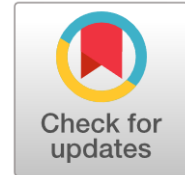


DISMEMBERMENT OF KATHLEEN'S PSYCHE IN JOYCE CAROL OATES'S *THE RISE OF LIFE ON EARTH*

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Abstract

Postmodern literary texts have been exploring characters that are whimsically strange. The tacit plots in the postmodern textual space enable the writers to construct and manifest the mental space of the characters in the textual world. *The Rise of Life on Earth* written by Joyce Carol Oates concocts the emotional estrangement of the protagonist, Kathleen Hennessy. Decrypting the text amplifies the unabating efforts of Kathleen to survive in a world that has been portrayed as a larger, repressive and pernicious family. Her masquerade to be a shy, passive and well-behaved girl hides the menacing vengeance that has culminated as a result of abuses and afflictions. Her mental spaces are constructed during the course of narration. This paper purports to scrutinize the fragmented psyche of Kathleen and the conceptual integration of mental space and textual space that replicates both social and individualistic reality and expands the understanding of Oates' text.

Keywords: Fragmented psyche, Mental space, Reality, Textual space, Transmogrification

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Postmodern era has been reflecting upon the heterogeneity of space. The impalpable mental space and tangled textual space have been the concern of literary writers who endeavour to foreground reality. Postmodern writers have been exposing the often-neglected mental spaces of their characters and the antipathy that results out of social ostracism using the complex textual space. They parody the psychosomatic predicaments that human beings face in their mundane life. The suffused actuality and the interaction of different spaces (such as physical, mental, cultural, textual, and others) in a literary work enhance the creative supremacy of the writers. Meanings emerge in postmodern texts as a consequence of the dislocations that the characters suffer and the dynamic perspectives that shift with time and space.

However, the retaliation of characters to a given situation depends a great deal on writers who, discerning the agony, build up an alliance with the readers. Realist fictions 'frequently witness strong emotional responses from reading audiences, often with negative valence' (Rossi, 2017, p. 280) and psychological realism has amplified the need to study the abstract concepts that exist in a textual space. Psychological realism probes into the intricacies of the tormented realm of the psyche that suffers dislocation due to a life not so harmonious and idyllic.

Consequently, the reader is compelled to investigate the text as a space that connects to other spaces. Peter Harder (2003) in his article points out that 'Mental world, like the real world, can be assumed to have spatial and temporal dimensions inside them' (p. 94). The conceptual integration of the different mental spaces of the characters enables the writers to construct a concrete textual space. In this way, discerning the afflictions and the inner drives of the characters reveal the text to be a psychic product and address the natural tendency of the characters to elude the conflicts. The textual spaces in which the characters originate substantiate the frictions that common readers experience. The mettle of the characters is revealed by their propensity to be persevering and stoical. Therefore, a greater sense of emotional outburst will be evoked when the readers perceive the anguish to be happening to them.

Joyce Carol Oates, a versatile American writer, in her works excoriates the adaptation of the American family to encounter the rapidly mutating world. The increased unrest that followed the Great Depression ramified the stature of family in

America. Jim Wayne Miller (1989) has remarked that 'The history of the American family shows a continuing flexibility, adaptability and resilience in its form and function' (p. 4). Oates has epitomized the reality of American society in her works. Her oeuvre has been infiltrating the affluent American society and they have arrived at the adroit rendering of the unfathomable darkness.

