CHAPTER IV

THE VIOLENT VISION
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THE VIOLENT VISION

Oates' world is violent. Her fictive world is violent, replete with nightmare, destruction, and futility, with a catalogue of horrors as incredibly real as the front pages of a metropolitan daily. Any understanding of her fiction is contingent upon an understanding of the place violence has in her tragic vision. For Oates, life is conceived in terms of a brutal struggle for survival against the world and against one's fellow human beings and it can only be conquered through violence. The one recourse man has to adopt is a sense of self-affirmation in the cheap, flash wasteland of modern America. Often his only avenue to a sense of integrity and selfhood is that of violence.

When violence erupts in her fiction, it is not, a programmatic resolution to every situation. It is not only Oates' handy way of resolving every crisis; it is also the natural outlet or course of action her characters take to when they are confronted with threats to their self-image or to the exposure of their impotence. Violence in Oates' works is not the Deus ex machina of an artist who cannot
write herself out of critical situations. When Oates uses violence in her fiction, it is the very real depiction of societal conditions - as she sees them.

Dalton criticizes Oates for "failures of literary intelligence, of structure and style, for not creating characters whose violent deeds are convincingly motivated." But this criticism misses Oates' creation of characters too simple or "ordinary" to experience deeply or realize fully what is happening to them and to society. Oates portrays the superficial lives of characters who cannot be other than superficial. Jules, who particularly comes under Dalton's attack, is incapable of discerning - any more than he does in the novel - what is taking place around him. He is a drifter, moved this way and that by chance. He may protest that he wants to get his life under control, but that is only futile dream.

The genesis of violence in Oates' fiction is scrupulously traced and nakedly described. Her novels may be so satiated with violence that the hoped for purgative effect is mitigated, but the violence in her works is a reflection of the violence in society; it is not a violence in the author's head, as Dalton claims. The novelist does in fact "attempt to confront the chaos that surround us and yet
defies our comprehension.” Repeatedly she struggles through her works to answer the question she poses in her review of The Doll maker: “How can the human imagination resist a violent assimilation into such a culture?” Her fiction pictures both the culture and the need to resist the assailing violence.

Violence, whatever its ultimate effect in a work of literature, must not be used as a series of set pieces; it is not merely depicted for its shock value. As Jules somewhat complacently remarks at the conclusion of, them:

“Violence can’t be singled out from an ordinary day!”

It is a very real part of all ordinary days.

Destruction and nightmarish experiences are common in her narration. Sometimes it appears that, the catalogue of horrors she portrays to be incredible. She conceives life in terms of struggle and survival. Possibly, certain issues are fought and conquered. The recourse the man adopts to achieve what he wants to in the American context or in a city like Detroit, is through violence. It is an avenue, with a sense of integrity and self-affirmation. To quote, Jung may not be out of place here, “Where love stops, power
begins, and violence and terror.” The violence we witness in the Oates’ world is due to a homogenous social order. Every character, Oates portrays gets involved in a violent act. If she or he fails, they become victims of the violence. It is a way of life.

Oates’ principle may not be to portray violence in absolute terms. Her novels search for the root of violence, in order to quell them. She, rather wants to expose, the violence where a sense of personal impotence becomes the root. Secondly, there is utter inability to affirm oneself. The person is unable to live fully as a human being if he chooses not to involve himself in violence. Oates creates a totally violent filled fictive world and leaves her reader exhausted since there are few comic interludes as a result, the tension builds up as the novel progresses, often culminating in murder, suicide or riots. Alfred Kazin points out that Oates views literature as a “silent tragedy.” The society is an instrument for creating chaotic situations, as a result, violence becomes the integral part of it. The symbol of forces within the society act as the harbinger of the violence. As long as the individual is obscured or becomes insignificant and is made a scapegoat, the social order is bound to change. As a result violence becomes an impulse.
People love violence due to the social constraints. At one stage violence and its fascination make people involve themselves in a sheer negative ecstasy. A sense of personal powerlessness, disillusionment, chronic set backs all become the focal points of obsession to indulge in violence. Oates' characters are unconsciously drawn into violence. They are easily provoked because of their family environment and social obstacle. Violence is a tempting factor for Swan or for that matter, any character, we come across in Oates' novels. It is also due to a sense of psychological imbalance because, to transcend the triviality of life they wish to have adventurous life. They look beyond and cross the frontiers of human ethics and decorum. This desire to overcome the trivial in the life is fanned by a sense of frustration and incapability. Oates defines power, as a human ability to act. It is more so, when he or she belongs to a group as opposed to strength. Violence is distinguished between Power and Strength by virtue of its nature as an instrument. Another disgusting aspect of this is the affinity between violence and individual ego. Ego multiplies in an individual as strength so as to involve in any action
as it pleases. Violence can destroy any order or any power. It is a
delusion that it confers heroism for achieving temporary results.

