CHAPTER II

THE WHEEL OF LOVE

In the ditches, in the dark crevices,
Shrunken glaciers keep their chill.
You cannot step across
The cold radiates upward, even against the sun

"The Impasse"       Joyce Carol Oates

Joyce Carol Oates's poem "Cupid and Psyche," while describing love as endowed with the potential of transcendence, also records a paradox "We fall backward into love/ and into time." Oates lyrically represents man's predicament, emphasizing human love relationships in establishing a communion, a well pronounced connectedness in order to humble the 'Faustian Will.' Delineating this theme too often in her fiction, Oates seems to reveal her felicity and concern for love, perceiving it even as the motive force behind creativity. Alfred Kazin informs that Oates "is always writing about love." He quotes her saying, "the emotions of love, probably that is the essence of what I am writing about, and it takes many different forms many social levels... I think I write about love in an unconscious way. I look back ... and say, yes that was my subject."¹ She mentions in another interview, that she

writes fiction with a central theme. "I have a whole lot of short stories about love - different forms of love, mainly in family relationships."² Her countless books affirm her assertion, that love is one of the highly significant elements of her creativity. Caught in the coils of love, Oates's literary psyche displays tremendous energy and grit, in transcending the consuming passion, while at the same time ardently sharing its warmth. Fiedler expresses the view that novel had a predominantly feminine audience and "it is scarcely surprising that its ideal theme should be love and marriage and that its ideal protagonist should be a woman - no grand lady, but some girl, passionate and pure, and known only by her first name, Clarissa, Pamela, Charlotte, Emma, Julie."³ Oates's stories are soaked in love and, detail the love afflicted psyche. When American novel for long remained in Fiedler's term 'a novel of terror,' partly, for the failure of love and being indifferent to the subject that sustained the art of European masters like, Stendhal, Constant, Flaubert and Proust, Oates has risen as a 'confessed romantic' chanting the melodicous strains of languished love. Her work is a repository of love presented in passionate splendour. While appreciating Schopenhauer's idea on love as an illusion, Oates appears to endorse the


sentiment of Havelock Ellis that "love is only a delusion in so far as the whole of life is a delusion, and if we accept the fact of life, it is unphilosophical to refuse to accept the fact of love."\(^4\) Spending her formative years in bleakly conservative surroundings and inheriting her parents' implicit faith in religion, Oates reads love as the very foundation on which the noble edifice of Cross stood. She evidently notices people turning to this haven, while a peculiar conflict is threatening to encompass all good and sturdy values. She endeavours to represent love as a drive of the individual for wholeness, reconciliation and personal adequacy. She often studies love more as a passion, a predominantly forceful emotional complex, than as a sentiment, implying a higher intellectual development and greater refinement. Though, love as Karen Horney describes can be "the capacity to give and take affection, denoting a genuine fondness for another person,"\(^5\) Oates appears to consider this warmth for others, originating only from an essential inadequacy, denoting a total dissatisfaction with the self.

Like Bellow, Oates appears to be intrigued by sadomasochism—the conflict between 'will' and 'love'—between the desire to 'control' and to 'give'; to 'master' or to 'rever'.

To Oates, the contact outside the self alone provides a

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personality fusion, and an integration, resulting in the stability of the self. "Every where on this highway, at this moment, there were men and women driving together, bonded together - what did it mean to be together? What did it mean to enter into a bond with another person."

(Ml. 392-93). Her concentration seems to rest on the essence of relationships altering both the involved individuals. She believes in human experience gaining a stable identity through meaningful love relationships, despite being aware of the changing emotional needs of the evolving personalities. She often opts for acts of compromise and reconciliation bridging the gulf between the 'validity of an event' and its 'distortion.' Oates's concern in such exercises is to capture the essential and unchanging in the general flux. She writes as if she is providing in her fiction a frank and forthright expression of love tendencies, in the tradition of George Eliot and Henry James, noticeably inspired by Jane Austen. This study attempts to capture Oates's felicity and unique practice projecting the masterly sweep of this all pervading emotion. Fiedler explains that love in literature is "a rationalization a way of coming to terms with the relationship between man and woman."

He contends that American novel is different from its European prototypes and one of its differences arises from its chary treatment of woman and sex. 6 Representing Oates

6 Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death, p.31.
as an artist of great calibre, practising the relationships, the study deems it significant to inspect Oates's treatment of men and women, the 'dramatis personae' in her fiction.

**Men and Women in Oates's fiction:**

G.F. Waller informs, that most of the stories of Oates are centred on women - not only because she herself is a woman, but because she senses that her "sex most clearly displays the essential psychology of confused and destructive feeling that characterizes contemporary sexual relations in America."7 Intensely feminine, Oates remains only as a writer, without becoming a doctrinaire feminist. Sex is never an issue nor a weapon to Oates. Nevertheless, her work appears to be a woman artist's self conscious act of love. Oates's short story "The Dead" included in Marriages and Infidelities introduces the central character Ilene Williams as if voicing Oates's sentiment, "I want to honour the dead by reimagining their works, by reimagining their obsessions ... in a way marrying them, joining them as a woman joins a man ... spiritually and erotically."(MW 478).

Since 1963, Oates has been writing about women elaborately tracing the negative influence of the stereotyped roles on the formation of women's personality.

7 G.F. Waller, Dreaming America pp.46-47.
Witnessing the prevalent chaos in human relations in contemporary America, Oates desires to take her women characters beyond their sexual roles. Oates captures the mood of women in present times by making Nadine an important character in *Them Muses*: "a woman is like a dream ... she lives in a dream, waiting for a man. There is no way out of this, insulting as it is, no woman can escape it. Her life is waiting for a man. That's all .... She has no choice .... she has no choice about it." (T.367). G.F.Waller explains that Oates "conceives the most crucial struggle for women not to be that of finding a satisfying social role but of liberating the creative springs of personality." 8

Oates creates recurrent female types of mothers and daughters. Clara of *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, Nade of *Expensive People*, Loretta of *Them Muses* and Ardis of *De With Me What You Will* appear to be the representative mother figures in Oates's fiction. They are all well versed in the art of survival, mostly at the cost of their lovers, husbands and maladjusted children. They appear to be egotistical, self sufficient, opportunistic, manipulative, pragmatic, adjustable and intensely amoral. Materially and socially ambitious, they have often jettisoned themselves into a higher social and economic circles. But their obsessive self-conscious nature distances them from any possible emotional release 8

Ibid.
causing them to endure much turmoil.

Karen of *With Shuddering Fall*, Maureen and Nadine of then, Helena and Shelley of *Wonderland* and Elena of *Do with Me What You Will* can be considered as the representative daughter figures. They are fragile, quiet, insecure, introspective and vacuous. Unlike the mother figures they are incapable of dealing with the unexpected, possessing little resilience. They are noticed often skirting the edges of severe psychological disorder. Karen had to be institutionalised while Maureen's catatonic state and Elena's somnolent trance describe the pathological condition.

