

Tribhuvan University

February 2018

Politics of Innocence in Mimi Alford's *Once Upon a Secret*

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**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

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Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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Letter of Recommendation

Sumitra Subedi has completed her thesis entitled “Politics of Innocence in Mimi Alford’s *Once Upon a Secret*” under my supervision. She carried out her thesis from September, 2017 to February, 2018. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted to viva voce.

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Approval Letter

This thesis entitled “Politics of Innocence in Mimi Alford’s *Once Upon a Secret*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University Sumitra Subedi has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my respected supervisor Pradip Raj Giri, Center Department of English, for his constant supervision and guidance. His vigorous efforts made me present this research work in this form.

I am also indebted to the Head of the Center Department of English Prof. Dr. Amma Raj Joshi for the valuable direction in concluding this research.

I would like to extend sincere acknowledgement to the entire group of professors, lecturers and the teaching assistants of the Department for their valued encouragement. My hearty respect goes to my parents, my husband Nabin Adhikari, brother Aananda, sisters Sarada and late Rupa, and other all my family members for their endless support and inspiration for my study.

I wish to thank my colleagues and all my well-wishers who directly and indirectly helped me to complete this work.

February 2018

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Abstract

This research work examines how Mimi Alford plays trick with her memory. Memory is valorized for showing innocent-self throughout this autobiography. The perspective of experience never leaves an author while memorizing. The subjectivity of an author could not be detached from his/her way of representation. Intrusion of an adult self of Alford gives the mature meaning of her teenage experiences. She reinterprets her past via her memory so there is space of speculation and underestimation. She tries to claim a ground in official history of JFK and tries to cover it with innocence and honesty of her nineteen-years-old self. By writing the name of all the people with whom she was associated, she tries to give an impression that she remembers her past properly and tries to hold the authenticity of the truth with herself. Her respect and forgiveness to the people who once used and miss-used her shows her policy to cover-up her mistakes and her attempt to search a remarkable space in the life of JFK.

Key Words: Retrospection, Politics, Innocence, Memory, Subjectivity, John F. Kennedy

Politics of Innocence in Mimi Alford's *Once upon a Secret*

This research paper explores the tactfulness regarding the memory in Mimi Alford's retrospective account *Once Upon a Secret: My Affair with John F. Kennedy and Its Aftermath* (2012). She was an intern of 19-years-old with special access to the President Kennedy. Though it is an autobiography, her secret is not merely the issue of her private life since she reveals her one and half year 'sexual relationship' with American thirty-fifth President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Here, she does not only dare to reveal an affair with a public figure but also unfolds layer of secrets those she kept for almost half a century. By exposing her secret she claims her innocence which is full of doubts. This research attempts to prove her false innocence in her own life narrative.

This research primarily deals with non-linear story of Alford's past life. She gives the details of how she reached to White House as a summer intern in the press office in 1962 and up to the bed of JFK at the fourth day of her internship. The media had recognized her only after when historian Robert Dallek published his book although in his book she was introduced anonymously. Even though she has accepted her hidden role in the life of JFK in May 2003 orally but after almost a decade she published this story of her life.

The interesting thing in her story is that she is trying to show herself as 'naïve and innocent'; it seems unbelievable because she uses her present self to analyze the incidents from so far. In her memorization an ambivalent position of herself is presented. On the surface it seems she is satisfied by her hidden role in the life of JFK but digging into the deep, she is not happy and satisfied. Lifelong she is uncertain about what she actually wants from the life; suffered from low self-esteem, lack of

own voice. These are the major problems that guided her to such a long silence. At last, having courage to overcome those adverse situations and suppressing forces she decides to open her mouth and accepts the relationship with JFK. She says that they met as often as twice a week. In her book she calls her sexual intercourse as “varied and fun” (65), describes the president as “sensualist” (65), who also enjoyed being “completely silly” (66) especially in the “bathtub” (66).

Mimi accepts the fact that JFK emerged as the center of media coverage in his presidential period as well as after his assassination. He was a political sensation. Mimi has kept her silence regarding their relation and later spoke up because the media was very close to her in search of that anonymous lady of Dallek’s book. First she was afraid of truth but later when she revealed it, claims that she is happy with her past. Seemingly, she attempts to give balanced perspective of her past but actually she conceals her sexual urge as well as her fascination towards the most powerful person. She uses her memory as a politics to make the meaning of her past, for the exteriorization of her dark secret as well as to claim herself as a need of JFK. Her attempt to show self-innocence is questionable all over the book.