For instance, in Oates' novel, *them*, she pictures Detroit.

Detroit is dangerous; its streets are
“unflowery”; autumn has no effect on it. It is a
“hole with a horizon.” Jules could “smell
Detroit.. a kind of stretched out hole.” All that is
ugly and brutal and impersonal is Detroit. Free-
spirited Jules yearns for something else. After he
takes a job delivering flowers, he reflects on the
incongruity of flowers in the streets of Detroit.
Yet, when he makes deliveries in Grosse Pointe
where flowers are more congruous with the
setting, a maid sees in him the “hungry look of a
city boy.” If flowers do not belong to Detroit,
Jules, the florist delivery boy, does not belong in
Grosse Pointe.
Ultimately the image of Detroit in Oates' fiction is the city of death, the place where human beings are killed and the human spirit dies.

"Lots of people die," Jules remarks, "and in strange ways in Detroit...".

People are gunned down in the streets of the city, but in the Grosse Pointe, he ponders, they die "in hospitals, walled upon."

Throughout the novel the contrast between the metropolitan jungle and the suburban garden is constantly invoked. Whether it be to wealthy Grosse Pointe or to middle-class Dearborn, to escape to the suburbs is to get free from the inevitable destruction of the urban setting. Jules' romantic dreams of a flight to California to the golden West are paralleled in his sister's escape to Dearborn. Ironically, however, when he pays his final visit to Maureen, he warns her that Dearborn can burn as well as Detroit - never admitting that Los Angeles is potentially destructible and destructive, too.

Detroit is "always Detroit"; there is something unchangeable and tragically
unredeemable about the city in them.

Vinoba Bhave’s refrain “fire burns and does its duty” (them 105, 503)

which intrigues Jules from the day he reads it in the waiting room of the clinic, contains a hint of the phoenix image: the city can be purged by fire only if it is to rise from the smoldering ruins as a new city with a new life. While Jules insists on “fires (which) will never be put out,” his associate, Dr. Mort Piercy, dreams more utopian dreams of society living in harmony, a city of peace, acknowledging that “society must be leveled before a new, beautiful, peaceful society can be erected” (them 501-2).

Together, Jules and Mort set out for Los Angeles and Jules’s lifelong desire to go to the West becomes a reality.

It is an anti-heroic tendency that Oates’ characters think that it is a violence prone society in which they live. They cannot continue to live in chaos and confusion, that permeate in a society.
They also think that if they become violent, though it is a negative approach, they believe that they can assert themselves and bring in a new order wherein violence will be totally eradicated.

It is a kind of grim fable about great expectations in the present time. Oates' belief is that the violence and egocentric destructiveness which are the tragic outcomes of western history and philosophy must be transcended by embracing the opposite vision. This view is found in the works of Lawrence too.

"...Oates' prophetic vision attempts to define the tragedy of our age, in which individuals yearn towards a new consciousness..." 

