CHAPTER V
AGONY AND ECSTASY

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth:
for the first heaven and the first earth were
passed away;
and there was no more sea.


As the concluding division of the thesis this
Chapter reveals an endeavour to summarise Oates's philo-
osophy based on the arguments, in the earlier Chapters.
While the "Lust For Life" projects an image of Joyce
Carol Oates invoking the divers. sparkling facets of
the writer's personality, "The Whel of Love," "The
Dark Angel" and "The Stream of Consciousness" narrate
the splendour of Oates's creative frenzy, capturing the
very architectonics of human passion, Oates endeavours
to depict in her prolific fiction. "Agony and Ecstasy"
ventures to synthesize Oates's precept as shown in the
pointed study of her canon. The stress here is once
again on the themes of love, death and anxiety, chosen
for the study. As the main argument of the thesis is
to trace the artistic vision through a pointed discussion
of the themes mentioned, incidentally highlighting the
'Travails of the Psyche,' this chapter provides a focus
on the Tragic Vision that lifted Oates's art to the
visionary and prophetic levels. The coverage on the visionary aspects of Oates's writings is to project the essence and significance of a writer who ventures to provide a commentary on the American Dream. As an artist employing Naturalism, Gothicism, the Grotesque and the Psychological Realism, and with her literary virtuosity Oates persistently delineates the themes of Love, Death and Anxiety. She offers the critique on her own literary practice with her exquisite interpretations of literature and men of letters, who influenced her creativity.

Love: One feels along one's spine and scalp the heat of creative energy as Oates violently renders the involvement of her characters in their miserable predicaments, subtly highlighting the essence of the human relationships. Oates investigates numerous infidelities in her fiction. She traces the tragic pretentions dealing with the relationship between man and woman, the relationship of man with his ideals and the relationship of the soul and the body. Oates writes that tragedy grows out of a sense of isolation resulting from a breakdown between self and community. (El.3) While Henry James' and Virginia Woolf's concern was primarily with mystery, beauty and tragedy of human relationships, Oates deals with the
depths of reality constituting individual personality. When they endorsed the sensibility of the modern, secular intellectual, who admits of no reality beyond that experienced by the mind, Oates ventures to capture the sense of man defining himself in terms of God, country, family, and history in her fiction. Oates's introduction of Oedipus complex much too often in her fiction endorses the demonic voice of Freud who informed that all culture grows out of this classic complex that civilization is its own discontent and man can never be saved (NHNE.194).

Oates appears to believe in Lawrence who had faith in the totally spontaneous synthesis of 'spiritual' and 'sensual' love without the necessity of personalities or subjective considerations (NHNE.70). Man yearns to be infinite, but he can express his spirituality through love only within the physical demands of his body, so that love may transform and release, though the return to the finit condition is inevitable. Lawrence's concept of Love beginning with the glistening body goes through it and transcends it. He has noticed this higher transcendental experience in the creation of inhuman, a more than human equilibrium created by the fusion of the permanently opposed entities of male and female. He was successful
in realizing the intimate relationship between himself and Frieda, who eloped with him leaving her husband and children. As Lawrence evolved into an essentially inhuman sphere, Oates makes Elena in *Do With Me What you Will* transcend the reality experiencing the redemptive love, reaching its fullest expression. Oates totally aligns herself with the Lawrentian thought as he expressed in the poem "One Woman to All Women."

We move without knowing, we sleep, and we travel on. And this is beauty to me, to be lifted and gone In a motion human inhuman, two and one Encompassed, and many reduced to none. (NHNE.71)

Oates's exercises detailing love relationships discussed earlier appeared to be modeled on Lawrence's endeavour to break through the confines of the static, self-consuming self, in order to experience the unfathomable power that transcended one's own knowledge of one's self (NHNE.80). Oates understands that only in love, in the division of consciousness into self and other, there is a redeeming completion. With all her appreciation for Kafka, Oates alleges that Kafka did not consider the spiritualization of the physical love particularly when the experience of erotic love can create another self a personality that is the result of the lover's spiritual
unity. The loss of individuality in love is often linked to the remorseless power of one person over another. Oates cannot conceive the lovers existing in their own individualities because the privacy of love to her implies loss. The revelation of the true individuality is achieved through the perception of the self, which lies outside the living self.

The over-emphasis on love in Oates's fiction, the pervasive employment of relationships are highly suggestive of the real vacuum in her characters who opt most naturally for the moments of transcendence in the active participative even in aggressive acts leading ultimately to the perfect state of liberation, automatically filling their psychic void.

Joyce Carol Oates stands as a unique and radical figure in the literary landscape obsessed as a writer with the experiential plurality -- with human reciprocity and human limitation, and with reconciliation to time and the manifest world. These dualities according to Oates can be transcended through moments of intensity achieved in moments of love even though they are transitory. She is preoccupied with the idea that the self is not a substitute for the world and selfhood is possible only when it is located in and delineated by a specific
temporal and spacial environment. Focussing on relationshipships Oates constructs the hatred, strife, conflicts, tra
anguish and guilt in familial relationships.

Like Lawrence, Oates recognizes also the fatal nature of romantic and sensual love in which the goal is oneness. The failure of romantic union in Oates's fiction traces the insignificance of romantic promise confronting the human limitations even in love. But Oates recognizes an awareness that there is salvation only in the defeat of sensual aspiration. According to Oates the achievement of the goals means the finality of death. Lawrence writes: "In sensual love, it is the two blood streams, th
man's and woman's which sweep up into pure contact and almost fuse. Almost mingle. Never quite. There is alwa the finest imaginable wall between the two blood waves... but...the blood itself must never break, or it means bleeding."¹ It is considered as significant at this juncture to represent the exalted role of sex in Hinduism as evident in the stipulated four destinies for a rightec person. Man is to work for these ends building one upon the other - Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Dharma as the Divine locus, in which the life of man is required

to move; *Artha* is the collection of all worldly wherewithal
*Kama* as the total expression of libido, the basis of all
creativity in the desire dominated existence, and *Moksha*
as the sum total of all these goals. That, final release
from the pain of existence into an external indefinable
bliss, results through the crude, carnal activity - is
beyond the comprehension of modern man and woman imbued
with the values of western civilization. That the Hindu
had even perfected the art of sexuality as recorded in
*Vatsya*, is *Kamasutra* to such an extent, at a time to make
a mention of anything of the sort was a sin to the rest
of the world, speaks volumes. *Jayadeva*, the Sanskrit poet
of the Twelfth Century AD could describe the sensual
dalliance of Krishna and Radha in such detail in his
collection of songs, *Geetha Govinda* and with such refined
nuances, that the dainty songs have become part of devot
To Oates as to those mystic poets love is not a single as
but a climate in which people live, a life time venture in
which one is always learning, discovering and growing. I
is not destroyed by a single failure or won by a single
careess as it constitutes the very climate of the heart.

Love in Oates appears according to Bonnie M.

Mesinger, as a potentially dissonance provoking

*The songs of this most celebrated religious lyric depi
t the joy of the lover's meeting, their estrangement and
Radha's anguish, Krishna's repentence and their
reconciliation and ecstasy.*
experience. Jung conceptualises the dual role of dissonance: "It is the function of consciousness not only to recognise and assimilate the external world through the gateway of the senses, but to translate into visible reality the world within us." Oates expresses this belief through her concept of love as a potentially dissonance provoking experience, one which may move the individual toward a new level of psychic awareness and consciousness.

The uniformity of theme coupled with diversity in form in *The Wheel of Love* reveals Oates's primary interest in exploring her conception of love. Oates contends that people are trapped within their own obscure destiny. Their total indifference to the things happening outside themselves leaves them in anonymous sins resulting in the negation and men and women search for an explanation of their lives in the mundane reality. Oates's women live futile lives. They remain unfulfilled as their love.

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3 Bonnie M. Mesinger. p. 182
collapses inside their ordinariness of their marriages, their displacements and their loss of relationships. The whole atmosphere of love in her fiction militates against moments of transcendence though suggesting optimistically that the possibilities for redemption perhaps exist. Marriage suggests transcendence but only momentary. The adulterous relationships described in Oates are highly meaningful because sexual life is significant only when an element of guilt persists, perhaps in appreciation of the atmosphere Oates notes both in Dickey and Mailer.

Her fiction examines the uneasiness, struggles and readjustments that lovers make to compensate for the changes in themselves and their lives. She captures the ambivalence of human love in relation to the ordinariness of human existence and the larger context of history. The fiction often conveys the female's sense of eroded self. But the changes and derangements brought about by love are not always distorting and crippling. Nevertheless, the idea of love as some shattering experience prevails in her fiction. The violent disruption caused by Love contains both ecstasy and mortality. Oates secularises the struggle of the individual to find the meaning of self in the sense of isolation and alienation from the modern world. In Freudian terms, Oates explains "a dynamic
struggle of the conscious ego or self to maintain its individuality against the raging forces of the primitive unconscious and the highly repressive reservoir of civilization." (NHNE.150-51)

Oates represents in "The Visionary Art of Flannery O'Connor," love as a disease symbolic of that connection between body and soul, mind and spirit: "the diseased body is not only an affirmation or a symbolic intensification of the spiritual disease that attends physical processes: it becomes a matter of One's personal salvation... to interpret the accidents of the flesh in terms of the larger, unfathomable, but ultimately no more abstract pattern that links the self to the Cosmos." (NHNE.165-66)

Oates informs the notion of the physical, reaching the spiritual, through the spirit of Angel Fire: "It is not simply our virtues that will be burned away, but our rational faculties as well, and perhaps even the illusion of our separate isolated egos." (NHNE.174-75)

The repeated experience of love Oates depicts animates the psyche into inexorable pattern of rising and falling. Because passion always is controlled by an abiding natural force of gravity that sends love to flights and makes it descend with a thud, often denying the reality. Thus Oates shows love often as a snare as a delusion.