Elena, the heroine of *Do With Me What You Will* is a typical Oates's female character. Charlotte Goodman writes, that Oates's prototypical young female leaves her home in quest of a new life. Like Maureen longing for the better world of Jane Austen, where men are tender and courteous to women and like Natasha in *Expensive People*, she runs away from home seeking a rebirth, observing the hardships of her mother. She desperately tries to avoid her mother's fate, like Clara Wolpole in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, fleeing from the squalid and bleak surroundings. As the long suffering martyrs of love, Oates's women are put to generations of social and psychological conditioning that often turns them

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vulnerable to the complex reality. Oates while employing her own female consciousness in Do With It What You Will, hints at the possibility of liberation only through the conscious will of woman.

Majority of Oates's women are caught in the throes of their own emancipation. The conflict seems to lie in the unenviable situation of seeking liberation while subscribing to much of the traditional roles. McLaughlin Marlon Briggs, ventures to prove that it is not the men themselves who cause women's despair, but the irrational dependence of women upon romantic love with all their inherent strength fall back on. Though Oates's women vehemently reject their sexual roles, the hold of their sex on their emotional behaviour remains real. Women in Oates's fiction seem to be created merely to explain the humiliating chaos of men's life or else to suffer their dark drives and desires. Oates goes very close to later Jane Austen who presented in 1794, a portrait of a woman in her Lady Susan. Austen created a character bent on the exercise of her own powerful mind and personality to the point of social destruction. It was a study of frustration and of women's fate in a society that has no use for women's stronger and more masculine talents.

Helen Deutsch points out the almost universal nature of women to be masochistic, passive, receptive, long suffering and enduring of pain. Women are referred even as narcissistic for "such humiliation requires inner bull work of narcissism, self-respect and pride". Oates appears to affirm Jean Paul Sartre's opinion that the obscenity of feminine sex is that of everything which 'raps open.'

"It is an appeal to being as all holes are. In herself woman appeals to a strange flesh which is to transform her into a fullness of being by penetration and dissolution. Conversely, woman senses her condition as an appeal precisely because she is in the form of a hole." 12

Oates describes in Wonderland that as a boy Jesse had peered at a graffito in the school washroom. It was the drawing of a woman in which the pubic area is shaded to look like a black door and the arms drawn so as to make the figure like a box, "some thing you could walk into and lose yourself in, all that empty blackness" (V.38). Years later Jesse stares at Mrs. Pedersen in a hotel bathroom, "exaggerated, swollen into the shape of a large oblong box .... Jesse felt it pull at him, tug at him ... as if confronting one of the terrible secrets of the world." (V.172). Only in


Do With Me What You Will, Oates makes the protagonist Elena attempt to transcend her sex, deserting her husband and eloping with an already married man, Jack Morrissey. Constance Ayer Dennes, explains that only this incident stands as a myth of creation highlighting the divinity in woman. Though Elena's elopement is a criminal act, it becomes a symbolic act of self-assertion, shattering the outdated paternalistic structures, even resembling perhaps the act of Adam and Eve in the Christian myth.13

There are plenty of stories about women throughout Oates's Canon. The Goddess' ind ther town (1974) a collection of twenty-five stories is a thought provoking document on love, hate and pain in women's lives. It provides a probing and thoroughly disturbing view of the 'Second Sex,' focusing exclusively upon women. They are very near images of Kali, the Hindu Goddess, incidentally specified in the title of the collection. Oates describes the statuette of the Goddess in her short story, "The Goddess", "standing with her legs apart, pot belliced, naked, her breasts long and pointed, her savage fat-checked face, fixed in a grin, her many arms outspread, and around her neck what looked like a necklace of skulls." (G.407-408) Goddess Kali, for all her monstrous representation, is

yet looked upon by the devout Hindus as a part of Nature's totality. Joanne V. Creighton mentions that "rather than portraying women as our literary myths would have them, which as Leslie Fiedler and others have pointed out, almost invariably depict women as either good or evil, Oates presents them as locked into the destructive form of Kali, unliberated into the totality of female selfhood."

In "Concerning the Case of Bobby J.", Francis, a white girl, accuses Bobby T. of attacking her, although she was responsible for what happened. As a result of her lie, Bobby T. spends the next nineteen years in prisons and mental hospitals. When finally released, the once fun loving, good looking black youth is practically a vegetable, afraid of people, unable to do anything for himself, destroyed by Francis.

The manifestation of this unique female selfhood can also be discerned in Betsy of "Blindfold" and Nancy of "Small Avalanches." They are young girls dangerously toying with sexuality with culpable men. These young girls wearing the mask of feigned innocence and naivete, learn that sex is an exciting and dangerous game where leading the male and frustrating him afterwards constitute the

wimming. Oates shrewdly represents the adolescent fantasy depicting a sixteen year old Marsha, aware of herself sexually and making tentative excursions into the world beyond childhood in "The Voyage to Rosswood." Betsy, Nancy and Marsha are resilient, daring and increasingly self sufficient. They experimentally approach life and venture to exploit men. Oates also portrays in this volume, the passive, frightened and withdrawn girls and women, who in spite of their unpredictable violent behaviour, often are made the victims. Sarah of the story "In the Warehouse," is a small, insecure twelve year old girl totally dominated by her extremely aggressive and highly enterprising girl friend Ronnie. Depicting an inseparable adolescent relationship, Oates makes Sarah suffer an unwilling communion with Ronnie. Sarah pushes Ronnie down the stairs of an abandoned warehouse executing a cold and brutal plan, fervently seeking a liberation from a suffocating relationship. Twenty years later, married and with children enjoying a comfortable suburban life, Sarah unsuccessfully tries to summon the guilt feelings for what she did to Ronnie. "There is a good shadowy space about me, filled with wanting. Wanting to cry, to feel sorry ... I have never felt sorry" (G.79-80). Through the desperate act of killing, Sarah has at last secured the much sought after liberation and emotional security, but, at a permanent cost to herself as a person.
Sarah has made the typical 'Faustian bargain' of Oatesian women. Quite often these vacuous women feel disenchanted with their emptiness and reach out for confirmation of their being as "The Girl" in this collection. Beautiful and bland, the protagonist plays the 'girl' in the wake shift movie of the 'director.' The action though includes a brutal assault, she holds no resentment towards any. Her only concern is to know that there was film in the camera. The film is meant to confirm her identity as 'the girl,' since she had no other selfhood. Often Oates attempts to turn the frustration of these women inward, in a conscious or unconscious quest for death. Freedom to these women appears to be the numbness of emotion, sprouting from the search of nothingness. The woman of "& Answers," lacking totally the sense of self respect, plans to kill her daughter and herself. She thinks that "men expect too much" from women "something like God," and women are doomed to disappointment because they are not equal to these expectations. Joanne V. Creighton remarks that representing these women, Oates offers an extraordinarily painful and credible portrait of a woman, whose whole-hearted acceptance of male superiority carries with it a total denigration of herself as a woman. 15

15 Ibid, p.153
Some of Oates's most effective stories depict women with successful careers but their professional competence unfortunately is not complemented by a similar felicity towards their sense of womanhood. Jenny the bright psychiatric intern of "Psychiatric Services", Katherine of "waifin"; and Nora, the University Professor of "Magna Mater" project great professionalism, engulfing their identity as women. Oates understands that the professional competence quite frequently demands a high price in a woman's emotional health. Many women are hopelessly dependent upon male approval soliciting earnestly their self-esteem. These characters illustrate the dilemma of the professional woman in Oates's world of fiction. Their lucid intelligence, uncompromising standards, aggressive and vehement urent, cool self-assurance, and unstinting dedication to work, only serve to undermine their image as women. Oates is not successful in transforming them into liberated souls. They are the emotionally insecure women caught heavily in the unsatisfactory relationships with men, and are thoroughly vulnerable. Nevertheless, Oates suggests no professional equality between men and women, considering women biologically, emotionally, psychically and socially, altogether different from men. Oates notices their sexuality spontaneously entering into all facets of their lives but often complicating their relationships. Though in Oates
violence and aggression provide healthy vents of emotion for men, unfortunately for women they result in unhealthy inhibiting and hardening of emotion. The problem for most of Oates's fictional women seems to be their perception of the lack of self and not the reconciliation to the possession of different selves.