Oates was fascinated with the phenomenon of contemporary America and all her characters suffer intensely the conflicts and contradictions at the heart of the American culture. The eccentricity of Oates' characters sometimes resemble those of Flannery O'Connor but they are always placed within the framework of society. She was obsessed with the psychological problems that torment contemporary men and women. Oates' novels are less sentimental and more intellectual.

But things are not in the hands of any individual or the collective characters of the society. They lack the collective
consciousness and the collective mind to stop violence in order to start a peaceful living. This irreligious violence is not sound nor fury, it is the barbaric instinct. Oates continually explores a new way to free the society from violence. She insists that a sense of identity and wholeness is possible without indulging in violence. The effort to achieve a personal integrity or significance begins when an individual asserts himself in any society. That kind of assertion comes out of two factors, one is the disillusionment within his family or sense of his own powerlessness for which the causative factors are economic debacle and the other is personal failures. Oates’ world is filled with violence, because the society she witnesses is likewise filled with violence. Her writings, challenges the limit of man’s endurance and the absence of self-thinking faculty. We don’t see any lasting effect or a change in the violent incidents, we come across in her trilogy or in other novels. It assuages one’s feelings of impotence, temporarily. But it does not change his life style permanently. Violence as the American society imagines is an agency of self-discovery and self-assertion. We don’t come across any preaching messages against violence. We also equally are amazed to learn that there is no spiritual
teacher to advocate the message of non-violence. Oates’ characters are drawn into violence by the sheer excitement of a violent act. Once William James wrote that, it “is the very horrors of war, which create its fascination. That kind of fascination at micro-level causes violence. There is no ecstasy, which comes from violence. It is a lust for destruction. Violence also enslaves a man to an urge which is animal in nature. The absence of brotherhood, a social bondage and a fraternity, egg on people to act violently, for any incompatible cause.”

By and large the twentieth century American fiction portrays violence. It is rather a naked reality in existing social order. Anais Nin pertinently observes that, “In days fiction is obsessed with violence... in order to feel alive, because the divided self feels its own death and seeks sensation to affirm its existence.” Thus violence is either a means of achieving or a surrogate for self-affirmation in the post World War society. Iris Murdoch protests against “there is so much of violence in modern fiction while simultaneously conceding its unquestionable role in human life.”

Oates traces the tragic connection between the failure to establish meaningful human relationship and its recourse to
violence. The essential aspect is that everyone in the family is at the crossroads. There is no living togetherness. According to Rower, “all her writing is about human relationships, Oates insists.” Her characters encounter multiple failures - failure in love, failure in family life, failure with the employer and failure with friendship. All this is because, of the simmering discontent. They make an individual a divided self. He is incapable of perceiving what is truth and the result is the violent indulgence. Another aspect is that they fail to come to terms with the vicissitudes of life. May be the American society failed to comprehend realities in life, as they are. It is a traumatic situation where the individual creates his personal failures. As things go out of hand and violence rules the day, at one stage, people accept that the violence is a part of their culture. Oates' violent characters belong to the self-image compensating category-Revere, Clara Valpole or Elena Howe who relentlessly search out the causes. Her characters are involved in violence. Her one hope for deliverance and redemption from atrocities brought on by violence lies in children who have not learnt it as the way of life. In order to preserve this hope, Oates has no real children in her fictive world,
all her young creations are miniature adults. When Clara runs away with Lowry, who is older than her, he is apprehensive about her age and asks her,

"How the hell old are you? She says eighteen," he replies, ‘O you are just a child’. Her replies is rather surprising, ‘I am not a child, I never was.” (them, P.420)

