CHAPTER III
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Of Oates' trilogy, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, is a typical portrait of the American experience. The setting is in the mobile society within the matrix of transience, the hotel and the motel. It begins among itinerant farm workers from Arkansas to Florida and back to Florida. In the opening pages we see Carleton who thinks of making sufficient money to pay off his debts and return to his small farm in Kentucky. But his ambition is soon forgotten. The novel succeeds in showing the very directionless of Carleton's life. He works, drinks and fights. His days drag on leaving him nothing to show for the effort he has put into living. He has no hope for the future, in order to lead a satisfactory life. From the beginning we witness Carleton's life, not being that much happy either. His father is a blacksmith. Carleton and his brothers go along to help him. When his father becomes old, nobody in the family wants to take over the blacksmithing.

*hereafter the novel, A Garden of Earthly Delights will be referred to as GED.*
His father was not that much comfortable when his sons, failed to live up to his expectation: He had nothing to say to his sons.

Carleton had brought his first baby in for the old man to see, but that hadn’t worked out right. His father hadn’t cared. Carleton had then felt the baby to be an embarrassment, a failure, because he loved his father and wanted to give him a gift, give him something, but he had no idea what his father wanted. Later that day, in the parlor, he sat quietly and watched his mother fondling the baby, transformed with love the way Pearl was transformed in that baby’s presence, and it came to Carleton that there was nothing you could give to a man who was dying. There was hardly anything you could say. He was going one way and you were going another and that was that. (P.18, GED)

The life of Carleton has some sordid quality. He lives along the workers in the hovels, eats along with them and wears the
Men always liked him and a certain kind of woman never stopped looking over his way; it had always been like that. He was a young man still, and if he sometimes felt old it was because of the mess of facts he had to sort out and get straight in his mind, things that had happened to his parents and to him and to other people, things that added up and defined life, like facts in a great book. He had so much to think about that he could not bother looking at mountains or rivers or woods or even other people. There was no time. (P.19, GED)

In his family life, we see his wife withdrawing herself from him and she bleeds to death after her last delivery. Carleton is not that much disturbed at his wife’s death, he chooses another woman, his life continues in his old pattern. His children grow up, foul mouthed and dirty. They have no secure, decent habitat. At the end of the first section of the novel, Carleton dies. The emphasis
of the narration is shifted to his oldest daughter. With the help of a kind man, Clara escapes to a small town, lives in rented rooms and starts earning for her livelihood. Oates delineates the pathetic life of Clara. She strives for beauty, she pines for comfort and she loves to eat, unfortunately nothing materializes in her life. What she gets in reality is a pair of cheap shoes, a faded ribbon and a matter of fact lunch. Still worse is, her beginning of her life as a mistress, later as a wife of a rich man. The novel is loaded with many incidents and long dialogues. In the novel, we come across accidents, gruesome murders and other blood chilling incidents. To cite an instance, Clara’s stepson dies in a hunting accident. Her own son kills his father. He commits suicide. Still worse is sexual encounters and the disintegration in the family. All these things take place in the family of Clara and in her surroundings.

Clara felt warm and oppressed. If she could have thought of something else she would have been grateful, but there was no getting around what she had to face up to. This was the way life would be, then. But did all women have to go through it? She glanced at Lowry, wishing he
would say something. All he said was not to "make any mistakes." It was clear what not to do, but it was not clear what she should do. What was so terrible for Clara -- and for Sonya, who also worked in the dime store and was Clara's best friend, and even for her married girl friend Ginny, and her other friend Caroline -- was that there was nothing else for them. There had been nothing else for Rosalie. Or Clara's sister Sharleen, or her mother. There had been nothing else in the world for them, nothing, except to give themselves to men, some man, and to hope afterwards that it had not been a mistake. But how could it be a mistake? There was no other choice. (P.147, GED)

The general social treatment meted out to women, we get as a glimpse, in the passage is, a reflection of the society in which it is written. In the modern concept, the principle goes beyond a point and it stresses that the writer has to present the social realities as they are. It is also the moral responsibility of the author that the
realism does not evoke any psychological disorder with his readers. For instance, we may not quite agree with Oates’ comment that in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, we read,

“To be safe from Violence you have to be violent yourself. - take the first step.” (P.149).

That doesn’t exactly solve any social problem. It is a kind of moral delinquency to take a violent path to quell violence. It is an American psyche that admits this kind of notion. It is a kind of excess, we get in Oates. Besides this, we also come across in the *Garden*, various types of sexual intrigues and something of a demoralizing attitude of certain havenots in order to sustain in the society. We call it as rotten, but the society which Oates portrays, doesn’t accept it.

“Oh, nothing, nothing,” she said, waving to dismiss him. She flicked her long hair out of her eyes. It fell far down her back and she’d washed it the day before, somehow expecting him to come, so she knew it must shine in the sunlight. She knew she was pretty and now she wanted to
be beautiful. "When things get better I will be beautiful," she promised herself. If Lowry would stand still long enough and she could climb up into his arms and sleep there: forever, the two of them entwined and not needing to look anywhere else, then she could relax" then she would grow up, she would become beautiful. She was standing now on a large flat rock near the water, which flowed in a fairly rapid stream in the center of the riverbed. She leaned over to see herself. There was a trembling vague image, not hers. She felt as if love were a condition she would move into the way you moved into a new house or crossed the boundary into a new country. And not just this one-sided love, either; she had enough of that right now. But the kind of love held out to her in the comic books and romance magazines she was able now to read for herself, which she and Sonya traded back and forth wistfully; love that would transform her and
change her forever. It had nothing to do with the way other girls got pregnant and fat as cheap balloons -- that wasn’t the kind of love she meant. The only real love could be between her and Lowry. You couldn’t imagine any real love between Sonya, for instance, and her boy friend who was married. They never felt about each other the way she and Lowry would... (P.184, GED)

The physical level of existence, men and women in the novel take too easily. We don’t come across a lasting love affair or a family tie. Everything is somehow meant for the time being. As it gets over they don’t seem to have any regret for losing a friendship or love. Each one thinks of the future life only after committing or indulging in sinful ways. For instance, Clara wonders only after her relationship with Lowry, comes to a close.