They all appear as victims suffering from inadequate female selfhood. Joanne V. Creighton observes that the very qualities of passivity, fragility, beauty, sensitivity and dependence considered as typically feminine make many women in Oates's fiction vulnerable to the brutality of modern life, "insufficiently resilient to cope with life's unpredictability." The typical Oatesian woman "sits around waiting for something to happen, or builds an impenetrable wall around the self so that nothing can happen, or consciously or unconsciously seeks her own death." Joanne V. Creighton convincingly suggests that "Oates's work offers a disturbing view of women's incapacity as a group to deal successfully with their sexuality and as a result with experience."16

Though, Oates does not encompass the full range of female, possibility in her fiction, she always explores intensively, the sexual roots of female non-liberation.

16 Ibid, p.156
She has a very bleak and sordid view of women's lives presenting them as the hostages in the home, rounding the religious literature of the Nineteenth Century. Mary Allen while expressing the opinion that no one can excel Oates in charting the female consciousness also mentions that she is a master at depicting women's anxieties. Oates presents in her work an antithesis to the philosophy of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner, who gave an unbridled expression of their rancour towards women. They have castrated woman in their works presenting images of antivirgin, and making men helpless in the hands of women. They painted women in dark and vulgar hues as a sadistic tormentor of man.

Oates noticeably keeps man often as a creature of tradition, inclined to change his love objects more frequently than a woman. When her women recognize a social need to strengthen relationships, her male characters are observed without the urgency of this responsibility. A typical 'Oatesian youth considers home and family restricting the freedom of the soul, nonetheless, he desires passionately the order and communion they represent. The ambivalence for road and home in Jules in them is a typical instance. The traditional character of man, striving to satisfy the whims of his woman, often slips

from notice in Oates's fiction. Like Twain, Oates makes men impure and betray women. Men in Oates's fiction remain typically irrational and a brute force, reveling in the carnival of arson, rape, riot and murder. Purity of the male is too abstract a theme in Oates.

Fiedler confidently mentions that in America "the only class war is between sexes." He further explains that American literature is filled with tearful extravaganzas in which the female is portrayed as pure sentiment, the male as naked phallus proliferated endlessly.18 Possessing a genuine faith in Lawrence, Oates seems to favor his opinion, that man like woman lives and moves as "a fountain of life-vibration, quivering and flowing towards some one, some thing that will receive his outflow and send back an inflow, so that a circuit is completed, and there is a sort of peace. Or else he is a source of irritation, discord and pain, harming every one near him."19 Most of the men in Oates's fiction look for fulfilment in romantic love although in her fiction the genuine sentimental love is very rare. "A man must love and must be loved or he himself cannot be healed, cannot heal others" (Ml.350). Oates keeps men and women in their traditional roles in her fiction,

18 Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death, p.90

though the generation has come a long way since the days when men were bread winners and women the home makers. She vehemently reflects the conflict in our times of women venturing to step out the traditional roles and still crave for the emotional stability in protective relationships. She is attempting to drive her characters to Lawrence' conclusion, "I think the one thing to do, is for men to have courage to draw nearer to women, expose themselves to them, and be altered by them; and for women expose themselves to them, and be altered by them." 20

Prose fiction began with the love affair of Lovelace and Clarissa. While love in one form or another remained the central theme of the novel in France, Italy, Germany, Russia and even in England, spiritually so close to America love seemed intolerable to American literary imagination for long. Thanatos prevailed on Eros, projecting certain obsessive concerns with the American national life. With the modern writer's interest in the states of mind, this reigning passion is recently being given the due recognition. The post-modern writers in America excel each other in exploiting the theme of love, gaining extraordinary insights into fiction, character and emotional setting.

Stevens Cynthia Charlotte while focussing on the pattern of family romance in Oates's fiction, contends that Oates evidently transcends her apparent subject matter - the concern for the social and economic realities of American life - emphasising the psychologically determining family relationships as the major causes of social and personal upheaval. Considering family as the centre of action, Oates conceives relationship as the key figure charting the evolving consciousness. Men and women endeavour in Oates's fiction to reveal in their individual expressions of their consciousness through various love relationships. The purpose of the present examination is to analyse these individual expressions of relationships emanating from the character's consciousness with a view to describing Oates's concern for the self.

**Physiological expression:** The physical process associated with the emotion of love has received little attention from psychologists as well as physiologists, though the psycho-somatic implications of this emotion have been perceived by scientists and laymen alike. Oates's grasp of the thought physiological expression of love appears to be masterly and/

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evoking. Her narratives are replete with the highly citing sexual description of the emotion of love. In the ory "The Maniac," Oates while tracing the protagonist, cords:

As she drew near him she felt an odd precision of her body, to each movement of her body, and in her mind's eye. She had a flash of something like a dream ... a vision of herself as a skeleton, but made of nerves and nerve tendrils not bone .... Oh my love. She felt a kind of music rise in her the quivering of this nerve skeleton, a trembling, a swaying an utterly delicate structure of tendrils, and her heart beat quickened, the pulse that led from the left side of the jaw down thickly into her chest felt warm, certain." (G.107).

Just two pages later in the same story "She felt ow the nerve fibres stimulated her muscles, how small arting pin pricks of excitement were beginning in the sea around her heart and stomach and the lower part of ae body, but most precisely just around her eyes."(G.109). Such sheer sensuality in the narration while revealing ates's faith in passion and preference for a "life of onsations" also suggests her concern for details in xamining the emanation of this emotion in total.

iial expression: The early infantile experiences set the pattern for later love relationships. rederrick J. Hoffman describes that all sexual normalities and abnormalities spring from the earliest infantile sexual life.22 Love is an attitude towards what is valued

and indicates a search for these objects of value. "For where your treasure is there will your heart be also." It describes an assurance that one is ready to meet the contingencies of life in any direction. It is only when this belief is thwarted love deteriorates into a pathological expression. Karen Horney writes, that family situations provide a fertile soil for the growth of Oedipus complex. Making family the centre of all actions in her fiction, Oates reveals a great interest in the Oedipus complex, while providing a focus to her countless characters Oates appears to make the sons pathologically addicted to their mothers or the mother surrogates. Major action in her fiction emanates from the Oedipal motive. Shar, a racing car driver violently attempts to rape Karen the heroine of With Shuddering Fall. They set out together in self-destructive racing spree. The ambivalence in Shar could not bring him to stable relationships. He leaves Karen frustrated and ends his life violently sparking off a carnival of riot and destruction. Steven, born to an unwed mother, Clara Walpole, could not reconcile with the idea of Revere as his natural father in A Garden of Earthly Delights. Like Prince Hamlet, he was jealous of

