CHAPTER II

THE FEMALE GOTHIC AND JOYCE CAROL OATES

Having analyzed the characteristics of Gothic and American gothic in the first chapter, the attention is given in the second chapter to analyze the nature of female gothic and the works of Joyce Carol Oates. In 1977 in *Literary Women*, Ellen Moers coined a new term called female gothic when she wrote about the depiction of women in the Gothic. Since then it lays the path for a new way of thinking about women and the Gothic genre. According to Ellen Moers female gothic means work done by the women writers in the literary mode that is called the Gothic (90). Later on the critics have expanded the definition including the depiction of women in the Gothic. It was the time when women became more and more literate and made a search for an outlet for sharing their erstwhile feelings as only second-rate citizens in the society. For centuries together literature was dominated by men while women writers were very few in number. Later many women writers used Gothic as a weapon and asserted their social status through their writing. With this kind of writing, the female gothic emerged.

Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley are the well-known female gothic writers. Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* provides stuff for the term female gothic regarding the depiction of women in the Gothic. In addition to this novel, Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* provides matter for talking about the depiction of women in
Gothic novels. Mary Shelley stands as a female gothic writer with her novel *Frankenstein* (1818). Mary Shelly listened to the German ghost stories told by Byron and was also influenced by Darwin’s Theories of Evolution.

Gothic has much to do with women in general. It is a fact that the first Gothicists are women. The female dreams in the eighteenth century have formed the entire setting for the Gothic novel. Women of the Eighteenth century England were not happy with their role as slavish wives and daughters. They were ill-treated by their relatives. They felt they were trapped in their own homes. Gothic romances repeatedly highlight the story of women trapped in domestic affairs. Eugenia C. Delamotte in *Perils of the Night* observes, “Gothic romances tell again and again the story of woman trapped in domestic space” (157). Even the man, who is very kind and honest in the beginning, later becomes a threat to the heroine. Sometimes even the husband imprisons the wife and this is not challenged legally until 1891 and it is considered a right of the husband. For example, in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, Rochester imprisons his wife, Bertha Mason. One can even say that Gothic romance is actually a woman’s genre. Especially when a female writer writes about the sufferings of a woman, she is able to give a new, clear picture about the woman. That is the reason why most of the Gothic writers happen to be women. So it is a genre meant for the women to write about the sufferings of women. Critics have come out with the fact that there is a special relationship between ‘female’ and ‘Gothic’. It is easily observed that Gothic fiction is preoccupied with women’s themes such as
marriage or childbirth. In a female gothic novel, a woman is described as an exile from her own country and as a stranger to her children.

Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wall Paper* come within the category of female gothic as they deal with the universality of female suffering. Gothic literature allows the reader to understand the heroine’s sufferings in a world of danger and mystery. Simultaneously it permits the women writers to make use of it as an ideal medium to conceal the radical critiques of the gender politics of their age. *Jane Eyre* is an educational novel showing the reader what happens when the female protagonist has integrity and fights for her rights. *The Yellow Wall Paper* warns the readers of the consequence when the protagonist does not fight against those who oppress her.

The nineteenth century is the age when books criticize women in general. On the other hand, Charlotte Bronte reveals a revolutionary attempt for supporting women through her novel, *Jane Eyre*. It gives the women readers a new philosophy of life. Jane Eyre is an advocate both for human rights and equal rights. She is a prototypical feminist. When *Jane Eyre* is published in 1847, the middle and upper class women are expected to be passive. The publication of this novel has made those women think that they are men’s equals. The short story, *The Yellow Wall Paper* talks about how women have been forced to suppress their complaints and desires. When the heroine brings her complaints to the knowledge of her husband, she is branded as
suffering from a temporary nervous depression. She is called by her husband as “blessed little goose”. She compromises herself that she should have less opposition.

Female gothic is popular in the nineteenth century among the literate middle class. It is a horror genre consisting of books written by women authors about a female protagonist. The four important characteristics that a female gothic possesses are castle, dungeons, forests and hidden passages. In a female gothic the natural cause of terror is not supernatural but it is either female disability or any one of the societal horrors like rape, incest and the authority of the male antagonist. In addition to the ruined castle, the conventions of female gothic include romance, abduction, insanity, murder and supernatural apparition. For Bronte and Gilman, female gothic is a safe medium to address the universality of female suffering as well as introducing progressive ideas for the modification of female conduct. Female gothic cautions women not to be naïve, suggests the appropriate reaction in certain predicaments and provides a support for women. Helene Meyers in *Femicidal Fears: Narrative of the Female Gothic Experience* says that through Gothic romance, women writers have successfully made a connection between gender norms and female victimization.