Various critics have forwarded their divergent view towards Alford’s revelation of her past from numerous angles. Most of them are oriented to the reliability of this particular story because it is about JFK, idol of many people, President’s arrogance and Mimi’s burden. Yet the motif behind this revelation as well as politics behind her memorization have been back grounded, it is the foundation for such criticism/analysis. Robert Dallek had anonymously introduced Mimi for the first time as a woman in the life of JFK to the public. In a biography of President JFK Dallek writes, “Kennedy had affairs with several Women, including Pamela Turnure, Mary Pinchot Meyer, Fiddle and Faddle, Judith Campbell Exner and a ‘tall slender,

beautiful' nineteen-year-old Sophomore and White House intern, who worked in the press office during two summers" (476). On 13 May 2003, an interview with Celeste Katz, a reporter of *The Daily News*, Mimi had accepted her affair with JFK officially. And on 14 May 2003 her revelation became the headline of *The Daily News* as "Mimi Breaks Her Silence".

A critic, in *New York Times*, Janet Maslin has reviewed Mimi's autobiography about what it has and what it lacks. As the memory is all about function of mind Maslin writes "MS. Alford's account of her wide-eyed innocence and the president's particular brand of cruelty towards her" (2). He regards Alford's innocence as extreme kind of one and he assumes that she was totally under the power. He reviews on the light of Ms. Alford's compulsion to continue her private relation with President due to his cruelty. Latter on he writes, "MS. Alford's account of her own mental process is remarkable for what it misses. She does not think of confiding in anyone. She does not think was an extramarital affair" (2). This review gives the critical analysis that was an educated intern of White House really unaware of what the extra marital relation is, was there nobody to whom she can tell her misery (if it was her real misery). Here we can see the fact that to show herself as lawful and pure character she hide/forget her knowledge about marital and extra marital relations. Her politics of showing herself as an innocent fellow seems dominant in her presentation of self-story. Martin Rubin has reviewed this book from another perspective. He writes that "This must have a very difficult book to write. That one senses this throughout is key to accepting it, admiring the author for having the strength to do it- and to carry it off with such grace" (1). Here, he praises Mimi for her courage, for her honesty and her dignity. He analyzes her difficulty but her success to cross it. To some extent, he glorifies Ms. Alford for her daring act of articulating merely private

issues, latter on he criticizes her as “what she sacrificed in lucre she has more than recovered in credibility and dignity” (1). She mentions in this autobiography that after revealing the secret in oral form she was offered by many people; they were ready to give her large amount of money if she publishes it. So he thinks she wrote this book for money but received dignity in return.

A critic named Bella English poses many issues in Mimi’s account. She raises the moral and ethical question regarding this autobiography. She views this book in this way;

The imbalance of power between the middle aged President and a teenage girl was enormous and I sympathize with the 19-year-old Mimi. But she is 69 now, a grandmother. Does she have anything of consequence to say beside “I slept with JFK”? Can no one keep a secret? Even for her own good?

According to Alford, she wrote it to rid herself of the emotional weight of it all. But that rings a bit false, as she has already been ‘outed’. (2)

Bella, firstly feels pity for Alford because she understand the gap between the President and Alford, afterward she criticizes Mimi’s ambivalent nature because at the beginning part of this book Mimi mentions that she wrote this book to get rid herself of the burden of keeping secret but the fact is that she had already been exposed. So Bells discusses the unconvincing details of Mimi.

Another newspaper critic Robert McCrum has viewed Mimi as a victim. He writes that “*Once Upon a Secret* is less an act of independent self- possession, more the helpless revelation of a woman as a victim” (3). He regards Mimi as a victim because he thinks that the burden of this secret stifles her emotional life, poisons her marriage and traps her ‘emotional shell’. He has feelings of compassion for Alford because he thinks that as a woman she had been victimized because of the physical

and emotional miss use of JFK. In *The Daily Beast* Leslie Bennetts has analyzed this book where Alford is suspected. Bennetts states “She is supposed to be weeping for the cameras and prostrating herself now-but instead of seeming teary and abject, Alford looks as though she’s been unexpectedly ambushed by something strangely akin to joy” (1). Critic himself is so surprised because of Mimi’s confession with such honor. In this account neither she condemns JFK for taking her virginity nor pretends that she have any sense of guilty about keeping such a relationship with JFK. Her claim of being a conventional girl about the thought of marriage and concept of ‘first time’ seem unimportant for her. Her so called innocence once again overlaps within it.