Revere, his father surrogate. He could not sustain his mother's ambition for an identity and control. Richard Everett in *Expensive People* appears intimately attached to his mother Nada. He is victimised by his "extravagant... love for Nada." (EP.22) He doubts that Everett is his parent and longs to hear the "strong hand even brutal voice of my true father." (EP.26) The killing of his mother is a "murder committed by a child in full possession of his wits." (EP.10) By this killing he betrays his total dependence on his mother. He feels his security thwarted and integrity ransacked, observing his mother's frequent desertions and his father's utter indifference. Oates's deliberate omission of whether the murder was a mere figment of Richard's imagination or a fact, appears to be an emphatic assertion of the classic motif. Oates's suburban imagination provides a good leverage to a unique, diseased filial expression of love. Sanford Pinsker mentions that *Expensive People* is the story of a matricide, of a son's desire to revenge himself against the crushing domination represented by his aloof and unappeasable mother. Unlike the authoritarian father where brutal phallic strength presumably terrorises his off-spring, mothers generate tension which is more insidious more conducive to literary ambivalence and irony.  

Hanley Stuart Hingham, an imaginary psychoanalytic critic in the novel, suggests in an imaginary review of the novel, "Those of us who have read Freud (I have read, every book, essay and scrap of paper written by Freud) will recognize easily the familiar domestic triangle here of son's homosexual and incestuous love for his father disguised by a humdrum Oedipal attachment to his mother" (EP. 162-163). Jules Wendall in them surprisingly escapes the ultimate end of the Oedipal character. Born in a middle class family, Jules observes the vicissitudes of social reality. He silently watches his mother Loretta's agonism; experiences and cultivates an aggressive temperament. His escapades bring him no solace. Even sexual relations with Nada, his employer's daughter, fails to lift him from the psychic morass. Expressing his discontent he advocates violence and initiates vandalism.

Nathaniel Vickery is the child of a gangraped teenage girl in Son of the Morning (1978). His restless roamings as a revivalist preacher and his experiences of frequent revelations reveal an Oedipal character always in search of an ideal father. Owen Helleck, son of Maurice Helleck and of Isabel, refuses to believe his sister Kirsten, suggesting their mother responsible for their father's murder in Angel of Light (1981). The seeds of suspicion sown, Owen is transformed into the Prince of Denmark.
Majority of Oates's female protagonists offer an expression of Electra complex. Oates's Childwold illustrates the child's love towards the father figure. Oates improves on Faulkner who has attempted this theme in The Hamlet with the portrayal of Bula Varper and Nabokov in Lolita. Karen of With Shuddering Fall, Clara Walpole of A Garden of Earthly Delights, Loretta Bottsford of them and Elena of Do With Me What You Will are the prominent figures providing as if the critique of this complex. Oates appears to suggest that it is only through neurosis that human beings could transcend the limitations of the uncontrollable human condition. As if describing the daughters' attachment to the male parent in Oates's fiction, Charlotte G. remarks, "it is ironic that the fathers who have abandoned them arouse the love and admiration of their daughters, while the mothers who have also been abandoned only arouse their daughters' contempt."26 The novel

26 Charlotte G. Women and Literature, 5-2, p. 20
flourished on the religious marches of Europe where the mother directed catholicism and the father contested Protestantism met, Fiedler contends that Rousseau and Goethe by introducing incest into novel inflamed the imagination of the world. He explains that many early novels in America exposed the naked revelation of incest 'at the flush of romantic candor' - the desired bride is the sister, surrogate for the mother and the enemy is the father. 27 Oates is venturing perhaps to reflect this conventional spirit by continuously suggesting a warped expression of the filial love. Charles Lam Markmann records that Oates is effective in creating women whose love for men is to be realised only at the expense of guilt toward mothers or fathers. 28 Two stories in particular "Demons" and "Matter and Energy" are almost archetypes of such a situation.

Oates's interest can also be noticed in other areas of filial expression of love. She sympathetically studies the problem of adolescent children's control of sexual impulses in her short stories. With an understanding of adolescent psychology, Oates makes her boy characters obvious with a highly specific biological urge, aroused by

27 Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death, p.56.
external stimuli and aimed at rapid discharge of tension. Her girl characters are highly romantic for their sexual feelings are closely tied to the feelings of love. Percival M. Symonds describes adolescence as "a time when many temporary crushes and alliances spring into being," each one corresponding to some inner need of the individual.29 Oates makes her boys the legendary Don Juans. She is aware that these flirting boys are afraid of their loneliness and perhaps even possible lack of virility and passion. Most of these young people express aggressive sexual impulses of violence and vandalism, at the outset appearing as meaningless. They are not ready for any intimate, mature love relationships for they fear that other persons will see through their mask, their inadequacy. Some of them who show desire in such relationships are spurned by their objects of love for evident psychological reasons. Oates's peculiar fancy for the adolescent psychology in her stories facilitates her representation of the chaotic reality where every thing is in a state of flux except the moment of being. Filial love for the present study is the love conceived in the ultimate way as the creative power of a new life. Properly understood the import of filial love lies in the affirmation of the relatedness. It is studied as the very foundation of relationships.

Romantic expression: While describing Elena's relationship with Marvin, Oates mentions, "obliged to him, spiritually she belonged to him ... She loved him for his patience, for the infinite business and complexity of his life ... She loved him for his existence, the fact of his existence."

(DWWI, 531). For Oates love is the belief in the existence of human beings. Terribly aware of the endemic and intrinsic loneliness, Oates holds out the hope for existence through a positive affirmation of all values in life. The characters of Oates like the medieval Troubadours, celebrate love directly for its experience as a refining and sublimating force, stressing only the melody of 'being,' Waller explains that in Oates "love is understood as a surprising reaffirmation of our deepest hopes, and to refuse its fulfilment is to acknowledge that we lack the courage to live except in the shallows of life."30 Oates's male and female protagonists in almost all her short stories are intensely in love with life. Without evincing much interest in the personalities, they revel or suffer being in love. The study of Oates's fiction suggests her preference for Dante's love for Beatrice, where, passion is hopeless and without consummation. Gerald M.Izenburg mentions a mode of being in which an individual could

30 G.F. Waller, Dreaming America, p. 48.
overcome the particularity and ceaseless wandering, reaching a state in which time and movement were suspended in which the individual was in touch not with the limited aspect of reality but with the whole centred self. This was the state of the 'home land and eternity' of love - the being together of 'I' and 'thou.' The Hindu myth of Radha's love for Krishna is the ennobling picture of the role of a woman in man's discovery of himself. Radha's union with Krishna, her endeavour to merge in Him is the be all and end all of Indian romantic poetry and philosophy. It is the greatest illustration of romantic love, reaching a state of Nirvana, the cessation of all passions leading to a higher consciousness. While detailing the relationship of Elena and Jack, Oates suggests to "look between them of pure Kinship; Of Triumph" (DWM.563).