Clara recognizes everything that has been happening ever since she was a child. She understands the entire social order, she doesn’t like to be called a child. Swan is rather happy to be called a middle-aged child. All these people do not have a childhood happiness or innocence. The very failure of their childhood innocence is ruptured by the constant bloodshed, they witness. So what they understand from the very prime stage is that, violence destroyed them once for all and their feeling of affection and love is lost. As they grow along with this type of social order they know only living for the sake of living - the meaningful living they are not aware of it.
The recurring theme we get in Oates is frustration, failure and violence. Her choice of Neitzsche's, "What is done out of love, always takes place beyond good and evil." This shows that Oates is all the time conscious of curbing violence in society. Probably all the time, she witnesses and lives with the society where the violent incident do occur. She makes it a point by focusing violence and its negative retinue, she wants ameliorated social order to usher in. In her trilogy, three classes of society she demonstrates that no strata of society is free from violent indulgence. The brutal and the physical violence of the migrants is matched by the destructive and the psychological violence of the Expensive People. When they are unfulfilled the suburban people take to violence. They are not the external manifestations. They are very much the internal simmering discontent in all spheres of life. Oates raises this question as to why people are violent? : She finds the answer, to be their mental disequalibrium and the lost sense of belongingness. Both together make them indulge in a reaction in terms of physical as well as mental violence.

In the trilogy again, we see Clara Walpole as a model, raising through poverty by violence, at every stage. She knows
only violence. Poverty and lack of direction to choose for a better way of life, makes her a desperado. The only way to self-affirmation and survival, she thinks is to destroy or conquer those people, who seem superior to her. From her sister Sharleen, her playmate Rosy, her coworker and finally to Lowry and Revere, she must either exploit them or defeat them in order to form an image of herself. Clara, is a pathetic figure, whose acts, we don’t consider as courageous. All her misdeeds are born out of frustration only. Hatred she nurtures. Bitterness she brings forth. Clara passes through violence and hatred. As a result, she becomes a hardhearted lady. If only at any stage some one had shown her, either affection or love and care, her characters would have been mellowed. She never learns to love, because she does not know what love is. Her father instead of teaching her affection and love, leads her to hatred. Her father tells her how he had killed a man. So during her formative years, what she gains is that violence is part of everyone’s life and killing people exhibits one’s heroism. This type of a sharply drawn sketches in her mind makes her a violent lady. In the case of Revere, hunting and killing animals are considered a mark of heroism. Curt tries to make Swan, a Revere
man and Swan recoils. Revere tries to force the issue but he reacts,

"he had the feeling for the moment that he could love this man, if only he wouldn't take him out hunting and make him handle guns and kill things. Why was there always so much confusion and danger with men" (G.E.D. 288)

Swan is forced into hunting. He hates the very sight of a dead squirrel. He weeps for it, for him it is a pathetic sight. Such a person finally indulges in violence. This tells us how, the mind of the individual is progressively drawn towards violence. Swan all through his life is a meek person. But we don't understand how he can go to the extent of killing Revere. This again proves the sense of powerlessness and loss of identity.

In Expensive People, Oates brings in non-physical violence, in the lives of the wealthy. Even here we find the word murder becoming a casual expression. The first words of the novel, "I was a child murderer," sets the tone for the intended violence. It is all
through only violent activities without any human relationship.
The world of Expensive People is a nefarious one. Children become alcoholics and do what they please. Gangsterism and barbaric activities are all the daily routine in the society of the Expensive People. It is a devastating experience. Richard Everett, early in life discovers that human beings are as fragile as glass. They can be easily be tormented and physically eliminated. To prevent this, he wants to practice a facade of self-control and self-reliance.

Richard fails in entrance examination of John Behemoth Boys School, Fernwood. His mother wants him to reappear, but he refuses. She wonders if he can ever be rescued from this because all the time, he only thinks of his failure in the examination. But it creates a deep sense of worthlessness in him. He broods whether he could yield to his mother’s wish or deliberately work hard, to get through the examination by himself. His mind vacillates as a result, a sense of failure sets in him. He has no image now. In the society, every one wants to have an image. People think, that it is the hallmark of the quality, a man is supposed to possess. How he builds up the image, and what sort of image - people are not
bothered. In consequence, the worthless individuals, are created. 