The Second World War was a global war among countries representing two alliances—the Allies and the Axis. More than 100 million military personnel were mobilized for this war and it resulted with the killing of 70 million people. The war started on September 1, 1939 with the invasion of Poland by Germany. Subsequently a war was declared on Germany by the most of the countries in the British Empire and
France. German invasion of the Soviet Union and the Japanese attack on British colonies aggravated the war. It was followed by the declaration of war on Japan by the United States. Germany and Japan represented the Axis and the major countries like United States, Soviet Union, Britain and France belonged to the Allies. The war went on for six years and in 1945 the war ended with a victory for the Allies. The Soviet Union and the United States emerged as the world’s two superpowers.

In the course of the Second World War, America initiated the nuclear age when it deployed atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Then America became very affluent and emerged as new America. Many intellectuals believed that the new America would discourage the serious development of novel. In After the Lost Generation (1951), John Alridge argued that American writing did not contain any moral or mythological resource to generate serious arts. But the American writers had some depression in their mind to express. Around 1950, a kind of dark naturalism was found among the American novelists. There came novels of violence, disorder and psychic extremity like Willard Motley’s Knock on Any Door (1947), Nelson Algren’s The Man with the Golden Arm (1949) and Chandler Brossard’s Who Walk in Darkness (1952). In these novels, the novelists’ attention was towards horror. The central figures in the novel either became social victims or conscious violators of social values. Critics noticed in the new fiction a retreat from the self and the domination of society as an adversary force.
Simultaneously, there emerged a group of women writers, from the south with an inclination to write about Gothic and the sufferings of man. Novels like Carson McCuller’s *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), Eudora Welty’s *A Curtain of Green* (1941), *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942), *Delta Wedding* (1946), Flannery O’Connor’s *Wise Blood* (1952) and *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (1955) focus on decadence and evil. They invariably produce a fitting Gothic sensation among the readers.

During early 50’s a group of Jewish intellectuals emerged and they became very successful writers. They thought of themselves as survivors and victims of war and holocaust. They could see the danger of totalitarianism in politics and art and could speak consistently for a new humanism. The group of Jewish intellectuals includes Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud and Philip Roth. The critic, Bradbury Malcolm is delighted to write that along with the Jewish intellectuals, there were a few Black writers like Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin who also talked of man’s predicament in a world of urban anonymity. Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) picturizes the namelessness and exposure felt by the Modern Black. His successor is James Baldwin who writes about violence, suffering and despair. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) portrays the sufferings of a Black family. *Giovanni’s Room* (1956) is an exploration of a homosexual relationship between a Black and a White in Paris.
Saul Bellow was born in 1915 in Canada of immigrant Jewish parents. He grew with strong political interests. Bellow’s heroes are mostly Jewish. They have an ambiguous relationship with others and with the society itself. Joseph, the hero of Bellow’s first novel, *The Dangling Man*, tries to know himself and the purpose of his existence. Politics and human relations deny him an assured self and he discovers that his existence in this hostile world has no purpose. He is dangled between the need for social touch and empty inner freedom. Finally, he gives up his freedom and joins the army. Leventhal, the Jewish hero in the *Victim* (1947) does not know his own place in the world but he understands the need to attach a value to man. His other novels, *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), *Seize the Day* (1956), *Henderson, the Rain King* (1959) and *Herzog* (1964) also deal with the existential dilemma.

Bellow is compared and contrasted with Bernard Malamud who far more explicitly writes about the traditional themes of suffering and ethnic identity. Malamud’s heroes are pathetic hunters looking for a new life beyond the imprisonments of conventional existence. Malamud’s *The Assistant* (1957) is about Morris Bober, a poor Jewish grocer who is trying to lead a decent life. *The Fixer* (1966) is Malamud’s political novel. Here, the Jewish handyman Jakov Bok is falsely accused of the ritual murder of a Christian child. Like Saul Bellow, Philip Roth also makes a search for identity and freedom. Philip Roth’s characters enter into a struggle between traditional ethics and new desires for personal freedom. *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1968) is about a Jewish son who fulfils his parents’ expectations but fails
to realize himself sexually. The Jewish professor in *The Breast* (1972) in his confused sexuality resorts to a gigantic female breast.