Most of Oates's married protagonists in her short stories derive bliss being in love, but at the same time they suffer intensely because of the agonizing relationships. They pronounce statements of binding commitment in highly romantic love relationships. Women in particular appear to set a high premium on love experiences. They seek the romantic relations for the restoration of their wounded self esteem. Talking to Lowry, Clara felt:

"the trembling started in her, a rapid violent trembling that began far down on her spine and passed up her back to her shoulders and arms, a feeling she had never known .... Revere .... was the same man, and she wanted him just as violently; making love with him cost her everything, every agonized straining to give life to that kernel of love he would always keep inside her. She would never be free of him." (GED,265-277).

Love appears sometimes to serve as a compensation for the inferior sex role they are forced to play.

The obsession of love appears to be the only occupation for her male and female protagonists. Jules in the company of Nadine considers that he "had gone beyond himself. He was being in a painting, embracinh a woman in a painting. Their love, so sweaty and violent at its height, had exploded into a thousand clean shimmering dots and golden leaves." (T.384). Nadine muses "a man's love creates a woman's love. You've made me the way I am .... There are men who are permanent in a woman's life .... You love me and I love you, I don't have any choice about it "(T.371-372). Wilson Mary Ann describes that Do With Me What You Will carries to fruition the themes implicit in her earlier novels ... chiefly the individuals reaching out for love as a means of transcending the isolation of the era.... In the love between Jack and Elena, Oates envisions an eventual transformation of the American Society.32 Elena ultimately

is totally transformed because of her memories of 'just being in love,' experiencing a fresh, differently exhilarating and greatly awakening passion for Jack. This romantic love for the 'gallant knight' at last liberates her from her morbid torpor. In this new consciousness Elena finds the significance for her existence. She provides an address for the truly liberated woman who no longer depends on others for her survival. It is as if to disprove the popular romantic tradition of providing a tragic end with irreconcilable misunderstandings, Octus takes Elena and Jack elope in search of happiness.

Karen Horney, while explaining the female social position, mentions that for centuries love had been the only or the main gateway through which women could attain what they desired. She argues that this difference in cultural positions has had a momentous influence on the psychic development of man and woman. Octus affirming this view lifts her women to the height of affirmation through the traditional female romantic occupation. Her characters fall in love inspired by something elemental not amenable to definitions. Preparing to elope together Jack and Elena met in their ultimate glory of pure kinship, of triumph and in that instant they forgot everything else. "Did you forget everything else? Almost everything." (DWM.563).

Karen Horney, The Neurotic Personality of our Time, pp.139-140.
Love living on very meagre diet derives its strength through darker roots. This deeper origin describes also a typical human condition of remaining contented in one's own inner environment refusing outside relationships.

Narcissistic expression: Charolotte G. informs that the reason for Oates's female protagonist's disappointment in sexual relationship is the Narcissistic confirmation of their powers the men seek from their lovers. Most of Oates's major female protagonists reveal a narcissistic character. Jesse Pedersen's frenzied run from one consciousness to another consciousness, Herz's autocratic parental behaviour, Marvin Howe's possessive nature and Nathaniel Vickery's restless wandering are a few instances of the obsessive self-love. Almost all Oates's male protagonists are conceited, luxuriously indulging in their delusions. While describing Carleton, Oates offers her readers an insight into this dominating factor. "Everything — every one — the whole world — was joined in him, only in him .... He was the centre of the world, the universe, and without him everything would fall into pieces...." (GED.126-27). Clara, his daughter, inherits her father's temperament and ultimately turns excessively self-conscious. Oates draws thoroughly narcissistic characters in The Hungry Ghosts: Seven allusive comedies. Oates's characters are personi-
fication of insecurity. Their ordeal describes their zeal for control. The attachment of Oates's women to incompetent and incapacitated men evidently denotes a narcissistic relationship. The responsibility in guarding and leading these persons gives these women a sense of personal accomplishment. Sometimes Oates's women express the 'clinging vine' attitude. They become compliant and accept a position of emotional dependence. They focus their narcissistic love on the male sex feeling secure only when surrounded by men and express great tension unless admired by the male, beautifully describing the essential ambivalence. Charlotte G. remarks, though "the mother's in Oates's fiction have suffered as a result of their own sexual and marital relationships, it is they who encourage their daughters above all else, to seek the attention of a man."35

Oates's narcissistic characters are preoccupied with love, a successful solution to the threat of their loneliness. Their falling in love is often a mere selfish expression. They are only in love with themselves. Her male characters often express their indifference to secure love relationships. If by chance a relationship develops it would definitely be demanding and all consuming. Creating dynamic personalities caught in the coils of self-love, Oates seems to invoke a sense of personal destiny out of the visible chaos.

Fraternal expression: Displacements of love are not confined to the family circle alone. Fraternal expression of love connotes in this study a genuine affection and a sense of comradeship moving beyond the purview of the ties of blood. Rollo May explains that "without an adequate concept of 'world around' love becomes empty of vitality and without 'own world' it lacks power and the capacity to fructify itself."36 Bellow seems to endorse this view by expressing that "goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other men, attended by love."37 Herzog neatly presents this sentiment by saying that "the real and essential question is one of our employment by other human beings and their employment by us."38

Oates's understanding of this aspect of love is in a sense nearer to Freud's expression that "the commandment to love one's neighbour as one self is in essence a prohibition," Such an order tacitly recognises that "men are not gentle friendly creatures wishing for love, but that a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment."39 Oates is vehement in depicting a naturalistic setting in her fiction.

37 Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet (Delhi, 1970), p.75.
38 Saul Bellow, Herzog (Greenich Conn.1965), p.333.
She drives her characters to establish their own identities in this wilderness, where fraternity is a mere myth. Most of her characters are the alienated souls craving for communion. They are not attracted to genuine object love, based on security in their selves. Without possessing stable and secure notions of their selves they cling to others just for the fear of losing them. Confronting violence in their inner and outer environments, they are found incessantly engaged in reassessing and reaffirming their values. G.F. Waller explains that "Love, the most integral of all is at once the most fragile .... The ordinary violence of love becomes in Oates a liberating excitement." While invoking the bleak horizons of friendlessness, Oates seems to focus the attention on the virtue of the spiritual life, through the transforming and inclusive agency of love. There is a "natural warm flow of common sympathy between man and man, man and woman," Lawrence writes, which keeps us "tender and alive at a moment when the great danger is to go brittle, hard and in some way dead." Like Lawrence, Oates wants to "restore into life" an openness as "the most natural life — flow in the world."

40 G.F. Waller, Dreaming America pp. 39-40.
42 "Transformations of Self; An Interview with Joyce Carol Oates," Ohio Review, XV (1973), p. 56
Oates's stories in *Marriages and Infidelities* are "characteristic exercises in extreme sympathy, a sympathy which lays out the facts and almost scientifically withholds easy judgments," writes S.K. Oberbeck. 43 Oates obsessively projects the isolated characters craving for love relationships.