It is in realistic terms or in practical way of life that all these characters are exposed of their insignificance. If they are really worthy people in the society, they need not pine for recognition and image. The other undercurrent as to why children become violent in the society is that the parents do not either live together nor shower love and affection on their children. Richard writes in his memoir, his growing realization that his parents hate each other. He secretly observes them and concludes,

“When all the stage props were ripped away, they always showed that they needed no fresh reason to hate. They simply hate it.” (G.E.D. P99.)

The sense of frustration and alienation all the more become significant, when parents pay no attention to their children, in any society. Somehow in American Society, it is learnt that family relationship is waning - living alone, without the affection of his father, Richard becomes a kind of an orphaned child. He has increased consciousness about his father’s nothingness. His life at the age of eleven becomes, a living death. Richard, loves Spark,
his dog but it is not absolutely sincere love. As, he lacks humanism, and real affection towards anybody, he is capable of killing the person, he loves most, in reality or in his mind atleast. In his family life, we see a vast disarray of relationships. Mother goes away, father remarries and Richard continues to be a lonely individual.

Richard is consumed with an insatiable hunger and emptiness, which he strives once and for all to stuff. Nada’s murder is the one that surfaces, violence, which disrupts the lives of the Expensive People. The undercurrent is tension and loss of values. ‘We are poor, shall we be vicious.’ them is not an exception. It records, the brutal malice enacted in the daily exchange of person to person. The family life is torn apart again by violence only. It narrates the tragedy of two generations destroyed by powerlessness and the belief that violence can, usher in a change to better the social order. Loretta Wendall is an invisible figure, braving all the turbulence she encounters in her life.
“She is, curly haired little girl, with compressed impulses of tenderness and viciousness.” (them, 31)

She gets into violence when her brother Brock, itching for excitement kills her lover Bernie Malin, when he is found with his sister. Brock, simply wants to kill someone. It is a kind of mysterious urge in him and Malin becomes his victim. After witnessing the murder, the narration moves towards a rape by the policeman. It is agonizing that Loretta falls a victim in the hands of the policeman, who offers to help her, but chooses to outrage her modesty. They marry and for a time, she believes that her life is somehow drawn towards a settlement.

“She has, come to the end of her life... it was a solid, good feeling to think, that she would probably live here for ever... everything was fixed and settled, good.” (them 54).

But it is a short-lived settlement and a transient satisfaction. She is constantly passing through one hardship after another.
She is a determined lady and goes ahead, undaunted. She refuses to,

‘let them get down’... there is not enough bastards in this city to get me down for long.’

(them 157).

She is a confused, disturbed and a wronged lady, living in a society where these things are all common and can happen to anybody, or may be that many will be passing through their lives as Loretta passes through. This is the bird’s eye view of the society.

A certain number of boys must grow up to die, in the electric chair. (them, 91).

When we look at this statement, we are puzzled as to whether it is an inimitable consequence of a progressive and a civilized society or not.

A debilitating and disturbing sense of entrapment destabilizes the balance of the mind of the people. The result is that, the order and harmony in a society destroys their endeavors to become good or at least avoid indulging in violence. It is a pity that
they pass through crisis after crisis and it is not due to poverty alone.