Bonnie M. Mesinger mentions that "Translated into psychological terms, this conception of love may be seen
as yet another indication of Oates's idea that the death of the ego brings with it a psychic rebirth—a psychic life that is no longer principally guided by the drive toward separation and defensiveness, but one that is conscious of the interrelated nature of all life and its essential unity. Jung has described such consciousness in terms of the "collective consciousness" that part of the psyche which is common to all men."4

Death:

Oates in a revealing analysis of James and Woolf mentions that her artistic alliance is with writers like Lawrence considering the two writers as self-conscious. She writes "But in the end we are somehow dissatisfied. We recognize the wonder of their aesthetic achievements. Yet we must admit that the melodrama of Dostoevsky and Stendhal has the power to move us more deeply." She mentions that after their experiment of the mind's dissection of itself and its dissociation from the body, perhaps we are ready to rediscover the world."(NHHE.44-45) Oates's fiction shows that "not only the expense of spirit in a waste of shame" that is catastrophic, but the expenditure of all spirit for the object of spiritual adoration can never be equivalent to the purity of energy wasted."(B1.12)

4 Ibid. p.124
By depicting 'death-in-life', Oates achieves 'life-in-death.' The discussion on Ionesco's *Dances of Death* describes Oates's understanding and appreciation of death, in her practice. Emulating Ionesco, Oates creates her art as "the tragic expression of those who cannot transcend the crippling biological, social, and accidental banality of their lives. To her characters, death is the only transcendence. Oates thoroughly grasps that the total agreement between self and the world is impossible. The biological fact of death prevents man from projecting his dreams into reality. The "needless irreparable reality and death," which many existentialists consider, as "the most important fact of life" is indeed for Oates, the singular fact of experience. (El.243) She writes that "Man, on his knees, is helpless before the horror of his own mortality, and his own mysterious, deadly self, which he cannot conquer because he cannot understand. (El.244) Death remains in Oates as the unforgettable feeling of the absurdity of life. It is the only sign of the "spiritual longings in a time-locked body." Oates mentions that "Freud believed that civilization is shaped out of the frustration of aggressive impulses. In his opinion the longer discontent of civilization was its apparently inevitable desire for destruction even self-destruction (aggression smothered
turned inward." Oates mentions that Lawrence differed from Freud with his intuitive knowledge "that it is not the presence of a restraining or alien 'enemy' that destroys man but the removal of this enemy. When the other is obliterated the individual is also obliterated." (NHNE. 67) Though Oates notices some of Lawrence's energies as sadistic, she mentions that he was exorcising unclean, muddled, pseudo primitive yearnings in himself (NHNE. 69) The sado-masochistic traits noticed in Oates's fiction remind the process of Oates's exorcising and cleaning her own primitive yearnings. Oates provides a significant expression to the savagery which is threatening to become an ideal in the days of cynicism and faithlessness. She mentions that this "employment of brutality is particularly becoming when a culture cannot accommodate man's most basic instincts, forcing them back into regressive physical levels away from the conscious imagination." (NHNE. 263) The expression of brutality invoking death appears to be Oates's rebuttal to the malignant mysticism noticed in abundance in the American reality. When the contemporary world is driving man to a continued shame and ignominy his response would definitely be a response of a rebel or victim living under the shadow of death. Percival M. Symonds describes the dimensions
of aggression as (a) a vigorous activity emphasizing self assertion; (b) a means to gain possession (c) an act signifying hostility, attack and destruction and (d) an act of control, dominance or management of another person (5)

Oates's purpose in flooding her fiction with bizarre violence representing the totality of aggression may be to convey suffering raised to a superhuman sweetness "the articulation of the emotions that accompany pain without the reality of pain itself, the Apollonian expression of Dionysian frenzy." (El.160) Robert H. Foss writes "Rarely premeditated or fully comprehended by its perpetrator, violence is a response to thwarted attempts at self determination." (6)

By placing Oates's fiction within the genre of the tragedy sister Mary Katherine Grant stresses that although Oates used violence and spiritual poverty in her fiction, her purpose is to move the reader toward a new consciousness. (7) Projecting the raw vitality of suppressed desire, impulses and instincts that suddenly explode in acts of violence Oates's "most characteristic stories read like

dreams or nightmares urgently written in order to release the dreamer," writes John Alfred Avant.⁸ Oates mentions that violence is the flooding of the ego -- a sudden and irrevocable alliance with nature's chaos. (El.6) G.F. Waller observes that "Oates designs a rhetoric of violence to direct us to the highly volatile, nightmarish undercurrents in our psyche, making us aware of imminent dislocation or disaster in our lives."⁹ Oates explains while tracing the depiction of violence in Yeats, that his "position is a fusion of activity and conflict, impulses which will not allow man's will to wither into nihilism. She argues that "the violence in a world such as Yeats's is not meaningless. It is essential for it affirms value.

Through such violence Yeats 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.179) These sentiments aptly describe Oates's employment of violence and death in her fiction.

By depicting death frequently in her fiction Oates seems to endorse the modern spirit Norman Mailer so well defines, "If the fate of Twentieth century man is to live


⁹ G.F. Waller, Dreaming America: Obsession and Transcendence in the Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979) p.38
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with death from adolescence to premature senescence, why then the only life accepting assurance is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey, into the rebellious imperatives of the self.\textsuperscript{10}

Revising Mailer's opinion, Oates suggests in her fiction that once the individual is separated from the web of associations that nurture his identity, he can feel his existence only in relation to death. Contradicting Mailer, Oates does not accept the deadly terms of the freedom. She depicts her characters as straining upwards yet all their straining leads not to transcendence but to a discovery of their relation to the finite world. She seems to endorse Bellow saying when life is not lived with in the axial lines of life, "the thrilling lines which are as gift" — "Truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony". Death will be a terrible nightmare.\textsuperscript{11} William Barret writes that "modern man has lost the meaning of life. and that "it will take nothing less than the presence of


\textsuperscript{11} Saul Bellow, The Adventures of Augie March (Harmons Worth, Middlesex, 1953) p. 524.
death to restore this sense of life." 12 Oates perhaps feels that consciousness of death would result in humility respect for the other and a sense of connecterness acting as a corrective to one's vanity and self-conscious existence.

Oates by representing death, is venturing to capture the existential anxiety in her fiction. Rollo May mentions "To Be" and 'Not To Be' express the fact that Non Being is an inseparable part of being. To grasp what it means to exist, one needs to grasp the fact that he might not exist, that he treads at every moment on the sharp edge of possible annihilation and can never escape the fact that death will arrive at some unknown moment in the future... Existence is threatened by Non Being." He mentions that without the awareness of Non Being anxiety and the less dramatic threats of loss of potentialities can turn the existence vapid, unreal and characterised by lack of concrete self-awareness. But with the confronting of Non-Being, existence takes on vitality and immediacy and the individual experiences, a heightened consciousness of himself his world and others around him," Rollo May suggests that Freud's emphasis on the inevitability of hostility, aggression and self-destructiveness in existence is only an ontological truth and should not be taken as a

deteriorated psychological theory. Life forces (Being) are arrayed at every moment against the forces of death (Non-being) and in every individual life, the death instinct triumphs ultimately. Oates understands that death is the most obvious form of the threat of Non-Being. Sanford Pinsker describing "Our darkest dreams are intricably linked with our deepest truths" as Oates's maxim also mentions that she is shock proof in today's shocking world with so much of horror and bloodshed, all against a deep and imperishable background of reality which is external.

Introducing At Edge of Imp possibility: Tragic Forms in Literature Oates mentions "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." Nihilism is overcome by the breaking down of the dikes between human beings, the flowing forth of passion." (El.6-7) Bonnie M. Mesinger suggests that Oates does not offer an utopia, darkly representing the existing order. She depicts the debilitating effects fondly hoping for a potential for change in the present order. Oates's conception of love and death is

14 Critique XX No.2 (March 1979) p.64.
paradoxical suggesting that in loving we die, but that in dying we may be reborn. Fiedler eruditely explains "that literature is more than what one learns to read in schools and libraries, more even than a grace of life, that it is the record of those elusive moments at which life is alone fully itself fulfilled in consciousness and form."16 Oates's interest in representing the elusive moments is evident in her persistent depiction of violence and death making life fulfilled in a higher consciousness.

**Anxiety:**

Oates's dominant method of characterization is deflation. Her characters start their careers as romantic figures with their overreaching will, and ironically end their restless tales in more realistic proportions. Oates ventures in her fiction to depict the inner life of man capturing the spiritual strivings against a material chaos. Ionesco impresses Oates very much, representing the most sinister truth about the human existence Oates learns from him and Nietzsche that 'Being' is an empty fiction constantly living in a world of 'Becoming'. Oates believes that 'Becoming' equally is fictitious equally empty when human beings are willed to motionless waiting for a miracle.

15 Bonnie Mesinger, p.201

She firmly believes that when Being is an empty fiction, 'Becoming' is a nightmare from which waking is both a salvation and an annihilation. In her fiction the individual's heroism depends not on the degree and kind of rebellion but on the degree and kind of imitation. Oates has come to believe that there is no possibility of striking a reconciliation with God and the route to Eden is permanently closed. Discarding the adolescent romance of freedom and immortality, Oates prefers the adult commitment with reality 'stressing at the necessity for compromise, reconciliation, association and reciprocity. Marriage, pregnancy, jobs are the means by which the individual compromises his freedom and autonomy. They are not Oates, also the means by which the individual constructs barriers against a chaotic and threatening environment. Oates has no ambiguity in life considering life as a series of dreams, interrupted, betrayed, brutally shaped and shapeless. As a practicing psychological realist, Oates is preoccupied consciously or unconsciously with the problem of reality. She is genuinely interested in the epiphany, confidently believing that human essences shrouded in mystery are in single existing moment in which they are expressed. She ventures to capture those moments of epiphany through her unique representation of the stream of consciousness. She
represents like Lawrence and Nietzsche the beauty and mystery of flux of 'Becoming', an enchanting experience though disappointing ultimately. She abhor permanence as a structure erected in perfection "therefore airless and stupefying." (NHNE.47-48). Like in Beckett, Oates's characters do not despair though their world is thoroughly illogical and cruel. Instead of remaining contented in romantic acceptance, they pose brave and cheerful fronts seeming to enjoy the 'black joy,' history allots to their lot. While writing about "The Visionary Art of Flannery O'Connor," Oates mentions Kierkegaard's view that man's natural state is one of anxiety. American imagination persistently endeavours to represent the emphasis on the individual negotiating the world in isolation and the individual's refusal to accept the limits imposed by the reality. D.H.Lawrence describes classical American Literature as "begotten by the self, in the self, the self made love". When the American writers wanted a paradise on earth, Lawrence prophetically proclaims that there is no paradise. 17