“She wondered how she would live out the rest of her life.”
We witness the characters in the Garden, who are driven to violence in order to recover, a kind of self-image or to assert themselves as significant people in the society. These people do not have any affection towards anybody. There are many strong moral implications, which nobody is concerned about. We come across three types of people in the society, one the brutal people, who love to live in physical violence. The second category is the mute spectators who are unconsciously drawn into it. The third category is the weak and the women, who come under the spell of this violence, without any reason. Oates raises these three questions, as to why people resort to these kinds of violent activities. The answer lies in the very foundations of the social order. We don’t come across a well-knit family life or well taken care of children by the parents. The male members in the families drift from one woman to another. In consequence, to fend for the family the female folk get into annoying situations. Children born to these parents become, either orphans or uncared children. So they become street children initially and they grow up into the wrecks of the social order. For instance, Clara is an example. Her move from poverty and migration to the camp of the wealthy, and
the road to which she travels is something awkward and unmentionable. The only way of life she knows is violence, because she has witnessed only this ever since she is born. The avenue left to her is to destroy or conquer those persons, who are hindrance to the progress starting from her sister Sharleen, to her playmate Revere. She must either exploit people in order to thrive herself with self-affirmation or to defeat them to put up an image herself.

Clara’s character is the consequence of violence. In the first appearance, we see her fighting with her older sister Sharleen. Each one hates the other - this hatred, coupled with the hardness and bitterness compels Clara for a life of hardship and tragedy. She leaves her father, when he beats her. She has no strong feeling towards any relationships, she encounters. She is free-floating. Her life has provided her with no models of deep ties with affection and love. When her mother dies, children take it casually. Her father takes a new wife; these things make an imprint in her mind and makes her incapable of loving any person or anything in the world. Rather she learns from the father as how to use persons and exploit for personal benefits.
My problem is that I don’t know what I am doing. Could tell it but me, but if I tell it I could have forced my fat, heaving body to begin this a year ago it would have been a different story then. And it’s possible that I’m lying without knowing it. Or telling the truth in some weird, symbolic way without knowing it, so only a few psychoanalytic literary critics (there are no more than three thousand) will have access to the truth, what “it” is. (P.5,6, EP)

As the novel progresses we get into the intersection of social and psychological theories. In the final chapter, we come across Swan’s murder of his ideological father. It is also a kind of Oedipus complex that involves Swan’s actions. Freud defined it as, an emotional attachment of the child to the parent of the opposite sex, accompanied by an attitude of rivalry to the parent of the same sex. In this sense Swan is very much attracted to his mother and he doesn’t like anybody trying to possess his mother including his father. When Swan is ten years old Clara takes him to some of Revere’s relatives. Some how, Swan is not comfortable
in the company, especially when the male characters talk to his mother closeby. Clara, is always high-spirited, attracted and is unaware of her own physical stature. Even, when Clara and Swan go out, he doesn’t like male members of her relatives or friends accosting her or being close to her. Freud’s observation on this aspect of Swan’s mind is worth quoting. “I have found, in my own case too, falling in love with the mother and the jealousy of the father and I now regard it as an universal event of early childhood... if that is so, we can understand the revitting power of Oedipus Rex... The Greek legend seizes on a compulsion, which, everyone recognizes because, he feels its existence, within himself. Each member of the audience was once, in germ and fantasy, just as in Oedipus, and each one recoils in horror from the dream fulfillment here transplanted in reality, with whole quota of repression, which separates his infantile state from his present one.”¹ The theoretical statement of Freud, gains proof in the realistic situation, even in the modern society.

In order to take as his rightful place, as an adult member of his father’s gender, a kind of mental disequalilibrium overtakes, the adolescent boy, which in turn seeks to establish his proximity with
his mother alone. It is also an impulse so as to eliminate a rival who is of his mother’s attention. This is precisely Swan’s predicament. Swan’s connection with his mother, has been perverted through her marriage with Revere. His feelings get complicated, and refuses to merit his mother as a mother. When he finds his mother with someone, even if it is legal, it becomes an anathema for him. In a way it is not his sexual attraction to his mother. It is rather Swan’s absolute love beyond comprehension; he has for his mother. which makes him jealous of her marriage with Revere. In a different angle Swan’s narrative provokes horror to cull into question. the use and purpose of gender relations, within the family, in a capitalistic social structure.

It is not merely Swan’s problem or his character, we get as a glimpse in the novel, what we exactly get is a feature of the American society itself. ‘However, the Freudian concept, need not be pushed too far, in the example of Swan’s character. But the Oedipus complex theory can be taken seriously as certain relationships may have become unsuitable for the particular form in certain social format. Oates’ narrative rather demonstrates, certain aspect of present day, family gender arrangements which
promote contradictions. In a way, it is Oates’ anti-romantic tendency. Besides, mother-son relationship, we also have, sister-brother relationship. Oates does not use incest. She is careful. Her theme is not gender excess.

Oates’ work presents family relationships, in a reoriented form examining masculine and feminine, from a feminist perspective. The theory of Oedipus, when we read Swan’s character doesn’t sound much pertinent. It is because of Swan not liking his mother, as she takes a new man in her life as a partner. If not Revere probably any other person would also have created the same impression in Swan’s mind. We understand Swan’s feelings in the following passage.