Constant suffering and bitterness makes them hard and creates a deadness of feelings. What they learnt is to fight and to kill, possibly to destroy, before they get destroyed. The social order makes them violent and desperate. Familiar violence is only social violence. The riots we witness are all emanating from domestic and nightmarish experiences. The only thing they learn is how to be vicious. Oates argues that, "if violence erupts in fiction," according to her, "it should not come first, nor should it be accidental." Whatever may be the ultimate effect of violence in the work of literature, you can take it nearly, for it is the depiction of a society shorn of values. We get this at the conclusion of, *them*, "violence can't be, singled out from an ordinary day! It is a very real part of all ordinary days." This sums up the whole concept of Oates' view of the American society. Oates refers to certain people in *them*, who are they? Loretta and her children, Jules, Maureen and to a greater extent to their father, to uncle Brock, last sister Betty and brother Randolph. They are not Americans of a particular era. They are the aggressive and adventurous people
living today. It is a micro-world that Oates has created. Wendalls exist and people like Loretta live in the vicious society. All this is because of Americans having no set public models and social ideals. Their lives are unhappy and their dreams are unfulfilled and their happiness - they do not understand, what exactly it is. Any society, that does not understand certain basic social principles will be made to encounter as the Americans do in the modern times. Oates presents, ‘America as viewed through the prismatic lens of its most popular genres’. She herself says, that she writes on the contemporary American culture, “now each novel tells an independent story. I consider uniquely American and of our time... the characters are both ancestors and ourself.” Oates protagonists are blind to social, and communal consciousness. She has written, ‘it declares: I will, I want, I demand, I think, I am.’ This is rather a past legacy of the renaissance. According to Oates, “a simple evolution into a higher humanism, perhaps a kind of intelligent antheism, in which all substance of the Universe (including the substance fortunate enough to perceive it) is their equal right.” 7 Her commentary on the violence prevalent in the American society is not wholly acceptable. She thinks of it as a kind of cultural
transcendence which they hope will transform the existing in the
social order. Her aim is that as a writer she must dramatise the
nightmarish conditions of the present, in order to make the people,
aware of what kind of a social order they are living in. Her
handling of the social realities ought to make the people see the
world in terms of heredity and family vicissitudes. And also to
create, and to identify with, heroes and heroines whose existence
would be problematic in the unkind and one might almost say a
barbaric society.

Oates tries to translate her theoretical statements into
fictional ones. The verbal ambience of Joyce Carol Oates’ works is
violent. Her choice of images, figures of speech, and her basic
rhetorical devices support and confirm her underlying concern with
the violent and the tragic. Most activities in her fictive world are
performed violently - conversations are angry and charged with
hostility, the interaction between characters is often brutal and
savage. Beneath this ambience is the persistent and gnawing fear
that one will be destroyed and the corresponding necessity of
establishing or maintaining a sense of order and meaning in one’s
life. The resultant tension is electrifying.
A subtle type of violence Oates uses in her fiction is the deliberately annoying and disconcerting absence of a resolution in many of her pieces. The reader is teased into involvement and concern for a fictional character or situation, only is confused by an artistic statement, which refuses to make sense. Oates acknowledges in “Fiction Dreams Revelations,” the preface to Scenes from American Life, that art is often mimetic. Because “nothing human is simple,” that art which endeavors to speak to human experience will not necessarily be explicable or satisfying. Her own fiction, consequently, is often violently, annoyingly not completed. Her characters do not act; her plots are frequently unresolved; certain of her stories do not make sense.

By means of such devices as the imagery of shattering glass, of jigsaw puzzles, and of entrapment, through the repeated and powerful technique of describing even the most trivial objects and events in terms of violence, together with the rapid pace at which her tales are narrated, Oates creates her own unique language and aesthetic tragedy and violence. Careful always to skirt the potential dangers of mere sensationalism and horrific titillation, she generates an ambience of violence integral to her tragic vision. She
is thoroughly imbued with the fact that the value of aesthetic violence lies in its power to bring man to an awareness of his own mortality.

As John Fraser notes in *Violence in the Arts*, "some violence make for intellectual clarity and a more civilized consciousness, while others make for confusion." If Oates' fiction leads to a sense of confusion, this is so in order to reflect the confusion inherent in human life and to push on toward a new consciousness. Only when one begins to ask how life can be lived or made to wonder if a careless move can un hinge the universe, can he begin to see how he can take hold of his life and avoid the careless move.

One mode of rhetorical violence in Oates' work is the technique of excessive concern for detail which creates an effect like that of a camera refusing to move to another scene; the reader is forced, as it were, to keep watching despite his desire not to see any more.

The result is that the horrifying truth becomes, a fictional reality. The love of violence and its fascination and ecstasy are recurrent themes in her works. Characters like Wendall, Jules,
Walpole, Swan are characters drawn unconsciously to the violent way of life. According to, Hannah Arendt, "People resort to violence when confronted with outrageous events". Erich concurs with Hannah, 'that violence may also spring from an urge for adventure and to look beyond and even to cross, the limiting frontier of human existence.'

