CHAPTER III

THE DARK ANGEL

Because Thou lovest the Burning-ground,
I have made a Burning-ground of my heart:
That thou, Dark one, Haunter of the Burning-ground
Mayest dance Thy eternal dance.

Bengali "Hymn" to Kali.

Kiss of Death: In the middle of a vividly expressed ecstatic feeling, the thought of death emerges in the Viennese folk songs. It is as though to celebrate an enjoyment of life and sentimentality. The tale of fleeting life, instead of leading to gloom, serves as a stimulus to enliven life. Viennese Dances by Beethoven, the Movements of Mozart, the symphonies of Schubert, the Scherzos and Adagios of Bruckner and Mahler the Waltzes of Johann Strauss and the entire Austro-German Culture, revels in the momento vivre as expressed by Goethe. It denotes a permanent vacillation between the moods of love and death.

Desiring a Beethoven or a Mozart, even while participating in interviews, Oates reveals a passion to seek the intensification of life, through the thoughts of death. Oates in a recent novel makes her character Brigit subscribe to this sentiment. Brigit
"is in love and therefore thinks of death: it is a romantic reaction, an instinctive impulse. Wishing to love and wishing to live keenly in the body - as she has not lived for years - she naturally thinks of the body's breakdown its perverse but inevitable failure." (UL.171) Oates's fiction evokes a frigidity of personality, a suffering from love. The presence of constant threat of physical and psychic destruction in the love affairs Oates describes, is a sure pointer to the opinion, that love is the champion of life, engaged in a relentless struggle against death. This relationship of love and death constitutes much of the talk associated with Dr. Krokowski in Thomas Mann's The Magic Mountain. The fiction of Oates suggests that her characters' loved with a love that was more than love' and were ultimately carried away by death. Oates appears to reflect Goethe's 'Kiss of Death' in a psychologically significant sense. The thought that it is the lover whom the girl finds dead after the night's sexual indulgence, that she desires to share death with him as she did the sexual union a few hours before, describes the predicament as Oates comprehends.

The Dark Angel: The deep and dazzling darkness the mystics have seen in God is evident in the intimi-
dating, yet wierdly beautiful figure of Mother Kali. She holds a severed human head in one hand and a skull cup dripping with blood in the other. She dances a midnight dance of elation on the burning grounds. As the momentum of dance increases, her rounded eyes protrude from their sockets and her blood red tongue hangs out of her mouth as though she were ready to devour the world. With her long wavy tresses spread out behind her like a black halo, Kali, the dark coloured, blood evoc Goddess, formidable and fearsome, dances her way into the heart of the devotee. Mother Kali, as the personification of death, inspires awe in human hearts. The idea of destruction and death, apparent in nature's dark, destructive moods fascinates the man of religion, the mystic and artist to visualise Kali as the Dark Angel. They draw back in fear at the outset, but they finally succeed in approaching her and expressing the experience that affects them so deeply. The fascination that her image has for man can be observed in innumerable depictions of her grotesque and sinister forms in her home Bengal. Artists feel impelled to portray Kali as the fierce symbol of death.

Destroyer and Preserver: Hindu mythology depicts God Nataraja dancing furiously, accompanied by a primeval thundering drumbeat and a clash of cymbals. He is the
Lord of Destruction feared by all. The climax of the rhythmic cosmic dance may lead to a holocaust. But the heightend awareness of a mystic and visionary, depicts instead, the resultant exuberant creativity leading to the emergence of new worlds. Temple towers, cathedral spires and domes of mosques attest the undefined yearning, to move beyond the mundane, while giving faith, a concrete shape in vedic chants, organ music and recitations of the Kuran. This faith to see beyond the portals of death is eloquent in poetry as in mysticism.

Dust to the dust! but the pure spirit shall flow
Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
A portion of the Eternal...

"Adonais" P.B. Shelley.

Thanatos: Freud formulated in 1920 a theory, revising his earlier thesis centered around the sexual drive. Speculating on the beginning of life and observing biological parallels, Freud came to believe that besides the instinct to preserve the living substance, there exists another instinct seeking to dissolve life, returning it to the primeval inorganic state. He has postulated the theory of the Death Instinct, Thanatos balancing life instinct, Eros. "The tendency of the organic is to return to the inorganic. The goal of all
life is death."¹ Freud was the first modern psychologist to investigate love, hate, ambition, greed and other human passions turning life intense and rich. Delineated by dramatists and novelists previously, these passions have become the subject matter of scientific exploration since Freud's great interest. Considering the human destructive-ness as one of the two fundamental passions in man, Freud has bestowed on it a rare dignity.

**Oates and Thanatos:** Oates expresses in *With Shuddering Fall,* "That is how our lives are.... The pressures are opposed, they fight each other.... two forces, one to live and one to die" (WSF.140). Writing about Lawrence's poetry, Oates suggests that "Unlike Freud, Lawrence would assert that the so-called destructive instinct is really a manifestation of intellectual perversion, not healthy instinct" (NHNE.48). Regarding Lawrence as a visionary artist, like him, Oates appears to consider the death instinct as a perversion, as a pathological expression. Obsessed with the ideas of old age, dying, death from decay, death without cancelling existence and death from an excess of life, Oates reveals a great understanding.

of this instinct. She depicts it as a destructive drive, usually directed against the self and when directed outward, with the capacity to destroy others. She even represents this instinct blended with sexuality getting transformed into harmless impulses of sadomasochism, merely awarding the sensations of controlling and choking life.

The Concern for Death: Man is constantly under the sway of an impulse either to destroy himself or others. He could do precious little to escape this tragic alternative. Glen W. Davidson contends that "human kind has been concerned about dying for as long as we can remember."? Death has been dealt not only in the context of various theologies, philosophies and sciences but also in the literary perspectives. Man has always viewed death with mystery and superstition. Though he had ventured to understand the traumatic death, the natural death has been more difficult for him to grasp. He has noted countless efforts throughout history, rationalizing this final reality, often manifested in ritual, symbol, and philosophical perspectives. The philosophical "why" of death still remains defying explanation.

Saul Bellow mentions in an interview that the root of the light is in the heavy and the source of all humour is in the grave.\textsuperscript{3} Johann Strauss the noted composer went into raptures, at the thought of death. He took it to lyrical heights announcing, "The grave is my greatest joy."\textsuperscript{4} Fiedler mentions that death is the true Muse in American literature. He reports that readers find in the fact or threat of sexual violation. He considers death as the supreme rapist who threatens when all other seducers have been banished to the semipornographic pulps.\textsuperscript{5} The thought of death has become so obsessive and all pervasive to the modern thinkers, that the historian Arnold Toynbee writes, "Death becomes an infringement on our right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."\textsuperscript{6} It has made a startling return to prominence as a fantasy in the American mass media and popular


culture. As the sensitivity towards destructiveness is rapidly diminishing in the present industrial society, necrophilia - the attraction to what is dead, decaying lifeless and purely mechanical is rapidly increasing. This tendency to appreciate death is seen very subtly projected in the art and literature of the present times. 

Eric Fromm suggests, that when machine constitutes the meaning of progress, man becomes merely an appendix to the machine and the Falangist motto "Long live Death" threatens to become the secret principle of society. 

The attitude of the present generation appears as paradoxical in denying death, when it is very real. Failing to reconcile with the dream of the infinite self, like the medieval times the new generation avoids death and sends it to the recesses of the unconscious. Modern man no longer accepts the inevitable condition of death, because he is less inclined to believe in a transcendent immortality. He imagines himself dying only in intellectual terms while emotionally denying the fact because it is something he is yet to experience. Except for occasional speculative comments by psychologists, death was rarely accepted as a relevant theme for psychological study.

Americans appear to think of death often, though they very deliberately avoid talking about death. One early study observes that most Americans think of death some where between once a month and daily. The only time they never think about death is during, before, or after sexual intercourse. Certain studies revealed that women showed a more positive view of death. They appeared frightened and thrilled at the prospect of examining death.  