So swan understood. Revere was going to be his father, but his real father was someone else. He felt that suddenly. He and his mother had a secret no one could make them tell. He would die with that sacred. He would protect his mother from anyone who threatened her, he would never tell, never, he would grow up and take care of her and do everything she wanted
and even Clara herself would never know that he knew. He had years to do it in. He would take his time. There were sounds outside, may be another car driving up, and dogs barking - and Swan looked down as if surprised that there was land beneath him, ordinary sloping land. For a moment he was confused, called back from the depthless land of the sky to this hard, familiar ground. There was an excitement in him that was like breathing in the glare of the sun itself, something too big and too strong for him but filling all the same. In his lifetime he could do anything. (P.303, GED)

Swan, because of his stress and strain, has a sense of importance also. Somehow at every stage in his life, he either faces failure or disillusionment. Rather he is used and manipulated by the people around him. His mother's affection is not that much appreciable to him. Similarly she doesn't have, any good companionship. Long suppressed, his violence erupts to kill a person whom he loves. It is a crazy thing and ultimately he has no
reason, either to kill Revere. He is a powerless character. He is an inconsistent being. The intention to kill Robert or Revere or his attempt to kill his own mother are all an act of neurosis, he suffers from. The passages quoted below speak of his character and predicament.

“Oh, Christ, he was only kidding. He wasn’t going to run you down,” Robert said, disgusted by Swan’s look of fear.

Robert approached the fence behind the woods. They would cut straight through instead of going the long way around by the lane. The meadow was spiky with cut grass; it hurt Swan’s ankles. He kept his eyes on Robert’s back, wondering what kind of face Robert would turn to him. At the fence he ran to catch up with him. “Why does he hate me?” Swan said. He was sweating profusely. His heart was pounding. This was the kind of thing he knew he should never say, but the words forced themselves out.
“Jesus Christ,” Robert said, rolling his eyes, “Forget it.”

“Why do you all hate me?”

“Shut up about that.”

“How come you all call me names?” Swan said. Something was moving up into his throat; may be it was vomit trying to get free. He felt wild. “I am not a bastard. Nobody’s going to call me that!”

“I said shut up!”

“Goddam you,” Swan said, and he realized, suddenly, that as soon as Robert climbed that fence and jumped down they would be home; here, in the back meadow, they were still out hunting. He lunged forward and struck Robert on the back with his fist, hard, and shoved him forward sideways against the barbed wire. Robert’s gun went off. The noise was so close that Swan almost heard nothing. Then, when he
was able to see again, he saw what had happened to Robert - the great gaping tear in his shoulder and throat - he stumbled backwards as if struck himself by a fist sharp on his chest. Robert began to scream. The scream came out in a high, thin shriek, like a girl, astonished and beyond pain, while Swan stood staring at him in a sun-drenched vacuum he could not move out of.

He could not move. He could not speak. Robert's screams rose higher and higher out of that face blustered by pellet, and Swan saw the blood streaming out and running onto the prickly grass where it floated along and lifted chaff with it, then disappeared. The air rang everywhere with the boy's screams. Swan had hold of his own gun; his fingers had frozen to it as if he needed it to protect himself against whatever had happened to Robert. Then he saw Jonathan, running on foot, and he saw his mother and Judd coming through the field; he thought that they
had lost time coming that way, all the way around the lane when they could have cut through the woods...

Clara’s face had gone white. She did not ever see Swan but ran to where Robert lay and tried to pick him up. Blood spilled over the front of her dress as if it were tipped out of a pitcher. “My God, Judd!” Clara screamed. “Get the car around! Get the car back here, we’ll drive him-”

Judd faltered a few yards away. He looked

“Get the car around!” Clara cried. She tried to pick Robert up again but he was too heavy. He stared up at her as if her were astonished by something, trying to think of how to say it, how to explain it. Swan say now that his arm hung to the shoulder by something thin and limp and that blood was pounding out. Clara began to scream over her shoulder at Judd. “Get the car, goddam
it! Judd! Jonathan! Get the car around here, you goddam stupid son of a bitch! You want him to bleed to death? What are you doing?"

It was Jonathan who finally drove the car around. Everything took time. Swan stood where he had been standing all along, watching them with his breath a solid column inside his body, not understanding what had happened or how he was related to it. It passed slowly, dreamily. He did not cry or think about crying. He still held the gun Revere had given him. Clara got Robert up, dragging him, and got him into the back seat of her new car. She was still screaming, yelling. Swan could not understand her. Jonathan, his face struck white, was behind her trying to help, but his hands did not quite reach Robert. They were all afraid of Robert, everyone except Clara, who was still screaming. Swan dropped his gun at last and pressed his hands over his ears. Judd was somewhere else,
further down the fence, leaning against it like a man trying to wake up. He could not get awake. Clara said to Swan, "Get on the telephone and tell him we're coming! Call the doctor!" She drove the car off, bumping through the field, Jonathan reaching out with difficulty to close the back door, and Swan still stood there with his hands pressed over his ears.

He was left alone with Judd, who was being sick, and that great shining patch of blood on the ground; and Robert's gun, which lay fallen against the barbed-wire fence.

Swan said finally, "I don't know." He was trembling when he spoke and he almost expected that she would take his trembling from him. If she touched him, embraced him, she could make him still again. But she did not. She sat looking at him for a while.

"Did you shoot him?" she said again.
“I don’t know.”

“We are going to know?”