Man is alone and isolated. The world seemingly created for him, is a dangerous illusion that blinds him to his true home." (NHNE.147) Considering life as a

struggle, Oates views world as either sacramental or profane. As a corollary she starts perceiving the diseased body not only as an affirmation but also as a symbolic intensification of the spiritual disease that attends physical process, "it becomes a matter of one's personal salvation - Jung would use the term 'individuation': to interpret the accidents of the flesh in terms of the larger unfathomable, but ultimately no more abstract pattern that links the self to the cosmos." (NHNE.166)

Passion to Oates hence is superior to intellect and as a philosophical proposition it has no language. (NHNE.194) She finds no solution conceiving life as a 7 10x crippling the human spirit. Like Kafka Oates while making her characters remain in the profane world drives them to obliterate their ego seeking a breakthrough in transcending the self depending on passion. It is a realization of the identity of the finite self with the infinite. Her work becomes like Kafka's a record of ego's crisis as it approaches its own transcendence. It gives shape to the necessary anguish that precedes the radiance. When the external world of history fails, Oates facilitates her characters to experience enlightenment through the interior vision hoarded and zealously protected from acts awarding higher consciousness. Initiation is the reward
of the enlightenment coming to the subject remaining at home, at his window when evening falls. It comes in a dream as a gift, though he did not create the dream. In Oates what seems to be basically a realistic fiction has so many variations displaying a range of experimentation in a wealth of literary antecedent. She achieves an objective tone choosing psychological realism. The point of view distances the reader. The frequent change to first person narration enables her to follow the non-rational impulses of her characters, giving her readers tremendous insights into the mysterious world of emotion prompting the action.

Bonnie M. Mesinger examines the psychic Dissonance in Oates's critical writings and fiction. "Psychic Dissonance is a psychological awareness of disparity of incongruity between two or more perceptions a person has about himself, his behaviour and his surrounding." The experience of Dissonance according to psychologists results in a motivation to reduce the tension produced by the awareness of inconsistency in thought or emotion. Thus psychic Dissonance is a potentially powerful force, one which may move an individual into new levels of

awareness. 19 "Equally possible however is a retreat from growth, withdrawal from new awareness when an individual perceives that his present state of being is threatened. An individual’s response to his own psychic dissonance is an indication of his ability or inability to cope with complexity and inconsistency." 20 Oates herself states explicitly her concern for evolving consciousness and her belief that both artists and scientists are involved in an endeavour of discovery and expression of the potentials inherent, but not yet fully apparent, in human consciousness.

Oates is stressing in her fiction that freedom always is a negation inevitably involving betrayal, repudiation and denial. Oates is thus documenting the art of compromise in contrast to the American romantic literature that fantasied the escapades of the Imperial Will in a condition of total freedom. The westerners have learnt that political democracy and economic prosperity in themselves do not solve any of the basic value problems. The western world stands on the verge of a spiritual rebirth - a fundamental change of attitude toward the values of life. After a long period of outward expansion, people have advanced looking into themselves once more.


20 Bonnie M. Mesinger, p.2-3.
As in Mr. Sammler's Planet, Oates depicts man's failure to come to terms with his self as the root cause of his present misery. The romantic striving for the limitlessness has resulted in new babarities and the regression to primitivism.

Robert Philips writes that Virginia Woolf mentions two types of writers. (1) Psychological writers - who feel their way patiently and surreptitiously in and out of the mind rendering each character different in minute, yet complete ways one from another, making us to realize the individuals; and (2) Fiction writers, poets in essence, identifying each character with a passion. Engaging characters in significant acts of crises, they symbolize and make abstract large issues. Their goal is to make us reach conclusions. Tennessee Williams and Oates remind the reviewer with the totality of their work arguing with Meredith's self proclaimed creed.

"My method has been to prepare my readers for a crucial point of the personal and then to give the scene in the fullest of their blood and brain under stress of a fierce situation." 21

Theodore Reik elucidates that the material events, the outside of an experience, have but a very small place in a psychological investigation. The emotional processes are the real subject of the exploration. Beauty and signi-

21 Robert Phillips, Commonweal, April 11, 1975, p.55
ficance are the aim of the poet; understanding, the goal of the psychologist. Oates genuinely ventures to reflect the modern disintegration in her fiction. It is an aesthetic expression of disgust, a gesture of helplessness in confusion and chaos. By psychological standards of measurement, they are persistent demonstration of an anxiety neuroses. It expresses Oates's belief that the emotional disturbance can make her characters assert themselves in liberating actions like violence and death. Like Sherwood Anderson hailed as the American Freudian in the peak of his career, Oates is an American writer who know her psychology possessing a rich fund of knowledge she has cultivated by her vast study shrewd observation and intuition.

The experimental writing of the Twentieth Century saw in the unconscious a linguistic problem, requiring a revision in the matter of imagery and symbolism. Oates as a writer is ever ready to go beyond the mere "stream of consciousness" manner of arranging phrases in a fluid pattern and of suspending the control of space-time over mind. For Oates wants the stream to resemble the 'flow' of the unconscious psychic life. Hence the eccentricity and the unintelligibility of much of her experimental writing. She believes that this new writing should follow not the laws of ordinary communication, but the dictates of the uncon-

sicious itself. Since this amounted to repudiation of the laws governing communication as an instance of hyper individualism it resembled surrealism. The surrealist would go directly to the unconscious itself spouting, the avenues which touch, approaching the consciousness. Like Freud who discovered the unconscious by devious methods, Oates gains an access to it by measuring the peculiarities and disguises which distinguish its attempts to break through to reality. Frederick J. Hoffman explains that the Twentieth Century writer often considers abnormal as normal. He mentions that the pessimism of the psychological novelist is an extension of the naturalism, which assumed that external forces left no room for individual free will. Man was a play thing of the forces. He also informs that some writers of this mold consider the search for life more as search for death. Attached to no fixed illusions these writers noticed the world negation to adjust desire to reality. When there was an opportunity for social protest these writers have turned to pessimism, which offered an object of attack outside the self.23 For a writer employing abnormality too often Oates is greatly misunderstood. She is not the patient as her critics loudly proclaim. She is a poet and not a victim. By the sheer fact of creation she has discovered (contd.)

a world she can explore and conquer not a world that makes her a victim.

**Tragic Vision:**

Lawrence Michel defines Tragedy as a critique of humanism from the inside.\(^{24}\) Tragedy is the psychological experience of isolation in which the ego begins to assert itself against external reality through the power of the intellect. Writing on "The Death-throes of Romanticism; The poetry of Sylvia Plath," Oates mentions that "Tragedy is cultural, mysteriously enlarging the individual so that what he has experienced is both what we have experienced and what we need not experience - because of his or her private agony." (NHNE.113) Most works of literature progress toward a dramatic confrontation with reality, the objective truth. The downfall of the hero is inevitably related to the success with which reality overcomes appearances. Tragedy reveals the darkside of human existence projecting the misery of mankind, the relentless nature of fate, the triumph of the wicked and the downfall of the just. Such an endeavour convinces that this life is but a bad dream, a phantasy unworthy of attachment and enthusiasm. It emancipates from the rule of the will lifting

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the individual to a state of knowledge where resignation rules supreme. With the profound nature of the subject matter and the sublime impression it makes, tragedy is at the summit of poetic art. Grasping the selfishness of the society Oates refuses to accept an optimistic view of life without getting herself deluded by a false picture of romance and poetry. Projecting a tragic vision in the works of literature, Oates writes that "Man's goals are fated to be less than his ideals would have them, and when he realizes this truth he is enlightened in the general sense in which tragically enlightens men — a flash of bitter knowledge that immediately precedes death." (El.30) It is Oates's faith that at the core of the mature art is the puzzled insistence upon the formlessness of all substance and the insubstantial nature of all form. It is in short a vision of human tragedy destroyed by muta

Tragedy has been dealing with the limitations of the human world. Oates writes: "If communal belief in God has diminished so that, as writers, we can no longer presume upon it, then a redefinition of God in terms of the furthest reaches of man's hallucinations can provide us with a new basis for tragedy." (El.12). Oates's work appears to be the existential dramatization of what it means to suffer, particularly detailing the
terror of disintegrating identity. Like Didion, Oates is a gifted writer capturing the emotional intensities of life in contemporary America. Depicting her obsessive theme of fragmentation both personal and societal, her fiction characterizes an almost palpable sense of dread, anxiety and immanent peril. Oates attempts to assault the mind while moving the reader's emotions deeply, with a writing that is intense, vivid and disturbing. Romantic writers view the heroic stance, in which the protagonist asserts his will against the external world as a liberating stance. For Oates this attitude is not heroic or liberating. She views the obsessive drive for absolute freedom for absolute control as symptomatic of narcissism or megalomania, as an instance of Faustian overcoaching which she regards as a tragic exercise in Nihilism.

Walter Sullivan detailing the 'dimensions of the real' in Oates mentions that the Modern hero is in a peculiar situation to create himself, placed irrevocably beyond good and evil. The necessity for self-creation appears at once as his doom as well as the only way to freedom. By venturing to transcend the society he is seeking means to destroy himself.\textsuperscript{25} Max explains to Karan in \textit{With Shuddering Fall} that the order of the universe

has to be appreciated in terms of the laws of centrifugal and centripetal forces. There are "two pressures," he elaborates, "one pushing in, the other pushing out, that's how our lives are... the pressures are opposed, they fight each other. The law of the circle...two forces, one to live and one to die" (WSF.140). Human existence is in the tension between the two forces. Later, reading Paradise Lost, Max comments, that there is no paradise." The only important thing is that we have no paradise, we have none." (WSF.182) To Oates any force directing to an outer spiritual world is an illusion. Trapped in a disorderly world, the only world available according to Max, the expectation of order and yearning for higher things to Oates is only a folly. Oates's epigraph to Do with Me What you Will from Henry James explains "The world as it stands, is no illusion, no phantasm, no evil dream of a night; we wake up to it again for ever and for ever; we can neither forget it nor deny it nor dispense with it."