Specifically, Oates is concerned with the endeavours of the young adults and their intricate mental space. The ruptures of the past and the present shape the perspectives and choices of the young adults who carry the traces of violence throughout their life. Kathryn Hume (2012) appropiates that 'When serious artists take up violence or outré sex, they tend to produce something different from the genre norm and their works are likely to provoke audience resistance and critical recrimination' (p. 115). Critics and commentators, like Greg Johnson, Joanne V. Creighton, Heinrich F. Plett and others, have also acknowledged the finesse of Oates. The irrefutable defiance of her young adult female protagonists makes them prototypes and as Elaine Showalter et al. (1993) acknowledge,

What marks all of her portraits, no matter what the mode – realism, surrealism, or gothic – is the scrupulous detail of the historical documentation and psychological realism. Executed with historical and psychological complexity, her portraits of women have often been groundbreaking. (p. 232)

Barbara Soukup and Yuan-wen Chi have analyzed and listed the images and stereotypes of women found in Oates' voluminous writing. This paper purports to explain uncertainty and violence as the feasible sequels of psychological disfigurement in Oates's *The Rise of Life on Earth*. Further, it would explore the bifurcated mental space of Kathleen Hennessy and venture into the series of attributes that substantiate her uncanny aspirations in the textual space.

Demythologizing family

Though society is perceived to exist prior to individuals, human praxis are the foundation for establishing social structures or institutions. But, individuals cannot exist alone. They are coerced into specific social positions that not only foment agitations in them but also condition them to reproduce the social protocols. Thus, a strategically

relational approach in reading would help us understand the transformation in individuals who as agents restrain themselves from the society of its autocracy.

Markedly, Family is a dynamic social arrangement constructed with emotional fervour. Familial praxis adjudicates the standard of living of human beings. In this context, Terry Eagleton (1996) vindicates that

One feature that distinguishes human beings from the other animals is that for evolutionary reasons we are born almost entirely helpless and are wholly reliant for our survival on the care of the more mature members of the species, usually our parents. (p. 132)

Familial space instigates proximity to other spaces. It acts as a spur and enables a child to adjust and adapt to the unnerving events of life. Also, the inadequacies in the propensity for nurturance in a family influence changes and transformations in the child's mental space.

Many writers have turned to be the representatives of realism trying to heed to the schizophrenic familial experiences of the working class people. Casualness and laxity caused disintegration in the American families of the twentieth century. The fundamental antipathy to family ensued from the vital relation between the familial constructions and the economic and social conditions of the time. The kingpins of the family – Father and Mother – felt confined in a landscape that encumbered them. Children and adolescents, on the other hand, were engulfed by their emotions and were bedeviled by the dearth of serendipity.

Subsequently, the children were benumbed. But, they often returned to the 'real' and got acclimatized to the vitiating society. Marilyn Wesley (1993) in the preface to her work posits the 'tactics of liberation' (p. xi) that Oates' female characters exhibit in her oeuvre. She also expounds that they are important in understanding the shifts in the familial and psychological experiences of the young Americans – mostly the sons and daughters. The sons and daughters, embroiled in the stupefying affairs of life, embrace, what Wesley endorses as, 'refusal and transgression' (p. xii). Oates tries to overhaul the adolescents, who are victimized either by destiny or by the relationships they hold with others (sometimes by both). She ventures into the dysfunctionality of family and

relationships as social institutions and, as Wesley contends, 'Oates' young protagonists enact a trenchant critique of the American family and of the society which has formed it' (p. xiv). The multidimensional conception of social reality negates certain facets of individualistic reality. Realist fictions highlight the individual traits whereas reality is based on the relations that individuals establish with their society. The transformations in an individual occur with their wavering conceptualizations about the world. The portrayal of the existence of human beings viz. realism is different from the efforts taken by them to make their experiences reified viz. reality.

Oates portrays the realm which blends the responses of the characters in both familial and societal spaces. As Harder (2003) postulates, 'Blending spaces gives fascinating results, because previously disparate properties can be brought to co-exist in the same mental space with properties that were found in neither of the original spaces' (p. 91). The blend enables the characters to create a self that is composite. The composite self is the median of the divided self and reflects every other self. It surfaces the rejections and attractions, repulsions and desires, and the unwarranted jealousy and the self-persuasion to live. These polarities are often concealed or subdued, and are to be understood in conversation with the different ways of retaliation that the characters show. The characters dynamically adjust to different spaces, and their changes fit into the exigencies of life. The fusion of different spaces provides the characters new identities that are deflecting and renegotiating in nature. The transformations in an individual make sense only when the ontology of individuals is related with the ontology of the society.