John Updike, Norman Mailer and Vladimir Nabokov belong to the school of naturalism. Updike is a prolific writer. His novels like *Rabbit, Run* (1960), *Couples* (1968) and *The Coup* (1979) pertain to social anxiety and secular unease. His domestic world is always witnessed with political and historical changes. In the society that he swims through, we come across many divorces. Norman Mailer’s first novel is *The Novel and the Dead*. It reports about war and its violence and the victimizations of the military machine. He strongly tells us that we should know that war is fought not for ideals but for the power concentration. His next book, *Barbary Shore* explores the political wasteland of post-war America. *An American Dream* (1956) is a semi-autobiographical novel. The hero of the novel, Rojack is a man both of wild inner desires and strong political ambitions. Next to Norman Mailer, in the history of American novelists, one cannot miss Vladimir Nabakov who is very prominent and successful. He wrote his earlier novels in Russian and German. In 1940 he moved to the United States. His first English novel is *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941). His central characters are left in a world of continuous disorder.

Soon after the assassination of Kennedy in 1963, the sense of horror increased in America. A kind of uncertainty prevailed among the Americans. This reflected in American literature too. American fiction neglected the humanistic and realistic
centre of the previous novel writing. It went far away from realism and entered into a state called “fabulation. In the later part of sixties, there was a counter culture movement and it was responsible for the rising protests about civil rights and free speech. It was an age the writers thought that outward violence could be countered by an inward spirit. This kind of psycho-political awareness deeply affected the fiction of sixties. There were a few Afro-American writers like John Oliver Killens, John A. Williams and William Melvin Kelley who revolted against white consciousness. And Then We Heard the Thunder (1963) by Oliver Killers, The Man Who Cried I am (1967) by John A. Williams and Dem (1969) by William Melvin Kelley are examples of novels dealing with psycho-political awareness.

American fiction in the sixties is dealing with the political violence in the society and the state of individual’s power to face them. Burrough’s Naked Lunch (1959) brings to light the contest between inner space and overwhelming political systems. American fiction has moved towards a fantastic factuality neglecting humanistic and realistic centre of the previous novelists. According to Truman Capote, his novel, In Old Blood (1966) is a non-fiction novel for it is a novel like report about the murder of an innocent middle-American Kansas farm family by two wandering psychopaths. The fiction of sixties becomes fantastic through its assault on the historical and the real.

A new experimental tendency starts with the appearance of such books as John Hawkes’s Second Skin (1964), Thomas Berger’s Little Bigman (1964), Jerzy
Kosinski’s *The Painted Bird* (1965), Robert Coover’s *The Origin of the Brunists* (1965), Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), William H. Crass’s *Omensetter’s Luck* (1966) and John Barth’s *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966). In the late sixties, we find a crucial break with previous realism and naturalism and there is a disintegration of the previous categories and groupings like ‘Southern fiction’, ‘Jewish-American fiction’ and ‘Black fiction’.

The era of post-modernism has started in the seventies. American novels of the seventies look at man as a machine with less thinking power and individuality. Joseph Heller’s *Catch 22* concentrates on the absurdity of man. It describes how man is bound to the system as machine. Heller’s next two novels, *Something Happened* and *Good as Gold* continue to talk about the absurd life in the post-war America. Bob Slocum is the hero of *Something Happened*. He works in a corporation office where everyone is afraid of someone else. He shares the universal corruption and lives in a guilty atmosphere. Vonnegut’s *Slaughter House Five: or, The Children’s Crusade* looks at man as a machine which is an important characteristic of a post-modern novel. Vonnegut converts himself into Billy Pilgrim, a child like, gentle-natured but emotionally damaged person from New York. He suffers the author’s experience of capture in war and imprisonment in the Dresden Slaughter house. The setting is actually a world of fantasy and Billy is displaced further. He is kidnapped to Tralfamadore which is partly a pathological location. Billy adjusts to the Tralfamadorian view of things like men are machines. So the characters in the American fiction of the seventies are the victims of their author’s imagination.
The next prominent post-modern writer is John Barth. His earlier novels, *The Floating Opera* (1956) and *The End of the Road* (1958) are comedies of existential absurdity. The hero of *The Floating Opera* is a suicidal hero. The world being meaningless, he decides to commit suicide but later on he decides to live because the world is meaningless. Jacob Horner in *The End of the Road* is a careless man leading a meaningless life. He goes to teach grammar in a college. He enters into adultery with a colleague’s wife and it ends in abortion and her death. He reverts to meaninglessness. In *Chimera* (1972) too, Barth confesses his meaningless existence. He says that he has lost track of who he is and his name is just a bundle of letters. In 1982, he has published *Sabbatical* which is a story of sea voyaging and sea-mysteries. The setting is on Maryland. In this novel, he handles the twin traditions of terror and sentimentality and makes a good attempt at the modern version of American novel.