The paradox in much of Oates's fiction is that her characters push to transcend their circumstances, but it is their fate to discover that they are imprisoned, in a dream, polluted by the American reality. Though the dreams are given shape by the ideals of culture, they are circumscribed by the limitations of the very same
culture. Oates's grasp of Melville's world as "insolubly dualistic" where "Man cannot transcend his finite situation and wavers between the antipodal forces of good and evil, heaven and hell, God and Satan, hood and heart, spirit and matter" should have influenced her own tragic conception.  

She suggests that the romantic dreams while feeding man's sense of self-importance betray in the end, estranging him from all that is truly vital in life. The greed of humanity for freedom, for the paradise on earth is never satisfied in Oates, and it is this conflict between aspiration and limitation that awards strength and stamina to her fiction. For Oates, history does not constitute the human tragedy for it is irrevocable but it is the extreme and self-defeating will that has the capacity to drag man further from an authentic relation to his world. Asserting his will, the individual is separating himself from the rest of 'being' and the extreme assertion of the will, leads, to the estrangement from the rest of mankind. Man is born into a world which is more far-reaching and subtle in destroying his dream of fulfilment. Ihab Hassan suggests a typical listing of titles of modern novels - 'The Victim', 'Dangling Man,' 'The Naked and the Dead,' 'The Heart is a lovely Hunter,' 'Invisible Man,' 'A Long days dying,' 'The Color of Darkness,' 'A Good Man is Hard to Find,' 'The End of pity,' 'A Trace of Night,' 'Lie Down in Darkness,' - all leading
to a self-demolition and shattering dreams. Writers since the second world war have been chiefly concerned with discovering values that would redeem human existence and offer the promise of fulfilment. For the contemporary novelist the person who reduces an individual's sense of self-worth who limits the possibilities for happiness and growth is an enemy. Oates is a relentless crusader in search of meaning amidst the moral and intellectual crises of the times.

Oates cultivates a temperament of Kafka and Kierkegaard who considered existence as both comical and pathetic, pathetic because the striving is endless, comical because it is a deliberate distortion and debasement of self. Frederick J. Hoffman mentions that man "according to Kierkegaard established upon himself both an eternal and a finite basis — from man's finite point of view, the infinite is incommensurable. His restless search for the understanding and his numerous hesitations and half glimpses by the way, give rise to the variety of ironic, paradoxical, ambiguous and comic situations which fill Kafka's pages." Writing about the "Tragic and comic

28 Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism and the Literary Mind, p.201.
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vision of the *Brothers Karamazov*, Oates informs that "Kafka asks whether eternity can wipe out the humiliation of time and one answers such a question in one of two ways: from the 
essentialist point of view, in which eternity does indeed lose everything in it, or from the existentialist point of view, in which there is no eternity but only segments of time that are never transcended." (El.112) Hoffman mentions that Kierkegaard regards dread and anxiety as a necessary emotional constituent of the search for faith. Kafka's writings are based on this view. "Man's way to God is plagued by uncertainty and insecurity. His persistence in the face of absurdity and the experience of dread is by way of becoming an act of faith."29

Tragedy is the structural consummation of violent action. Violence is the sword and salvation of tragedy while passion is the essence of the tragic vision. With the expenditure of passion reality is affirmed and not annihilated. Oates mentions "Nothing can come out from nothing no energy from a bodiless spirit... there can be no violence out of a sense of nothing (El.6). The violent act to Oates paradoxically is evidence of a real and meaningful world. The human limitations imply man's inability to achieve God, like consciousness they also create the aggressive impulse giving a witness to the life

29Ibid, 198
force which Oates considers as the very epitome of tragic reality.

There is an underlying belief in Oates's fiction that language has a potential to permit man giving order and meaning to his inchoate world. Oates's choice of images, figures of speech and her basic rhetorical devices support her underlying concern with the violent and the tragic. She repeatedly affirms this belief that the "customary use of language is to restore with its magical eloquence the lost humanity of the tragic figure..." (El.12). By enriching her narratives with rhetorical violence Oates seems to suggest that violence often becomes a substitute for verbal language. John L. Horeaux writes that deaths, murders and killings in her fiction are often only paradigms, for a language of random destruction. By employment of rhetorical devices connoting violence and hostility with images of shattering glassware and trapped animals, Oates offers her narratives a breathless pace. While acknowledging the power of language she calls attention to its equally powerful ability to destroy. She creates a language of violence and tragedy. Describing "The Language of Tragedy and Violence" in Oates, Sister May Kathryn Grant writes that "Not only are the central episodes violent—rape,

30 "Mirage Seekers," Atlantic 224 (October 1969) p.128
murder, suicide, riots, beatings - but the smallest
descriptive details are also. The ultimate effect of
this technique is the creation of fiction permeated
with violence and tragedy. Oates's works offer nothing
to mollify or diminish the intensity of her tragic
vision.  

Oates does not favour the relief commonly associat-
ted with the final act of tragedy in which the old corrupt
world falls so that new and better world may replace it.
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31 Mary Kathryn Grant, The Tragic Vision of Joyce Carol

32 Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism and The Literary
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\(^{32}\) Frederick J. Hoffman, *Freudianism and The Literary Mind*, p.173-74..
Oates is psychologically, a perception of isolation. Oates writes "the shock of perceiving one's own specific identity coincides with the possibility of the tragic experience." (NHNE.7) She believes that the intuitive awareness of a spiritual oneness in mankind has been obscured by an over-reliance upon the intellect. Oates like Saul Bellow in his Humboldt's Gift endeavours to harmonize intellect as well as intuition in evoking a unique consciousness. She describes that one's life can neither be 'owned' nor 'controllable' and the only option is in conforming to a universal 'heartbeat' and to surrender. She often deliberately fails to resolve the tension between Faust and Adam, Thanatos and Eros, Will and Being, conscious of this tension inherent in the human condition. Oates while writing on Ionesco's Dances of Death mentions that the Professor in Eugene Ionesco's The Lesson explains "one must be able to subtract too. It's not enough to integrate. You must also disintegrate. That's the way life is. That's philosophy. That's science. That's progress, civilization." (FL.226)

As an artist Oates appears to hold the view that it is the experience that matters and the aesthetic achievement is only secondary. Writing on "The Hostile Sun! The Poetry of D.H.Lawrence," Oates mentions that Picasso has stated that it is his own dynamism he is painting because the moment of his thought interests him more than the thought itself." (NHNE.47)
Visionary Perception:

To Oates, tragedy "does not seem to be cathartic but to deepen our sense of the mystery and sanctity of the human predicament." (NHNE.102) While detailing the visionary aspects of literature in her critical treatise "The Nightmare of Naturalism: Harriet Arnow's The Dollmaker," Oates writes, "It seems to me that the greatest works of literature deal with the human soul caught in the stampede of time unable to gauge the profundity of what passes over it ... in this way history passes over most of us. Society is caught in a convulsion, whether of growth or of death and ordinary people are destroyed. There is no means of salvation." (NHNE.105)

Like Lawrence, Oates conceives the novelist as a prophet, with technique often coming as Lawrence himself puts it, from the end of pen. Her vision too consistently relies on evocation to an extraordinary degree. The singular feature with Oates is to shock and disturb her readers with her obsessive observation of the common lives. Just as Lawrence, Oates is driving her readers to confront themselves at the frontiers of experience. Like him, Oates articulates in her fiction the dynamics of ideology and the complex structures of emotion. As Oates improves her talents as a novelist, her fiction
while evoking the chaos and confusion in the reality also projects these experiences to wider patterns of significance. Her importance as a writer lies in her capacity to perceive the dual roles to submerge herself in the present age and to achieve a transcendence in her articulation of the reality. According to Oates the artist has to enact a cultural role in experiencing and articulating the underlying ongoing movements of emotion. Her objective is to study the individual in his specific and changing life style and capture the particularities, contradictions, tensions and uncertainties.

Depicting the present as a period of transition, Oates makes her characters live in a time of not yet. She makes them obsessed with the thoughts of what limits them most, simultaneously making them to believe that it is through such obsession they can achieve transcendence. She affirms that the struggle for uniqueness will be transcended by a new heaven, new earth of egoless involvements and compassion, where struggle is not destructive, where fulfilment is achieved through self-transcendence and not by self-affirmation. Oates writes while comparing her own Age with the Age of Lawrence that "our own era is one in which prophetic eschatological art has as great a significance as it did in 1916; Lawrence's despairing conviction that civilization was in the later days is
one shared by a number of our most serious writers, even if there is little belief in the Apocalypse in its classical sense. G.F. Waller explains that "Oates has more and more taken on the role of Prophet, at least in the sense that the writer can see beyond what we are immersed in." Oates writing, "Out of Stone, Into flesh: The Imagination of James Dickey," informs that "A mysterious unfathomable revolution seems to be taking place in our civilization, and like all upheavals in history it is neither knowable, nor governable, like irreducible branchings in the flow of life in evolution, it goes its way quite apart from the wishes of entire species, let alone individuals. However, it seems to be characterized by loss of ego, by experiences of transcendance among more and more people, especially younger people."

(NHNE.246-47). Oates suggests that the artist must be concerned with the transition through which America "sensitive, energetic, swarming with life...most obsessed with its own history and its own destiny...approaching a kind of manic stage" is passing, "preparing itself for a transformation of being" similar to that, experienced by individuals as they approach

34 G.F. Waller Dreaming America, p.13-14.
the end of one segment of their lives and most rapidly
and perhaps desperately, sum up every thing that has gone
before.\textsuperscript{35} Writing on James Dickey, Oates asserts
that "a mysterious, unfathomable revolution seems to be
taking place in our civilization." Only through the artist
laying bare his personal history as representative of the
crises of society, can it be "knowable" or "Governable"
(NHNE.246).