He stood helplessly. His brain buzzed as if alive with those fine brittle dragonflies he had seen that day; but he had no answer. (P.354, 355, and part of 356, GED)

After this, if Swan attempted to kill, he would have become a coldblooded murderer. He harbors killings, but when he realizes why he should kill his father, after the incident.

“You don’t need to use that gun, that’s all right,” Revere told him. Swan knew that it had not been his gun but Robert’s that had killed him, but this made no difference. He had wanted to give the gun to a boy at school, but his father took it from him and put it away. Revere had a habit now of breaking off his words in the middle of a sentence, staring at something up on the wall or in the sky; then he woke up and forgot what he had been saying. Swan was uneasy before him.
It was as if he had opened a door suddenly and there his father was, unexpected, a different man from the one who had always sat so stern and straight at the table and who watched Clara with his strange, heavy stare, with an air of possession that did not make any attempt to what Clara was saying. (P.357, GED)

Torn between his love for his mother and his revulsion at her suspected promiscuity, Swan thinks that she is not worthy of his affection. It is a strange feeling Swan has that his mother all through her life is not chaste. He is disturbed mentally when he understands that only one person with whom he could love and live appears bleak. Mentally he is not able to accept his mother's way of life.

Swan is rather a mentally upset individual. He has a kind of revulsion in him that starts with his suspicion on his mother's character. In fact, it is an imaginary one. It is not possible to give any room for suspicion as regard the character of Clara. She chooses Revere openly. Although it is a good relationship, Swan is upset probably, because he thinks that his mother is drawn more
towards Revere than him. He is a freak, who harbors ill will against Revere. Swan in the thick of night driving alone, goes to the place where Clara and Revere live. When questioned about his sudden, appearance there, he has no answer. He stammers.

"I want to... I want to... I want to explain something to you."

Incoherently he speaks, as though he is in a state of delirium. He stammers again, in the next instance, he picks up his gun, still he is not in his normal sense. He kills Revere and himself. This is positively the action of an abnormal person. We find from the beginning, a kind of abnormality in the character of Swan. Probably it may be due to his family environment. He has no love or affection even towards his own cousins. We get the glimpse of this in the following passage.

Swan had lots of cousins but he didn’t like most of them. At Christmas and Easter and the frequent occasions when people got married or died or had babies, the big Revere family got together. There was Judd’s family, and Eric’s
family (he had six children and two old people living with him), and two or three other families with Children Swan could not keep track of. Swan had always liked Judd, and his Uncle Eric was a bald, big man who talked too loud and was mainly interested in farming, so Swan liked him well enough. He liked and trusted adults because they left him alone.

At these big gatherings the kids ran wild and Swan had to stay close to Clara. If he’d gone out with them to play down by the creek, what might have happened? One time his cousins had ambushed him when he stepped fearfully into the hay barn, urged in by there pleads and promises. They were going to show him a new colt, they said. But when he stepped in the dark barn with its dry hot air slit by countless crack of light, they had hit him with dozens of green pears and bloodied his nose. Then all the kids, including Swan, were blamed for picking pears from the
orchard trees. So he stayed close to Clara no matter how people snickered. He did not mind. "Look how big he's getting," she would say, dragging him forward for some woman to glance at him. "He eats all the time, he's real healthy. Smart, too." Then she'd push him back a little and he could sit down again, forgotten, and wait patiently until it was time to drive home. He would have hated these gatherings if he had thought he might have an opinion about them. As it was, he thought of them the way he thought of blizzards, mud slides, any kind of bad weather or bad luck. If he was lucky he had a book to read. If not, he sat and waited. There was a great deal to listen to and try to understand in this aimless, meandering talk of adults. He discovered one thing: that people's talk went all over, started and stopped and started again, but that if someone had something to say he got it said - it just took a while. The important things
were not the things said most often, but things alluded to quietly. Their talk was like a complex sloppy weaving. And he discovered another thing as the years went by: there was a vast territory conquered by these people and now wholly possessed by the, by their network of names and relationships, occasionally tied in with someone “in the city.” The city people were admired but not trusted; when they were mentioned, it was often with a cynical smile, a sneer. Their world consisted of land and certain holdings, but more than it consisted of people spread out everywhere, all the way to Europe -- innumerable cousins, many of them girl cousins who were always getting “engaged.” Swan had a sense of something holy and terrifying. As he sat listening, hunched over and shy, humble, patient, his need to be one of them and to share that name rose up in him like a wounding, deadly blossom opening inside his body. He had to be one of
them and to understand and to possess everything... (P.362, 363, 364, GED)

We see here Oates’ balancing act, where she, tries to balance society and family inhibitions. Somehow, the sociological problems take upper-hand. Swan is a by-product of the American Society. Clara symbolizes, a woman torn between male chauvinism and female dependence. Clara strives for beauty, pines for recognition and wants to live comfortably. In A Garden of Earthly Delights, we come across disturbing incidents and blood chilling actions. Why do they happen? The answers lie in the spectrum of the whole social order. Clara’s stepson dies in a hunting accident. Her son Swan kills his father and shoots himself. Besides these harrowing incidents, we also come across, obnoxious sexual encounters, arguments, fights, incidents and certain sequences which appear in the novel ultimately, which are the focus of the social structure. In her novel, people become crazy, mentally deranged and are prone to violence. There is also the consequence of modern psychological problem with sociological implication.
Expensive People have less violence and more pathos. Oates brings in subtle and non-physical violence, in the lives of the wealthy people, in the novel. In the world of Expensive People, Children become, alcoholics, undergo emotional breakdown and become communal outcasts. They are also, the demoralized lot in the society. The devastating atmosphere focused all through in the novel is rather disturbing. Orphaned children, derelicted families, poverty-stricken families are all the integral part of the American social structure. Oates satirically describes the lives of the Expensive People, by their names: Maxwell Void, Gustav, The Veals, the Spoons, the Muggeridge. We understand the miserable lives, as the novel progresses. It is the suburban life we get into. The revulsion of the suburbanites towards the urban setting is evident, in Richard Everett's remark that his family, 'rarely descended to the city.' Further he remarks,

"No women ventured into the city. People are bought and sold in suburbs. However, the inhumanity is not less, there is a suburban style of doing things, the manner of dress, which identifies, the suburbanite, as different from the
city dweller. However, the emptiness of life is evident everywhere. Going to parties and doing certain social order are all important things. Behavior at cocktail parties, with well defined smiles and handy compliments are all part of the culture. But the growing emptiness in this unceremonious life style, disturbs Richard and he thinks it is a waste land. The people are all paranoid, and are self-loathing."