In this regard, *The Rise of Life on Earth* is a severely critical narrative that presents the textual space as the metarepresentation of Kathleen Hennessy. Kathleen's engagement with the society urges her to exist with a fragmented understanding of the crystalized ontology of the society. The novel probes into the intransigent social institutions like family, relationships, and gender. It sketches the Kmart realism (also called Dirty realism) that, in the words of Bill Buford (1983), deals with the '... unadorned, unfurnished, low-rent tragedies about people' and the characters are 'waitress in roadside cafes, cashiers in supermarkets, construction workers, secretaries and unemployed cowboys.' Set in Detroit of the 1960s and 70s, the novel unfolds the hostile circumstances and the emotional aloofness of Kathleen. Detroit was the haven for the

blue-collar population, and Oates' writing is shaped by interlacing the turmoil of post-Great Depression with a greater class of entities like economy, gender, psychology, abuse and violence. Her Gothic tone voices the horrifying events that have been covered up by the autarky and serenity of the opulent Americans. Walter Sullivan (1987) alleges in his article:

We know that in Detroit and New York and points south and west there are millions of people living ordinary lives on ordinary incomes, committing no murders, indulging no illicit appetites, requiring no psychiatric therapy or protective incarceration. She wants hers either rich or poor, criminal or sick or drifting in that direction, with here and there a reasonably normal human being who might in rare instances earn the reader's unqualified admiration. (p. 7)

The counterfactual statements of the naïve realism are Oates' forte, and she tries to elaborate on the ontology of the world in its very existence, devoid of epistemic fallacies. She registers the anguished rejection of family which is supposed to be the source of nourishment. Kathleen's actions reflect how individuals, being an agent, recast the societal praxis when they undergo emotional estrangement in them. Further, the novel depicts Kathleen's coming of age in a desensitized environment, and her criminalities after turning to be a schizoid.

Dismemberment of Kathleen's psyche

Dismemberment refers to the fission of a realm. It is employed as a tool to study the narrative components and it evinces intense sensibilities among the readers. Further, the narratives of dismemberment portray multidimensional characters and their enormous layers of lives. In consequence, understanding the characters' actions and incitements becomes complex. The situations that promote such behaviours in the characters contradict or interlink or/and reinforce each other.

In parallel, Oates' work is based on social complexity and it revolves around 'home' with interludes of terror. She tries not to sublimate the violence in her novels because she believes that America grew with it. She allows her characters free, and it is to be noted that a mere psychosis does not radiate violence in her storyline. It is a set of psychotic confrontations that gain prominence by making the characters suffer from the

unexpected emotional traumas following the insults and the injuries. The characters struggle to survive amidst a threatening society. They endure the duress and exercise their free will under traumatizing conditions. This, in turn, recompenses them with scars of frightening memories. As Brian Birdsell (2014) explains, 'While mental spaces exist in our working memory, once they become established they exist in our long-term memory as a frame, which then can be called up into working memory when the context deems it to be necessary' (p. 73). In this novel, Oates exudes the throes effectuated by a transmuted family (that exist in Kathleen's long-term memory) and mirrors the menaces (play of the working memory) that the society shoves on an individual-Kathleen. The concomitant experiences of dismemberment result in fracture and fragmentation of self that makes it difficult to establish subjectivity. Kathleen's mental space carries the blended memories that facilitate the organization of her personal space. The dissolution of a single self enables her to renegotiate her life. The tridimensional image of self (self-perception, other's perception of self and self's perception of other's perception) influences her behavior. As Erol Subaşı (2020) avers, 'Although people act purposefully, the general results may not reflect their original aims' (p. 113). The plot discloses the series of clever devices used by Kathleen, who tries to elude the insidious trap by being guileful. The clash between the 'angel' and 'demon' in her mental space supplies shocking revelations.