Heloise, a blog critic, is dissatisfied with Mimi’s details so he writes, “What makes her book compelling and unsatisfactory at the same time is that Mimi, despite telling of her affair with Kennedy, does not spill the proverbial beans. There is little Salacious detail of their love affair” (1). The lack of the detail about love affair is problematized by this critic. She says that she is more than a mistress in JFK’s life but projection of their sensual relation projects herself as a mistress. She talks about their sexual intercourses more but the emotional attachment is not there, so the term ‘affair’ does not seems suitable. The most significant analysis of Mimi’s secret has been done by Guy Adams. He looks in her account the negative side of the President. He writes “She describes, in splendid detail, a succession of their extramarital encounters, some of which claims, were fulfilled by narcotics” (3). Mimi in her book talks about how President used power over her to take drug and for their ‘sensual relation’. Unlike above addressed perspective on Mimi’s account, this thesis aims to excavate her politics regarding her memory through which she tries to present herself as simple and unknowing girl. While exploring her politics ethical and moral questions will be

raised regarding her memory.

According to Mieke, for Bal, memory is ‘travelling concept’. Anne Whitehead discusses this concept in her theoretical book *Memory: the New Critical Idiom*. Whitehead cites, “For Bal, then, concepts are not fixed but can travel ‘between disciplines, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities’. As they travel, their meanings change, and such mode of difference ‘need to be assessed before, during and after each trip” (3). Here it means that the concept of memory undoubtedly travels in fascinating ways between academic disciplines, across geographical space and in course of time. Memory itself is not static force rather it is movable so real and clear picture of the past through the memory is always doubtful. The travel of memory over the time demonstrates that memory holds the history. People perform that ‘travelling notion’ of memory either in oral form or in written.

Anne Whitehead has defined an autobiography as “an intensely self-reflexive mode of discourse through which tensions, uncertainties surrounding the self could be displayed and mediated” (63). Via an autobiography people try to prove who they are at present by going to the past. Usually they unfold the past for creating their identity in the wide ground of living world. Autobiography most of the time may not be adequate because it is limited to certain perspective or it is dominated by subjectivity of the writing self, which is called politics. Likewise, sometimes we do not remember all things, sometimes we do not want to remember, do not like to bring something in present situation which even we do not forget. Memory is affected by present demand which comes under the term ‘politics’. Throughout this research workshop Mimi Alford’s singular perspective and presentation of her past life will be analyzed. Memory is a foremost autobiographical subject which involves in meaning making

process. Autobiographical memory contains memories of event that have occurred during the course of one's lifetime. It encompasses our recollections of specific, personal events. The used memory in an autobiography and personal identity are linked by reciprocal relationship. This research deals about the construction of Mimi's subjectivity through the help of memory. The way Ms. Alford plays with her memory is a major agenda of this research. Here she not only remembers her past but analyzes through the position of present self. Her access of memory will be dealt on the theoretical frame of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative* and Avishai Margalit's *The Ethics of Memory*.

An autobiography never is freed from the intrusion of its author. It cannot be merely objective presentation of the past event. In our recalling process of once experienced incident either we exaggerate or we understate certain aspect because our subjectivity does not let us to be purely objective towards the things. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue:

Remembering involves a reinterpretation of the past in the present. The process is not a passive one of mere retrieval from a memory bank. Rather, the remembering subject actively creates the meaning of the past in the act of remembering (Rose). Thus, narrated memory is an interpretation of the past that can never be fully recovered. (16)

An autobiography's objectivity is always questionable because while recalling the past one interprets it in search of the meaning of the past. It is reinterpretation of the past original event/incident. In the case of Mimi Alford also same thing is applicable. No doubt, *Once Upon a Secret* is an autobiography, it is fuelled with Alford's way of interpretation. In this account she mostly reinterprets the events from her age of nineteen. Her then immature self is now matured and the mature meaning of the

events she is trying to convey which is problematic. Here, past is not objectively unveiled because of the tactfulness of mind in the process of remembering. Through this unveiled past story she attempts to show her innocence.

In the topic of memory, Avishai Margalit inclines an idea that the personal use of memory is akin to know. In our revisiting the past we tell the things that we know. Furthermore, in the same book earlier, he writes that the previous knowledge comes in our mind while we remember something. This happens in our mind but while we narrate our memory, it suffers from our personal involvement due to our passion to be humble. Memory is primarily subjective and concerned with inner life. The relationship between emotion and memory is complex. Margalit presents a concept on remembering past emotions and reliving these emotions in the present. To clarify this concept he declares, "Remembering emotions as a way of knowing how the things we remember were felt at the time- a way of grasping the sense and the sensibility of past events needed for understanding and assessing the things we care about in the present, especially the people we care about" (109). This statement relates emotions and their memory to living in an enhanced world. While we evoke our past emotion simply we re-describe it in the present. It is not only description. Furthermore, he claims, "A history of emotion tends to become revisionist history, a re-description of the emotion we had in the past" (111). That remembered emotion is reviewed one along with re-definition and re-discussion. In the same vein, Alford's *Once Upon a Secret* is more about her past emotion which she later re-describes. She does not remember the emotion itself but how she viewed the emotion in the past. The emotion in the sense that all over the book she reveals her layer of secrets and relations, among four relations, first one is full of sexual intimacy but she claims it as an affair second is her familial relation with husband and daughters, third is just once sexual involvement

with her 'third lover' and the last is also her marital and sentimental/emotional relation.