The Resurrection of the Dead: The third section "resurrection of the Dead" in Women whose lives are food men whose lives are money, Oates's anthology of poety, addresses death and dying. While discussing Dostoevsky, Oates remarks that his psychological insights deal mainly with the self-lacerating effects of egoism and its corollary, the wish for destruction and death. (EI.112). Frederick J. Hoffman, eruditely informs that "the odor of decay seems to prevail in modern fiction - a sense of the death which dwells in society it self." A close examination of each novel of Oates reveals her interest in resurrecting death. With Shuddering Fall ends with a probable suicide, brutality and the heroine's admission


9 Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism p.171.
into a mental hospital. *A Garden of Earthly Delights* ends with an attempted matricide, patricide, suicide and the heroine's institutionalization. *Expensive People* ends with matricide, *them* begins with a brisk little inaugural murder, proceeding to a mental breakdown and an attempted homicide and ending with an urban riot, a gruesome carnage, *Wonderland* beginning with a family massacre exposes necrophilia, cannibalism and other horrors. Each of these first novels of Oates, "deals with a male imagination and consciousness that seeks to liberate itself from certain confinements" as Oates points out. The means of liberation appears to be violent death which runs as a backdrop for all these novels.

After *Wonderland*, Oates writes that she has come "to the end of a phase of my life" and desires to move towards a more articulate moral position, not just dramatizing nightmarish problems but trying to show possible ways of transcending them...I want to do what I can to bring it nearer."  

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10 Quoted in Linda Kuehl, "An Interview with Joyce Carol Oates," *Commonweal*, December 5, 1969, p.307-308

evidence for this newer vision of hope. The *Assassins: A Book of Hours* (1975) also reveals this spirit only as a reaction to the deterministic world that surrounds Oates's characters. G.F. Waller records, that this novel is probably the most concentratedly grim of all of Oates's novels, focussing on death, murder, and the spiritual destructiveness of a family obsessed with prestige, power, and political aspirations."12 The Petrie family in *The Assassins* represents the obsessive materialism of western culture, leading to death, perceived as a threat to the ego. Death becomes a tool in tracing the ego's fate of the future without the self. Oates explains while writing on Kafka, that "it is not the higher life that knows good or evil or dread, but only the self in its fear of an ending to the higher life, as if, in releasing itself even from fear, it would suffer a tremendous loss." (NHNE.297). G.F. Waller while suggesting the affinities of Oates's *The Assassins* with Kafka's *The Castle* mentions that it articulates a fear of life, a sense that material existence is imperfect and continually threatened, a desperate incessant struggle against flux, ambiguity, and absurdity. Waller adds that this novel as well, expresses some thing of Kafka's and Lawrence's search for transcendence beyond the mere

personal, beyond the self obsessiveness of the ego." In this novel Oates represents death as the ultimate threat to the autonomy of the ego. Andrew Petrie, a powerful right-wing political philosopher is the central character of the novel. He has been assassinated and each of the novel's three parts, concentrates on the effects of his death on his brother Hugh, an important paranoid cartoonist, on his young second wife Yvonne and on his religious younger brother Stephen. Keeping these three characters in the centre, Oates invokes a haunting sense of death in the novel. Yvonne is made to experience many premonitions of her husband's death and there is information about earlier attempts to assassinate Andrew in the novel. Hugh attempts to kill himself and Yvonne is hacked to death, ultimately. There is the sense that "every one is doomed." (A.561) and Oates suggests a frightening feeling of arbitrariness in that death. "This sort of arbitrary, whimsical death...death by accident, almost...It's very American and very frightening." (A.560). Hugh/Yvonne project the spirit of the novel in their talk. "He was good man and he died horribly. We all die horribly, Yvonne." (A.378). The members of the family, including the patriarchal father

13 Ibid
in a Catholic rest home in California, Andrew's brother's wife, ex-wife, son and an assembly of cousins experience his death directly touching their own fragile egos. The three parts of the novel are held together by three structural concepts - the world, the flesh and the spirit. The first part defines ego in terms of the sheer brutality of the physical world, "haphazard circumstances... a rift in the Cosmic fabric through which all sorts of ugly things poured." (A.103). The violence of sexuality Oates describes in this novel details the agonies of the flesh. Hugh occupies the centre stage. Yvonne becomes the sexual target of the psychic pressures of the P tert family. "Love was the word they assigned to their need, their ephemeral, egotistic need; she was the accidental object of that need and might easily be replaced by another object." (A.293) She cries at one point, "what do you want from me - all of you?" (A.325)

Their answer evidently is frustrating and destructive. The long first section of the novel details the disintegration of Hugh under the impact of his brother's death. Emaciated, embittered and despising, Hugh is a despicable and weak character, betraying the death of his spirit. His plan to seduce Yvonne appears to be a confused mixture of revenge, exploitation and childish perversity. He
experiences no genuine desire but "only the angry memory of desire, the idea of desire." (A.132) The portrayal of Stephen Petrie provides the commentary on the third part dealing with the spirit. He panicks before the possibility of total surrender. "Not existing, not wishing to exist, he lived a life of constant surveillance; his host was Stephen Petrie and he was forced to dwell with in that host, sharing a common bloodstream, common organs, a skeleton, a dim reservoir of memories." (A.446) A strange recluse and a religious fanatic, Stephen finds his life constantly dislocated by visitations from a realm of experience beyond himself. He knows "the essential absurdity of the exterior world," where "fragments daily did baffle" (A.494) where people are trapped "in bodies they can't recognise as diseased." (A.500-501) G.F. Waller in a brilliant study of the novel mentions that "what Stephen comprehends and what he embodies in the novel pattern of meaning is that to surrender oneself to God is to have no self, no strong centre of consciousness, no being - toward anything. The true self is a realm of absolute negation," Waller elaborates, "Stephen's experience of God seems to draw much more on Eastern and Western sources, in its suggestion that evil, suffering,
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and materialism itself are manifestations of the same underlying spiritual alienation." But Oates represents Stephen finding no way to relate the vision with the fact. As Oates's most forbidding novel to date, The Assassins describes that the reality is so despairing that the human beings are in this world not because of their free choice, and from which apparently there is no escape.

This portrayal of doom and destruction by Oates is as if to counter the typical American intellectualism, treating all strong feelings as suspect and for surpassing the emotional needs. Oates is attempting to project the human beings as more than disembodied intellects through the suggestion of pervading discomfort. She seems to offer an idea that the ultimate degradation of our dream is in our bodies, needing a through cleansing. Hospitals and beauty parlours become the shrines of a priesthood in her fiction, designed to clean and purify bodies. Often the heavy sorrow of the body becomes unbearable and the repressed fear of decay and disintegration erupts through the cleaned surfaces.

It has been explained earlier in this thesis that Oates chooses death and allied themes with a purpose. The American novelists sincerely attempt to make the conflicts

14 G.F. Waller, p.196-197.
in reality generally palatable. Needing a proper literary mode to depict the social and psychological terrors of the complex American times they perceive the gothic mode ideally suited.

The Gothic romance: Belonging to a class of melodrama, the Gothic portrayed the power of darkness, with the subordinated events producing the necessary terror. The 'maiden in flight' a distinct gothic symbol denoted the loss of religious and ethical moorings. Representing the artist's uprooted soul, it also described the run from secular and religious authority. It vigorously expressed a passionate desire for liberation from the decaying tradition. The singular character of gothic representation was the symbolic content presented in a highly condensed dreamlike and nightmarish experience. The gothic represented a transgression in which a creature destroyed his maker conveying horror with its symbolic meaning. It is not the enacted violence that grips the reader but rather the extent of his own identification with those impulses which underlie the action. The 'Faustian Commitment' or the 'Diabolic Bargain' constituted the core of the gothic romance. As a commitment to the vagaries of the unconscious, it represented a deliberate plunge into
insanity and damnation. It narrated the tale of abandonment of marriage and family death, and rejection of all bonds of love and sympathy. Fiedler describes it as the tale of a person who had surrendered the hope of Heaven for the endurance of Hell making a pact with Satan.\textsuperscript{15} Mortan Kaplan and Klass have established a connection between gothic horror and the incest motif quoting Elino Railo: "as the motive offers opportunity of evoking that terror and suspense fill d atmosphere of mystery which is one of the chief aims of the terror romanticism, it is to be expected that whatever literature turns into romantic channels the subject of incest will sooner or later emerge."\textsuperscript{16} This subgenre detailed the ambivalence in the parental fixation. Nevertheless the oedipal situation in gothic works was detailed with great restraint by a deftly given direction.