Donald Barthelme is considered to be the source of a modern meaningless text. He is a writer of sadness, pointing to the spaces of a self-negating world, at the same time using and pointing up the materials it offers. American novelists of the eighties have enormous fictional imagination constituting a new reality. William H. Grass in his critical book *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (1970) remarks that a good novelist must keep the readers imprisoned in his language. He reveals his consciousness of the discrepancy between language and reality in his novel *Omensetter's Luck* and in the novella, *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* (1968).
In the eighties, a group of black women writers like Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Angela Carter and Paule Marshall, through their writings have proved the female creativity and accomplishment. Alice Walker published her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* in 1970. Her second novel, *Meridian* contains some of her own experiences. Before she published *The Color Purple*, she wrote some other novels like *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982) is written as a series of letters. The letters record the miserable experiences of Celie’s oppression and liberation. Celie is a fourteen year old girl who writes to god when she is sexually abused by her guardian. Her next novel, *The Child Who Favoured Daughter* is about a father’s sexual attraction to his daughter.

was recaptured and she tried to murder her children. She succeeded in killing her baby daughter with a handsaw. According to her, death is less horrible than slavery. Sethe is the character for Margaret Garner in the novel. After release from jail, Sethe shares her small house with her daughter’s ghost. *Beloved* provides its readers shocking incidents of daily barbarism of slavery. It is a book made up of dreams and folktale but it correctly reveals American reality. *Sula* is about a black heroine who fights desperately to come out of her paralyzing home. Sula’s final effort to come out of her past becomes successful through her dearest friend Nel’s decision to marry her. Angela Carter’s motive in her novel is to talk only about the sexual battle between female and male. *Shadow Dance* (1966), *Heroes and Villains* (1969), *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman* (1972), *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984) are her prominent novels. In all these works, her characters are preoccupied with their sexual ties.

The well known American contemporary women writers of fiction are Pearl S. Buck, Eudora Welty, Anne Tyler, Mary McCarthy and Joyce Carol Oates. Eudora Welty (1909-2001) is a great American woman novelist and short story writer who introduces a new feminine vision in American fiction. Her work is centrally feminine. She challenges the traditional and the patriarchal view of women. She views women gaining access to the rights and prerogatives that men had and revaluing their own nature and abilities. Eudora Welty is influenced by the early twentieth century women writers like Getrude Stein, Willa Catherine and Ellen Glasgow. She is one of the most important writers of the South. *A Curtain of Green* (1941), *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942), *The Wide Net* (1943), *The Golden Apples* (1949), *Delta Wedding* (1946), *Music from Spain* (1948), *The Ponder Heart* (1954), *The Bride of Innisfallen* (1955), *The Shoe Bird* (1964), *Losing Battles* (1970), and *The Collected Stories of Welty* (1980) are her contribution to American fiction. In her works, she gives a call for the women's rebellion against confinement. Most of her works focus on modern daughters who venture out beyond the protected areas of traditional womanhood. Her women characters make a sense of personal satisfaction in their lives.

Anne Tyler, an American woman writer has emerged as a popular writer during the 1980s. She has written more than twelve novels and fifty short stories. She is labeled as a domestic novelist and a writer of psychological novels. She has avoided sexual, political and social issues in her work. There is an absence of violence in her novels. In almost all her novels, there is either a death or a suicide but it is never discussed in detail. But only the aftermath of death or suicide is felt throughout
the novel. In *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant, The Accidental Tourist* and *Breathing Lessons*, Anne Tyler examines the various crises and problems in the family that spoil the harmonious relationship between the family members.

Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973) is the first American woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. She is known for her rich and natural descriptions of peasant life in China and for her biographical masterpieces. Her first novel, *East Wind: West Wind* (1931) is about the Chinese peasant life and it has got the Pulitzer Prize for her. *The Living Reed* (1963) tells the readers the history of a Korean family. Mary McCarthy (1912-1989) has written novels, short stories, autobiographical essays and political essays. Her novels and short stories reveal her concern for social responsibility involving race, class and gender. This kind of concern keeps her away from feminism. Her major novels are *The Group* (1963), *The Company She Keeps* (1942), *Birds of America* (1971) and *Cannibals and Missionaries* (1979). *A Lost Lady* (1925), *The Professor's House* (1925), *My Mortal Enemy* (1926), *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), *Shadows on the Rocks* (1931), *Lucy Gayheart* (1935) and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940) are her further contribution to American fiction.