In the same light Margalit makes an impression about living and reliving an emotion that "Living an emotion is living an involved life. It is way of seeing, reacting to and thinking about the object to which we relate in a certain way" (128). Alford in her life narrative, after leaving the previous involvement with men, she could not avoid the reminiscences of the memory . She relates herself while recalling the past moments. The way she presents her sentiment towards men by regarding them as her lovers insights her attachment with them. She is involved with her past emotion as a result she recently, in January 2009, visited JFK's graveyard at Arlington National Cemetery. Furthermore, he asserts "reliving an emotion is being tied to an original event that is constitutive of the emotion (and not just a causal trigger of the emotion)" (129). The emotional attachment Alford recollects throughout her narrative is her original intimate relation with various men. That means she is reliving in the past. She still recollects her strong feelings for JFK so she time and again takes the side of him even if he did unjust to her.

At the same time, Smith and Watson present the opinion of Daniel L. Schacter claiming "Memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the event themselves" (16). In the same manner, Anne Whitehead also claims, "Memory simultaneously transforms, so that memory represents not a copy of an original but more precisely a version of it" (51). This means that recollected memories are not the exact copy of previous events rather it gives the details of the way how someone experienced the past events. In the process of recollecting the past, our mind plays a role by being active and because of the activeness our personal intrusion is always there. In this sense we cannot mirror that past as it was. Memories to some

extent assist us to know the experienced events. All the experienced events do not come as it is rather they come according to present demand. In this sense memory is always suffering from preference of the author, time and need. *Once Upon a Secret* includes Alford's interview with Random House Reader Circle, where she tells, "I tried to be honest and faithful to that nineteen-years-old Mimi as I remember her" (205). Through this line it is clear that she is in a way to expose her teenage innocence. 'What she was' is not her concern but how she remembers is. Alford also reveals her secret as per of her preference because the primary witness is already been dead and she wants to enhance her innocence.

Likewise, Linda Anderson in her book *Autobiography* has discussed about memory. She claims, "... To remember is not to restore something previously lost, to find a link in a chain which was previously missing. Rather the past can only be known belatedly, restructuring in the present what had previously been thought of as past" (61). Act of remembering does not bring everything about the past in the present. Moreover, past comes in a delayed form. Through the remembering process events not only be restored rather in course of time we know it, we understand the value as well as meaning of the past either from our knowledge or by our analysis, which directly comes under the intrusion of the self. Memory is not an isolated phenomenon rather subjectivity of its holder comes along with. In her book, Alford includes her present realization of the past. She at the present state understands the past. She states, "Of course I was not aware at the time that I wasn't unique, that there were other women in the president's life. I never made the logical leap that if he behaved this way with me, he was probably doing the same with others" (70). Through these lines she introduces her teenaged innocence in a little sense it seems noticeable but some lines below she writes that other women were silent because

Dave Powers warned them to be silent but she were not warned and the fear of having questionable contact to JFK made her unspeakable. If she had sense of thrill because of that secret relation, she would have broken it but she wouldn't. Her subjective judgment about her intimacy with JFK regarded herself loose character so she had compulsion to be silent for her own good. Her own decision to be silent is responsible behind her long suffering.

The present realization of the past itself is personal phenomenon. When Alford tries to maintain her honesty towards her fiancé she unfolds her secret 'sensual relationship' with the President before and after her involvement with Tony. At that time she had realized that her past is her guilt because she had cheated Tony, she was unfaithful to him. In the back when she deceived Tony by continuous visit to JFK she did not feel any humiliation but the time when she disclosed that secret part she felt guilt. She reveals her most significant truth of past in a conversation with Tony, this way

"There's something I have to tell you" I said.

"What?"

"The President..."

"What?" he interrupted.

"It's more than you think..."

"What?"

"I'm not as innocent as you think."

"What?"

[...]

"I was closer to him...."

"What are you telling me- that you slept with President Kennedy?"...

“Since when?” he asked.

“Last year.”

“Even after you met me?”

I nodded.

“How many times?”