The term 'gothic' once reserved for the decadent and unreal tales is applied in the post-modern times to a kind of natural depiction of the commonplace, including the

\textsuperscript{15} Leslie A. Fiedler, \textit{Love and Death}, pp. 133-134.

story of everyday bloodshed. Long before symbolism has been invented in France there was a full fledged tradition of symbolism in America born of the contradictions of the national life and a peculiar puritanical inheritance. Gothic romances exploited this language of symbol, invoking the dreams and the repressed guilts motivating the action. All major American Writers from Brockden Brown to Joyce Carol Oates sought out the gothic for a special reverence. Fiedler rightly mentions that "until the gothic has been discovered, the serious American novel could not begin: and as long as that novel lasts the gothic cannot die."17

Oates's gothic precept: Sanford Pinsker while assailing major part of Oates's fiction, praises the virtue he notices, "no doubt Miss Oates's work will one day be subjected to full critical ars et... But it is the gothic element 'we feel' and for ... Oates, that may be enough."18 Oates seems to view the world as a gothic place radiating brutality in the urban and rural squalor. John Gardner, remarks that Oates "writes gothic novels and has described the genre as fairly accurate assessment of modern life."19 Marion C. Hodge Jr. argues that the

17 Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death, p.143
Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers. By the North Gate (1963) narrating the lives of the hill people of Eden county renders the primitive rhythms of the land. One catches the 'mysterious shadows' disturbing the simple rural lives in the stories "Swamps", "By the North Gate," "Census Taker," "Spiral," "Plot," and "where I lived and what I lived for."

Many of these stories contain violence resulting from the suppressed psychological urges graphically representing the sordid details of the breakdowns, rapes, suicides and murders. Samuel F. Pickering Jr. writes that these tales "resemble those of the gothic novel with neuroses replacing skeletons in closets and the mood of sexual стр, д drowning out the heroines' last sigh as she falls faintingly and innocently to the castle floor."^{22}

The collection taking its title from a poem by Rihaku indicates the boundary between civilization and savagery. "Sweet Love Remembered" in particular describes the spirit of the collection. The relationship of past to present, the sense of disorder and violence and the urgent need to construct something rational out of one's movement in time are the crucial themes, the story details. The Master Plots describe, not the "surface" of her stories are as deceptively placid as rutted fields, but the terrible

groundswell culminates in sudden fissures of emotion, cries of anguished frustration, sporadic outbursts of mindless violence; also explains that "this first collection brings the most fashionable of gothic horrors to the unlikely rural areas of New York State and displays a considerable talent in the doing." 23

Upon the sweeping Flood and other Stories (1966) is Oates's second collection with southern rural characters who remain ignorant of their own violence. Oates reveals Flannery O'Connor's fascination for violence cleverly narrating the subtle psychological implications. These stories of bloodshed elaborate the general gloom surrounding the people without alternatives. The title story is a description of a traveller caught in a flood. He can even be considered as a metaphor of a man overtaken by unforeseen inner turmoil. Walter Stuart who shifted his faith from the 'unreliable God' to the tangible things and emotions is a self-appointed doctor of the sick Heavens in the story. With all his presumptuous notions of saving others he is absolutely empty. He drives to a farm and attempts to save an idiot boy and his insolent sister from the flood. He finds himself stranded with them in the farm house.

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which breaks apart in the violence of the storm. Defying
the natural chaotic order he obsessively dwells in imagi-
nation. Even before becoming a man, he considers himself a
saint. The erratic actions of the boy and the repulsive
nature of the girl alarm him. Like an Evangelist chasing
evil he first kills the boy and then attacks the girl, for he
considers them representing disorder. Oates seems to
argue that man's life in fact is chaotic and any effort
on the part of man to set right the chaos outside his
personal experience is self-destructive. The lines of
Edward Taylor - "We have grieved them by such physik that
they shed excrement upon our lofty heads," presented as an
epigram by Oates reveals the gothic spirit of the collection.
Oates like stuart, recognized the excremental condition of
man's existence. Millicent Bell while reviewing this
collection quotes Sartre's description of Faulkner's con-
cept of present times, "irrational in its essence: it is
an event, monstrous and incomprehensible, which comes
upon us like a thief."24 Stuart wades out towards the
rescue boat hysterically pleading to save him." He seems
frightened of the boy whose incoherence appears to
threaten him mirroring his own precarious stability. The

24 Millicent Bell, "Her own Rough Truth," New York Times
Book Review, June 12, 1966, pp.4-5.
fury of the storm is a literary mechanism to represent the conditions under which restraint is broken. Carolyn Walker rightly explains that "much" of the power of Joyce Carol Oates's fiction lies in her disturbing ability to identify and expose the fears we have deep within us."²⁵

The Wheel of Love and other Stories (1970) explores two major fears, one the individual's fear of externally inflicted physical or emotional damage as in "where Are you Going, Where Have you Been?" depicting a helpless girl's fear of male sexual aggression and as in "In the region of Ioa" detailing the fear of emotional pain resulting from the protagonists involvement and the other, the fear over the consequences of the sudden eruption of hidden psychic forces which can never be understood, anticipated and controlled. Oates's execution of these fears in her stories is an extension of the literary devises of the medieval gothic romance into the post-modern realistic fiction. "In the Region of Ioa," the much antholoi, story which won the 1967 O'Henry first prize is a typical gothic rendering. The title is inspired by Shakespeare's Measure for Measure. Both in Oates's story and in Shakespearean play the male characters are threatened.

Oates's hero with insanity and Shakespeare's hero with beheading. They are chased all round the ruined castle, crying for mercy and are forced to suffer. Oates expresses her concern for the plight of sister Irene. With a rare insight and a deft handling, Oates captures vividly the feelings and doubts of sister Irene confronted with Allen Weinstein's demands. John Alfred Avant reviewing the collection mentions that "Oates's horror is nameless and so savage that to find comparable literary experiences one must go all the way back to Poe and Melville."26 Oates like Flannery O'Connor is obsessed with man's fallen state and his futile struggle to lift himself from his condition. The bizarre characters, distorted details, the emphasis on social decadence, spiritual vacuity, and the stress on sex and violence noted in these stories are sure pointers to the gothic spirit. Robert E. Long writes though not all, some of these stories have so much violence, "in almost everyone there is a violation of an individual's identity, his sense of who he is or what life is..."27 G.F. Waller elucidates this idea by mentioning "our experience is consistently revealed as characterized by fragile gaps between word and act, ideal and reality - not in a trivial

27 Saturday Review, October 24, 1970, p.36
everyday sense but almost as a metaphysical principle, felt all the more strongly just because we are seekers of meaning, not merely of contentment."  

Marriages and Infidelities (1972), Oates's fourth collection of stories displays diminished people at various moments of crises. L.M. Charles suggests that this volume is filled with tension, violence and the despiritining American present, mentions that we have "here the Oates who cannot resist the gothic at its most luxurient, who believes that there can be no suffering without physical violence and that this is a part of every life, who slides into the trap of shock play." Her America is a reverberating symbolic structure where the commonplace as high ways, automobiles, supermarkets, shopping centers, marriages, infidelities and other features are woven into the fabric of gothic parable. Oates also introduces the typical American myth of love in death, a love which thrives only in the shadow of death. Exploring the erotic nature of death Oates reveals in it a concern for immortality, continuity, and the personal identity. A haunting anxiety, an unexplained despair, a distance from reality and an obsessive atmosphere fill these stories offering a distinct gothic colour. Peter Straub goes to the extent of suggesting


that these stories of adultery, death, murder, madness, obsessive relationships urban sense of overriding, panicked sense of unreality and the undercurrent of violence turn Oates into a frightening personality. 30 Behind the macabre details a sordid tale annotating the reality can also be discerned.