Next is Fernwood, the place where,

‘all garbage doors sly meekly up when their owners turn into the drive way, and no one was ever responsible for anything.’

Oates here brings in, not only the emptiness of the people, but also, the rootlessness of the people. Moe Molinsky the visiting editor, points out to the women assembled at Nada’s, his experience of flying from New York to Cedargrove, which has convinced him of the emptiness of the suburbs. It is a message, to which nobody heeds. He tells them that New York, is a fantastic, but unreal city.
He further narrates, that the suburbs of America are doomed. For him, the suburb have more artificiality. He wants to make the people realize and come to their senses. He demands that healthy are well fed, their children live with ‘no cares,’ ‘no problems,’ ‘no duties,’ ‘no responsibilities’, ‘no thoughts.’ They are similar to children portrayed in Waltdisneys land. Moe Malinsky's fervent commentary is that the people should realize and wake up to realities, in order to lead a real life. Richard, who overhears his speech, understands the implications. Sometime ago he felt that Fernwood is kind, nice and lovely and it means nothing. His description of the fantasy reveals his attitude towards Expensive People. He is a man, with a pliable attitude. He thinks that there are well-wishers and good people around. For him, Fernwood has harshness and tranquility, nice roads and expansive highways. Unfortunately it also has mountains of beer cans and broken glass and embryonic child’s face. The Nada, is the reflection of nothingness, which is fully represented in Natashia, who is nicknamed Nada. She embodies the superficiality, snobbery and emptiness. Her son recognizes that every word, every gesture of hers is a hell, he thinks, it is fate encircling his body. Her self-
pitying and self-indulgence are all, make-believe sequences. She values nothing and loves nothing. Her only ambition is to climb the social ladder. Richard’s awareness of her superficiality, climaxes in his discovery that she is Nansy Romanov from New York and not Natasha Romanov. She represents the fulness of artificiality of the suburban wasteland. But all through, we get, the glimpse of Richard, as a person, with some quality and he is definitely, out of the mire of the Expensive Peoples. Richard also explains, his love for children, libraries, and his liking for nature. He says all libraries, those sanctuaries for the maimed and undanceable, the lowly, neurotic, over weight, under weight myopic, asthmatic - are the filtrations in the libraries. The ‘libraries exist for people like me’. Besides libraries, the glassware in China are powerful metaphors of consumption in Expensive People. Richard admits that he is eating too much following the example of his relatives. He is also tempted to stuff himself with money and dies in that unique way. Acquisition and consumption are significant realities in the world of Everett. Eating, sinking in the food, is the way of life for Expensive People. In their world everything has a price tag and has the class of living. Richard hates
all this, though he is not able to extricate himself from this gluttonous atmosphere. The mental tension, constantly we come across, hinders people, from communicating to one another. Things would have become better, between Swan and Revere or between Clara and Swan. We see Lowry please Clara, because, he is not able to communicate, what he precisely wished to. The relationship comes to an end, because of their inability to communicate. They need language to communicate, they know the language but at the opportune moment, they do not have the power of the language. In consequence, they separate. Lowry’s son Swan realizes that he has the same problem of communication, when he tries to talk to his girlfriend Loretta. They all suffer from a kind of neurosis, and they do not communicate as the occasion warrants. It is because; they are living in a social order with its “brain washed morality.” Another aspect is, that they do not have a well-knit family order.

“What’s this, now you’re calling me Mother?

Weaned at last? Don’t give me that solemn weeply look through your glasses, my friend, I don’t particularly care to be called Mother by
anyone. I don’t respond to it. I’m trying to hold my own and that’s it. No Mother, no Son. No depending on anyone else. I want you to be so free, Richard that you stink of it. You’re not going to blame me for anything.”

“Who should I blame then?”

“Nobody.”

“Not even father?”

“Especially not him.”

“Isn’t there anybody?”

“My own father, my drunken madman of a father.” Nada said, but without her usual melodramatic conviction. It was plain that she regretted having hung up on that call. “If you don’t be quiet I’ll buy a Home Clipper Cutter from the Discount Mart and cut your hair here at home and ‘almost sever’ your ears, little chum.
You and Gustav both.” She reached over and stroked my hair. (P.225, EP)

Besides family dislocations, we also notice, a kind of cultural setback.

“Our culture, my friends,” he said, “is based upon competition and greed. Who can deny this? It is inhuman, totally inhuman. It is terrified by love -- not just sexual love, my friends, but all love. Paradoxically enough, or rather not paradoxically at all, this culture is obsessed with brutality: in its fixed aesthetic forms, the police state and the television set.”

Mavis Grisell clinked her Egyptian jewelry in agreement; she was always agreeable. Nada sat a distance away and crossed her legs. Her vagueness that evening puzzled me, and it was only years later that I realized she took Cedar Grove so unseriously that even her old friend, placed in it, became unserious; she hardly
listened to what he said and therefore had no idea that he might be insulting her guests. Of course her guests had no idea either.