“I don’t know. A lot.” (134-135)

By doing all the indigestive activities she wants forgiveness from Tony. In an adverse situation she confronts her unfair relationship with Tony by hoping ‘catharsis and relief’ (166). She cheats Tony by ‘being claimed by the President’ first. She now realizes that telling the truth for her is “not only a gesture of honesty but one of faith as well- in him and his love for me” (145). Although she was not faithful to Tony practically but still claims it because she finally discloses her underground truth. She analyzes that event along with present consciousness. At time when she told truth was just a way to unburden her sorrows but later she interprets it as her faith. Through this type of dualistic focalization her innocence is crashed over her plot-line.

The previous experience teaches a lesson to us. The memory of once experienced events recognizes our strength and weaknesses. When we come up with the significance of our memory it helps for the future. If we regard some events from the bygone days as our weakness in the present we correct it for the better upcoming. Alford has realized that the suppressed voice was her main problem as a result it damaged her first marital life. And when she got married with Dick Alford she raised her voice unlike first marital life. She found out her cause of sorrow and improved. In her account she realizes, “I’m no longer the passive, silent wife and mother. I have a voice. And part of being happy is using that voice to speak up for yourself at the moments when your well-being is at risk and staying quiet when it doesn’t matter”

(192). After all she realizes the fact that being happy is more important than being right. Keeping silent never heal the pain. We should follow the acting out method for any suffering otherwise it harms our survival. For this reason she adopts a most useful lesson from her past. Thinking of the President lying beside the First Lady did make her feel like an intruder. So the etiquette lesson of her cotillion days at least taught her something.

In the age of sixty-one she has realized a mistake from the past. As she finds out, “I had spent my entire life misguidedly cradling a secret and letting it close off, one by one, the doors to my heart. I was not going to make that mistake again” (189). We believe that past is a teacher, it shows good and bad aspects of us. Unlike previous fearful and coward Alford, now she is known about the harmful effect of suppressed voice. She realizes the mistake of her past and decides not to do same again. So memory is a way to which we can assure our better future.

According to Mimi Alford, her purpose of visiting White House for the first time was taking an interview with Jacqueline Kennedy’s secretary. Actually, Alford was assigned to take an interview with the First Lady but because of the busy schedule of Mrs. Kennedy, her secretary offered Alford a chance to take an interview with her about the First Lady and Alford did accordingly. She never even met Mrs. Kennedy but still write an article on student newspaper *Salmagundy* about the link between Miss Porter’s and White House. In previous summer she wrote that article and next summer she was invited by White House as a summer intern. The interesting fact hidden here is that even in the second visit she did not meet First Lady. Clarifying why she could not meet Mrs. JFK, Alford mentions:

Although my White House adventure began because I had asked to interview Jacqueline Kennedy, I never once met- or even saw- her during my time there.

One reason for this was that her office was in the West Wing and I was in the East Wing, and the two sides of White House, though not a hundred yards apart, were separated worlds, operating independently of each other... But the main reason I never saw or met her was that she spent most of the summer of 1962 away from the White House. (74)

This statement of author is not convincing because early she claims that she had very close and friendly relation with Letitia Baldrige, the First Lady's social Secretary and chief of staff as well as with Dave Powers, special assistant to the President. If Ms. Alford had strong will to meet First Lady in her second visit to White House by requesting them for a short time she might have met Mrs. Kennedy but she did not try it even once. The reason behind it may be that since she had an unhealthy relation with JFK and First Lady was unaware of that but still Alford did not want any risk. The realization of that bitter truth did not let her to stay in front of the First Lady. To display her innocence she subjugates her sense of guilt and shame. Alford here pretends that she would meet Mrs. Kennedy if she was in the White House in that summer. It is author's intention to assure own good personality at any cost.

Memory is not a neutral and passive phenomenon. It is infected by the time and space of the telling. In the act of remembering we always are conscious about the present context. Memory in relation to context is significant issue of an autobiography. Smith and Watson take insight from Susan Engel while presenting the relationship between memory and the context. Engel claims, "Acts of remembering takes place at particular sites and in particular circumstances" (18). In this statement Engel is clear that memory is always time and space bound act of human being. Similarly, Smith and Watson assert 'the memory invoked in autobiographical narrative is specific to the time of writing and the context of telling. It is never

isolatable facts, but situated association” (18). They believe that memory and context are akin mental process. Original experience could not be presented via the memory because in the way of remembering we already become selective, we articulate our past by analyzing the current atmosphere. We do not want to show our negative side intentionally. Being a social creature we underestimate the bad behaviors, that’s why we try to maintain good personality. We choose those events from the past which give positive impression to the reader/audience. Ms. Alford by providing this story of her life tries to highlight her rational human impulse. She claims that because of her innocence she did all those activities: kept secret relations, try to run away from President’s memory.