Luis L.Martz suggests that Oates earnestly ventures
to convince us in \textit{The Fabulous Beasts} that connection is
possible even through the 'fabulous beasts' that we are,
or created by our verbal powers. Oates is not only trying
to convey in her abrupt temrous apprehensions the sense
of broken connections every where. But she also suggests
at the same time the need to mend connections. She quotes
Heidegger in one epigraph in this collection,"it is not we
who play with words but the nature of language plays with
us." In terms of this poetry, language dies at the core
of our humanity demanding our response and creation, so
different from the limited forces found in outer
nature.\textsuperscript{36}

Oates's attempt to make her characters transcend
the triviality of their lives by driving them to seek

\textsuperscript{35} Joyce Carol Oates, "New Heaven, New Earth," \textit{Saturday
Review}, November 4, 1972, p.52

\textsuperscript{36} Louis L. Martz, \textit{The Yale Review}. 66-1 (Autumn 1976)
p.117
adventures that take them beyond the frontiers of human experience makes her visionary perception quite evident. She writes: "The conversion of a centred personality into a higher, transcendental personality cannot be an artificially, externally enforced event; it must be a natural event - because the conversion is imminent." Presenting a vision of the ultimate human anguish, like Henry James and Virginia Woolf, Oates is a superb visionary of the web of consciousness, dramatizing the psychic experience as total reality, transcending the tragic limitations of the socially organised life. Her talent lies in her capacity to make her characters escape the crucial dichotomy between inner vision and outer reality. Her subject though is familiar, it is conceived and written in book after book at such heat that it becomes a poetic realisation of an apocalypse wherein, the trivial incidents extend themselves into the universal. Oates transmits the thoughts and emotions of her characters with such force, that there is merging of consciousness between character and reader, so that the sensitive reader becomes aware of a greater life force in which he or she participates. Oates owns a strong and dynamic mind to synthesize the tortuous despair.

with a great lust for earth, simultaneously possessing a capacity to make life complicated by the release of primitive terrors Freud and Einstein contributed to the consciousness.

Oates passionately believes like D.H. Lawrence that the "essential function of art is moral...But a passionate implicit morality not didactic. A morality which changes the blood, rather than the mind."38

Oates perhaps is representing through her fiction the superman of Nietzsche, who will bring about a transvaluation of life, destroying, at the same time creating. Living creatively and passionately he will give voice to the struggle for power. Oates perhaps desires through such a representation a cultural renaissance in which art and philosophy play a dominant role awarding a genuine and lasting transcendence.

Oates's The Edge of Impossibility: Tragic Forms in Literature and New Heaven, New Earth: The Visionary Experience in Literature reflect the tragic awareness of isolation and separation and the visionary perception of unity and harmony. The mystical intuitive perception of unity and harmony denotes the province of visionaries. Oates appears to favour the idea that tragic vision, the perception of

fragmentation and isolation, must give way to a visionary outlook perceiving interconnectedness and unity. Demanding an extension of the self to cover the extent of the world, Oates mentions Dr. Lewis Thomas describing brain as the most public organ on the face of the earth, open to everything, sending out messages to everything." The public nature of the brain is an evidence for the belief that man is not isolated, not separate from other men or from nature. We pass thoughts around from mind to mind, so compulsively and with such speed that the brains of mankind often appear functionally to be undergoing fusion. This is when you think about it, really amazing. The whole dear notion of one's own self-marvelous old free-willed, free-enterprising autonomous, independent, isolated island of a self-is a myth."39 Writing about this isolated existence earlier, Oates mentions. 'It is time for psychology to take very seriously the propositions advanced by all the great mystics - that the 'self' is a part of a larger reservoir of energy, call it any name you like. As long as the myth of separate and competitive "selves" endures, we will have a society obsessed with adolescent ideas of being superior, of conquering, of destroying."40


While introducing *The Philosopher's Stone*, Oates writes, "we seem to be moving toward a rejection of the traditional western philosophical enquiry, "Whom am I?" to the traditional Eastern inquiry what Am I?" Such a movement is of course, a tremendous leap - the substitution of the word *what* for the ego centered word *who* really constitutes a near miraculous transformation."  

41 G.F. Waller makes an interesting observation in his scholarly study of Oates. "In Oates's work one now discerns a movement, observable in her essays as well as her fiction, towards a fascination with Eastern renunciatory philosophical modes. It is as if the violence and egocentric destructiveness which have been such tragic outcomes of western history and philosophy must somehow be transcended by embracing the opposite vision."  

Oates evidently moves toward a deeper, more inclusive reality of the visionary experience. Her view of the evolving nature, does not recognize a tragic theory, traditionally affirming the reality of the separate and private individual, heroically struggling against a world. Oates while writing about "Kafka's Paradise" mentions that Kafka and Lawrence shared a fundamental detestation  

42 G.F. Waller, *Dreaming America*, p.216
for tragedy and a belief that it is an art form which expresses overestimation of the self to the exclusion of other realms of being. (NHNE.270) As tragedy demands an emotional investment in the ego, Oates confidently mentions that it would ultimately be destroyed because it has evolved too far in one direction (NHNE.273). She suggests an alternative to this condition in the blend of intellect and intuitive powers. Such an exercise, Oates feels, would provide a unified vision suggesting a mystic and visionary experience. It is a demonstration of Oates's ability to integrate seemingly conflicting concepts. Oates extends her interest in the effects produced by visionary experience to the individual and to the society as a whole, believing that "the degree to which an audience accepts or rejects or sympathetically detaches itself from a given tragic action will ultimately condition the collective life of an era" (NHNE.14). Oates expects such affirmation to manifest in the life of the individual artist also. Walt Whitman said that the poetry he wrote was incidental to his life; and Lawrence often made the point...that his true art was his life, the living of his life (NHNE.4). Oates thus celebrates the perception of the individual artists, considering the perception as redemptive, revolutionary
and enlightening activity helping the society as well as their individual selves.

Abraham Maslow describes visionary perception as one feature of what he calls a peak experience. Maslow finds psychological confirmation for unmotivated and impersonal, ego-transcending perception with philosophical implications, nevertheless supporting Oates's view of reality. He differs with the classical Freudian view that perception and cognition are always motivated and egocentric. Oates recognizes in Lawrence, Kafka, O'Connor and Yeats a synthesis of life-affirming powers, and therefore an indication of their self-actualization. Her scholarly interest in the writers of visionary capabilities endowed with self-actualizing powers in her New Heaven, New Earth, appears to be a healthy and growth producing activity in the artist herself. Accordingly she believes that visionary writers "at one time or another seem to experience an impersonal force, a blossoming, a flowering of the energies of life itself." (NHNE.72) G.F. Waller detailing "The Obsessive Vision" of Oates mentions that her "Prophetic vision attempts to define the tragedy of our age, in which individuals yearn towards a new consciousness, sensed through and

43 Abraham Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being (New York: D Van Nostrand Co. 1968) p.79
yet ultimately transcending sexuality by exploring similarly the way passion and its necessary violence, 'redem and may perhaps make a kind of eternity.'

(Bl.139)44

Underlying Oates's commitment to the literature of ideas and its criticism, is a strong belief, that writer, both create and are created by their work. This belief argues for the visionary experience as a superior indication for the life force.

Creative Springs:

Like Lawrence, Oates shows an awareness of the dichotomy of the illusions available to the imagination. The simple act of writing becomes a triumph to Oates as of Lawrence, where in she could synthesize an extraordinary variety of selves- the 'personal,' the 'transcendent,' the 'sexual,' the 'social,' and the 'artistic,' asserting herself and her sophisticated art form. (NE.247) Oate's's The Edge of Impossibility: The Tragic Forms in Literature is quite an important book for it suggests a deeper understanding of Oates's literary practice to suit to her precepts made so vocal in this treatise. It is a creative work charting the course and nature of the creative flow illuminating Oates's deep convictions that inspired her fiction.

44 G.F. Waller, Dreaming America, p.21.
Just as psychological predispositions colour the reader's response to fiction, so the psychological predispositions of the author inevitably affects the creativity on all levels from fundamental decisions concerning, structure, point of view, character and situation to questions of theme and style. Leon Edel detailing the Modern Psychological Novel mentions that Dorothy Richardson's writing was her way of overcoming the stigma of her shopkeeper class. W.S. Wall's sought to overcome the sense of inferiority he felt, because his parents were servants.45 On the same analogy it can be argued that the proletarian temperament of Joyce Carol Oates and the unique revelation of her creative unconscious appear to be the consequences of Oates's personal experience of Depression, particularly as the daughter of an assembly line worker. Robert H. Bossum mentions that "Oates's fascination with the Depression clearly stems from the collective impotence and bewilderment characteristic of that period. Her preoccupation with control accounts for the importance she places on childhood, not only because the parent-child relationship typifies the conflict but also because she believes that early experiences become internalized fatalities. 45 Leon Edel, The Modern Psychological Novel (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1964) p. 157.
It also accounts for the much remarked violence in her fiction."46

Freud 'the sage of modern psychology,' has created a whole mythology of complexes and inhibitions around libido, the master urge of creativity. For Freud civilization is nothing but these complexes and inhibitions coming layer upon layer on the primeval uninhibited sexual nature of man. These complexes and inhibitions create the conflict confronting the social norms. Creativity is a popular process of rationalization, particularly channelizing the libido within well-defined pathways. Albert Mordell, describing the erotic motive in literature mentions that a "literary work stands in the same relation to the author as the dream of the much patient. The source/reexplanation of creative genius will be found in the infantile love life of the author. A genius discovers a new truth or depicts beauty, having experienced a repression and led to make certain conclusions from that event which society has not wished to admit."47


Theodore Reik mentions that prominence of thoughts about death is an unconscious reaction to secretive aggressive and murder as thought and impulses. Originally occurring to young and temperamental people when their strong wishes and desires are frustrated, these tendencies finally take the form of intense preoccupation with the abstract nature of death making the highly personal origin recognizable. Nevertheless Oates employs death, not for sensation but for a specific purpose discussed earlier in "The Dark Angel" in this thesis. To Oates life is life when it is understood clearly as dying. The knowledge of death has a creative effect on man charging him to complete his life leading to the process of self-actualization. All obsession with death is to solve the riddle of life. It is a frantic search for truth that would make life meaningful. The death wish noticed in literature, though a preoccupation is not the artist's desire for physical cessation but appears to be the movement of the given work toward a total consummation that can only be death.

