PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to examine the travails of the literary psyche. The terms 'Travails' and 'psyche' suggest the range and efficacy of the study. They connote a human tragedy that delineates a unique literary expression. Dealing with the 'birth throes' of a writer, the study attempts to trace a blossoming literary career nurtured by a singular tragic vision.

Prose fiction has blossomed into the most purposive and thoughtful reading material in the current century. A subtle, complex and profound composition, it reveals a potential to replace religious, philosophical, scientific and other exercises interpreting life.

The post-modern American fiction produces brilliant narrative innovators, who savour the human experience with the full play of their imagination, emphatically defying rationality. Writers like John Hawkes discard plot, character, setting, theme and other supports of fiction while invoking the totality of vision and structure, relying exclusively on verbal and psychological coherence. They summon the obscurities of psychic landscape to the conscious levels of sensibilities to a degree rare in contemporary literature.
The postmodern writers perceive 'psyche' as the focus of the 'life experience'. They render its peak experiences employing new literary techniques and procedures. They throw overboard the terms 'intellect' 'logic' and 'sentiment', heavily relying on impressions and sensations while rendering the psyche. They discover the close kinship between the heart, the symbol of feeling and perception and the mind, the symbol of thought and reason.

American writers favour a characteristic stance toward life. Their elemental insight and consuming imagination modify experience into a sustained illusion of life. Though not even a single literary genre was invented in the United States, the fascinating American variants intimately woven into the social fabric, dynamically impel man to feel and create a future.

Joyce Carol Oates is singular in this fictional scene, revealing great concern for the evolving consciousness. She emphasizes the responsibility of artists and scientists to discover and express the potentials of human consciousness. She highlights the awareness of the depths of mental experience through searching explorations into the realities of mind in her brilliant
fiction. Her conception of literature as a moral and educative art suggests that she shapes her own fiction in a manner conducive to the reader's growth in awareness. She is among the finest and most fertile talents of this era creating a significant and versatile literature. She is indebted to a legion of writers for her concern in psychological states, her reach of lyrical heights and her attainment of keen sensibilities.

Endowed with Joycian linguistic gifts and a Balzacian ambition to capture the physical and emotional world in her fiction, Oates calls herself a romantic in the tradition of Stendhal and Flaubert. An American writer, dedicated to shaping the culture, Oates longs to run that "course between unknowable extremities, the antimonies of day and night, life and death."

Joyce Markert Wegs from the University of Illinois at Urbana, initiated a scholarly interest in Oates. Since this endeavor fifteen studies examined various aspects of Oates's literary practice.* Of these, "The Tragic Vision of Joyce Carol Oates" by Mary Kathryn Grant, "The Artistic Vision: Theory and Practice of Joyce Carol Oates" by Beadar Eileen Tep, "Joyce Carol Oates: Transformation of Being toward a centre," by

* According to the information available from the Volumes of Dissertation Abstracts International.
Mistri Senobia, "Dissonance and Indeterminacy in the Critical Writings and Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates: Implications for the interpreter," by Mesinger Bonnie Martha and "Dreaming America: The fiction of Joyce Carol Oates" by Eller, G. Friedman are brilliant and erudite contributions to the critical canon on Oates. Most of these scholarly studies are not available in India as all these projects were undertaken in the American universities. Though Joyce Carol Oates is a celebrity in the intellectual world, the scholarly interest in her from India is not prominent and encouraging. Critics often mention that Oates repeats her themes changing only her characters and setting. Love, Death and Anxiety appear to be the themes she favours most in her abundant fiction. This investigation is an attempt to interpret her tragic thought, tracing its origin, growth and the course it has taken based on the analytical study of these favourite themes in her fiction. The word 'fiction' connotes in this study, the Prose Fiction. As Oates is a prolific writer the coverage of her entire contribution to the prose fiction is stupendous and an almost impossible task. All Oates's major novels and collections of short stories are nevertheless studied
with a particular focus in an endeavour to highlight the lofty prophetic stance culminating in a unique tragic vision, based on obsession and transcendence. The perspective and interpretation are expected in this study to be different from other studies on Oates, as this investigation is based on harmony emanating from the convergence of three significant concepts pervading Oates's canon lifting her to prophetic heights. As an earnest attempt by an Indian, suggesting the near total personality of the writer Oates, based on all aspects of her writing, this study, the investigator sincerely hopes while reflecting an Indian sensibility would also be a humble beginning of a scholarly interest in India in Oates.