When the novel opens, the intimate and comfortable details of Hennessy's family are under pressure and the members of the family are in a difficult situation. Kathleen and Nola are the daughters of a stereotypical Oatsian mother who is opportunistic, manipulative and amoral. As a consequence of her disappearance, their father becomes derisive, and his impudence is beyond the tolerance of the children. Nola is found dead and Mr. Hennessy is imprisoned for murdering his daughter. This underscores the opinion of Wesley (1993) who affirms that 'The initial move in Joyce Carol Oates' domestic fiction is the demotion of the mythic Mother and Father to the ordinary mother and father, a demotion usually inscribed in contrast to the omnipotence of former deities' (p. 17). Kathleen, being orphaned, survives the injuries and is nurtured by the nurses in the hospital. However, she suffers from the memory of the nightmarish event. She has been bereaved of Nola due to her depraved hysteria. She had banged Nola's head causing her death and Mr. Hennessy was accused. But, during his trial he behaves as if his daughters 'ceased to exist, thus could have no specific connection with him' (Oates, 1991,

p. 12). The representation of the compressed agony makes Kathleen a unique Oatsian protagonist, and as Birdsell (2014) writes, compression ‘... is the ability to condense a vast amount of conceptual structure into something that is easier to understand and control’ (p. 76). Kathleen’s compressed mental space allows the readers to contemplate on her positions and dispositions in the plot, and reassess the relatively enduring norms and representations of the society. We can easily perceive Kathleen to be tactful but her enervation in a sterile and bleak environment needs to be appraised.

However, Kathleen’s debilitation makes her passive and she breaks-off smiling. But, she does not succumb to the deprivation of maternal affection and the patriarchal rage, rather becomes indomitable. She becomes the object of admiration during her stay in the hospital: ‘For Kathleen had no visitors except now and then someone from the special-welfare agency, thus no gifts. Yet she was so uncomplaining: so docile, so seemingly sweet-natured. If only all their patients were like Kathleen Hennessy! -- so the nurses concurred’ (Oates, 1991, p. 6). The extravagant love showered by the nurses, who admire this child with an adult-like fortitude, impedes her interest to get discharged. She admires Betty Lou, a nurse, who gives her rosary – the symbol of radiant hope – before she moves to the Chesneys’ place.

Chesneys’ foster home shapes what Kathleen turns out to be. Manea & Barbu (2017) advocate that ‘Because people need to orient themselves in the surrounding space, the human mind acts as a sort of simulator by creating images with which people can operate inside their reality’ (p. 38). Kathleen vitalizes her ability to embrace reality but the excess stimuli falsify her propensity to build images. She is often reminded of the locution ‘one thing cancels out another’ (Oates, 1991, p. 38). She tries to retrieve the lost maternal affection and connects with Mrs. Chesney. She begins to expand her mental space and affiliates her emotions with other children. Nevertheless, her reality distorts. She accords to the disgruntled comment of Mrs. Chesney that ‘a defenseless child must be turned to an unworthy mother, an alcoholic, or a drug addict, or a whore, any type of lowlife white trash favored over her because she was only a “foster” mother’ (Oates, 1991, p. 30). This befuddles her ideology about family.

Despite the nurturance that Kathleen receives from Mrs. Chesney, she is abused by Tiger, Mrs. Chesney’s son from her first marriage. Her sanguine impulses fade with his

humiliating comments and behaviors which were not restrained by Mrs. Chesney who 'could be in one of his loud jokey jovial moods, bullying, hurtful' and it was, in terms of diplomacy, 'just kidding around' (Oates, 1991, p. 37). Every abuse, humiliation and infliction gets engraved in her mind, and she gets incrementally associated with the traumatic events. Re-experiencing such events stipulate reparations from a depressive state.