The fact that Oates can reach the frenzied heights in detailing morbid nature in bizarre incidents would make one wonder whether it is possible for a human mind to conceive such a purple world as if finding a vicarious sadomasochist. But Oates appears to believe that without such enthusiastic and romantic rendering the natural locale of the monstrous interior cannot be approached. Ida Kapp writes that "Oates is particularly successful with bleak landscapes, where the isolation is real rather than superimposed by her peculiar giant on human relations." 31 The theme Marriages and infidelities reveals infinite variation in view point, action and the kind of people involved. "The Sacred Marriage" describes a dead poet, his widow, the academics who visit their home and get caught in the spell of the young widow. "In Normal Love" is a story of murder touching a man, his wife and children as life has never done before. "Scenes of passion and despair"

30 Peter Stamb, New Statesman, August 23, 1974, p.261
mentions Ginny representing the suburbia. She gets used to her marriage and her neighbours suffering the creeps from a peculiar boy who smashes things and ultimately Ginny beats her own daughter in a neurotic frenzy. Oates displays her mastery in projecting the crisis of the extreme emotional states of the individuals living in the most complex times. Barbara A. Bannon reviewing the collection mentions that "Oates's inventiveness in dealing with an intricate tracery of betrayals, allegiances, passions never falters." 32

The Hungry Ghosts (1974) reveals Oates as a compulsive writer, urgently releasing the dream and nightmares crowding her intellect. Oates captures the gothic mood in the seven dark allusive comedies, set in a contemporary campus locale, far away from the wilderness of the secluded castle. This collection is a series of slashing satires on writers, critics, reviewers and academics, whom Oates observes as without nobility. She reveals a thoroughly gothic spirit in the story "Pilgrims Progress" which incidentally received the O. Henry Prize. She describes the academicians as unstable outside their scholarship and highly vulnerable to charismatic personalities committed to shady radical politics in the campus. John Alfred Avant, writes that

32 Barbara A. Bannon, Publisher's Weekly, August 7, 1972, p.40.
"the best Oates is pulp transformed into a unique American vision...she can be shattering as an "American Primitive." 33 Josephine Hendin mentions that Oates's vendetta is wonderfully matched on the malice of the writers and academicians when intellectual arrogance, 'envy' and 'spite' rise like phoenix, Oates too has risen to kill them with relentless intellect. 34

Oates magnificently captures the brilliant Lolita themes of passivity and destructiveness loving bare all her obsessive patterns in the twenty five stories of The Goddess and other Women (1974). The stories abound in child molestings, auto accidents, adulterous wives, reveries of rape and other sordid excursions into the American nightmare. The very first story "The Girl" reveals the 'darkness of the castle' with its 'run' and the 'pursuit' in a girl's narration of her association with a film making unit. The narrative distortions and the indirections in the story are calculated and deliberate for keeping the readers short of information. Oates knowingly blurs the connections between different time planes, thought, speech, reality and fantasy. The story


"Magna Mater" is a sermon on the corruption of the young by a neurotic adult world. It narrates the relationship between a divorced mother and her mentally ill son, describing a sense of life 'being lived at the bone.' The title story describes an upper class woman in a New York junk store finding the statuette of the Hindu Goddess Kali. Oates's choice of this ominous figure appears to be highly symbolic of her interests. Choosing such a symbol for the 'second sex' she has successfully turned the flood lights on to women's deeper impulses in her own style.

The Seduction and other stories (1975) is a collection of some of Oates's best revelations of complexity in lives generally considered to be without depth or imagination. The characters are highly inarticulate, humdrum workers and 'guncracking' teenagers. They are all complex characters worthy to live in an entirely different fictional locale. Oates reveals the mystery and intricacy in the texture of these lives. The story "Passions and Meditations," expresses Oates's penchant for despair and terror vividly. Elizabeth Pachoda contends that the turbulent force of the invisible world always carries with it those odd mixtures of terror and affirmation and perhaps Oates's most
impressive working of this combination appears in this story."\textsuperscript{35} Oates's greatness lies in the dramatization of these characters in 'hot chase,' who suddenly notice a 'strange world' beyond their known experience.

The *Poisoned Kiss and other stories* (1975) contains the stories coming as Julian Barnes puts it "from the recognisable Oates's territory of obsession and extremity, solitude and violence."\textsuperscript{36} The very titles of these stories narrate the gothic fable worthy of a fictional treatment of Mrs. Radcliff or Mary Wollstonecraft. The reviewer for *Choice* mentions that Oates borrows for this collection what the modern European masters of the morally ambiguous gothic parable and fable have exhausted."\textsuperscript{37}

"Our Lady of the Easy Death of Alferce," is a story typical of Oates, narrating the drama of futility and despair. It is a *tour de force* of a state of Virgin Mary who sheds a tear moved by her sympathy over a devotee's anguish. The sense of frustration is relieved when a much grieved mother breaks the statuette, knocking

\textsuperscript{35} Elizabeth Pochoda, "Joyce Carol Oates honouring the complexities of the real world," *New York Times Book Review*, August 31, 1975, p.6

\textsuperscript{36} Julian Barnes, *New Statesman*, May 21, 1976, p.685.

\textsuperscript{37} *Choice*, 12.9. (November 1975) p.1171.
the infant Jesus. Oates seems to attempt here a theme dealt earlier by Albert Camus in "The Plague", Dostoevsky in "The Idiot" and The Brothers Karamazov and Melville in almost everything he wrote. Oates builds a synthesis of the existential and the timeless in rendering the real world's complexities. In "The Son of God and His Sorrow" Oates while treating the crucifixion as God's punishment to Christ for failing to save the world, also dramatizes the psychic and physical violence, the impracticability of love and the spiritual corruption. Oates notes both the sense of isolation and mute sympathy as failures in functional communication. Writing as fiction that alarms and repels, Oates is only stressing at the oppressive and insistent rhythm of American life.

Oates's Crossing the Border (1976) and Night Side (1977) describe a dense world threatened by unexplained terror and grave tension. In these stories Oates presents people who are struggling against the crippling and formless social order defining a personality, though they remain inarticulate and defeated towards the close. Though Oates's stories attempt to reconstruct in the second collection the day to day dreams and nightmares into the ghostly tales in the realistic tradition of Daniel Defoe rather than imitating the culture of Walpole or
Mrs. Radcliff, there is a dominating sense of otherness, with much of the action taking place in the 'dark' producing fullfledged ghost stories. With only the 'moment' remaining timeless, the action in these stories ultimately culminates in disruption. John Romano describes the characters as "a gallery of people haunted, spooked, driven mad or victimized in general by invasions from outside the same rational borders of consciousness." Oates appears to have borrowed the occult genre to present a distinct emotional colour to her otherwise clinical studies of the pathological condition. Individual stories like "The Such Storm" have a compelling drive and sweep to remind the 'chase' in the dark corridors of the ruined castle." Publisher's Weekly comments that these "stories are devoted to mystery and imagination, the other worlds of dream and nightmares, mediums and odd happenings. Each of Oates' haunting tales has its own dreamlike quality as it leads us through darkened landscapes on untravelled roads to solitary and unfamiliar borders." 39

The present attempt to capture the gothic spirit in Oates's fiction would be significant only when some of Oates's novels are brought under the lens. Expensive people (1968), them (1969), Wonderland (1971)

and Bellafleur (1980) can be considered perfect illustrations of Oates's gothic practice.

Expensive People is a radical departure from the social milieu and gritty realities recorded in Oates's first books. The protagonist Richard Everett announces, that he is a child murderer. His world is the upper middle class suburbia a "domestic American darkness" (EP.145) in which parents are their children's molesters. His mother Nada born to immigrant parents wants to create herself a new "world that owns and controls everything." (EP.56) She wants to escape from her dark past into a realm of expensive things that "seemed emanations of a higher existence." (EP.116) He only remains the end of a woman, alternating between pride and lust, getting herself ensnared in the expensive world. Oates appears to have written this novel in the American novelistic tradition of family violence. Fiedler suggests that much of the best American fiction is a parable of the rebellious child America, engaged in an ambivalent effort to wrest itself from the domination of the mother, England. 40 This novel while following the American tradition offers a variation of the Freudian romance. Instead of killing his father to marry his mother, 40 Fiedler, Love and Death, p.23.
Richard kills his mother only to establish a profound relationship between himself and his mother. As in the gothic genre, the mother is coveted and ultimately murdered. The Oedipal child hates her for her rejection of him. The experience of the fright in this story is involved in the wish to kill, rather than the act of killing, disguising the guilt provoking gratification.

The 1969 National Book Award winner them is a perfect gothic novel. Though the machinery of the classic romance finds no expression in this novel, its effects are terrifyingly internalized. The ragged terrain of the Eden County reflecting a world of innocence and passion, making audible the gothic echoes of Faulkner, in her earlier novels are substituted in this novel as in Wonderland with the image of the city. It serves the same purpose of the 'haunted castle' transforming the dreams into the nightmares. This novel starts with a gunshot exposing the life of Loretta, struggling to escape its reverberation. A sixteen year old girl when the novel begins in 1937, with her mother dead and her father out of work, Loretta brings a young man to sleep with her and she finds him shot dead by her brother. The senselessness of this death and her father's guilt forces her to marry a corrupt policeman.
Her adult life and the childhood and adolescence of her children are seen against Detroit, a city of slums and criminality. The reviewer of *Times* mentions that Oates creates an urban gothic, transforming the mysteries of experience into vital characterizations. Guy Davenport mentions that them is a novel of heart breaking power. "Its theme is the loss of promise in young lives, and the awful repetition of squalor and misdirection, generation after generation. Miss Oates demonstrates that life which has reverted to barbarism with in the city is a more terrible barbarism than outside civilization." The relentless battle her characters wage with the realities, is a symbolic act for spiritual salvation, incidentally the ultimate purpose of art.