“Very interesting point.” a man in a dark suit said with enthusiasm. This was Mr. James Bone, a manufacturer of garage doors.

The editor popped a shrimp into his mouth and his jaws ground with vehemence. “Certainly it’s interesting! It happens to be true. America, my friends, is based upon money. And money is based upon man’s natural selfish desire for power. So we may say that the basis of our evil is the selfish desire for power.” (P.238, 239 EP)

If it is not a cultural setback, it is the economic criteria in American society. Culture, economic problem of communication are all in a chaotic condition that we witness in American Society. All which every American daily encounters is a reality. They don’t want to face the reality.
“And this is the tragedy, boys and girls, the tragedy of non-communication. Think of our culture - the advertisements, the intensely stimulating movies, your popular dances and the clothes you wear. You must come to grips with this environment and conquer it; otherwise it will conquer you. We must demand of the adults of America that they face up to the realities of the world they have created. There is no room for squeamish hypocrisy. Did you know, boys and girls, that in any given group of young people a certain percentage of the girls will have unwanted pregnancies, and a certain percentage of all will have a venereal disease? Everyone knows that, but no parents will face up to the fact that their children may go into these statistics. Were I a parent myself, I would insist that my children come to me with any and all questions they have. There would be no red faces, no coughing spells, nothing except rational,
wholesome talk. Sex is not a tabooed subject, boys and girls. It is not unhealthy and dirty. Sex should be discussed openly anywhere, in Sunday school, in classrooms, as well as in school lavatories.” - (Laughter of a spontaneous sort) - “and even at the dinner table.” (P.254, EP)

Everyone wants to either change the society or come out of it, to create a new awakening, in order to change, the whole ambit of the rotten American social order. Everybody is aware of the inherent bad qualities in the society. Everybody, talks everywhere, but nobody has the courage to call a spade a spade. Everybody wants to change the society, but not themselves.

Muggeridge speaks highly of the moral conduct and has an inclination for changing the society for the better.

“Now you are talking, my dear, about the notorious double standard,” Dr. Muggeridge said as if this were a favorite topic. “This means that society expects highly moral behavior of its young women and looks the other way when its
young men do as they please. Of course this is grossly unfair. But our society is changing, as you know. I think this more than anything else is what is bugging your parents. They expect you girls to be dainty and pure, like their grandmothers. Even the most flagrantly immoral boys expect their wives to be pure when they decide to marry... finally!” (A ripple of laughter.) “But our society is changing so rapidly that there will be a time when girls will have exactly as much freedom as boys.” (P.258, EP)

“Dr. Muggeridge,” said a girl, “what about a kiss on the first date? Is that bad, or what?”

“Some people go all the way on the first date,” Dr. Muggeridge said. “It’s just a question of quality, not quantity, don’t you think so? Again, discussion is called for.”
“Dr. Muggeridge,” said a girl, “what about abortion? Do you think that’s good solution to an unwanted pregnancy, or what?”

“There are many opinions concerning abortion. The old-fashioned religious belief was that it was a crime, and it is still a crime in many states. However, if we look at the situation objectively and scientifically, it is clear that a couple, faced with an unwanted pregnancy, may make the decision themselves about what to do. I personally believe that marriage in such circumstances is a poor solution. For one thing, it would cut down severely on your youthful experiences in the world, to be married in your teens. Think of the fun you’d miss out on, the dates and dances! And it suggests that sex is something very, very serious and not just a normal part of life, something to enjoy....”

“Where are you going?” Gustav whispered.
'Out," I said.

I left the auditorium, which was so hot I felt sick. But outside in the corridor, and outside in the parking lot where I was sick to my stomach, it was just as hot. My clothes were drenched with sweat. (P.259, EP)

In the fifth chapter what we come across is, the people's views of the church. So long, church remained as an untouched subject, a sacred cow, in Oates' novels. Atleast not as glaring as we come across, in *Expensive People*.

The father was neither madman nor genius but just an ordinary, very ordinary, apologetic, slow man with the slightest suggestion of a hump between his shoulders. Nothing more. I don't want to go into the details of those visits with them. Father handled it well enough, but its better to forget about it. And Natashya was never Natashya but Nancy, Nancy Romanow, born and baptized and confirmed in the Catholic
Church, and therefore, according to their notion, saved in spite of everything. The Catholics believe that one can make a swift last-second prayer of repentance or something, and Mrs. Romanow argued with us about this as if we were selfishly holding Nada's soul back from its rightful place in heaven. (P.300, *EP*)

It is the disorder, in the social order that has been responsible for every disturbing incident that happens in the *Expensive People*. It is rather, a bird's eye view of the society. The individual isolation, want of belongingness and sense of insecurity, all combined give an individual, a strange psychological state of mind:

Yes, there was a series of psychiatrists. Father did that much for me, or against me. My favorite was Dr. Saskatoon, who explained gently to me that I had loved my mother so much, indeed overmuch, that I could not accept the fact of her death being caused by anyone except myself; a familiar delusion, he assured me. I had wanted, poor deluded brat, to be my
mother’s destroyer simply because I had wanted to establish forever a relationship between the two of us which no one could transcend, not even my father. “You have a very ambivalent, may I say rather negative, attitude toward your father,” Dr. Saskatoon told me.