The American gothic writer, Joyce Carol Oates is chosen for this research because a number of her works arrest the interest of the readers with striking gothic events. Joyce Carol Oates is a contemporary American novelist, short story writer, poet, playwright, critic and editor. She is born on June 16, 1938 in Lockport, New York to Frederic Oates and Carolina Oates. Her father is a tool-and-die designer. She
is the first of the three children born to her parents. Her brother is Fred Junior and her sister is Lynn Ann. Oates has grown up in the farming community of Millersport, New York. The farm belongs to her grandparents and it is in Erie Country. This place becomes the setting for many of her novels and stories and it is used in the name of Eden County.

When Joyce Carol Oates is a child, she is given Lewis Carroll’s *Adventures in Wonderland* as a gift by her grandmother, Blanche. This book is a great treasure for her and it has made a good influence on her writing. During her teenage days, she has read the works of William Faulkner, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Thoreau, Hemingway, Emily Bronte and Charlotte Bronte. These writers have made a deep influence on her writing. Oates has begun writing at the age of fourteen. She sustains her writing by reading the work of D.H. Lawrence, Flannery O’Connor, Thomas Mann and Franz Kafka. She admits their influence on her.

Joyce Carol Oates has graduated from Syracuse University in 1960 and has earned a Master’s degree in English in 1961 from the University of Wisconsin. Along with her husband, Raymond J. Smith, a critic and editor, she has moved to Detroit, Michigan in 1962 and has settled there. She has taught at the University of Detroit for six years. There she has got an opportunity to understand the social turmoil which has challenged American cities in the 1960s. Detroit forms the setting for several of her novels. In 1968, she has left Detroit and has gone to the University of Windsor in the Canadian province of Ontario. In 1978 she has moved to Princeton, New Jersey and
has continued to teach creative writing. She is a very prolific and successful writer who is now living in Canada. Joyce Carol Oates has published her first novel, *with Shuddering Fall* in 1964 through which she aims at rediscovering the world. In 1966, she has published “*Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*” which she thinks she is most noted for of all her published work. One of her first acts of rediscovery is *Them* (1969). She says she has tried to give a shape to certain obsessions of mid-century Americans like an urge to violence as the solution for all problems and an urge to self-annihilation, suicide as the ultimate solution for problems. In the 1980’s she has experimented the Gothic genre in *Bellefleur* (1980), *A Bloodsmoor Romance* (1982) and *Mysteries of Winterthurn* (1984). Oates finds a permanent place in America’s post war literature by allowing her fiction immerse in popular culture, sensitive to division of class and gender and exercising anxious assessments of history.

She received the National Book Award in 1970 for her novel *Them* (1969). Since then she has published an average of two books a year. She is so prolific that she has published thirty-nine novels, thirty-three short story collections, eight dramas, eight novels, twelve critical Essays, two children’s fiction and a number of poems. Apart from this, she has also published a few novels under the pseudonyms of Rosamond Smith and Lauren Kelly. The novels which have earned her popularity are *With Shuddering Fall* (1964), *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (1967), *Expensive People* (1968), *them* (1969), *Wonderland* (1971), *Do with me what you will* (1973), *The Assassins : A Book of Hours* (1975), *Childwold* (1976), *Unholy Loves* (1979),

Different publications have come out with different results about the best of Oates’s works. In an article published in *The Rocky Mountain* in 2003, it is mentioned that *A Garden of Earthly Delights, Them, Wonderland, Black Water* and *Blonde* are her best novels. But *The Times* in 2006 expresses its opinion that *On Boxing, Black Water* and *High Lonesome: New and Stories* are the most sought after works of Joyce Carol Oates. *Entertainment Weekly* in 2007 has come out with a list of her best works which are *Wonderland, Black Water, Blonde, I’ll Take you There* and *The Falls*. However, Joyce Carol Oates once has said that she would want her readers to read *Them* and *Blonde* than anything else.