*Wonderland* (1971) like Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* considers life as a chess game where one eats the other in order to get to another square. Like Alice, the protagonist Jesse Harte undergoes a series of metamorphic transformations. After he escapes the gruesome family murder he is seen as a physically enlarged adolescent, as a cold and brilliant scientist, and as a pathologically

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41 "Urban Gothic," *Time*, October 10, 1969, p.106

enlarged creature. Jesse's Narcissism and his daughter's Nihilism describe the emotional dimensions of the novel. Both of them refused to acknowledge the world suffering from a distorted self. Oates conducts a voyage through the landscape of American culture. Irving Malin comments, that the pattern of the American protagonists to master their environment became an inflexible measure, eventually destroying the self. When American fiction makes these compulsive designers, heroes, Oates views them as villains like Pedersen, or the uninitiated like Jesse Harte. Making Jesse villain hero in the gothic tradition, Oates makes him confront his Nihilistic father, solipsistic grand father, megalomaniac Pedersen empiricist Cadw, the behaviourist Ferrald, manichean Monk and finally sensualist Reva Denk. When this novel is considered as a melodrama, the incessant run of the protagonist denotes the distribution of the conflicting motives of a single individual among a number of fictional characters. Seeking a place in the world for Jesse, Oates drives him on a Faustian Commitment making pacts with the modern devil figures. Away from the consciousness and the horror of the interior realms, Oates attempts to view the gothic perceptions through an irresistibly medieval and scintillatingly romantic

setting in the next novel for the study.

*Bellefleur* (1930) is a novel woven in the rich gothic texture. Lucinda Franks describes her meeting with Oates in a typical gothic setting at Oates's residence in Princeton. Oates appears to this reviewer some how lost in time as though she has emerged from the gothic porticos of her own "Bellefleur." This new novel spans six generations of an American family beginning with Jean Pierre Bellefleur. Banished from France, he built a castle in an American valley in 1882. Oates presents a gothic saga in a tableau of the real, and the surreal, rich in magic, tragedy and unforgettable characters. She creates people who isolate themselves from their complex worlds, imposing a singular narcissistic vision. They ultimately retreat into states of denial seeking redemption in the natural order of the universe. The Bellefleurs established an immense estate on the shores of Lake Noir in the mountains of upstate New York, as a haven for the aristocratic French refugees from the Revolution. In the modern period, members of three or four generations live in the fortress castle, known by the family name. A mass murderer, a vampire,

a genius child, a hermaphroditic clairvoyant, an ascetic, a child of delicate sensibilities, an entrepreneurial lady venturing hard to reassemble the original estate, and a tribe of eccentric characters constitute the dramatis personas.' The incidents in the novel are violent and bizarre with peculiarly grotesque images. Raphael the builder of the castle specifies in his will that he be skinned and a civil war drum be covered with his hide. A labourer who married Hepatica Bellefleur turns into a bear hunted and killed by her relatives. Samuel falls in love with a black succubus, haunting the most elegant room of the mansion. A bird of mixed species called Noir vulture carries off and devours an illegitimate baby. A hunch back dwarf caught in the mountains is a family retainer. A sparrow sized spider named Love perches Leah Bellefleur's girlhood shoulders. Many such details provoke the dread that holds the gothic novels aloft. There is an abundance of emotion and rhetoric in Oates's blend of the gothic and the family saga in this novel. Jane Resh Thomas comments that "Oates's tampering with reality and time is more subtle and interesting. She develops her complex plot with spectacular skill, in a circular rather than a linear chronological
pattern, as if all Bellefleur time were present now."

Contemporary American novelists discover the gothic mode as an applicable response to a breakdown of order in the modern world. Their opinion of the world returning to savage brutality as well as tending toward mechanical coldness results in the depiction of a sense of disorder in their fiction. G.F. Waller suggests that American gothic combines the rational with the romantic and this characteristic describes Oates's unique representation of sudden upsurges of violence, horror, or intense lyricism through a seemingly naturalistic surface."

Ryan Steven Tom writing about Oates observes that in gothic fiction, the haunting human construct becomes the central metaphor of dreams decaying to nightmares."

The way of violence: In each of Oates's first novels, the narrative begins in the years immediately surrounding the American economic Depression. Each novel opens with an act of violence and this initial act reaches its final consummation in the concluding scenes of the novel.

45 Jane Rash Thomas, "Plan to make your stay at 'Bellefleur' a long one," Minneapolis Tribune, August 3, 1980, p.10G

46 G.F. Waller, Dreaming America, p.5

Oates's central characters often act out rites of exorcism through symbolic and actual killing. Her portrayal of the demonic character owes much to Freud's and Dostoevsky's conception of the criminal as the true saint acting out the repressed desires of the community. Her fiction examines both, the impotence that explodes into a destructive act and that which implodes to self-destruction. Oates observes: "Art is built around violence, around death, at its base is fear. The absolute dream, if dreamed must deal with death, and the only way toward death we understand is the way of violence." (E.6-7). "Let everythin' burn! Why not? The city was coming to life in fire, and he, Jules, was sitting in it, warming to it, the flames dancing, along his arteries and behind his scared eyes." (1.488)

Oates has revealed her penchant for violence in story after story. "Typical activities in Oates's novels," says Marvin Mudrick, "are arson, rape, riot, mental breakdown, murder... and suicide." 48 Oates seems to explain her condition by saying, "A Writer's job, ideally is to act as the conscience of his race. People frequently misunderstand serious art because it is often violent and unattractive, I wish the world were a prettier place,

but I would not be honest as a writer if I ignored the actual conditions around me."\(^{49}\) Oates feels that violence is essential, for it affirms value. Through violence only, "the writer is clearly able to believe that the death of the body, and its mutilation, does in some way free the spirit or exaggerate and emphasize the spirit, so that impurities are lost." (El.157) For Oates violence "is the flooding of the ego by the fury of the veins, a sudden and irrevocable alliance with nature's chaos." (El.157) Susan Beth Orenstein contends that "flaws in the American Dream encourage various acts of physical economic, ideological and sexual expression. These violent deeds, in turn precipitate a revitalization of society, the self, and the need for grace on the part of Oates's protagonists."\(^{50}\)

Oates appears to be cultivating considerable skill, and expending formidable energy while contriving violent incidents without turning her art into cynical and sensational expression. Such a practice, Oates seems to believe would permit the literary genre to evolve, dealing with the rhythm, logic and direction, in

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\(^{49}\) Quoted in "Author Joyce Carol Oates on Adolescent America," \textit{US News and World Report}, \textit{May 15, 1978}, p.60

capturing the very architectonic of the human feeling. Charlotte, explains that life usually assumes a certain shape in Oates's fiction, though at the outset seeming without purpose. Ordinary circumstances form a pattern establishing the texture of the work of fiction. "Motivations develop, relationships mature and shift, aims are pursued, actions are taken and consequences also are endured. Suddenly accidents happen and blood flows and violence erupts." 51

With shuddering Fall (1964) concentrates on violence, describing the feverish relationship between Karen and Shar. There are sexual encounters, arguments, fights and accommodations keeping the story in the grip of a violent fare. The story is terrible beginning with the burning down of Herz's cabin and ending with the doom ridden racing circuit. The events following the meeting of the lovers include rape, a car wreck, miscarriage, race riot, suicide and insanity." One of the excellent qualities of this novel... is an unswerving fidelity to its theme," Writes John Knowles, "the theme is

violence," yet the material never becomes overtly garish, since it is presented with "Clarity, grace, and intelligence."\textsuperscript{52} Oates employs every device at her command to create an explosive atmosphere. Her narratives mirror the turbulence and disorder in this highly harsh, vindictive and grasping world. Once the tragic tale is initiated the growing tension most naturally culminates in violent death.

