the two texts can be taken as 'evidences'. The paper has analysed the idea of the social exclusion as to how Atwood's protagonists, because of their questioning spirit and sceptic attitude towards the knowledge tradition remain socially excluded. It has also shown that not only the entity of 'the universally-valid-knowledge' is questionable, but also it results in the exclusion of those not conforming to this tradition. It also concludes that the very tradition which is meant to disentangle the complications in human life has indeliberately resulted in excluding them. The idea of social exclusion has been very beautifully captured and represented in Atwood's novels.

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