In this autobiography, *Once Upon a Secret*, Alford gives the detail that she had seen the darker side of the President’s behavior. She writes about forceful use of drug by her because JFK imposed his power upon her. The way she gives detail of a night when she was in the tour of eleven Western states with President Kennedy:

I’d seen flashes of the president’s darker side, which emerged rarely and only when we were among men he knew. That’s when he felt a need to display his power over me. Although my admiration for him remains steadfast to this day, it is the darker aspect of his nature that I find hard to reconcile with all his admirable qualities. In revealing this side of his personality now, I realize yet another damaging note will be added to the record, but I cannot airbrush or ignore his actions during his darker moments; they remain a stain on my memory. (100)

The dual nature of Ms. Alford’s is existed in above mentioned lines. The poised memory of the President’s imposed power upon her in front of other hunts even in the present but still she has sense of respect to him. She exposes herself as so good and

forgiving personality but the doubt is that if someone is hurt by a man how could s/he still respect that man? Wouldn't there be ego problem? If a man is insulted in front of mass because of the power of next one, does the victim show his gratitude for that victimizer afterward? She bares the story that she took the drug:

. . . I was sitting next to him in the living room when a handful of yellow capsules- most likely nitrite, commonly known then as poppers- was offered up by one of the guests. The president asked me if I wanted to try the drug, which stimulated the heart but also purportedly enhanced sex. I said no, but he just went ahead and popped the capsule and held it under my nose. (101)

Here her real victimized picture is portrayed because taking a drug unwillingly and forcefully might ruin her life permanently. Here, she had become a guinea pig in the true manner. Only after this incident she felt she was relieved not to see him. Here one may realize her innocence but this research does not because she already had faced a shameful moment in the White House pool side. Where she was asked to perform oral sex for Dave Powers by the President and she had done silently without any refusal. If she was well mannered girl the first time she may be unknown about those awkward things but time and again it may not. Her intention to prove herself as an innocent girl is failed again.

Similarly, Alford kept relation with the President and Tony Fahnstock at the same time as she says, "Simply put, I was leading two lives and enjoying both of them" (114). After an official and ritual engagement with Tony she continued meeting with JFK. This means that she wanted to be secured with Tony because of their sameness in familial and other status. She knew at that time that her secret intimacy with so-called lover would not get marital form so she did. Her decision to get married was not usual because in marriage she wanted an escape from her critical life.

She was not expecting the love as common girls expect from a marriage instead she was seeking security and certainty only. She unintentionally leaks this truth when she writes, “In marrying Tony, I opting for security. And perhaps grasping for an escape route from my crazy double life... I was in a way, fulfilling my destiny” (121). She could not get rid of her sensational behavior at that time so she did all this but now at the age of 69 by overlapping that sexual urge she tries not to be a loose character girl. Not to show her deceptive form she date both man. Here researcher does not see her good manner. One point she says, “With Tony I began to think we had a future together. With the President I began to realize that my attachment, however strong, had no future; it was real and unrealistic” (113). The idea given here is also controversial. She has already articulated her realization about the gap in terms of age, power and other materialistic matter between them. She never thinks of future with JFK earlier. Before and after getting Tony too, she was dedicated to the President just for fun and pleasure. As she mentions, “She was on her own for the first time in her life, away from parents and siblings, home and school. She was flattered by the repeat invitation. She was determined to have fun, damn the consequences” (62). The unmanaged and careless habit is crystal clear here. But in the previous extract she speaks as if she kept that intimacy with JFK by concerning her future. Her attempt of introducing herself as a girl who is very much oriented towards life turns false here.

In the same line, after seeing the consequences of double life she again does same. On the one hand she had heading her marital life with Tony meanwhile she had spent night with a senior staffer, named Bill Noel. Although she states Noel as her third lover but that was not love that was only attraction because there was no any emotional attachment. As she writes:

When Bill had the bright idea that we should run the London Marathon in May

1982, I immediately said yes. Five of us flew over, but only he and I had signed up to run. The other three were along as tourists and supporting players, which explains why Bill and I were assigned to share a hotel room the night before the race. We needed the sleep; the other could go out and hit the town. It was the sign of how innocent our relationship was- that no one in our group thought the sleeping arrangements were inappropriate, including us. By that time I had not been intimate with my husband for five years. In fact, we had barely hugged. Alone in the hotel room that night, I realized how much I yearned for physical affection and connection. So I made a bold, spontaneous gesture that surprised both of us. I climbed into Bill's bed instead of mine. It seemed like such a natural culmination of all the encouragement we'd shared during our months of training. I had turned thirty-nine two days before, and Bill was my third lover. (169)

In the given lines her infidelity is clear that she is too sensual woman who has kept sexual relation with several men in her life time. By claiming Bill as her lover she naturalizes her sexual appeal but actually with Bill neither she thinks of any future nor any other long lasting relations. On the basis of short period's friendship she shows her passion for physical affection, which shows her extreme sex demanding nature. Through the claim of love she avoids guilty feelings. Here she conceals her sexual urge. The fact of her life style is hidden here that she has a strong sensuality power but she does not accept it directly because of her conscious mind which forces her to be socially acceptable.