\textit{Expensive People} (1968) details the darker side of the economic facts of American society. It examines the impact of morally bankrupt suburban influence on Richard Everett who narrates the story of his pathology and his murder of his mother. Richard's self-conscious collection of the matricidal events, in tone appears to be reminiscent of the blackly comedic effects of Nabokov's \textit{Lolita} or Purdy's \textit{Malcolm}. Oates makes all efforts in concentrating in detail and in clearly voicing her concern for violence. When questioned of how the male figures like Swan and Richard fit into a particular literary scheme of violence, Oates answers "they tend to be more intellectual and, I think they are rather autobiographical. I project my

doubts, my metaphysical and philosophical doubts in
them. That is why they erupt into violence more
often." In Oates's suburban paradise, human asso-
ciations are so elusive that only murder appears to
guarantee the stability.

them (1969) is larger, richer in disaster and more care-
fully conceived work covering the lives of a Detroit
slum family. Beginning with the Depression, the story
moves to the racial riots in Detroit, covering the
chaotic lives of Loretta and her children. In the
preface of this novel Oates states that she deliberately
understates the known violence of slum life "because of
my fear that too much reality would become unbearable."

Alfred Kazin writes that Oates "has an
instinct for the social menace packed up in Detroit,
waiting to explode, that at the end of the Nineteenth
Century, Dreiser felt about Chicago and Stephen Crane
about New York." Elizabeth Dalton notices a lack of
structure and internal impetus in the narration. She
notes that events do not build toward a climax. They
appear to the reviewer taking place in the random and

53 Linda Kuehl, Commonweal, December 5, 1969, p.307
insignificant way of reality. This contention only affirms Oates’s felicity as a writer, her virtuosity to adapt the structure of her art form to suit to the motiveless violence that pervades the history. This novel reveals the minds of people whose reactions and aspirations are dictated by a machine oriented culture. Robbed of their imagination and spontaneous emotion, they are condemned to the death of faith and love. John L. Heuruey reviewing them notes that Oates "sees contemporary America as a country in which the improbables, the chaotically and violently improbable, constantly reroute purposeful lives and some times destroys them." He mentions that the murders of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King are only paradigms for a language of random destruction. Oates depicts the America screaming from the headlines of its newspapers perhaps reminding her concerns in her collection of poetry The Fabulous Beasts. It is for this vehement insistence of history that Oates is described by reviewers as "crowded with psychic existence" as having "violence in the head," and as "the fourth Bronte.

55 Commentary, Vol.49, (June 1970) p.76
sister," 57. In an answer to a question about the violence in her fiction, Oates said, "these things do not have to be contrived. This is America." 58

Ellen G. Friedman mentions that in a world where the individual is constantly faced with his limitations, violence seems a seductive form of liberation." 59

Aesthetic Application of Violence. Oates very carefully creates her own language of violence in her works. She generates a pervading genre of violence integral to her vision. Oates is confident that the purpose of the aesthetic violence is to bring man to the knowledge of his own mortality. She employs every device at her command to create an explosive atmosphere. Her narratives genuinely reflect the turmoil and chaos in the grasping world. Oates deftly sets an ominous tone in describing the night club scene the place of celebration/with Shuddering Fall. When shar, Maw and karen assemble in the club "music from the juke box exploded into the


59 Ibid, p.84.
room, musquitos and flies scattered to the ceiling." (WSF. 143). One of their group keeps company with a woman "teased into prettiness" "by a violent exotic outlining of her lips" couples dancing in one corner of the room seem to "gallop together violently." (WSF. 141) The cumulative effect of these violent images culminates in Sharr's getting ready for fresh aggression. The common things as lipstick, Juke box and music play violent implications. Oates employs such a device just before Sharr's tavern's death. Whilevisi, along the beach Sharr and Mariam encounter a foreign couple shouting at each other. Sharr begins to crave for violence. He is tempted to attack a young woman bather. The mounting details generate a tension paralleling the rising fury in Sharr until the desire for violence had grown so strong in him that tears of rage and lust had forced their way into his eyes." (WSF.223) Oates creates an explosive atmosphere by heaping scenes of violence suggesting the sense of imminent action.

Oates reflects the fragility and frustration of her characters through the images of shattering glass and trapped animals. The striking images suggesting the fragility of the human life are of glass ware and China, reminding Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie.
Oates describes her characters in terms of fracturing or shattering glassware. This fragile and delicate sense is deftly captured in Jules's remarks to Nadine in them. Jule considers, that he had come to realize the truth that "We all carried ourselves like glass, we are very breakable." (T.363). In Expensive People the awareness of frailty grows on Richard. The image of destructibility is devastating in this narrative because there is no relief. Richard writes, "I am glass, transparent and breakable as glass but - and this is the tragedy - we who are made of glass may crack into millions of jigsaw pieces but we do not fall apart. We never fall apart...we want nothing more than to fall apart to disintegrate, to be released into a shower of slivers and have done with it all, but the moment is hard to come by, as you can sec." (EP.192) Oates employs the image of entrapment integrally linked to violence as in With Shuddering Fall. Karen, feels when a fight erupts between her father and Shar, "once more a creature trapped within a dream is waiting for release. The unreal violence of the past few minutes rushed to a climax and exploded in her brain as she felt the impact of her father's disgust." (WSF.72) Mary Katherine Grant's study in "A Vision of Violence" and "The Language of Tragedy and Violence" in her classic on Oates describes vividly Oates's grasp of
rhetorical exploitation of violence."60

Oates questions herself if "Am I personally haunted by the fear of violence, the need for violence, or do I reflect everyone else's feelings about it? I sense it around me both the fear and the desire and perhaps I simply have appropriated it from other people."61 While discussing Thomas Mann, Oates explains that Adrian is Mann's most exalted embodiment of the artist for he "makes a conscious choice of nightmares: he arranges and wills his disaster." According to Oates, such artists who deliberately involve the brute constitute the cream of art. (El. 213)

Violence as a literary tool: Rocco Clairr Joyce examines Oates and Flannery O'Connor employing violence as a literary tool. The study discusses both Oates and O'Connor opting for linguistic and personal patterns of violence. The writer while beginning with types of distortions proceeds to study Hoffman's categories of assailant as person as ideological instrument and as mob cons-


tituting the personal forms of violence. Rocco Claire Joyce after tracing the dimensions of violence elaborates the idea that seeking self-identity, the victim gradually assumes the role of assailant indulging in violence thereby tracing the transformation of a victim turning into an assailant. 62

Violence as Affirmation: Oates has a good understanding of the character rooted passions in their socio-biological roles. She proves in her fiction that they are the stuff from which dreams are made driving men to art, religion and all that makes life worthy. Eric Fromm suggests that man "wants to be his own creator, to transform his state of being unfinished, into one with some goal and some purpose allowing him to achieve some degree of integration." 6 Social violence springing from the passions, is a well defined characteristic in Oates's fiction. The necessity for a compulsively obsessive leaning towards violence in Oates's fiction appears to be the well founded apprehension of the writer that nothing lasts and nothing around is

62 Rocco Claire Joyce, "Flannery O'Connor and Joyce Carol Oates: Violence as Art," DAI, 36-9, (March 1976) p.6090 A.

safe from the inevitable flux. Oates passionately records that "Nothing must be allowed to come to rest, to reach fruition. The only fruition honoured is that of death, which produces an ecstasy that comes from a sudden enlargement of vision - the breaking down of the dykes that separate man from man - so that personality is finally annihilated by violence." (E1.159).

Instead of getting repelled by the terrible introductory remark "Violence is always an affirmation," violence should be perceived as a last remedy against Nihilism, in Oates's view a desperate grace. Oates explains that "Nihilism is overcome by the breaking down of the dykes between human beings, the flowing forth of passion." (E1.6-7)

Oates's response to Death: The constant employment of death in fiction emphatically suggests her preoccupation with the inevitable end. The primary emotional response in Oates's fiction is the fear of death described as the 'Death Anxiety.' Oates appears to consider death as a serious menace giving rise to fear and a specific anxiety. This is the fear of being dead, the fear of nonbeing, the loss of self and identity causing existential chills. Simpson explains that "the fear of death is existentially
turns his physical weakness as a tool to convince the senator, who comes to know towards the end of the story that the blind are bestowed with a sense of perception. The blind boy Robin achieves his purpose by directly suggesting the mortality to the Senator. We brought the essential goodness nearer the man's reach cleverly subduing the arrogance of the senator. It is the fear of death that provides the moment of epiphany in the senator's life. The jack knife in the professional hands of a blind boy acts as the Bible, teaching the veracity of Jesus and the significance of 'cross to the materially successful senator. Understanding the reality, the senator returns the knife that pierced his ignorance exposing human fraility.