Kathleen learns to recreate the sullen trance of life into something defensible. She lays down her arms and surrenders to the swaying movement of life. When asked about something she stutters 'I don't mind if I do' (Oates, 1991, p. 35). She is often found inarticulate – unable to express. Additionally, she suffers from dysgraphia and has a cognitive disability that 'moving her pen so slowly across the paper she forgot what she was trying to say' (Oates, 1991, p. 33). Sullivan (1987) explicates that in Oates's works,

There are sexual encounters, arguments, fights, accommodations, but except for the fact that we continue to read about the same group of characters, the incidents and sequences appear to be separate unto themselves. And soon, the seemingly inevitable disintegration toward mental illness sets in. (p. 13)

Kathleen's infirmity arouses slowly with the storyline.

Sometimes a sensation as of ants rippled across her skin, her scalp shivered and prickled and she knew there was something that must be done, something pent-up like the air before an electrical storm that must be discharged otherwise she could not sleep. (Oates, 1991, p. 42)

After the mysterious fire at the Chesney's house, Kathleen relocates to different places. The fire had something to tell her and she remembers Mrs. Hennessy's words 'fire teaches *whatever is, is now*' (Oates, 1991, p. 42). To brood over something seems futile, and Kathleen drifts with the eventualities of life. Her fragmented and persecuted psyche becomes a blend that fosters both the responsibility to be amiable and the devastating malice.

Later, when Kathleen becomes a nurse's aide, her torments and retaliations are camouflaged with her innocent, reliable and diligent manners. 'The thoughts start from the body and they are translated into metaphors that are used and expressed in an almost

unconscious way' (Manea & Barbu, 2017, p. 39). Her gestures give prominence to the unarticulated emphatic emotions. She counts her blessings so as to forget the cruel reality and to remember those who touched her with love. Her deepest cuts are surfaced when she utters her bedtime prayer:

I stood before them, oh and I was not ugly or clumsy like a cow but seeing me they saw my soul like a shimmering flame they did not see me in the flesh at all but another standing where I stood: Praise God. (Oates, 1991, p. 62)

She is exalted to be a nurse's aide, the profession which bestowed on her the endearment that any human being deserves. She forbears to react to her natural instincts. In this way, Kathleen's forbearance occurs at two levels. The chasm between these two viewpoints allows the readers to approach the novel with epistemological determinants that verily result in the revelations which tussle with the ontology.

Suitably, the scrimmage between 'who' she is and 'what' she has to be is relentlessly cross-examined in the novel. The dismemberment of Kathleen's psyche occurs in the abstract sense. Kathleen, psychologically averse, is caught between self-annihilation and self-vindication. Oates's grotesque inventiveness shows how Kathleen is forced to undergo the process of degeneration. Consequently, Kathleen's constructive and amenable 'what she should be' is ousted by 'who she is' – which is defiant and recedes into mere nothingness. Kathleen feels empowered and supercilious to the patients, those who were dying: '...her powers of observation were sharpening; her senses were becoming more alert'. Earlier, in school she was detested for her awkward writings, but in the hospital her problems with enunciation vanished and 'she was intelligent as the other nurse's aides' (Oates, 1991, p. 67). This may be seen as the influence of Betty Lou and other nurses, who had admired Kathleen during her stay in the hospital after the devastating event.

Oates' manoeuvre, on eulogizing the stigmatized nursing profession, has evolved the desired ripple of ardour. Deep in her heart, Kathleen has developed a profound fondness for the profession that when she saw 'a nurse's photograph in the newspaper, she'd speak out with uncharacteristic avidity so the others might glance at her as if a chair or a door had spoken, 'Oh! -- that's what I'm going to be, a nurse" (Oates, 1991, p. 32). The flaws in the character's perception and her ultimate surrender to darkness are not

attributable to the profession. She has to be judged in accordance with the robust mind. Despite the noxious sensations, she looks after the patients like an indefatigable defender.