**Sensual expression:** The love relationships so far examined, hover around a highly romantic notion of existence. They have none the less attempted to detail the evolving consciousness, directing the psyche to a more concrete sensual relationship. Being the most complete expression of union and sharing of experience, sexuality represents the highest degree of intimacy. *Kamasutra of Vatsyayana* while presenting detailed instructions on erotic technique and aphrodisiac recipes also offers precious information about the significance of sexuality in human existence. 44 One of the great intellectual contributions of Freud is his recognition of sexuality as an important motivating factor. G.N. Izenberg mentions, that Jean Paul Sartre considered sex and love as basic to his understanding of human motivation, for they formed the very foundation of all human relationships. 45


To Lawrence, the act of coition enables man and woman to go to the deepest sources of their nature to understand themselves and to be familiar with their separate and complementary roles. He even pleads for the denial of the intellect, emphasising sexuality. "My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says is always true." 46

Oates's sensual style of narration in her fiction, filled with physical imagery and the metaphors of the body are clear endorsements of this aspect of Lawrenceanism. Oates adopts this style as a strategy to engage her readers, emotionally stirred and mentally obsessed, concentrating on the concrete reality of the senses, while Fitzgerald ignored consummate genital love, considering it as mere 'yearning' and a 'frustrating' experience. Oates, like Lawrence, is fascinated with the power and dynamics of sex. Frederick J. Hoffman mentions that physical love is allied with creation for it opens the door to a secret, mysterious and dark world, the world of "hidden nakedness." Artists seem compelled to explore, bring into light and creatively represent this world. 47 G. F. Waller records that


47 Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism and the Literary Mind p. 287
Oates "focusses repeatedly on the numinous aura of sexuality, on how sexuality contributes to, or so often mocks our attempts to order our lives." 48 Theodore Reik mentions that psychoanalysts wanted in fiction a detailed discussion of sexuality not for eroticism in the subject matter but to study the writer's ingenious ways of dealing with this subject. 49 Maurice Valency writes that the Troubadours started the tradition of concentrating the erotic attention upon tiny areas of behaviour in their lyric poetry. By transforming the quickly forgotten joy of physical union into a long cherished love affair adorned with a wealth of highly charged poetic detail, the Troubadours have taken the mere athletic activity of sexual pursuit into the aesthetics. 50

American psycho, as Fiedler and others have explained, found no satisfaction in the consumption of relationships between man and woman to breach the gulf between the consciousness and unconsciousness. The great American novelists, experts though of loneliness and terror, scrupulously avoided the passionate encounter between man and woman. They were reluctant to offer even a 'full fledged mature woman' in their fiction. Starting from Brockden

48 G.F. Waller, Dreaming America, p. 17


Brown and Cooper, through Poe, Melville and Twain, to Faulkner and Hemingway, there appears a quest for an innocent substitute for adulterous passion and marriage. Oates appears to provide a variation to this tradition by suggesting a sentimental relationship, at once erotic and immaculate. She depicts in her fiction a sexual union, committin', its participants neither to society nor to sin and yet symbolizing the union of the 'ego' with the 'id.' Oates appears to offer her opinion on sexuality with a striking comment:

Making love does not demand of Alexis such exquisite control, such deep affection, such respect .... Making love is some thing; technical a more skill at least a kind of talent; making music is something impossible to fathom. The one is diversion, the other is life itself (UL.55).

Eric Fromm, in a discourse on destructive nature mentions, that in no sphere of behaviour does the character of a person show, more clearly than in the sexual act. A person's love, tenderness, sadism, masochism, greed, narcissism, anxiety, and in fact all other character traits are beautifully expressed in the sexual behaviour.\(^51\) It is the sexuality in the major works of Otes's fiction, that reveals the unpredictable and vulnerable nature of personality. Oates's most serious purpose of writing is

to graphically represent, personality caught in the fever of violent passion. When personality learns to subdue the environmental determinism, recognizing the 'power of the possible' in emotional stability, sexuality can really be a creative force. Lacking this virtuosity, Oates's characters are washed away by the flood of the carnal love and lose themselves into despair once the relationship is consummated. Karen in With Shuddering Fall leaves her devout catholic home, obsessively attracted sexually to Shar, a symbol of flux. When he dies in a crash, Karen loses control and is admitte into the psychiatric ward. "Her frenzy turned to thoughts about Shar - She would cry aloud at the memory of his body, his muscles and sweating back, his clenched teeth, his strong thighs" (WSF.296). Sexual desire tends to appear for Oates as a terrible force affecting the personality. Love has the power to unsettle all that appears permanent and can transform a life of rationality and strength into morbid fear and fragility. Oates like Lawrence, invokes through human sexuality, the Nietzschean vision of the self, establishing control. Oates attempts to transcend the motivating reality of the limitations of pain, memory and fear, through a life, devoted to senses. She appears to be convinced that life affirming human values can thrive only in such a climate. Unlike Kafka who did not examine the possibility of
the spiritualization of physical love, Oates considers "that the experience of erotic love can create another 'self,' a personality that is the result of the lover's spiritual unity" (NHNE.295). Her story "Bodies" spiritualizes love through a thoroughly erotic representation of a relationship, while "The Sacred Marriage" abandons the tangible and ephemeral sensuality.

Oates seems to be subtly suggesting through such anoral demonstrations in her fiction, the insignificance of the satiation of physical needs, when the emotional needs are all embracing. Oates appears to employ sexuality as a means of self realization. It is in this sexual grade love has become not only refined and complex but also more intense. Biology explains that the female sexual impulse is directed with a desire to be pursued and won by the male. Oates's female characters apart from the natural demonstration of instinctual appreciation of manly strength and courage also venture, desperately seeking; identity. The traditional womanly roles stifle their zeal in existence. They gravitate to a radical behaviour seeking adulterous sexuality. For then the gratification of their sensual appetites out side marriage denotes identity. They ultimately reconcile to the situation that sex and love like everything else are in a state of flux. Only the particular moments of the union round their being. Experiencing the reality of another person through the
tangible sensual relationship, Oates's characters attempt
to subdue the sense of estrangement.

Oates seems to appreciate Karen Horney's opinion that
men and women feeling insecure and unprotected turn erotic
and create an erotic atmosphere between themselves and
others, whether or not particularly attracted by them.
Creating the emotionally disturbed characters refusing to
believe the genuine affection, Oates makes them see a
potential sexual partner in any man or woman. Karen Horney
explains that under the circumstances the only way of
getting human contact is through sexual relations. 52

G.F. Waller, while noting John Updike's remarks that the
"Uncontaminated act of 'the sensuous passage way into a
woman', provides a transcendent purpose of secular lives,"
explains that "while acknowledging the hunger for purpose,
Oates also observes that love must be understood as a
violent and unstoppable force, not simply an instinctive
urge to achieve rest or transcendence." 53 Oates describes
the despairing and grasping nature of violent sexuality in
her novel, The Assassine: "Harvey labored over her, his
eyes closed, his hands now shut into fists on either side
of her head, his body raised slightly from her - and

52 Karen Horney, The Neurotic Personality of Our Time
pp. 152-153.

53 John Updike, Picked up Pieces (New York: Knopf, 1975)
P. 473, G.F. Waller, Dreaming America, p. 17.
relieved of his weight, she felt her mind drift and spin and dart mixed in with the air hammers and Harvey's strained gasping breath and yet freed of them, soaring away from "them" (A.415).