The Finite Nature: Oates's characters appear to be deeply affected by the finite nature of existence. Maureen broods about a world where "objects disappeared, slipped through cracks, devoured, kicked aside, knocked under the bed or into the trash, lost. Nothing lasted for long." (T.212) "The Census Taker" in Oates's first collection makes an earnest attempt to capture the finite nature. The census taker visiting a county learns of how death has taken a heavy toll over the members of one family he wanted to investigate. The girl of the family drives home the point that census taking can in no way arrest the fleeting time.
"Mister, you can't never catch up with that time or with any time... Half them people you got in that book are dead now or grown old, or different... each new entry in this official book negates an earlier entry, that the columns of names, dates, places were absurd... that the census itself was impossible." (RNG 26) The finite nature of things is conveyed through the term 'all washed away' often employed in the text. Oates presents this sense of ephemerality as the very core of the loneliness that surrounds the protoplasm. Detailing the expense of spirit in story after story Oates seems to offer her judgement on mortality and flux.

Horror of the Naturalistic Setting: When caught in the grip of despair and futility life makes death a thing of little consequence. Oates's grim naturalistic setting for her major fiction elucidates this observation. It projects a gloomy, and violent picture of the proletariat, vainly struggling to keep death at bay. The external environment facilitates the character, gaining depth and sharpness meticulously suggesting the chaotic reality. The naturalistic and the sterile suburban setting of Oates's fiction invokes the chronic, over powering sense of boredom and routineness leading to a sense
estrangement. This intense and all pervasive feeling appears to haunt life in the midst of orgy of emotions. The sufferers are admitted to endure a sense of overpowering futility. They often venture into violence shedding their frustrations unceremoniously. Without even bothering to grasp the gravity of the situation, Oates's male protagonists crave for recognition before they slide into the anonymity of death.

Journey as a symbol: Though sometimes Oates keeps the meaning of death restricted, she nevertheless makes its echo, heard by directly alluding to the expense of spirit in the cessation of activities, she makes the fear of death evident in the frequent use of journey as a symbol in her stories. The fast cars, the reckless driving, the mention of speed and thousand other details relating to the theme, indirectly suggest the condition of flux. It even represents the death wish. Oates has the talent to describe travel, as though the reader is permitted a dramatic entry into the consciousness of the person travelling. The short story "Convalescing" in Marriages and Infidelities describes the driving, suggesting the impending doom the protagonist is going to endure. David
ventures on this hazardous journey just to escape the obsessive thoughts of his wife's infidelity tormenting him often. Oates turns the description of the drive and the collision where the protagonist is involved as an intense personal experience to the readers. Freud mentions that in a dream "Departing on a journey is one of the commonest and best authenticated symbols of death." 65 Literary composition when considered as a dream, the journey David makes in this story becomes an apt symbol for the death wish. Infact David ventures on his journey as if on a premonition and he remains ultimately suffering the psychic death.

Love and Death: As we have noted earlier Oates uses the concept of love often to create tension. Oates makes her protagonist in "I was in love" express her condition with a statement opening her narration," I was in love with a man I couldn't marry, so one of us had to die." (WOL.388) Oates's very first novel With Shuddering Fall tells the story of a destructive love affair between a stunted obsessive character and a spoilt innocent girl. As the first novel of Oates, it introduces her philosophy that love often is a violent emotion resulting either in

physical or phychic death. Her delineation of romantic, sensual and conjugal aspects of love in her fiction already examined in this thesis, narrates this bent of mind vividly. Love always suffocates her characters and the grim setting often stifled their zeal in life. Even her love poems depict in suggestive phrases and images the pervading sense of doom. *Love and Its Derangements* describes the condition of love in a lyrical melody brutally suggesting Oates's fondness for the sinister. Hilda Gregory mentions that "Love allows this simulacrum of death, the body's sensual bindings sundered, and conflict momentarily abandoned."66

**Sexuality as the destructive agent.** The abundance of sexuality noticed in Oates's fiction also suggests her penchant for death and destruction. The obsessive sexual preoccupation of her protagonists can be deemed as the surrogate actions of violence and brutality. In them two girls employ sexuality to destroy and in turn to be destroyed. They are Maureen, the passive victim, who invites violation and Nadine, her cold sadistic counterpart. Sexuality instead of remaining as a creative activity, awarding lasting satisfaction, only becomes an

expression of aggression between partners found mistakenly together. Oates's descriptions of the scenes and passionate actions reveal a sense of devouring and destructiveness. Making love, Jules's "mind flashed to him an image of himself and Nadine, entwined together, a woman's long, pale arms lashed about his body and Jules's strong back arched over her in a grip of death. Hadn't he always put his faith, in such bizarre images? Jules risking his, Jules leaping to that, Jules plunging in?" (T.393)

Sexuality when studied as a pathological expression also can be interpreted as an alternative to physical violence. While discussing the "Tragic Rites in Yeats," Oates mentions, "the fulfilment of the highest passion—sexual passion must be at the moment of death, so that passion itself becomes not life giving or life enhancing but in Nietzsche's terms, one of the many destroyers of body." (El.180)

Disgust with the Body: Oates's representation of physical intimacy in adulterous relationships, highlights a sense of hopelessness, impotence and rage exposing the fear of a traumatic annihilation. Oates ventures to emulate Kafka revealing a disgust with the body. Frederick J. Hoffman mentions that "disgust with the body is connected
with yearning for death."67 Oates reveals a pronounced leaning towards the flesh and the blood. While opting for senses in unravelling the mystery of personality, she unconsciously touches on the truth that though the senses are tangible they are of transient nature. Oates drives man to seek his destiny groping in the dark land of senses. While seeking to control his existence, Man steadfastly endeavours to turn his mere 'being' into a 'happening.' Depending on the life of senses, Oates's women characters like in Lawrence, undergo near death and near annihilation, preparing for tempestuous and sensuous immorality.

**Eros and Thanatos:** Oates's critical work, *New Haven, New Earth*, illustrates in clear cut terms, her endeavour to gather the tragic knowledge of the relationship between life and death. It is her conviction that life is being fulfilled only through death. The study of Oates's short stories suggests her implicit faith in the interaction between life and death. Oates's endeavour as a writer is to filter the essence of life by projecting the cross purposes and relationships in familial situations. As is already suggested Oates views love and death always as indispensable intertwined and inevitable. It is possible

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67 Frederick J. Hoffman, *Freudianism and the Literary Mind*, p. 206
that Oates's fondness for the soul-stirring Viennese folk and classic musical culture encouraged Oates to view the two conditions always together.

Silence and Death: Oates enquires "How does one transcend the relentless barrage of words and achieve the fact of physical death, the loss of the ego?" (El.24) Oates's voluminous work spanning more than two decades, while endorsing her indefatigable energy appears to reveal ironically her latent fears. Though she expresses her desire to gain the loss of the ego through the fact of physical death, Oates seems to be scared of silence. She considers communication very vital for its capacity to employ language - the precious life breath of humanity.

Silence implied the loss of language to Oates. She considers violence as "an art of invisible movement gaining a symbolic rhythm moving from one silence to more profound silence." (El.168) Oates's priority can be examined as a defence mechanism against this profound expression of violence. It explains her obsessive and compulsive writing career amply revealing the artist's death wish.

Brigit the major character of her novel Unholy Loves "returns to the apartment and notes its absolute silence, which seems bound up somehow with winter, with the snow. Silence is brutal: the world will end in silence." (UL.258)
'Winter,' 'snow,' 'silence,' 'brutal,' 'melancholy truth' apart from the sentiment, are all terms suggesting a far deeper sense than the overt expression.