Despite her assiduity to her profession, the bleakness of life haunts her. She turns pale and distracts her consciousness by turning herself back to the methodical process of cleansing. She is often found cleaning her hands and the surgical instruments, in the way they were meant to be. She finds pleasure in doing it, as if it cleansed her body and soul. The vignette of the meticulous cleansing process provided by Oates may be seen as analogous to the inexorable guilt and anxiety felt by Macbeth, who feels excruciated by the stain on his hands. Kathleen entails herself to the cleansing process to redeem her clandestine soul.

Nevertheless, the fiery sensation of ants, as if they thronged on her skin, stifled her. She hides her agitation and follows her instinct that says, '*Never lose faith.*' (Oates, 1991, p. 70) She remembers the fire that had destroyed the Chesney's house. It was a mystique which, according to the commoners, had nothing to do with the 'innocent' and bemusing Kathleen.

Kathleen Hennessy was surely blameless and never for a moment under suspicion and perhaps in fact it had not been she who'd dropped a lighted cigarette into a greasy rag so oddly hidden away in a closet at the front of the house... (Oates, 1991, p. 73)

Such dispositions in her evolution as an Oatsian prototype juxtapose the biblical archetype Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, who was acquitted from her crime. Kathleen's predilection to be ambivalent diminishes the bleak and gruesome horror. The voice of premonition is muted within her.

She then gets into the web of love spun by Orson Abbot, a medical intern, who exploits her physic and psyche. She tries to elude into a 'self-constructed life' but is thrust into the gyre. She believes that tranquility and happiness are still possible and is not aware of the aphorism that states '*...the first shall be last and the last, first*' (Oates, 1991, p. 83). She is enmeshed to believe in the sadistic/voyeuristic pleasure that her transmogrified self seeks not righteous indignation; instead, the vexation is ventilated through the sequestered and ghastly proclivity. She feels the vacuity sternly when Abbot

rejects her and, as Frederick R. Karl (1987) states in his article, this emptiness is something 'outside space and time, in some dimension that lies in the subconscious'. He asserts that it is 'for Oates, a paradigm of what women must do – that emptiness, for her, defines in the main where women are' (112). Kathleen's mind flips with the question '*Why her and not me?*' (Oates, 1991, p. 92) whenever she locates women who are adorned with an engagement ring. Her psychological resilience has become feeble that she feels accursed when all other women could afford a pliable life. Her feral hankerings are the only accomplishments that admonish the upshots of free will.

Kathleen feels exasperated with the fiery sensation that grows in her in an unwavering manner. She feels baffled when Abbot asks her to define 'what was her life' (Oates, 1991, p. 106). She learns that she has curved without giving much thought about 'Life'. Her nihilistic outlook has prevented her from being adventurous and the hoaxes that Abbot loads over her leave her pathetic. '*Better to learn now than later* but she could not remember who had told her that' (Oates, 1991, p. 120). This way, as Beachler and Litz adduce, 'Oates enables her female characters to function as subjects in themselves rather than as constructions of male desire' (Showalter et al., p. 238). Now and then there were mysterious deaths in the hospital and Kathleen was not suspected. She was one of those 'diligent and dutiful' nurse's aides. Kathleen, deprived of all viable assistance, quits her job and expects a new beginning – a new 'rise'.

Oates heed to the politics of abortion that had been of great interest in America between 1950 and 1970. Julie Burchill (1987), the British feminist and abortion advocate, in her work states that 'The freedom that women were supposed to have found in the Sixties largely boiled down to easy contraception and abortion; things to make life easier for men, in fact' (p. 13). When Kathleen finds her belly swollen, Abbot had already depleted her body and emotions. She decides to involve herself in self-abortion and feels no misery. The prenatal space becomes an abstract – something far from her existing mental space, which engages in grasping the distinctly momentous events. She knew that she 'had ceased to exist for him' (Oates, 1991, p. 123). The intoxication of the drugs eases the pain of abortion, both physiological and psychological, and she feels compelled to do it so as to maintain a balance between her 'calm countenance' and her 'neurasthenic aspirations'. She feels a sense of relief as '*Now the worst has been done, now there is nothing*' (Oates, 1991, p. 33). Kathleen's act bears emotional, psychological and social