Oates's fiction ventures to glorify the sick self directly touching the symptoms of a deeper malaise. The Christian outlook considers the whole world as sick.

48 Theodore Reik, The Search Within p.142
infected with slave morality. Oates's fiction suggests that she views history like Nietzsche. The present moment is always some crisis, some fall from classical greatness' some corruption or evil to be saved from. Oates's catholic-christian background nourished by Flannery O'Connor's influence should have presented her with a characteristic world view.

Introducing the Critical Essays on Joyce Carol Oates collected by Linda W. Wagner, Oates writes "a work of art created with any degree of seriousness over a protracted period of time, reflects in various rippling, quivering layers, the selves that constituted the writer during the period of composition."\textsuperscript{49}

For Oates, created character and 'self' in the modern world are analogous to the problem of contemporary artist. The drive for autonomy in the personal and political sphere is mirrored by the drive for artistic freedom and originality. These struggles appear to engender a climate of anxiety and a sense of paranoia. Sensible of the risks of ontological dissolution and doubt, Oates believes in artistic control. She perceives her goal not in autonomy but in an integrity of vision with the potential to accommodate a universe of trash and of beauty. She celebrates the artist's special power and

\textsuperscript{49} Linda W. Wagner, ed. Critical Essays on Joyce Carol Oates, p.XI.
authority to create and honour that realm. Oates at the same time opposes the idea of the isolated Artist as hero - an authoritarian figure who imposes his will on a bewildered audience.

Freud's Interpretation of Dreams influenced the writer to revise his view of himself as an artist and of his responsibility to his readers. Experimental writers like Oates expect their readers to participate in the creative act in an ingenious way. From Oates's imaginative and rhetorical writing it is clear that she believes in literature as a way of life. The creation of literature itself is an experience with performative value in the shaping of the individual's belief and actions.

Oates's inconstant probing into the essentials, her tremendous zest to the macabre, her felicity in representing the morbidity appear to be parables for her own deeper affliction. While discussing Kafka, Oates mentions "the ultimate, interior, soul transforming experience the despairing problems of life are finally tricks of language the ceaseless torment of hell merely that - a self-form will that willfully constructs parables. (NINE, 268).

Oates says "I have come to the conclusion that all

50 Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism and the Literary Mind p. 111.
writing is matter of psychological and ever biological responses "to a "demonic" experience, Oates writes frequently. Novelists are "so violently driven, so excited that what they create is not at all important to them." The Novelist in "celebrating art itself, creativity itself as it flows through" the personality. 51

In her preface to the Scenes from American Life the short story collection Oates edited, she writes: . "Every person dreams and every dreamer is a kind of artist. The formal artist is one who arranges his dreams into a shape that can be experienced by other people. There is no guarantee that art will be understood, not even by the artist, it is not meant to be understood but to be experienced." 52

While the basis of Oates's early literary enquiry appears to be founded on the larger, more theoretical questions of philosophical reality, the materials of her creative and critical writings appear to have led her inward toward the psyche and psychological interpretation. For Oates the impulse toward tragic vision grows from a recognition by the artist of the split between self and community, a realization of isolation. The

52 "Transformation of 'elf: An Interview with Joyce Carol Oates," Ohio Review, XV.

ego, on the one hand encourages survival through intellec-
tual abilities, separating itself from others to preserve
the physical entity. On the other hand it remains frus-
trated against, death, the final reality. Death may be .
interpreted as a merging of individual consciousness into
a universal oneness made possible by the annihilation
of the ego. It is a rebirth when the artist passionately
asserts his ego against reality—connecting himself to
other selves. Oates writes "Nihilism is overcome by the
breaking down of the dikes between human beings, the
flowing forth of passion." (El. 7) As we witness this
tragic action of the artist "we share in a mysterious
dream the necessary loss of self." (El. 4)

American Dream:

Oates appears to suggest through her fiction the
hidden springs of American aspirations. Ihab Hassan
writes, "The anarchy of the American soul is nourished
on an old dream: not freedom, not power, not even love, but
the dream of immortality. America has never really acknow-
ledged time. Oates seems to depict the American dream
as a false one of conquest, control, ownership and an
impossible exercise of overcoming mutability.

53 Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the
contemporary American Novel (Princeton: Princeton
She does not endorse the philosophy of tian self consciousness underlying the American dream, though she dramatizes with great care its futility in her fiction. G.F. Waller notices in Oates the restlessness of the human personality inherent in the dream. He views the American paranoid search for material security as the external sign of an inner restlessness springing from the American permanent, characterized by its changes and chances. Noticing Oates's primary focus on the struggle for autonomy in her fiction he mentions that there is a tone of celebration based on the knowledge of the inner landscapes and the human personality and its dreams, creating the external world. According to Oates, an unreasonable pursuit of individualism, negotiated by the primacy of the ego is the problem of the present culture. (NHNE.61) This pursuit while frustrating the basic human desires also thwarts the evolution of consciousness in man.

"Ordinary consciousness is an exquisitely evolved personal construction" designed for the primary purpose of individual biological survival." Oates considers the American society cultivating ordinary consciousness

54 G.F. Waller, Dreaming America, pp. 40-41.

to a rare degree. This exclusive cultivation she feels, promotes the need to conquer as well as the fear of being conquered. Individuals hence in Oates find themselves alienated and society is characterized by competition and lack of community trust and cooperation. Conditioned by the impulses to master and to control, the relationships in Oates with nature turn wary. She believes that literature instead of getting caught in the ir, must work toward evolving consciousness. Oates mentions that the conception of the isolated consciousness, the ego-ridden "I" is responsible for "a society obsessed with adolescent ideas of being superior, of conquering, of destroying." 56

Oates represents initiation as a condition mediating between two types of anonymity. (1) The anonymity that results from a complete surrender to a religious or social order and (2) the anonymity that results from revolt, the defiance of the past which holds the individual's identity. Oates suggests that the American recoil against a life dominated by a restrictive institutions has driven the Americans in an opposite and dangerous direction in substituting the self-isolating freedom for imprisoning conventions and traditions. Frederic

56 Joyce Carol Oates, "The Myth of the Isolated Artist," p.75
I. Carpenter writes, "American dreams erred not in the direction and romantic absolution, but of individualism."\(^{57}\) Oates's *With Shuddering Fall* makes that final compromise between the isolation that is an imperative of the community. It is a compromise which Fiedler asserts the American Gothic romances refused to make: "On the one hand, their fiction, projects a fear of solitude which is the price of freedom; and on the other hand, an almost hysterical attack on all the institutions which might inhibit that freedom or mitigate the solitude it breeds."\(^{58}\)

From the beginning America has been a country dreamed out of wishes. The American Dream of wealth, power and individual fulfilment is at the centre of the American 'Self' image. Oates seems to feel as has Mailer, that dream may have changed into a nightmare. Oates's work has been a celebration of the instinctive and the irrational, of the subterranean territory of the self that is expressed in dreams. Her works are explorations of the deep psychic content of the mind of America. She converts private fantasies into matters


\(^{58}\) Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in American Novel*, p.129
of public concern. She has a romantic conception of
the role of the artist in clarifying a Nation's vision
of itself. Oates appears to endorse the sentiment that
the artist must like Walt Whitman dream for others, the
collective American Dream.

Conclusion

With the arrival of Joyce Carol Oates, the American
fiction abandoned the alien world of the romances to re-
center time and history. When Norman Mailer confessed
his inability to locate the center of values confronting
the monster of American life, when Philip Roth found
it difficult to make the American reality credible, and
when most of the modern writers turned as fabulators,
Oates remaining steadfast, creates history in suggesting
ways and means to set right the 'broken connections' and
establish harmony invoking the very same 'anonymous Sins' responsible for the discord. Oates's opinion
that man is tethered to the society conscious of the
limitations the society imposes, distinguishes her work
from much classic and contemporary American fiction. The
writers of the period noting the disparity, between the
self and the society, are making excursions into various


60 Philip Roth, Commentary, 32 (March 1961) p.294.
new literary forms in a bid to create a world elsewhere. Oates remains convinced that the escape into the isolation of one's own fantasies and fears only intensifies instead of liberating the human being from the fabulator's vision.

Candid in her evaluation and representation of a transparent and urgent world, Oates while exposing the false dichotomy of mind and body considers herself as the champion to fight the intellecutionalization. While bringing a solid past into the midst of ineluctable reality of the physical world, Oates denotes the descent of the man of ideas into the primordial world, where the relentless flow of lifecycle is discerned in all its power.

Her fluid demonstration of the art of writing leaves nothing unsaid. Her imagination is so nervously rich that characters and ideas multiply themselves as if by their own volition. Oates fuses and recreates the central Lawrencean motifs of fascination with flux, prophetic and visionary aspect of Art and the therapeu tic exposure of the self. The highest vision that Oates gives like Dostoevsky" is the vision of the unfathomable raw process of creation as it leaps from the unconscious." (El.113). Like Yeats Oates reveals her genius not in her ability to hammer her multiple thoughts into unity; but
rather in her faithful accounting of the impossibility. This stance may lead one to the edge of madness, but undeterred, Oates like Ulysses continues her pilgrimage cherishing the remembrance of things past. With wonderful ease Oates brings together aesthetic theory and emotional experience. She writes, "It is not knowledge that redeems or knowledge increases unreality, it is rather the power of the creative imagination whether working in stone, or with words..." (El. 147).

Observing the mundane millions, Oates presents them in their touching inarticulateness. She meticulously translates the mute suffering terribly disturbing the readers without really making them to understand. She is enormously interested in people and their lives. "I am fascinated by people I meet .. and my interest in them is not vampiristic, because I don't want to take life from them but only to honor the life in them, to give some permanent form to their personalities. It seems to me that there are so many people who are inarticulate but who suffer and doubt and love nobly, who need to be immortalized or at least explained." 61

Oates like Schopenhauer is convinced that the sign of the artist's vocation is the capacity for

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suffering. When blind striving and the will to live dominate and stifle lives, the artist observing this suffering from will, renders permanently the aesthetic comprehension of ideal states. She reflects the sharpest perceptions of life and the most exquisite aesthetic conquests of the will. Linda W. Wagner writes that Oates is "rather the serious writer intent on telling stories, an artist in the Dostoevsky-Balzac-Laulkner mode who believed in the writer's responsibility to draw a culture and its people to present its discreet components so that readers might gradually come to understand some of the mystery that life at its most complex includes."62

Oates believes that the power of the artist is in managing and convincingly dramatizing feelings. She transcends through her character's obsessive actions remaining psychologically healthy and leaving her art remarkably sane.