The Potency of Language: Language can be understood as we perceive in Oates's fiction signifying life as well as contempt towards this very life. The power of language helps to provide order and meaning even in the most frightening experiences. Language can even send human beings to worse death. Swan in *A Garden of Earthly Delights* uses language to hurt his mother Clara. When Clara deposits him at the library, the paradigm of order in Oates's fiction, and moves away to meet her lover who calls her that "bitch." When Revere's son Jonathan calls Clara a "Goddamn filthy bitch" talking to his friends, it is not directed for the same purpose. His use is simply descriptive, while Swan's is punitive. When Swan is finally called upon to use language he fails miserably. After driving all night to his home and meeting his mother and Revere he fails to explain his reason for his return. He can only stammer "I want to ... I want to explain something to you." (GED.438) When words fail, wan again, he picks up his gun, resorting to a physical language
and accidentally kills Revere before committing suicide. Oates mentions in Night side that "Language itself is primary obstacle to communication." (NS. 196) Sometimes Oates invokes language in silence. She seems to suggest that an intense and forceful communication is possible in stifling the language. Oates presents the erratic and irresponsible relationship between Karen and Shar with its periods of real silence as more intimate than anything Karen had experienced. (WSF. 172) Oates's *Do With Me What you will* is a powerful instance of silence making itself highly audible. She consistently imputes to language antithetical powers; one to heal and the other to destroy, consonant with her employment of violence. When verbal language fails, her characters fall back on physical language or they retreat into passivity and silence.

The Finality of the grave: Oates suggests the finality of the grave in clear and emphatic terms. "The Daughter" included in the short story collection *The Goddess and other women* illustrates this condition very clearly:

> The finality of the grave that overtook every one in time all - blurred as if they were no more than water in water, everything blended to the same texture, so that Anne never condemned any thing that was 'the way life is.' Everything
her father's drunkenness, her husband's cow-like weakness, the cancer that had killed her mother, the draught that plagued everyone in late summer, the bitterness of winter, ants and sugar bowls, toothaches, the long lethargy of having a baby."

(G.58)

By involving such obsessive and macabre descriptions Oates evidently desired to exorcise all emotions. While presenting the inevitable condition with emphasis and in great frequency Oates seems to succeed in graphically representing the sordid reality.

Death as a liberating force: The finiteness of days instead of calling curtains makes Oates a radical and abrasive writer like Lawrence, viewing death only as a liberating force. (NHNE.102). "Pastoral Blood" is a typical short story that illustrates Oates's peculiar employment of death. The protagonist's race comes from an affluent family. She is engaged to be married to Tom and the marriage is just six days away. Suddenly she loses interest in everything and decides to commit suicide. She drives on a highway, leaving her home and picks up a thirty-five year old man from a diner at the roadside. He watches her race and fails to understand her problems. Even physical intimacy with him fails to bring her to senses. She drinks and picks up three more young hitchhikers, though the elderly man vehemently opposes her. She is finally physically
assaulted and she lands herself in a hospital. In the hospital she determines to take her life at a later date for no obvious reasons. She is young and energetic without any obvious problems. She has no misunderstanding with her fiancee and appears perfectly contented with her lot in life. But the story begins with her decision to die. She imagines that all her Kith and Kin endorse her decision to die. "She no longer cared to live." (BNG.75). She loses the zest for life and she is not afraid to die. In fact it is a necessity to her for she values death more than life. Evidently human relations based on blood become blurred in her vision and she appears to opt for universal relationships awaiting death, that way making death humble. Her intense physical suffering while attempting suicide fails to deter her from her purpose. She might be trying to transcend death by deciding to die. Frederick J. Hoffman suggests that "the first sign of an awakening consciousness of God is the wish to die." 68 She ventures her journey to the land of death in "a miracle of chrome and silver blue finish, a work of art with intricate designs of silver and white" arranged so elaborately, one might suspect they had some meaning." (BNG.82) Thomas Mann eruditely comments: "To die: that means actually

68 Frederick J. Hoffman, *Freudianism and the Literary Mind*, p.207.
to lose sight of time, to travel beyond it, to exchange for it eternity and presentness and therewith for the first time, life." The decision to end one's life is highly subjective. But even from this height of subjectivity Grace tries to establish objectivity. Oates's talent for perceiving the objectivity in thoroughly subjective actions is visible here. To Oates, death is not the mere physical cessation. As an intense commitment, it is a positive feeling like love, with a scope of profound psychological implications.

The grotesque element in Oates's fiction Oates has seen love, a highly romantic and soul filling experience as extremely painful and Death, the most sinister and exhausting human conception as the most pleasant agent. All violent, anomalous and paradoxical experiences can be considered as grotesque features of life. Grotesque is akin to gothic, vigorously employed in the contemporary American fiction. It depicts the extremity in the American life annotated by violence, psychic fears, exploitation, severance with reality, pessimistic and cynical attitudes corresponding to the timeless grotesque characteristics. The traditional demonic character is

69 Joseph and His Brothers (New York: 1934) p.54
Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism, p.220.
modified by Oates into a frightening concern for the unconscious, retaining still a sense of timelessness in the mental derangement. Sometimes a paradoxical Oates's title like "Unmailed, Unwritten letters" can send out 'Cries for help not meant to be heard,' Oates considers the incidence of grotesque features a method of articulating private bewilderment. In the "Turn of the Screw" Oates conveys a grotesque idea of how interior lives touch upon one another in peculiar ways without communicating any essential truth.

The violence in Oates' fiction giving a purple gothic colour tends sometimes to appear grotesquely absurd if it is meaningless and noticed merely for its presence. Sometimes psychological urgency springing, the horror of violence appears an absurd experience. The pathological condition though reflecting the basic absurdity in the reality can be considered as grotesque expression.

Oates attempts to detail a search for the identity leading to violence in the rejection of the self. Her conception of the human endeavour ultimately reconciling is into an initiation of learning, perhaps the source for her grotesque and seemingly absurd imagination of the
human, condition. Introducing her short story collection, *Where Are you Going, Where Have you Been*? Oates explains that "these stories deal with human beings struggling heroically to define personal identity in the face of death itself." She writes on the paradoxical situations in these stories. Mary Mitchel in her review of the title story observes an existential allegory behind the grotesque front. The reviewer notes Oates considering a religious allegory of the seduction of Eve revealing a theme of initiation.70

The central character Connie's rejection of the family members, the pop music permeating the story and its dedication to Bob Dylan offering religious dimension/pop music, stress the allegorical significance. It is music instead of an apple that lures Connie away from her haven ultimately seducing her. The metaphor of music is lavishly employed in the description of Alfred Frick, the seducer. The images suggesting religious allegory are subtly interspersed throughout the story. Friend's magical influence on Connie supports the idea that he represents a superhuman force. Oates possesses the talent to absorb and transmit, in her fiction the agonising terror that disturbs America.

70 Maric Mitchell Oleson Urbanski, "Existential Allegory, Joyce Carol Oates's 'Where Are You Going, where Have you been?" Studies in Short Fiction (Spring 1978, pp.200-203
She clears the illusion of order residing in a family, religion, money, love and marriage the traditional repositories of security. Walter Sullivan notices a grotesque intrusion in Oates's introduction of horror into the intimate details of existence. "We may be frightened by the distortions of a dream landscape, but horror resides in the transformation of what we know best, the intimate and comfortable details of our lives made suddenly threatening."  

Oates achieves the grotesque in an ingenious blending of the traditional demonic culture with the contemporary psychological manifestation. The blend of fantasy and satire with psychological realism awards a distinction to Oates's fiction. Joyce M. Wex studies Oates as a grotesque writer evoking the contradictions of the subtle emotions and exposing a transcendent reality beyond the surface experience. Oates's adolescent protagonist Connie in the prize winning short story "Where Are you Going, Where Have You Been?" discovers a perverse and a paradoxical blend of lust and love, life and death and good and evil. Providing an authentic surface detail depicting the popular adolescent world.

71 Walter Sullivan, "The Artificial Demon: Joyce Carol Oates and the dimensions of the Real?" *The Hollins Critic*, 9.4 (December 1972) p.2

Oates captures the grotesque. While the false values resulting from the popular culture, provide a corrupt religious imagery, Oates suggests the terror through the possibility of several thousand pullible connies falling to the charms of thousands of Arnold Friends masquerading as the knights of the popular culture. Oates perhaps makes her story a prose version of the medieval ballad which narrates the tale of a demon lover carrying away a helpless victim. In the process Oates reveals the complexities of the victim confronting a grotesque alien intrusion. Oates transforms the traditional grotesque characters into single-minded obsessive personalities as represented in The Hungry Ghosts: Seven Allusive Comedies. Her attempt to write from inside her inarticulate characters though at the outset appears as grotesque, it denotes her endeavour to be 'exhaustive' and 'exhausting' in rendering the chaotic reality.