Likewise, the issue of forgetting and forgiving is another part of memory. It can be used either as a politics or as 'the change of heart' in an autobiography. Once again Avishai Margalit provides a sight that, "Forgiveness is first and foremost a

policy: a policy of adopting an exclusionary reason with regard to someone who has wronged us” (201-202). Here, exclusionary reason he means a reason against acting for certain reason. One can forgive someone either intentionally or he/she really forgets the particular event of humiliation, insult etc. The voluntary way of forgiving is occupied in the primary text of this research. She is surprisingly kind and forgiving towards those who she now realizes took terrible advantage of an innocent young girl. She is far gentler about them than about her youthful self. She neither blames Dave Powers for taking her to the President nor JFK for taking her virginity. As Mimi Alfords writes, “In the end, I don’t – I can’t- blame either Chris or Barbara for their severe opinion about me” (118). While giving clarification of Chris and Barbara’s judgment about her that she was not as capable as the White House Press office needed, she does not resist their view rather she stands as if their evaluation does not affect her. But the fact is that she was really unqualified in their job. Hereby, she hides her disqualified qualities by using the forgiving as a tool.

Alford experienced ‘the thrill of being desired’. She cannot describe what happened that night as making love. But she resists any charge of date rape. Her forgiving is compatible with the covering-up view. She intentionally forgives both Dave Powers and JFK because she still respects them, cares about the prestige of JFK and her own. Seemingly she cover-ups the President but actually she masks her ethical and moral existence. She have guilt of her spoiled character so to be secure from probable ethical downfall she does not charge JFK and Powers.

By the nature autobiography is a tricky genre. Because autobiography has an element of history, readers expect some measure of historical accuracy from the author. The history may be personal as well as public or official. The event of Cuban Missile Crisis is raised by her. At that time due to that issue the America was in terror.

By being selective about the events she chooses in order to illustrate her life, she is giving a deliberate shape to her narrative, a shape that the messy longing for sex is not directly possesses. As an author she is aware of the tricks that memory can play, she devotes much attention to examining how memory works. After getting divorced she plays a trick with her secret by taking it as her 'fact from the past'. She easily adopts what she has been running from and she is no longer panic by avoiding the fact.

Meanwhile, she plays another remarkable trick with her existence through her remembering that she claims a space in the history of America. Though she appears as a woman who is happy with her past but actually the falsity of her happy appearance foregrounds when she shows her intense dissatisfaction with the ignorance of historians. She, very cleverly, claims her space in the life of thirty-fifth President of the America. Her trick she presents in this way:

I hope it's obvious, by this point that I don't have any illusion about myself as a crucial, clandestine character in the history. I know I am a footnote to history-no, strike that. I'm not even a footnote, because that would suggest that I had a role in the course of historical events that was consequential in some way, that had some impact on a conversation or a decision that affected the lives of others. That didn't happen. If anything, I'm a footnote to a footnote in the story of America's thirty-fifth president, someone so far of the radar that a diligent biographer couldn't identify me by my full name in his JFK biography. (175)

Throughout this extract her deep dissatisfaction is envisioned. Seemingly she accepts the fact that her role does not affect any crucial decision of the history but in the depth by focusing her intimate relation with JFK she claims her space. If she is not interested about the history and her place in it she never talks about position of the

people in the history. She repeats the same phrase, “I was a footnote to a footnote” (195). If she was satisfy with it she just informed us but through repetition she shows her point of disagree. Intentionally she linger historical subject matter in her autobiographical account. This tricky way to claim a position in an official history is her politics. To claim this position her memorization is essential.