Oates writes, "If art has any general evolutionary function it must be to enhance the race, to work somehow toward an essential unity and harmony, survival and growth - and perhaps an integration of the human world with the natural world."63


In her prophetic stance - Joyce Carol Oates reveals the Lawrentian affinities. Her emphasis on transcendence through obsession, struggle, suffering and affirmation of the flesh underlines the ecstasy in agony.

asaktabuddih Sarvatra
jitātmā vigatasprah
naśkarmyasiddhim paramām
samnyasena dhigacchati

"He whose understanding is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self and from whom desire has fled - he comes through renunciation to the supreme state transcending all work."

The Bhagavadgita,* Chapter XVIII
Verse 49.

* Translated and edited by Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (Bombay: Blackie and Son Publisher's Pvt. Ltd., 1979)
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Bala ji Prasad  
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Professor Bala ji Prasad:

Please accept my apologies for the slowness in answering your interesting letter. I had too many commitments already agreed upon to leave a little time for anything else.

I would have preferred to answer with my opinion of psychic significance of Love, Death, and Anxiety in novels of Joyce Carol Oates. I could have written that in a paragraph or so instead of the enclosed pouring which you may not have time to read. I did this because, I am ashamed to say, I have not read all the novels, and thus could not give an honest opinion.

You have probably read her latest and thirteenth novel and have no need of the many details of action of which I wrote to give bases for my opinions.

I thank you for your kind words on two of my novels on critics have tended to ignore. Most critics, as well as those who wrote to me, expressed much praise for two of her novels: Hunter's Horn and The Dollmaker. Two books of fiction were also widely reviewed with much commendation.

Sincerely,

Harriette Simpson Arnow

ANGEL OF LIGHT is a dramatic tragedy of several lives in an imaginary Washington, D.C. The author through her characters probes "the psychic significance of Love, Death, and Anxiety." It is also a story of greed, hatred, lust, wealth, and ambition for financial and political power to be realized through betrayal, deceit, crime, the right friends in the right places, or the getting of a wealthy spouse or lover.

Angel of Light may seem a strange title for a novel that depicts deceit, planned murder, and several characters capable of only self-love. The author explained: Maurice Halleck was the great-great-great-grandson of John Brown, an avid abolitionist. Believing he had "letters of marque from God," John Brown spent most of his adult life in fighting slavery. He, with only twenty-two men, attacked the Federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry in what is now West Virginia. Many of his men were killed. John Brown was captured, tried for treason, found guilty, and hanged in December, 1859. Abolitionists of the North idolized John Brown as a hero. Thoreau referred to him as, "An Angel of Light," Thus, the title.
Maurice Halleck might also be called, "An Angel of Light." He was capable of great love, socially for his wife, their two children, and his best friend Nicholas Martens.

The story is basically the story of a family: Maurice Halleck, father and husband; his wife, Isabel de Benavente Halleck; and their children, Kirsten and Owen. Most important of the several other characters is Martens.

The novel begins with the Halleck young ones: Kirsten age seventeen, a senior in Eyre Academy for Girls, and Owen, a senior at Harvard. It is March, 1980, several months since their father's death. Months before he died Maurice Halleck had been accused of taking bribes, and of being slow in prosecuting certain cases. It was suggested that he resign from his important but imaginary post as Director of the commission for the Ministry of Justice. A few weeks later, Maurice Halleck was found dead with his car half buried in Bream Down swamp. The police had investigated; the House had investigated his death. Investigators had also found the confession written shortly before his death. The verdicts were suicide.

Kirsten and Owen knew their father was innocent of any wrong. They were certain he had either been forced to write the confession or had not written any of it. The
almost illegible scribbles and fragmentary sentences were unlike his writing. Maurice's closest friend, Nicholas Martens, could scarcely read the confession. Owen and Kirsten knew their father would not write in that manner. Kersten was certain he had not committed suicide. A car had come up behind him and pushed off the road, or he had been killed in some other manner.

Owen and Kirsten made a pact to find the murderers. They wanted justice, not revenge.

Their mother, the beautiful and seductive Isabel de Benavent Halleck, had accepted the invitation of a friend in Nassau to spend several weeks in her home. The friend was trying to help Isabel recover from the shock of her husband's death. Not that Isabel needed to do a great deal of recovering, and any way black was most becoming to her blond beauty. Owen remembered that when she heard the news of her husband's death she kept saying: "Your father has disgraced us, your father has made a fool of himself, your father was insane, your father did this deliberately. Your father should never have accepted money -- not in that idiotic way."

Less than two weeks after making the pact with his sister, Owen received a telephone call from his mother. Her subject was Kirsten: Kirsten had always been a difficult child; one of her psychiatrists had said she had suicidal
tendencies. Now Kirsten is worse than ever; she will not come to the telephone when her mother calls, and from what Isable had learned from conversations with Kirsten's suitemate, the president of Eyre School and various faculty members, Kirsten is cutting half her classes, sleeping by day and wandering around the dormitory and outside at night. Isable had also learned from Kirsten's suitemate that Kirsten had lost so much weight her clothing no longer fit." -- and I assume -- dear Christ I know -- that they are in shameful condition."

The school psychologist had seemed to like Kisten; she had found her an extremely sensitive girl with a high I.Q. Isable didn't know what to do with Kirsten. She was simply exaggerating the sort of grief any child would feel under the circumstances. Isable thought Kirsten needed professional help. "I might have to have her committed."

Owen objected to the idea of committing his sister to an asylum for the insane. He argued with Isable when she told him to go see Kirsten; the girl wouldn't see her. At last, much against his wishes, Owen agreed to visit Kirsten. He heard laughter and knew that someone was in the room with his mother. A man? There is now seductiveness in Isable's voice, seductiveness with the awareness that she is half Spanish.
Owen disliked to leave his studies at Harvard for the drive to Eyre School to see Kirsten when he didn't think he could help. A short time before, he had received in the mail from his sister a manilla envelope containing two photographs cut from newspapers.

One was of their mother in a Dior gown of fuchsia silk with cream rose pearls and earrings to match. The caption, after giving her name and husband's position, read: "One of Washington's most popular hostesses -- Cochairwoman of the board of the Women's Auxiliary of the Smithsonian." Kirsten had written around her mother's photograph "Adultress-pig. Bitch. Murderer."

The other photograph was of Nicholas Maten shaking hands with the President on the occasion of his swearing in as Director of the Commission for the Ministry of Justice, the post formerly held by the late Maurice Halleck. Kirsten had drawn arrows pointing to Nick's head and written: "I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_WHAT TO DO AND WILL DO IT."

Owen considered it as one of Kirsten's worst pranks. He told no one and tore the photographs and envelope into small bits. Owen was not as certain as Kirsten that their father had been murdered; the idea that his mother had planned and had the murder committed was unthinkable -- at first Owen tried to be brotherly; he told Kirsten
she was not getting enough sleep or enough to eat, but said nothing of her plucked eyebrows or slovenly dress. Staring at him she said: "You know what I want, you know what we are going to do, don't deny me, don't deny him."

Owen could not then believe as Kirsten believed. He said her plan was sick, crazy, absurd, and hopeless, reminding her there'd been no witnesses to their father's death, the official cause of death had been decided. Did Kirsten think someone had forced him off the road to kill himself? Forced him to get drunk every night?

Years before her father died, Isabel had told Kirsten she was a psychopath. True or not, it could have been only a piece of her mother's cruelty. Mentally, Kirsten had not been well since, unknown to Owen or Isabel, she induced a friend to drive her to the place where her father's car went off the road in Virginia, about a hundred miles from Washington. Kirsten walked down the steep slope into Brea Down swamp. She saw death in the misshapen dying trees; she smelled death in the brackish water and the decaying plants in the black water she walked through. She tasted death in the mud and water.

She spoke to her father, "You know, you have gone first. You inhaled it, the teaming life. Breathed it in.
Teeming life, polluting life, I love that word. I first used in ninth grade, pullulating, you were proud of me, you loved me, I disappointed you in the end but you loved me, you were the only one -- the only one."

Meanwhile Kirsten continued at Eyre School:
"Thinking, Brooding, Inventing. Dreaming. Populating her head with fantasy figures that are, in fact, real figures."

Kirsten and Owen continued their investigations between the author's flashbacks into the lives of their parents. The first of these takes the reader back to early September 1944, when fourteen year old Maurice Halleck, commonly known as Maurie, is unpacking in his assigned suite at Bauer School. Maurie, the first to arrive, had first choice of a bedroom. He chose the bedroom facing the court because he thought it would be so noisy no other student would want it.

Nicholas Martens, known as Nick throughout the novel, came with his mother while Maurie was unpacking. They made no effort to hide their distaste and surprise at sight of the undersized Maurie with his snub nose, wire rimmed glasses, and his face red with embarrassment as the pimpls erupting on his face, neck and back.

Nick wanted the bedroom Maurie had chosen. The ensuing conversation is a masterpiece of characterization of Nicholas Martens; he not only got the bedroom, but had
Maurie apologizing for having taken it. Here, the reader feels that Nick will get what he wants from the world.

Hew knew, on hearing Maurie's name, what Halleck meant -- wealth. True, a large proportion of boys at Bauer School came from families as wealthy as Maurie's and a few were wealthier.

Nick's father after an unsuccessful career as a musician had become director of an unsuccessful music school. Nick came to Bauer as a scholarship student.

Nick became a straight A student, Harvard bound, president of the debating team, the third or fourth best chess player in the school, and president of his class for three years. Nick, the school politician, courteous to adults -- to important adults -- and hilarious as he mimicked them behind their backs, was an excellent actor on stage and off.

Tall, slender, graceful, handsome Nick weighing one hundred fifty pounds, was the school boxer, co-captain of the varsity basketball team, the track star and school tennis champion.