“Dr. Saskatoon,” I would say, my teeth about to grind together in a spasm of shuddering, “Dr. Saskatoon, you don’t understand what it is like to be free and alive when everything is finished - no, please let me talk,” I would cry, shivering convulsively. “Nobody ever lets me talk and I have to say this - there’s nothing more terrible than to commit a crime and still be free, there’s nothing more terrible than to be a murderer without a murderer’s punishment. Dr. Saskatoon-” (P.305, EP)

After the reading of the Expensive People, one gets the impression, that it is a well told and true account of American
society of the twentieth century. In the end we get, Oates’, candid remark:

As for God - did I find God through suffering and repentance? Indeed not. I am afraid not. God came to me in a dream once disguised as Father and backslapping and loud as usual, but his slaps on my back were harder than need be. And that is the secret of the backslapper - he is really pounding you to death. In my reading I came across Freud’s remark that everyone’s notion of God is based upon his unconscious notion of his father. Well, I am stuck with a sadistic, happy, backslapping God and to hell with that. (P.307, EP)

So it is the emptiness of a society with colorfully painted façade of the American social structure which is portrayed. We get in the mouth of Richard:

And he would say, “Richard, let me assure you of this: hallucinations are as vivid as reality,
and I respect everything you say. I know that you are suffering just as much as if you had killed your mother."

The thread of trilogy gets concluded in them. Oates herself states that it is a work of history, in fictional form, in personal perspective. "Nothing in the novel has been exaggerated in order to increase the possibility of drama - indeed, the various sordid and shocking events of slum life detailed in other naturalistic works, have been understated here, mainly because of my fear, for too much reality would become unbearable." The novel dated in August 1937 begins with the love story of a girl. She admires her own reflection in the mirror. She has fantastic dreams, about her future. Her name is Loretta Botsford. She thinks her last name has no melody. She has been influenced by movies. The reality is, that she lives a cramped existence on a mid-western canal. she has an unstable brother, Brock. He is a riffraff. He puts an end to the dream of his sister, by murdering her boy friend Bernie. Loretta, gets depressed. She is saved by a cop, Howard Wendall. He takes her away from the scene of the crime. With him she starts a family, gives birth to Jules, Maureen and Betty. Though life
initially begins well, later on, it destroys the romantic, view of Loretta and her dreams get shattered. She has lived all through in a dream world. When she comes to encounter realities in life, she is shattered. Her mother-in-law is a vicious figure. Betty knocks her down. Jules reacts to the tyranny of home and leaves. Maureen tries to evade the whole atmosphere by withdrawing into herself. Howard gets killed in an accident. Loretta marries Furlong. He is a crude man, who hates Maureen. Loretta's illusions about her beauty and independence wanes away. The men whom she married killed her dreams and imaginations. Her children disturbed her mind. We see in the novel that the characters have to conform to social structure and that they are powerless to overcome or to make it better. For example, Jules is attracted to a wealthy girl, Nadine, who shoots and nearly kills him. Maureen becomes a harlot, in order to acquire money and also escape from home. The entire novel is set in Detroit, from 1913 to 1967. Everyone in the novel faces social setbacks not only in the family but also in the social circle. We witness the violent reaction of Betty and Jules.

Periods of peace are a rarity. What we come across at every quarter is a obsession, a disappointment lacking the sense of
belongingness which is without any well-anchored family or social moorings. The forces here operate beyond the individuals control, either they should choose to live with them or die with them. Things would have been different if these people were taught at their prime period, education or other niceties in life. For instance, as one of Jules’ mentor points out, books would give them a better understanding of life, to make them understand what realities are, and what life is. Life is illusive, but for these people the dream of happiness, in reality are not known as to what it is. For two things one, they are poor. It is a promiscuous society; Loretta is innocent and falls a prey to Wendall, the cop. She thinks initially that marriage would open up a new vista for her. Unfortunately it is not. She is plagued with, one hardship after another. Her spirit is undaunting. She is invincible. It is a pity, that she has a shallow personality, though she withstands the attacks on her. She shouts that, nobody can down her. The confused impulses of tenderness and viciousness remain unresolved throughout her life. The violence and the sorrowful episodes are all, a few of the aspects of the living conditions of the poor in the American society. When one accepts that the problems are inevitable, all violence and its
consequences fall into its place. What we learn from them is that violence arises and the tragic end is the result of the violence, but all these things are due to impotence. People do not have the courage to say anything against the violent indulgences of the people and also are not mentally prepared to overcome, petty setbacks they encounter, in their life. A deeply debilitating sense of entrapment cripples the people. They get a feeling that they have to suffer, they have no way out to escape or to overcome. Their lives defy order and unity. A kind of unknown vicious power erodes the efforts to overcome the crises. Every crisis they face triggers only violent response. For instance Maureen is a victim of her own inability to shield herself from her life. She becomes a cheap woman to earn money, so that she thinks, she can be comfortable, but her step father Furlong discovers the money she has and he takes it away after beating her. It is only a proof of the lack of courage to overcome, the onslaught to lead a life of her own. She thinks, at least some kind of education would help her recover herself from the trauma. She goes to a night school. She is taught fiction, but she does not accept it. The books for her do not teach, what she needs. She searches within herself for a way to
lead her life and give a shape, alleviating from pain. She moves from Detroit to suburbs, but life is no better there.

Jules gets involved with the rioters, plunderers, looters and shoots people. It is a way of life for them. Life has made them, hard and bitter. Successive failures, domestic unhappiness, social situation make them fight and destroy. Education has no meaning for them, culture, they have not heard of - these nobody ever told them. Unschooled, unemployed and uncared results in the society getting into the gnaws of violence. It is a social problem. Oates’ fiction is the anti-thesis of the earthly Eden. There are power struggles, class struggles and race struggles. Ultimately all these kill the human spirit. For a peaceful society, people must involve leveling it with a vision and a beauty. The harmony has to be inculcated in the minds of children in the formative years. The values of people and humanism must be taught. Otherwise, like them, it would become a chronicle of flights and dislocations. Dislocation causes frustration, which in turn causes, alienation, which ultimately result in brutality.