Chapter I, LUST FOR LIFE presents an introduction to the writer, Joyce Carol Oates, defining the roots of her literary practice. It spells out Oates's priorities as a writer. The brief biographical section, describes at the outset how the "appearance of Joyce Carol Oates on the midsixties literary scene has been termed "phenomenal. It suggests Oates's total dedication to work, evident in her overwhelming publishing record, absolutely free from any compromise. It examines Oates's mental make-
up and unique working habits while throwing light on her literary preoccupations and antecedents. Representing Oates as a poet, dramatist and rhetorical writer, the study reveals her versatility sharpening her fictional imagination. It also projects Oates as the practitioner of Literary Naturalism providing an insight into Oates's preference for the themes under study. This chapter also provides an analysis of the critical reaction to Oates's work with a view to tracing her sustained superior achievement keeping the crucial ambitions of Literature alive and in perfect temper. It also records Oates's abundantly prolific creative endeavour highlighting her dazzling talent laced with a demonic imagination. This chapter while attempting to trace Oates's loyalty to the themes also emphasizes the priorities of the American writer evident in Leslie A. Fiedler's classic, *Love and Death in American Novel*.

Chapter II, THE WHEEL OF LOVE details Oates's deep concern for relationships and connectedness. Charting the tragic course of Love in *Anonymous Sins* and Other Poems, Oates announces in *The Fabulous Beasts* that "By love, as by roots in the soil, we will be connected to one another." This study attempts to trace the psychological implications of Oates's tragic depiction of love.
Fiedler mentions that Love in Literature is a rationalization of the relationships between men and women. The study of Oates's representation of men and women in her fiction, provides a framework to critically examine her central theme. "I have a whole lot of short stories about love -- different forms of love, mainly in family relationships." The examination suggests that Oates's understanding of love defines and interprets her creativity. Attempting to project Oates's masterful sweep of this emotion the study makes an analytical examination of the various facets of love in Oates's fiction, advocating a condition of the extended Self. To Oates only this contact outside the Self, provides a personality fusion and an integration, resulting in the stability of the Self.

Chapter III, THE DARK ANGEL is an attempt to represent Oates seeking the intensification of life through the thoughts of Death. The study discusses the significance of the Death Instinct and attempts to chart Oates's understanding of Thanatos balancing Eros. The study defines the role of Violence and Aggression in the Drama of Death Oates stages in her fiction. According to Oates "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." Oates awards an authentic charac-
ter to violence and makes it an effective medium for in-
voking a tragic vision. The study attempts to examine
Oates as a practitioner of Gothic and Grottesque schools
of thought. This practice helps Oates to treatise on
the imperfections of the contemporary society, and cap-
tures the architectonics of human passion.

Chapter IV, THE STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS represents
Oates's concern for Anxiety. The study examines at the
outset Oates as a practitioner of Psychological Realism,
fervently depicting the contemporary neuroses. Her
representative short fiction is closely studied in
order to establish Oates's felicity in tracing the con-
sciousness of her characters involved in the process of
self-actualization. The chapter further observes Oates
studying a particular psychic issue, conditioning existen-
ce in some of her major novels. The study attempts to
represent Oates's conception of the condition of
'Freedom' in her fiction invariably leading to solip-
sism and nihilism converging on initiation, an act of
total surrender.
Chapter V, AGONY AND ECSTASY summarises the thesis graphically examining Oates's literary practice exploiting the three themes chosen for the study. While indicating the directions and dimensions of Oates's precept, the study involves her Tragic Vision that lifts her exercise to the mystic and prophetic levels. This is an attempt to represent Oates's capacity not in hammering her multiple thoughts into unity but in faithfully accounting the impossibility and bringing together the aesthetic theory and emotional experience. The study concludes on an optimistic note that in spite of the intense agony Oates depicts in her fiction her endeavour all through is to seek the true liberation of the Self in detachment, powerfully advocating compromise, reconciliation, association and reciprocity. The thesis endeavours to represent the ceaseless struggle between man's earthliness and his heavenly aspirations providing a critique on Agony and Ecstasy.