Scholastically, Maurie considered himself the best of the second best. Times, he was brilliant in class; other days he could get nothing right. He didn't rate in sports, though Nick had taught him tennis; he could
play three sets quite well but after that his asthma bothered him.

Yet, Nick and Maurie remained close friends. Maurie Halleck was almost blind in one eye, undersized, with his pimples, his talk of God and Christ, and often bullied by Nick into apologizing for nothing.

Nick's classmates wondered and sometimes asked Nick what he saw in Maurie to make him his best friend.

One of Nick's closest friends was Anthony De Piero, Nick's equal in grades and most other matters. Little was known of him except that he'd been born in Brussels and brought to the States at the age of three. His father was dead; his mother heiress to a large fortune. Nick sensed that Tony was the one boy he was unable to manipulate. Tony, speaking of Maurie, once said to Nick: "You're going to hurt him. You want to hurt him."

Nick told Tony he was full of shit. Nick did like Maurie -- in a way. He was always good for a loan from his allowance and never seemed to care when, or if, Nick paid it back. Nick enjoyed talking to him, telling of his parents whom he was glad to be away from because of their constant quarreling. He would listen to Maurie unless he talked of God and Christ, doing good, the sufferings of
Cardinal de Monier in Africa, or of Albert Schweitzer whom he greatly admired as he did Tolstoi's Confessions and many of Dostoevski's characters. Weary of such talk, Nick would bully Maurie into silence.

More importantly, friendship with Maurie meant that Nick would always be included among those invited to the Halleck town house for Christmas vacation or better, a stay at the Halleck's lodge by Bitterfield Lake. That meant swimming, boating, canoeing, tennis, hiking, climbing the surrounding mountains, unusually fine trout fishing, or skiing when there was snow.

Nick was of course one of Maurie's three friends who shared the graduation gift of Joe Halleck to his son—a canoe trip down the wild Loughrea in western Ontario during August, 1947. Maurie's father furnished everything from canoes to food and camping gear. During their holiday, the young men realized they were no longer school boys. They would, come autumn, be college men. Maurie dreamed of getting a degree from a college of theology.

Nick was the helmsman of the canoe in which Maurie paddled; Tony Di Piero and Kim Ryan were in the other canoe. The boys were seasoned and skilled canoeists, though the Loughrea was the most interesting, the most difficult
white water they had yet known. Maurie's arms were stiff and aching before the day's end. Yet he did not complain. He had grown since entering Bauor School, but was now only five feet, eight inches tall, weighing 125 pounds.

They reached the lower Loughrea rapids, the most dangerous part of the river, on their fourth day of canoeing. They had on that day already spent five hours paddling. Now it was late, but Nick was in a hurry to run the rapids.

They entered the three-mile stretch of white water plunging amid rocks, boulders, fallen trees, and scrub willow. At this point the river narrowed. It bent; it twisted. The air turned to vapor. One can feel not only the violent thrust of the water and its many currents, but the drop, the weight of gravity itself.

Kim and Tony's canoe in front capsized. They caught opposite sides of the canoe and clung as the craft plunged down the river. Shortly afterward, Nick's canoe slammed broadside against a rock. Maurie was flung into the river. Nick tried to stay in the canoe, but his hands slipped and he, too, was flung into the water.
He could see little in the spray and mist. He could make out what appeared to be a piece of cloth, disappearing, reappearing as the rapids flung it this way and that. Maurie? The swift water knocked Nick about as he tried to reach what he thought could be Maurie.

Maurie was flung against a ledge. Nick managed to get close enough to grasp his hand. He had saved Maurie from drowning. None of the canoeists at the time of the accident, or later, any of the Hallecks blamed Nick for the accident. He was the hero. He had saved Maurie's life. And so he remained to become a legend in the Halleck family.

Years later, Kirsten asked Di Piero if Nick did save her father from drowning.

Di Piero answered: "Nick saved his life. -- Of course Nick caused the accident; he was so impatient and careless, making us go into the rapids without studying it first; we should probably have carried the canoes. It was his fault. He was such a pushy bastard even then".

A few chapters are chiefly concerned with Kirsten's thoughts and activities. These are followed by another flashback to August, 1955. Here, we meet Maurie and his
fiancée the beautiful and seductive Isabele de Benavente. She and Maurie have accepted Nick's invitation to visit him and his parents at their cottage on Mount Dunvegan Island off the coast of Maine.

Maurie and Nick are now graduates of Harvard College and Harvard Law School. Nick's father mentioned to his son the several thousand dollars owed Maurie for helping pay Nick's expenses in law school. Nick is not worried about the unpaid debt; he is certain Maurie would not accept the money if he offered to repay it.

Maurie is already in Washington with the newly established Commission on Civil Rights. Nick is with a Boston law firm, but would rather be in Washington.

Isabel is the only child of wealthy Luis de Benavente of New York City, Washington, Palm Beach and Madrid. A financier, Luis de Benavente had successfully lied his way through government investigations of his various and multiple financial exploits.

Isabel, in spite of her father's "sensitive" reputation, had been a Washington Junior Cotillion debutante the preceding season.

Nick had already heard much of Maurie's finances. He knew that Maurie was "besotted by love" and desperate
to marry Isabel. Yet, Nick is too much of a man of the world to show surprise at her silvery blond beauty, her painted fingernails and toenails, her bare midriff, or the sophistication of a girl who can't be more than eighteen or nineteen years old.

The shock and surprise came from Isabel's eyes -- her calm amused stare, her arrogant smile; her hard and knowing and sly eyes exactly like his eyes. Isabel's eyes said to him: "Yes, I know you, Nick Martens, you are the boy Maurie used to adore before he met me. You are the boy who almost caused his death, and almost saved his life. I know there is an "understanding" -- a "sacred bond" -- of which you never speak."

Nick despised himself for thinking that Isabel was far more attractive than his fiancee, June Penrick, teacher in a Quaker school.

Maurie, eager for the two people he loves best to become acquainted, suggests after lunch that Nick and Isabel take a walk along the beach while he stays with Nick's parents. He had thought their stroll would last only a few minutes; a storm was threatening. The great storm of wind and rain came and still Nick and Isabel did not return. Maurie was beside himself with worry; they could be drowned. Unsuspicious Maurie was too
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Angel of Light Has an unexpected and ironical ending. The tragedy also brings to mind: "Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles."
Writing fiction today sometimes seems an exercise in stubbornness and an anachronistic gesture that goes against the shrill demands of the age—that only the present has meaning, that the contemplative life is irrelevant, that only the life of purest sensation is divine, and that the act of giving shape to sensation, of giving a permanence to the present, is somehow an inversion of the life principle itself. But writers of prose are tough, meticulous people, dedicated to a systematic analysis of the life of sensation and of the electronic paradise that threatens to make language itself obsolete. Writers of prose are all historians, dealing with the past. It is the legendary quality of the past we are most interested in, the immediate past, mysterious and profound, that feeds into the future. It is writers who create history.

Today, there is a demand that the past be obliterated. The style of the new decade is accelerated and deathly; all this emphasis upon sensation, upon a life altered by various drugs, is a speeding up of the ordinary process of life. It is a gravitation toward death. And inherent in the new generation's rejection of the past is a rejection of the future, a rejection of any

fiancée the beautiful and seductive Isabele de Benavente. She and Maurie have accepted Nick's invitation to visit him and his parents at their cottage on Mount Dunvegan Island off the coast of Maine.

Maurie and Nick are now graduates of Harvard College and Harvard Law School. Nick's father mentioned to his son the several thousand dollars owed Maurie for helping pay Nick's expenses in law school. Nick is not worried about the unpaid debt; he is certain Maurie would not accept the money if he offered to repay it.

Maurie is already in Washington with the newly established Commission on Civil Rights. Nick is with a Boston law firm, but would rather be in Washington.

Isabel is the only child of wealthy Luis de Benavente of New York City, Washington, Palm Beach and Madrid. A financier, Luis de Benavente had successfully lied his way through government investigations of his various and multiple financial exploits.

Isabel, in spite of her father's "sensitive" reputation, had been a Washington Junior Cotillion debutante the preceding season.

Nick had already heard much of Maurie's finances. He knew that Maurie was "besotted by love" and desperate
to marry Isabel. Yet, Nick is too much of a man of the world to show surprise at her silvery blond beauty, her painted fingernails and toenails, her bare midriff, or the sophistication of a girl who can't be more than eighteen or nineteen years old.

The shock and surprise came from Isabel's eyes -- her calm amused stare, her arrogant smile; her hard and knowing and sly eyes exactly like his eyes. Isabel's eyes said to him: "Yes, I know you, Nick Martens, you are the boy Maurie used to adore before he met me. You are the boy who almost caused his death, and almost saved his life. I know there is an 'understanding' -- a 'sacred bond' -- of which you never speak."

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extended period of time. This is all deathly, an unconscious desire for death, for the end of consciousness. The artists of America must resist the temptation to give up the struggle for consciousness, to go down with the age. It is very tempting for us, this disavowal of intelligence, this sub-religious gesture of surrender to the sense and emotions, to death. Writers of prose and poetry are living in the most stimulating of times today - if only they can survive.

Those of us who are also university teachers can see clearly, in some of our best students, the dangers of the new religion, of the ethic of the unconsciousness: a certain aimlessness, a distrust, a fear of the future that seems to them either forbidding or unimaginable. Many of these students are both older and younger than they should be - older because they have experienced a great deal, younger because the experiences seem to have flowed through them, meaning nothing. It is a mysterious age, the present. It questions all meaning. Writers, trying to make sense of the age, are also creating it, and there is more need than ever for the contemplative life, for an assessment of where we are going and where we have come from. We need to withdraw from the age, to make ourselves detached. The writer of prose is committed to re-creating the world through language, and he should not be distracted from this task by even the most attractive of temptations.
The opposite of language is silence; silence for human beings is death.

In the novels I have written, I have tried to give a shape to certain obsessions of mid-century Americans - a confusion of love and money, of the categories of public and private experience, of a demonic urge I sense all around me, an urge to violence as the answer to all problems, an urge to self-annihilation, suicide, the ultimate experience and the ultimate surrender. The use of language is all we have to put against death and silence.