Oates’s fiction portrays America as a ‘Wonderland’ in which individual lives are frequently subject to disorder, dislocation and extreme psychological turmoil. G.F. Walker in *Dreaming America* comments about Joyce Carol Oates’s description of America:

> The America she evokes is violent, spiritually destructive, and yet hopeful in its fragility; hers is a vision of openness as much as of despair. Oates’s dream of America is an enticement to a new heaven, new earth by participating in dreaming itself, a celebration of the potential triumph of the imagination that, paradoxically, only America embodies. (59)

Similarly Greg Johnson in *Understanding Joyce Carol Oates* analyses what kind of fiction writer Joyce Carol Oates is:
Joyce Carol Oates’s versatility as a fiction writer relates directly to her overwhelming fascination with the phenomenon of contemporary America: its colliding social and economic forces, its philosophical contradictions, its wayward, often violent energies. (8)

Her characters range from city dwellers to suburbanites. All these characters suffer the conflicts and contradictions of culture. She is obsessed with the theme of violence. She depicts such violent action as rape, incest, murder, mutilation, child abuse and suicide to explain the forces of evil with which the individuals are forced to fight. Most of her novels contain strong feminist overtones. Her intention to use Gothic device is to explore the ambiguities of gender and the problems related to sex.

Joyce Carol Oates’s genius lies in her ability to convey the psychological states of her characters in a realistic manner. Her greatness is revealed in her narration where she is making a link between the intense private experiences of her characters and the larger realities of American life. She has fully understood her primary role as an artist and analyses the soaring situations of the present, like anxiety, and dislocation. She is well aware of hatred and powerful feelings around her. She focuses on the psychological terror and imbalance of individuals. It is actually her vision of America. Most of her novels according to the critic Carolyn Riley are grinding, brutal and harsh (362). Sometimes, she is even accused of using obsessive violence in her work but she gladly retorts that her violent stories accurately mirror the psychological and social problems of our time. The critic Peter Conn in Literature in America
simply accepts Joyce Carol Oates’s view that her violence is quite commonly a faithful transcript of the time’s temper (534). Many of Oates’s characters in vain try to escape the world in which they find themselves trapped but they are repeatedly defeated. As a matter of survival they are forced to acknowledge the world and recognize its limits. Jesse Harte in Wonderland tries to escape from his father’s attempt to kill him. He becomes orphaned when his father commits suicide after murdering his family. He then undergoes a series of experiences. This makes him withdraw further and further into himself and he depends solely on himself. In the end, he picks up full human consciousness by means of rescue and love.

Oates’s novels, A Garden of Earthly Delights, Expensive People and Them share certain thematic similarities. Each novel depicts a family from a particular American social group. A family of migrant workers figures in A Garden and in Expensive People, we find a family of affluent suburbanites. Similarly Them deals with an urban poor family. In all these three novels, the central male characters, Swan Walpole, Richard Everett and Jules Wendall try to come out of intolerable confinements and for this, they even resort to violence. Swan Walpole in A Garden wants to kill his mother but he kills his father by mistake and then deliberately kills himself. Richard Everett in Expensive People kills his mother and plans to kill himself. Jules Wendall in Them is very successful in getting liberated. Jules’s anger and rebellion is not towards his mother but he is actually against his father. He kills a surrogate father, a policeman and thereby he frees himself. The critic, Marilyn C. Wesley is able to make a connection among A Garden of Earthly Delights, Them and
Wonderland on the basis of the presence of the two different kinds of fathers (73). The quest for liberation of the self is the most important theme in Oates’s fiction. These three novels together as a trilogy deal with different forms of liberation. There is found an obsessive drive for absolute freedom among the characters in Oates’s fiction. While discussing the characters of Joyce Carol Oates, Mary Allen in “The Terrified Women of Joyce Carol Oates” edited by Harold Bloom observes:

Both men and women face a void; but men are typically much more active in attempting to fill that void than women who are more likely simply to collide with men’s violence in their sexual encounters. (63)

The Gothic world which Joyce Carol Oates has shown in her novels and short stories is one that is shaped by irrationality, passions and violence. About the violence employed by Joyce Carol Oates, Walter Clemens in Joyce Carol Oates: Love and Violence observes, “each of Joyce Carol Oates’s books has been a different technical and intellectual experiment, gradually building up a fictional world that is recognizably her own” (32). Oates creates such a world of violence that she has often been called ‘Gothic’. One can understand this after reading her novel Them. Loretta Wendall a sixteen year old girl wakes up to find her lover shot dead beside her by her brother who does not like him. Later she is raped by the policeman who agrees to remove the body. G.F. Walker in Dreaming America talks about the application of violence by Joyce Carol Oates:
She repeatedly uses concentration of violence in her fiction to direct her reader’s attention away from the externals of American society to crucial underlying surges in the psyche. (38)