To foreground her naïve character in her memorization Alford includes a philosophical idea from the sermon of Dr. Thomas K. Tewell, senior pastor at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. For him sex is ‘twelve-letter word’, which is ‘faithfulness’. Furthermore, he adds three principles for pursuing a life of faithfulness. She presents those three principles;

Principle number one was that human sexuality is a sacred gift and must be exercised with great care. Sex is not a game. Principle number two was that God is not a prude. He doesn’t want to rub us of pleasure, but promiscuity destroys relationships. Someone always gets hurt. Principle number three asserted that the deepest desire of the human spirit is for intimacy. Sex without intimacy is not faithfulness. (170)

These three principles advocate for the celebration of sex. Knowingly she cites this philosophical testimony to justify her past act and deed as holy and usual. Here she tries to trace her past act with religious testament. She highlights all these philosophical doctrines in order to have religious acceptance. Even in the religion sex is explained as a gift of God so her sexual relation is not a crime. What she had done is moral for her. She had sex with several men because of their intimacy so her sexual life is not a crime, she exercised it with grace. Here, a girl who can relate a philosophical insight to be ethically safe, who can suspect the morality of God is not innocent rather she is tricky one.

In the same light, earlier she says she was happy with what she had done but later she states, “I knew that telling the truth was not only my sole option but possibly my salvation” (177). Here, her previous claim of innocence seems futile hence it becomes sin hereby and she is longing for salvation. If she is cheerful with her bygone days she never thinks about the salvation her intense grief of wrong deed is spilled. In this point too her innocence is turned into sin. Hence, her failure of claiming innocence is available throughout *Once Upon a Secret*. Her sense of guilt is presented at the last part but still her sense of gratitude is also tied in the same manner. So opposing force of humankind is excavating throughout her account.

In this autobiography, Alford deals with both thick and thin relation but this research is confined with the previous one. Especially the relation with her lovers is basis of analyzing her politics of memory. Margalit argues that, “We usually care about our parents, children, spouses, lovers, and friends” (32). Here, she dominantly talks about her past with her dear ones. Likewise, for Margalit, memory is the “cement that holds thick relations together” (8). Hereby he makes his argument that through the device of memory we perform our relation with nearest and dearest ones this is more related with ethics. Memory and its representation touch very significantly upon the question of identity. By using the memory as both source and authenticator of autobiography Alford makes her existence strong. The crux of her work lies in the nature of identity formation. She has presented subjective version of history which is related to JFK and claim for her space within it.

This autobiography brought to light on Alford’s hardships of keeping secret for long and its undergone effects. She relates her suffering with emotional trauma. According to her, earlier the President’s power caught her latter Tony’s forbidden to reveal her secret ruined her emotional life. Her married life with Tony was not

pleasing. They were unable to share either joy or grief. They had not as intimate relation as a couple needs. Even in the birth and death of their premature first child they did not comfort each other. She always tried her best to hide her past so run away from possible exposure. But at last, she indulges herself from that undergoing suffering of secret, the support of her current husband for articulating mysterious past helps her to heal that pain and restores her emotional health.

An author of autobiography tries to depict his/her past in well-mannered form because being the member of particular society s/he cannot willingly cross the boundary of social restriction. Social acceptance becomes foremost basis for their social life so s/he cannot go beyond the social order. Naturally human does not have rational state of mind only, because most of the time unconsciously or it may be consciously s/he may want/perform irrational behavior but while memorizing s/he does not include that even that was not forgotten. Hence, forgetting is also voluntary. But it may be involuntary also. In the case of Alford, she has made a policy of forgetting to hide her salacious character.

Through this autobiography *Once Upon a Secret* Alford tries to foreground her false innocence. In an interview with Meredith Vieira Alford says that “19-years-old Mimi was serious and enthusiastic girl” but in her account that seriousness and enthusiasm is missing. She deliberately forgets it because if she shows her seriousness she had to be oriented towards one life but she lead two relations one with JFK another with Tony and after two decades too she was guiding two lives with Tony and Bill at the same time. Importantly, voluntary forgetting is deliberately hiding and it is the thing what Alford has done in her autobiographical work *Once Upon a Secret*. Her intention to prove her innocence turns into her longing for official history. Her relation with JFK turns into fascination and attraction towards power. Similarly, love

for Bill becomes her seduction. To some extent, in the age of nineteen, she may be naïve and innocent but when she kept relation with the President, she cheated the First Lady, her fiancée as well as she kept her family under the cloud so her innocence is no longer her property to be as pure as she claims.

The major yielding of this research is that Alford has very consciously played with her memory. Within the boundary of her remembering, (selected) events from her past are represented. *Once Upon a Secret* cannot accomplish her desire of innocence and honesty. Alford vividly describes how she was an important part of JFK's secret life but she casts doubt on the possibility of ultimate falsity because the people involved were no longer alive. Seemingly innocently but actually consciously and intentionally she presents her story especially her role in the life of JFK, through which she tries to claim her remarkable space in the life of JFK. Her dissatisfaction of being "a footnote to a footnote" (175) encourages her to write this life narrative.

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