“How can I live my life; if the world is like this?”
Whether it is city life or social life, Oates is consistently taking the material from her American experience. For her, city lacks identity, she calls it, 'a nation of strangers.' This strangeness causes alienation. The absence of link with one another, reimposes further the alienation. We come across in *them*, repeated dislocations. We witness a sense of homelessness of the migrants and lack of mooring in the soil. Man requires a root, if he wants to be stable. It is a social principle and a human necessity. If this does not happen, the ultimate reality will be a social delirium. Maureen is the victim of the Wendall’s constant dislocation which runs through in, them. She asks,

'How can I live my life, if the world is like this?'

This pictures the whole ambit of the American social experience. *them*, represents the desire for human connection. People in them, pine for sympathetic understanding, fellowship and affection. Unfortunately, the social structure has taught the boys only to 'smash'. It is a power that takes them to violence. May be Oates is trying to project the concept of individuality, in a society, but somehow, the concept she has is a misnomer, because the individuality takes the form of violence. In short, the American
society on the whole, puts a premium on the individuality and the individual experience. More often than not, it draws the people towards violence. Oates here, brings in certain kinds of violence: they are individual and collective. In the earlier two novels, we see the individual violence. The Detroit riot is again a collective one. It is not condemned outright. It reflects that the author is not, comprehensively offering solution to prevent such recurrence of individual and collective violence. Violence enters into her concern and she is not able to envision a change in human attitude and consciousness. She doesn’t focus that every man is the member of the social organization. We come across instances, where Oates does not approve of violence. ‘History is not a natural sequence, it is made by man, we create it. Man does and undoes everything.’ This is a statement, we read in the novel after the Detroit riot. Oates does not disown it either. People struggle to express themselves in a culture that has no strong religious or philosophical code of conduct. In any society, the absence of such an ethical framework would ultimately be withdrawn into violence. And Oates in her trilogy keeps the flame of it, alive in them as well, in the concluding part of it. We are not likely to subscribe to
Oates’ idea, that violence is implicit in human life and that an opportune situation takes the toll. This kind of idea, we get in her trilogy. Further discussion in the subsequent chapter will delineate Oates’ concept of violence and human endeavor.

Oates remarks that, “All of Detroit is melodrama, and most lives in Detroit is fated to be melodramatic.” She maintains that she pictured the society as she has witnessed. Nothing in the novel is either exaggerated or made melodramatic. She says, ‘Nothing in the novel has been exaggerated in order to increase the possibility of drama indeed, the various sordid and shocking events of slum life, detailed in other naturalistic works, have been understated here, mainly because of my fear that too much reality would become unbearable.”

The various types of violence, we come across in *them*, possibly represent a cross section of the social scenario, that existed around 1936. However as the history has it, even in the subsequent stages the Detroit is not totally free from certain heart rending events. Wendall the central figure in *them*, seeks freedom through violence, he thinks it is the way to mark his importance. It is, “a kind of American success in an ironic sense, of course. He is
a hero and a murderer at once." The pattern of them, differs from her two earlier novels in the trilogy. Here, Jules is the most resourceful and sympathetic character than Swan and Richard. them, comprises, a complex fictional statement than two of the other novels in the trilogy. them is textured in a crowded city life, whereas Clara and Swan, in the A Garden of Earthly Delights, live in a small environment. The novel is not an indictment of city life, but about a city which becomes an inextricable part of the Wendalls' innerself. In that analogy, the city becomes an emblem for those wild and melodramatic events that takes place. Oates found in Detroit a powerful, concentrated example of a vibrating field of coming across of other peoples' aspirations, desires and experiences. The characters represented at a different levels are anonymous masses of poor and working class people in the major American cities. Each of the Wendalls does, however, represent a distinct method of dealing with a chaotic forces of Detroit life. Significantly, all her characters survive, may be it is a struggle and survival. It is realistic and them is a hopeful work, bringing to the fore the endless dramatically moving struggle between oppressive matter and undying spirit inherent in every character. Like Clara
Walpole, Loretta also develops a thick skin and sardonic exterior which gives her enough strength to withstand any ordeal. Jules and Maureen thrive because of their internal strength. Though Maureen grows as a frightened child, she faces all situations bravely and soldiers on. She becomes an eternal victim, wounded both physically and psychologically. Maureen retreats into conservation and self-defense position that controls the rest of her life. Loretta and Maureen represent two kinds of survival: one yielding to violent flux of life, as Loretta does, becoming tough and resilient and Mureen gets hardened to the realities surrounding her. The male oriented power struggle is the result of Detroit violence. Jules Wendall is able to deal effectively with, the Detroit situations than his mother and sister because he is a male. Compared to other two novels in the trilogy, them is a hopeful novel and requires to be read in the context of her essay published in 1972, entitled, *New Heaven and Earth*, wherein she remarks, “In spite of current free roaming terrors in this country, it is really not the case that we are approaching some apocalyptic close... the United States is preparing itself for a transformation of ‘being’ similar to that experienced individuals as they approach the end of one segment of
their lives and must rapidly, and perhaps desperately sum up everything that has gone before. The hero we have seen in *them*, is a libertine physically and psychologically. He does not accept the defeat, however, he moves forward symbolically representing the American culture. Moving for a transformation, trilogy has a message, its message is regeneration through violence. It does not advocate violence as a way of life.
Chapter - III

THE CONCEPTION AND CREATIVITY

END NOTES

1. Freud’s letter to Fliess in 1897 - Vol,1 - 265.