Oates’s female protagonists aspire to live a better life than that of their mothers. The young female protagonist leaves her family in quest of a new life. Like Natasha in *Expensive people*, the female protagonist runs away from her home in search of rebirth and rebaptism. Poverty is one of the major reasons that lead to the unhappiness of Oates’s female characters. Some of these female protagonists are rich but still they try to avoid the fate of their mothers. Nadine and Maureen Wendall in *Them* escape from their rich houses. Similarly, in *Wonderland* Shelley Vogel who is the daughter of a famous neurosurgeon often runs away from her modest home. The means of escape that Oates’s young female protagonist takes is a kind of sexual liaison. The female protagonist tries to capture the attention of men. Her affluent young women seek relationship with men as a matter of getting fulfillment in their lives. These women seem to be searching for a father – substitute who will give them care and security which are denied by their own fathers.

Sometimes, it is the mothers themselves who with their own experience of sexual and marital relationships encourage their daughters to seek the attention of men. The efforts of Oates’s female characters to improve their status usually end in failure. After marriage, these characters are treated brutally or ignored and sometimes even abandoned by their husbands. In *Wonderland*, the two female characters are the
wives of successful physicians. This novel best illustrates how Oates’s women are affected psychologically by marital relationship.

Oates’s female characters suffer from psychological disturbances like anxiety, depression and psychosis. Some of her characters are alcoholics, drug addicts and suicidal. Oates’s characters see themselves and others as objects. They undergo a process of depersonalization and become stone. For example, Elena in *Do with Me What You Will* turns herself into stone. She is a person completely lacking a will of her own, who can be very easily manipulated by others. It is usually Oates’s male characters who act violently and her female characters become the victims of their violence. Joyce Carol Oates’s readers get a chance to know about the sufferings of a young girl in *Marya: a life*. It is the story of a deprived child transformed into a scholarly girl. Her mother, Vera Sanjek Knauer is a merciless woman. She is the kind of mother that a child never feels safe with. Marya is left in the care of her aunt and uncle where she is sexually attacked by her cousin. Marya excels in High School and wins a scholarship and goes to New York. The critic, Eileen Teper Bender groups *Marya: a life, Solstice* and *Mysteries of Winterthurn* together for they reveal the aspirations and concerns of the community of women.

Oates’s women characters do not know how to avoid the anxiety and depression that lead to madness. In her novels, we find the causes for the madness of women. Oates probes into the powerlessness of women and the causes of their
depression. As a result of violence shown to them, her female characters often become anxious or depressed and sometimes they go mad.

During the early 1980s, Oates published *Bellefleur* and *A Bloodsmoor Romance*. Both the novels reveal the Gothic incidents. In *Bellefleur*, we see a man deliberately crashing his plane into the *Bellefleur* mansion killing himself and his family. In *Bloodsmoor Romance*, there are such elements of Gothic romance as mysterious kidnappings. In *You Must Remember This*, Oates portrays a family suffering from emotional and moral distress. Suicide attempts, violent beatings, disfiguring accidents and incest take place in this novel. It centers on an intense love affair between a former boxer and his adolescent niece.

Though violence is one of the predominant themes employed by contemporary writers, Joyce Carol Oates differs with her contemporary writers on violence. John Hawkes is a contemporary writer who portrays only a metaphorical violence, which is a projection of psychic images rather than of reality. What Oates portrays never trespasses the limits of possibility. For example, in *Wonderland*, Monk, a psychotic ex-medical student tells Jesse and his wife that he has stolen a uterus from a cadaver room, taken it home, boiled it and eaten it. The reader is horrified to read this but he is prepared to think that it is quite possible to happen. Oates insists that society provides boundaries for existence and knowledge that cannot be crossed. There is always a limit for possibility. It is her consciousness of the limits of possibility that clearly distinguishes her fiction from much classic and contemporary American fiction. Oates
calls herself a feminist. Besides feminism, her work deals with politics, migrant workers, legal ethics, urban riots etc., Oates likes to expose her own idea of wonder and mystery of human character and personality.

Oates’s short stories also highlight the darker aspects of the human life. Her short story collections as *By the North Gate* (1963) *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?: Stories of Young America* (1974), *The Lamb of Abyssalia* (1980) and *Raven’s Wing* (1986) focus on violent and unpleasant relationships between the sexes. *Raven’s Wing* contains eighteen stories. *Golden Gloves* is one of the stories in that collection. It is about a young boxer. Oates gets inside the skin and muscle of the boxer and conveys all the pride and glamour of physical prowess.