connotations. Self-abortion enables her create a psychic space that both intensifies and relieves her trauma. All through the process the only ray of hope was the rosary that Betty Lou had gifted her. She tries to reconstruct her world with the debris of the past. However, her decisive impulse may be seen as a continuation of the abandonment by her mother (registered in her long-term memory) and she becomes sterile with regard to maternal affection in the present. In this regard, Kathleen remembers and re-members the social strictures that stimulate her counteractions.

Apparently, Oates' narration resonates with the consumerist living experiences in America, where everyone and everything has to be consumed. Her delicacy in exploring the gothic components in her work underscore the proposition - consume violence else violence will consume you. Hume (2012) extrapolates that, 'Violent fantasies are part of most people's unconscious repressed by laws and rules of our culture.' Characters, who consume violence, often bear witness to the consideration of the social order as beneficial and defensible. 'Granted', states Hume, 'not all genre horror ends with the positive characters emerging into sunlight' (p. 116). The bizarre decisiveness shown by Kathleen in the novel is the reprisal of the gaze thrown at her by the society. Oates's subtle parlance intensifies the impelling darkness that enables the readers to dwell in a menacing fictional reality. The antithesis between the title and the denouement exhausts the readers. The covert storyline creates suspense, and the flashbacks disclose the restricted perceptions making the text more accessible.

Oates' parlance of food as a symbol finds a different connotation in the novel. She tries to project the American appetites – the grotesque relation between food and people. It is highly significant to discern how the excerpts related to food in the novel display Kathleen. Hilde Bruch (1973) has noticed that 'There is no human society that deals rationally with food in its environment that eats according to the availability, edibility and nutritional value alone' (p. 3). Oates designates the eating habits to demonstrate the emptiness felt by her character. Kathleen is either ravenous or craving for food. Her hunger did not subside during her stay with the Chesneys. She 'prays in silence--*please let there be enough* and if there was enough she did not then pray not to be teased, not to be tormented, reasoning that God had extended His kindness far enough for that occasion' (Oates, 1991, p. 41). Oates's inclination is to match the filling of the stomach with the effort to fill the spiritual emptiness. The transformation of Kathleen with a better

principle of eating habits is seen during her service at the hospital. 'It gave her pleasure to assist a patient at mealtime and naturally it gave her most pleasure when a patient ate well, and with appetite; she never failed to report to the nurse those patients who were eating poorly' (Oates, 1991, p. 66).

As demonstrated, Kathleen suppresses her insecurity with a smaller self image and tries to uplift her assertiveness. She relives the memories and the ensuing neurasthenia relieves her from the emotional disturbances. Her poised behavior conceals the forcible synchrony of intimacy and the emotional estrangement. This perplexity augments the following proposal of Manea & Barbu (2017): 'By creating these personifications of other people with whom the individual interacts, people unconsciously create a mental model of their social world' (p. 41). The people that surround Kathleen cause anxiety, and Kathleen is the angel who hides her devilish instincts. Though the apparent transformation of Kathleen creates a sense of uneasiness among the readers, she is an exemplar for the visionary reworking of the victim who reconstructs her life with the help of the reality she has witnessed. Her evolution, precisely transmogrification, is spontaneous with the afflictions. Kathleen as an angel is the representative of any woman who yearns for love and as a demon is the carrier of the anguish and abhorrence of the abuse survivors. Suitably, Kathleen, as a prototype, repudiates conformists' response to violence.