Charlotte G. mentions that in "Oates's fiction sadomasochism is such a major component of sexual relations, it is not surprising that she portrays physical relationships as certainly disappointing and even destructive." Her understanding of the sensual love reveals not only an impulse for union but also an impulse for destruction and even for devouring. In certain situations Oates describes, eating and love making become synonyms. The expression of maniac sexual appetite of Oates's female protagonists seems to contain a clear psychological implication. Aware of their inner inadequacies they consider the sexuality as a symbolic act of filling the void. Karen Horney writes that "the neurotic need for affection often takes the form of a sexual infatuation or an insatiable hunger for sexual gratification." She adds that "a great deal of sexual activity today is more an outlet for psychic tensions than a genuine sexual drive and therefore to be regarded more as a sedative than as a genuine sexual enjoyment or happiness." Fiedler also notes the representation of

54 Charlotte G. Women and Literature, 5-2, pp.22-23

55 Karen Horney, The Neurotic Personality of our Time, p.147, 159.
sexual encounter in American Novel as an expression of psychic turmoil. Oates employs sex often as a direct expression of neurotic anxiety. While her male characters indulge in arson, rape, riot, and wanton destruction, her female characters express their aggressive attitudes through violent involvements in extramarital sexuality. The marital expression appears somehow to Oates as a subdued physical expression denoting even a negation of genital sexuality. Despite the depiction of Oates's women characters fervently desiring sexuality, they remain often mostly frigid and passive recipients in the process of love making. Charlotte G. notes in the passage of Do With Me What You Will, terms suggesting acts of pathological nature in the description of sexual intercourse such as 'terrible', 'spasm', 'brutal', 'scream', 'wildly', 'viciously', 'agony', 'crazy', 'murderous' and even 'mad'. Oates appears to emulate Yeats' tragedies in turning her stories into rituals of sacrifice. They compel the human element to risk the humanity often through the flesh, through the sexual intercourse with the other worldly, desiring the supernatural knowledge. Yeats says in A Vision that "the tragedy of sexual intercourse is the perpetual

56 Leslie A. Fiedler, Love And Death In American Novel, p.71.

57 Charlotte G. Women and Literature, 52, pp.21-22.
virginity of the soul." Oates's concern is to desecrate the perpetual virginity, while escaping the hold of the body. She ventures to demonstrate the possible solution for the human predicament, building her stories around the tragic rites. Oates attempts to depict a relationship wherein a mythical and incantatory dissolution of the individual personality into a confident 'known' and 'being known' is achieved through the physical relationship.

Like Lawrence, Oates seems to consider sexuality as a "cosmic flow" symbolic of the state of flux. Her characters experience sexuality as a terrible power spilling even into their dreams. It becomes a pathological condition as well as a relation depicting the complexity in the reality. Oates notices the decadence of the human race, and represents the humanity needlessly moving towards death. G.F.Waller informs, that Oates while wanting to locate "a flame" or a "Life Everlasting;" wretenth; through the cosmos for ever and giving us our renewal," is confident as Lawrence that "one can get in touch with it," through the sensual human relationships.

 Conjugal expression: The study proceeds from the lysis


G.F.Waller, Drawing America, p.21.
of the ephemeral, but a highly rejuvenating morality to a
firmer base, seeking the "life everlasting, wretched"
through the cosmos." The conjugal expression offers a
significant connotation to life, defining reliability and
the kindered feeling. American literary imagination
persistently delineated a perverted expression of love,
considering marriage to a woman as an intolerable act.
The distinguished fiction of the towering persons of
Cooper, Poe, Dave, Melville, Twain, James, Faulkner and
Hemingway seem to reveal an archetype at work. They have
all turned away from society to nurture, desperately
avoiding the fact of women, marriage, and child bearing.

The extension of the elementary sexual impulse into
conjugal affections with its complex associations seems
sociologically the most important feature in the natural
history of love. Frederick J. Hoffman mentions that
"since a happy creative marriage is the most genuine source
of creative endeavour, society should above all make such
a marriage possible."60 Marriage is a potential relation-
ship joining man and woman in a family situation. Oates
has understood family as the key to mankind's meaningful
form of life, being a vital link in man's emotional
stability. The concept of man as the 'house keeper' and

60 Frederick J. Hoffman, *Freudianism and the Literary
Mind*, p.283
woman as the 'home maker' did not appeal to Oates's imagination. Oates represents the mother as vainly striving to invoke the stability at home all through her fiction.

Oates appears to consider marriage in her fiction as a state of tragic tension. Marriage seems to be a relationship riddled with the irresolvable conflicts. Like Nietzsche, Oates saw marriage as a dynamic force always in flux, requiring an application most cleverly cultivated to keep it in good humour. Oates represents in her fiction the narcissistic exploitative character, stifling the spirit of harmony in a marital situation. Her characters often search for a nonexistent perfection in marriage as in other vocations. Most of Oates's male characters in her short fiction are flat, stereotyped with very little control to boast over anything. They remain as nonentities without any responsibilities, or sense of participation. What little of marriage left in the familial situation is exercised with the feminine narcissistic character. Oates's Marriages and Infidelities with 24 stories, makes an objective study of the institution of marriage. "Accomplished Desires" in this collection represents the mistaken notions and misunderstood human relationships. A treatise on how the educated understand the marriage, driving it to hopeless and desperate ends, this story questions the very sanctity in marriage.
It reflects a continental culture where marriage appears to be a contract, an antithesis as though to the oriental situation, which thoroughly sanctifies the cohabitation of man and woman. Barbara of the story mentioned "thought of how reality was too violent for poetry, and the love itself shimmered helplessly before the confrontation with living people and their demands." (ML. 136) Dorie who marries Mark Arber after Barbara's death "felt strangely cheated, a part of her murder... She stood weeping again, helplessly... she was herself and that was fact, a final fact she would never overcome." (ML. 149) Ira Kapp, succinctly notes that "in the fiction of Joyce Carol Oates, we are taught that the real opportunities in marriage are for mutual demoralization and destruction." In the process of escaping such a marital situation, adultery appears to be the only way out. Adultery can be considered as an act of vengeance and a striking out for freedom. Oates employs this tool much too often suggesting a liberation from the traditional female roles. "I was in love" is a story tracing the agony and urgency the psyche endures charting the extent of flesh. The protagonist is sensitively and passionately feminine for her role as a wife, mother and even as an adulteress. With a capacity to make the unbelievable believable, Oates makes adultery - 

61 Ira Kapp, The New Leader, December 11, 1972, p.9
profane act of marital infidelity, into a sacred, liberating avocation. Oates appears to provide a critique on conjugal love by stretching her imagination across the void plains of lovelessness and passion. Fiedler observes that American writer feared maturity and marriage seemed to him its essential sign. Oates's characters, springing from the familiar situations appear at the outset as deeply entrenched in the inevitable condition of marriage. They reveal slowly their aversions to maturity and attempt to wriggle themselves out of any responsibility. Zeenobia Mistri ventures to prove that "Oates's protagonists fail because they yearn for a joining together, without mending together. They seek to 'control' and 'love' simultaneously and they split under the pressure of their nudity."  