Joyce Carol Oates’s poems create a feeling of controlled delirium in the minds of the readers. Though violence is not the subject matter of her poems, she discusses violent extremes as in “Women Whose Lives Are Food, Men Whose Lives Are Money”. In this poem one may come across such details like the monologue of a dead woman who is dragged out of a river and a man suffering from heart attack. Her poem visualizes a flooding river tearing the dead out of the cemetery.

Though Oates is a prolific writer of different genres, she is not very popular among Americans. Her novels are not sold and read widely. The reason for this is her idea of American society. Her treatment of violence, obsession and unconscious motivations are original and unique but they fail to catch the interest of the
Americans. The Gothic coverage that she gives is more distant from their idea of reality and imagination. Another reason for her failure is that we cannot find much humor in her work.

Many critics who have deeply analyzed the works and life of Joyce Carol Oates have given their observations. Greg Johnson’s finding is that even when Joyce Carol Oates is just in her twenties, she is recognized as a major new voice in American fiction. Her voice is considered new because her novels serve as an ironic, postmodernist commentary on contemporary American culture. Each of her novels tells something uniquely American of the present. The Americans suffer from various kinds of emotional turmoil. Greg Johnson in Understanding Joyce Carol Oates says, “Oates’s attempt to dramatize this turmoil, and often to convey psychological states at the very border of sanity have often led her into the fictional mode loosely described as ‘Gothicism’” (16). He analyses and says that Oates's distinctive “voice” often conveys the kind of extreme psychological intensity and occasionally the outright horror, traditionally associated with Gothic fiction. About Oates’s relationship to American traditions and culture, Joanne V. Creighton in Joyce Carol Oates Novels of the Middle Years says that Oates “sees her parents’ lives and her own, as emblematically American” (3). Oates is unhappy with the ‘genteel’ literary community that misunderstands the violent world of her fiction. Oates clarifies that this world is the result of her literal and psychic inheritance. Another critic, Ellen G. Friedman after analyzing the life and works of Joyce Carol Oates, like many other
critics, feels that he is compelled to comment on the incongruity of her life which is ordinary and her fiction that is filled with violent episodes (1).

Ellen G. Friedman observes that Oates in her interviews speaks about the violent society, function of religion, her ordinary life and her childhood with an indication of satisfaction (1). In an interview to Walter Clemens, she expresses her shock about today’s frightening world. She says that she writes about violence and extreme because she is able to find the imperishable reality possessing violence (33). In another interview to John Alfred Avant, she talks about the necessity value of the Eastern religion. She regrets that America is unfortunately mistaken in its steps towards success. She comes out with a suggestion that the wisdom of the East should be synthesized with the scientific knowledge of the west for the betterment of the world (29). When she is interviewed by David Germain, she comments that she has created so many characters. Of these characters, she admits, the personality of Marya in Marya: a Life and the personality of Enid in You Must Remember This resemble most like hers (175).

The present thesis as already stated attempts to re-view the status of Oates as a Gothic writer. The researcher’s attempt in this thesis is to depict how Oates uses the genre of the Gothic successfully to reveal the terror and violence of the present day society. Many critics and scholars have recognized certain works of Oates as Gothic. This dissertation has utilized along with the standard Gothic novels a few other works
of Joyce Carol Oates to reveal the Gothic in various ways. Keeping in mind the theme and the time, the researcher has used six novels of the writer for the present study.

The successive chapters will deal with Joyce Carol Oates’ efficiency as a Gothic writer. The analysis of *The Mysteries of Winterthurn* and *Bellefleur* in the third chapter points out the steps taken by Oates to move from Victorian to the modern gothic. The aspect of family gothic is discussed in Chapter four by taking *A Bloodsmoor Romance* and *Foxfire* for study. These two novels reveal to the readers the Gothic events like abduction and revenge happening within the family. Chapter five analyses *Because It Is Bitter and Because It Is My Heart* and *American Appetite* and shows how American dream is criticized. These two novels are chosen for a combined analysis because in these novels the characters believe that violence is the solution for their problems. Even for an ordinary problem, the Americans go to the extreme of murdering people. Sometimes it is a different meaning that the Americans try to give for American dream. It is a different meaning because it is different from the conventional one which is accumulating wealth. The sixth chapter sums up the variety of Gothic elements used by Oates in the select novels and also it sums up the thesis as a whole.