Oates' writing about human relationships are given impetus in all her works. The failure of the parents to love their children is the nucleus of violence. That we see in the offspring of Dr. Pederson, the child murder Richard Everett, the Vagrant, Clara, Walpole and Elena Howe. Failure to love leaves Oates' characters with no recourse except to resort violence. Generally Oates' violent characters belong to the self-image, compensating category like Swan, Revere, Elena Howe and Clara Walpole. Relentlessly she searches for the causes that make these people turn to extremism. Her plea is that extremism has to be overcome by reason and good sense.

Oates is concerned with power relationships. The prevailing struggle of the people for survival in a disordered society, is her concern. The loss of social values, personal shortcomings, family
disintegration, economic degradation and unethical practices within the family are all Oates' pet themes for narration. By reading the works of Oates, one sees the real tragedy of so many Americans today. The drama of society was seen by an American in a society as the shifting line between the individual and the mass into which he was helplessly falling. It has now become the free-floating mythology about "them" which each person carries around with him, an idea of causation unconnected to cause. This is no longer a fixed point within people's thinking. In the American social novels of this era there are pathfinders and the characters are awaiting a channel to better their lives. Oates has an instinct for the social menace packed up in Detroit. The chaos of American life, to say nothing is of its staggering armies of poor, outraged, by no means of peaceful people are pressed upon her. It is rare to find a woman writer so much concerned with burning social problems like Oates.

Oates describes in her trilogy, the anxieties of men and women in general. In the vortex of violence the ultimate worst sufferers are women. In the contemporary American Society, inspite of all its progressive thinking, the gender bias becomes worse, when it comes to the question of woman's right. Being a
woman in the current context appears as a symbol of suffering and marginalization. This is rather a general sketch we get from Oates. Oates’ trilogy registers the psychological suffering of radically truncated characters confronting, familiar and societal factors that make them inadequate of existence. Oates wants to bring in a new panorama of a social canvas, with empowered daughter, a loving son and a powerful and protective father and a forceful and a caring mother. If these characters, with the featured qualities would become a reality, the new social order emerging in the American Society could not be a distant dream. Oates’ portrayal of violence in her works is with the ultimate aim of bringing order through disorder. It is again a feminist unconsciousness, which does not either accept or corroborate a new violent incident or action. Her intensive plea is for a new ameliorated society that should emerge—warning of evils—which should be shunned by everyone in the society by both male and female, who would ultimately pave way for the peaceful society. It is Oates’ optimism in a new humanism which will be devoid of all traces of indecency that compels her to project certain naked realities with gruesome violence that take the toll of the people. She articulates for a new social order. It is her
vision. Violence is not her message. It is only her thematic concern.

Oates’ major concern has been to focus upon the intense conflict between the individual and the society. She has employed a variety of aesthetic approaches in her attempt to convey certain grotesque realities. According to Philip Roth, “the American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to describe, and then to make credible, much of the American reality. It typifies, it sickens, it infuriates and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one’s own meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents.” Oates has adhered to the novel of ideas and to the mode of psychological realism in her trilogy. At the same time, she has produced experimental works of fiction with American reality. She dramatizes the social turmoil in order to convey confused psychological states as the very border of sanity, which has often led her into grotesqueness in her fiction. She is not concerned with either reception or rejection of her works. Occasionally she is criticized for her picturing more violent scenes in her novel than love and romance. She is not concerned with the lighter side of
life. Her concern is the society at large. She believes that society has to be changed in whatever manner possible. The American society should become a model of virtue, which is the ambition of Oates. Because of her commitment to turn the society into noble one, her reputation continues to grow in the U.S. as well as in the other parts of the world. She is one of the living legends, in the domain of literature of this era.
Chapter - IV

THE VIOLENT VISION

END NOTES

1 The Undiscovered Self

2 Alfred Kazin.