Kathleen is motivated by her instinctual cynicism which transmogrifies her into a diabolic self. As Oates wryly comments '...Masks do not merely, or exclusively, hide faces. They shape faces too.' (Oates, 1990, p. 128) Oates transcribes the transmutation of women's faces and phases in their life. The equivocal narration complements the characterization of Kathleen. Oates engraves the existential angst that causes transmogrification in the docile Kathleen. Kathleen's uncanny appetite is camouflaged with the sublime smile, which she thinks would adjure people to relish her presence. Kathleen, born with undefiled/unsullied intentions, is not edified, and in her attempt to face the insentient world, she draws a veil to her disastrous thoughts projecting only her good nature. The untrammelled conjectures about life escort her into a pejorative phase that incarcerates her in ambivalence.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton in her *Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls Convention* points out that 'The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her'. Kathleen's antagonistic views of the world arise from her experiences. Manea & Barbu (2017) expand this view as: 'Also besides the language, there also exists a field of sensorial experiences projected in space of which people are not aware of' (p. 38). Kathleen's neurasthenia and her adherence to the methodical cleaning process are the instances from the novel that justify the above proposition. These non-verbal gestures are stimulated spontaneously and are the sources of meaning-making. Kathleen's nightly prayers and her continuous affinity with the rosary reflect her immaculate soul. Yet, these actions fail to satiate the fiend in her that waits for an unleashing moment and when unleashed, it destroys all that it can. She is an archetype of the blend that Harder (2003) has formulated – '... the ability to blend mental spaces must presuppose the ability to entertain two pictures of the same thing simultaneously' (p. 93). Kathleen accepts violence like an angel and stands up to it with her anomalous mould.

Conclusion

Any child is innocent when born. It depends on the adults for its cognizance of the world. The demented adults convolute the child's perception of the world by infusing or reticulating violence and abuse into their life. When exposed to harsh realities of life, the child becomes traumatic and faces problems in decision making. In this way, the child loses its innocence and grows into a distorted adult. Oates's description of the ghastly life makes us feel sympathetic towards Kathleen. She doesn't resolve the issues, rather she affirms that the conflicts are inevitable. She enunciates the collective consciousness of those whose life on earth has never met with a rise but has always been a fall. 'Oates' criticism endorses a paradigm shift from the competitive 'I' to the collective and cooperative 'we' (Wesley, 1993, p. 143). The dedication caption of the novel *FOR THE KATHLEENS* signifies the women born and brought up with pain and violence. Though the text does not provide any resolving statements, it encourages us to consider our own answer to the problems, just as Kathleen does.

The self-generated suffering and the psychological resilience in the face of adversity overlap creating a vicious circle. The search for a meaningful life is replaced

with the need to exist. Oates's dynamism in creating characters like Kathleen can be seen as the response of writers to the debauched society. The title captures the little hope that keeps mankind going amidst the chaos. It signifies the love and nurturing elements enjoyed by mankind. But it is ironic to what Kathleen actually meets with in the novel. She has been portrayed as a girl who endures a tragic life. She symbolizes people who are born and raised in situations that can never be repaired. Her life is dominated with abuse and indifference. Though the readers cannot sympathize with her, she is the symbol of resurgence at odds with the repressive and disputatious society. Her stratagem stems out of the cognitive structure that takes inputs (passivity and insularity) and creates a new relation of the inputs culminating in transmogrification. Once the readers identify the blend in inputs, they seek meaning out of it by investigating the cause and effect kind of vital relations.

Mary Kathryn Grant (1978) affirms that Oates' female characters are 'physically crippled by the events of their lives and the tragic frustrations with which they cannot cope; their only redeeming quality is that they do survive' (p. 25). This novel extends our reading approach in two ways – muting violence by situating it at the fringe of the society, and raising voice against violence by conceptualizing it as episodes of life. What one comprehends is the genuine, grim and graphic reality of life and an exigency to accept such reality and find a plausible approach to it. Wesley (1993) specifies in one of her chapters, "The Transgressive Others", 'Oates' oeuvre is the presentation of the American family as the classic dilemma of colloquial expression: "you can't live with it, and you can't live without it" (p. 144).

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