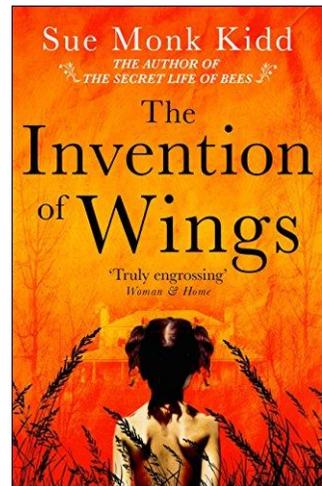


## Book Review on Sue Monk Kidd's 'The Invention of Wings'

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The author, Sue Monk Kidd born in 1948 in Sylvester, Georgia, U.S.A., is a novelist and memoirist by profession. Kidd is known for her best novel *The Secret Life of Bee* (2002). This book received critical acclaim and was a New York Times bestseller. It won the 2004 Book Sense Book of the year Award (paperback), and was nominated for Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction.



*The Invention of Wings* is a novel based on historical fact of the slavery abolitionists of Charleston, Sarah Grimke and her sister Angelina Grimke and their housemaid, who is a female slave provided by the aristocrat parents as Birthday Gift. The novel is the monologue of the protagonists Sara the abolitionist and the other is Handful

the family slave; coming one after another building the well knitted plot to bring out the picture of slavery and the struggle of abolishing it as well as the discrimination against women during the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in America. While reading the novel the readers may easily associate themselves with Sarah and Hatty. Linguistic approach is also apt as for Sarah proper English language is used for her monologue. For Hatty's part of monologue, the author uses different dialect of English as it gives impression of the dialect used by African American (slaves of that time) as they gradually learnt the language of the American masters, for example words like Massa is used for master, Missus for master's wife, Mauma for Mama etc.

Daily Telegraph quotes: 'Wonderful.....by turn funny, sad full of incident and shot through with grown-up magic reminiscent of Joanne Harris'.

This is a historical novel. The novel is in the form of fictional autobiography of the abolitionist Sarah Grimke and her birthday gift or maid Handful. The narrative of the novel is unique, as the monologues of two main protagonists', one after another, carry the story foreword with their own experiences. It's the story of a Grimke family and their African American slave girl; Handful or Hatty Grimke along with the people related to them and the abolition movement specifically of Charleston, America. Mr. Moore Grimke was a powerful, aristocrat and judge in Charleston, who supported slavery and owned

salves for fieldwork on plantation and housework. Sarah had witnessed punishment given to slave, which traumatized her so much that she started to stammer with fear.

The novel opens with Hatty describing her ancestral stories told by her mother over and over to imprint the ancestral history on her mind, because Hatty did not know anything other than Ker mother and the family where she was born in American slavery in the house of a master. For her mother, it was an important issue to be connected to their roots, because the members of slave family were sold and resold many times over and disconnected from their loved ones.

*There was a time in Africa the people could fly. Mauma told me this one night when I was ten years old. Said, "Handful, your grannymauma saw it for herself. She say they flew over trees and clouds. She say they flew like blackbirds. When we came here, we left that magic behind." (1)*

On 11<sup>th</sup> Birthday Sarah Grimke was gifted a maid for herself the slave girl of 10, her name was Hatty, she was called Handful. Handful is presented after decorating her with purple satin ribbons around her neck, wrists and head as a gift. Sarah denies accepting Handful as her maid and tells her mother to set the girl free. Same night Sarah wrote an official letter of announcement to set Handful free. Sarah's parents punish her for writing the official letter to announce the freedom of her slave; Hatty gifted to her by her parents, so they stopped giving her books to

read as that was her most loved hobby. Sarah was not allowed to pursue her dream career of becoming a lawyer like her father instead she was taught basic knowledge of numbers, history, stitching etc. less logical activities to keep a person busy. Hatty describes her anger against the unequal treatment of the slave masters' children and the slave children by the master's family. The slave children had to assist in all the works in and around the house or if they are healthy then they need to work on the field. Slave children were presented as personal maid for young children of the master. Hatty was Sara Grimke's Birthday Gift. They both were of the same age.

John Grimke had many slaves working in the house and one of them was Charlotte, her daughter was Handful the one who was gift of Sarah. Handful hated to be slave, just like her mother and they would find ways to ease off their work bourdon, but when they are caught of any mischief they were punished in inhumane way for example Charlotte was punished by tying her one leg to her back of the neck with belt. She was asked to stand for which Charlotte was skilled in stitching beautiful pattered quilts. She had taught Handful to stitch quilts with pattern that tells stories of their lives before and after the slavery. After some years, free and unmarried Sarah goes to North America for her father's medical treatment. There she learns to live as a free and confident woman. Her father apologizes for not allowing her to become a lawyer and advises her to achieve her dreams. Soon her father dies of illness and Sarah returns home in Charleston to see her

mother turning into heartless slave owner, who would thrash slave girls for minor mistakes.

Charlotte collected and saved money to buy freedom for Handful and herself. She develops relationship with a freeman (free African American) Denmark Vesey during the time she visits market without permeation of owner and stitched clothes to earn freedom. One day when she went out with permeation to buy things that she needed she was gone without any stress. Handful kept hoping to see or know about her mother's disappearance without any discussion or note. Hatty's mother is punished brutally by Mary Grimke for disobeying. When went for shopping with permit, Hatty's mother is abducted. Hatty is punished for small mistakes. Once to punish Hatty, the master's wife sent Hatty to Workhouse. Workhouse was known to be the hell for any living being so the rebelling slaves were sent to Workhouse to teach a lesson. Hatty had an accident and her one leg was crushed in the giant wheel in the Workhouse.

Sarah goes to north to see the Quaker Mr. Israel Morris. Israel and his family had become friends with Sarah on the journey back to Charleston. His family had invited her in north and encouraged her to be Quaker. Sarah liked him. As he is widower now and has to look after his children with the help his sisters, Israel wishes that Sara could be teacher for his children. He invites Sarah. Sarah goes to his place, takes care and gives homeschooling to Israel's children. Sarah learns the ways to be a good Quaker.

Gradually their friendship develops into love. They want to marry. This change is unwelcomed by Israel's elder sister, Catherine. Catherine does not approve of it and throws Sarah out of home in the unknown country. Sarah suffers humiliation and goes back to home where her young sister also follows her path to be a Quaker and wishes to abolish slavery. Hatty was not useful in the Workhouse as she was now a handicap so she is sent back to Grimke. Hatty to survive sews beautiful quilts and dresses for the Grimke family. Sewing skill was gift of her mother for Hatty.

Sarah starts to do something which she wanted even when she was young—of eleven years—to free slaves. Sarah and Nina her young sister both head to North and work on the antislavery awareness. Nina wrote very impressive pamphlets on antislavery. Sarah also wrote pamphlets on abolishing of slavery from America. For this, Sarah was band from coming into her hometown, Charleston the state that supported slavery. Though Hatty hates to be a slave she keeps her master; Mary Grimke happy by working hard even by facing brutal punishments. Hatty still cherished her dream to be free some day and fly like Blackbirds of Africa, like her ancestors did in Africa. The structure of the novel is somewhat stiff to continue to read, but the language is lucid and the story line is in linier narrative, so it simple to understand the story of the novel. The reader gets to know both sides of the American slavery and the struggle

of women belonging to both races at the same time white and black.

This novel is well researched and historical work on the theme of American Slavery and the work of antislavery activists Grimke sisters. The novel is appreciated a lot.

'Intoxicating.....The tale of one motherless daughter's discovery of what family really means.....and of the strange and wonderful places we find love' notes the Washington Post.

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