Walter Clemons observes Oates mentioning, "I believe we achieve our salvation or our ruin, by the marriages we contract. I conceived of a book of marriages, some are conventional marriages of men and women, others are marriages in another sense - with a phase of art, with some thing that transcends the limitations of the ego." 

Petite J. Michael contends that Oat s's women are driven to

64 Walter Clemons, Newsweek, December 11, 1972, p. 77.
 illicit affairs vexed with the drudgery and alienation and frustrated in seeking a satisfying identity. Passion revives their sense of themselves and they ultimately understand that they have only subordinate roles in marriage which institutionalized the female dependency.  

65 Simon de Beauvoir in her classic The Second Sex passionately argues that adultery is the fitting reply to the male sexual caprices, contending that marriage finds its natural fulfilment in adultery, she quotes Engels remarking, "Love in the modern sense of the word, appeared in antiquity only outside the bounds of official society. The point where antiquity stopped in its search for sexual love is just where the middle ages started: adultery, Simon de Beauvoir emphatically adds "And that is indeed the form that love will assume as long as the institution of marriage lasts." 66 Another facet of the conjugal love that is very conspicuous in Oates's fiction is the institution of divorce. Most of Oates's male and female portrayals either heavily indulge in adulterous activities tossed restlessly in passion or languish in isolation, stunned and shaken by the impact of divorce. Oates has shown in story after story


that the divorced are the fraternity who have gone through terrible emotional turmoil. She depicts divorce as an exclusive Hell to the concerned parties. Through this civilized instrument, meant as an escape mechanism, Oates makes her characters reflect on divorce as an imperfection in owning up one's own dismal failure. She reveals the flaw that brought the marriage to ruin. Her fiction informs that the bonds which kept the numbers together making a 'house' a 'home' are slowly vanishing. Even children have come to represent less and less of a binding force in marriage dissolved in spirit and flesh, constituting what sociologists call the 'empty shell families.'

Ambivalent expression: Love depends entirely on common interests and pursuits. Love when not reciprocated gets repressed by the arousal of the opposite emotion of hate. Close contact, often causing restrictions and frustrations, culminates in resentment. It is love that prevents this resentment from flaring into the open. Percival M. Symonds writes, that love achieves its highest expression, only when hate finds a constructive outlet. He mentions that love flourishes best when hate is sublimated. 67 Excess of Narcissism, pronounces aggressive tendencies makes the undiluted expression of hate highly vocal. Oates

67 Percival M. Symonds, The Dynamics of Human Adjustment, 2:540.
creates many incidents where love turns inside out, resembling a furious unrelenting 'hatred' nearly infantile in its intensity. Her novel Unholy Loves (1979) captures the glory of those emotions interacting off and on with all the characters. The incomplete fusion of aggressive and erotic trends reveals itself in many forms of exaggerated cruelty in human affairs, noted in great frequency in Oates's fiction.

Oates appears to restrict her creative vision with the workings of the abnormal psyche like Dostoevsky. She seems as baffled by the phenomenon of love as the great master. Oates evidently views love as the inclusive and master passion. Alfred Kazin observes brilliantly, that for Oates love "is an attraction of person to person so violent that it expresses itself as obsession and takes on the quality of fatality." He notes that the emotions of her characters are stark physical truths like the strength or weakness of one's body and she herself is the most intensely unyielding lover in her books. Kazin is terribly impressed by the force with which Oates follows so many people through every trace of their feeling, thinking, and moving. He lauds Oates's obsessive patience with the sheer factuality of human existence. David Madden obsce that focussing on familial relationships in her fiction,

Oates constructs the entire web of blood ties and examines the hatred, spite, conflicts, traps, anguish and guilt." 69

The Wheel of Love: Ernst Reischl's jacket design provides a real insight into Oates's collection of short fiction. The Wheel of Love, Reischl superimposes the author's name and the title on a photograph of a linear construction by Naum Gabo. It refers a wheel-like frame, which is distorted from pure circularity by the tension of hundreds of taut thread spokes, converging and diverging within the frame. The shape is something between a circle and a diamond, the sweeping curves of the outer edge contrasting with the severe yet fragile lives of the spokes. A more appropriate illustration cannot be imagined for Oates's twenty stories of people striving with the complications of various love relationships. It is as if the lines of their lives intersect and withdraw from one another, stretching tightly on a frame distorted by their own inevitable tension.

The representation of the wheel appears to be a symbol with literary connotations. The instrument can be the 'Wheel of Fortune,' which makes the individual ride high for a short while, before the spin of the wheel

collection are heavily overlaid with sexuality and violence. It appears that Oates believes love in love, always causing psychic violence to themselves. Sheer horror underlines each of the stories in layers of varying depth. Oates's capacity to create horror has been often compared to that of Poe and Melville and she is more reminiscent of Flannery O'Connor. Oates offers in The Wheel of Love "a theme of love, but love more familiar to Ophelia than Juliet," the Virginia Quarterly Review records reviewing the collection. Each story has a suicide, breakdown, adultery or some such horror as its pervading event. Oates records admirably the dominant terrors of the modern civilization highlighting the oxies of madness, fear and emptiness. "The Wheel of Love" forms a lens through which Oates examines the tortures of love. Pearl K. Bell observes that Oates "Projects with conviction love as a disease, an affliction an uncontrollable psychic rash. In her hands love becomes a universal form of self ordained depravity, often obsessive and perverse an involuntary act of enslaving self condemnation."

Depicting the deprived and the sufferers of love, Oates drives them to endure "fire, flood, and earthquake."

The anguished narrator of "Unmauled, Unwritten Letters"

71 The Virginia Quarterly Review (Winter 1971), p. XV

vocalizes this agony:

"I have never wanted to love any one;
and risk are too great. Yet I have fallen
love for the second time in my life and this
time the sensation is terrifying, bitter, violent.
It ends the first cycle, supplants all that love,
erases all that affection - destroys everything.
I stand back dazed, flat on my heels" (WOL 68).

The title story in this collection is prefaced by an excerpt from Stanley Kunitz's poem:

Some must break
Upon the wheel of love, but not the strange,
The Secret Lords, whom only death can change. 73

Her fiction meticulously captures the transitory and
incandescent moments, dissects them deftly, and records in
all sincerity the results of a thorough surgery. Without
permitting any relationship to escape a close scrutiny,
Oates keeps the wheel spinning. In The Fabulous Beasts
Oates expresses that "By Love, as by roots in the soil
we will be connected to one another." She describes in
such profound notions her concern for existentialism.
Rollo May quotes Kierkegaard mentioning "When we are dealing
with human beings, no truth has reality by itself:
it is always dependent upon the reality of the immediate
relationship." 74 Her choice of John Donne's line

73 Stanley Kunitz, "Lovers Relentlessly," Selected
Lines 19-20 quoted in "The Wheel of Love" in The
Wheel of Love. p.190.

"we can die by it, if not live by love," from "The Canonization," for epigraph to The Wheel of Love is an apt exercise in the process of spiritualization of love.

Developing and modulating the stories like the movements of a symphony with an incontestable flow and logic, Oates deftly touches the notes of ecstasy in the terrors of love. She appears to suggest vehemently, that it is the terrors and not the ecstasies that contain her stories of love.