

Self-love in Six Stories

by Joyce Carol Oates

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will consider the concept of love as revealed by Joyce Carol Oates in selected stories from her collection of short stories titled The Wheel of Love. To study Oates' treatment of love is to gain an insight into an important aspect of contemporary society since in her own words she is "concerned with only one thing, the moral and social conditions of my generation" (from the title page of her collection).¹ Another value of this study derives from the contrast between love as portrayed in the lives of Oates' characters and the ideal of love as defined by contemporary theologians such as John Powell, who summarizes the contrast as follows:

When people are fully alive, saying a vibrant *yes* to the full human experience and a fullhearted *amen* to love, there is an indication that their human needs are being met. But when the contrary is true, when discomfort, frustration and crippling emotions take over in a human life, there is a contra-indication that the human needs of these people are not being met. It may be through their own failure or through the failure of those closest to them, but they are just not getting what they need. Somehow, somewhere, something has gone wrong in those lives. Starvation and disintegration have set in.²

In The Wheel of Love, one notes a developing theme, a particular focus, in which Oates concerns herself with the disasters of love. In most of the stories her protagonist is a female in an urban setting. A number of the stories in this collection deal with adultery, and in each instance there seems to be a recurring psychic impotency which leads the protagonist into a kind of deviant search for love.

This paper will deal with the idea of recurring psychic impotency in six of the short stories in The Wheel of Love:

"In the Region of Ice," "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?," "Shame," "The Wheel of Love," "Bodies," and "The Heavy Sorrow of the Body."

Although many critics refer to the problem of love in Oates' writings, a brief review of the literature on Joyce Carol Oates has revealed no in-depth consideration of the psychological and theological implications of love in her stories. It is merely by some critics' general statements regarding her stories from this collection, and by my own explications of the stories selected, that the theme is explained and clarified.

CHAPTER 1

Joyce Carol Oates once told an interviewer that she is always writing about love. She stated: "The emotion of love, probably that's the essence of what I'm writing about, and it takes many different forms, many different social levels . . . I think I write about love in an unconscious way. I look back upon the novels I've written, and I say, yes, this was my subject."³ To Alfred Kazin she said, "I'm writing about a certain person who does this and that and comes to a certain end."⁴ Following his interview with Oates, Alfred Kazin makes the observation that the kind of love Oates speaks of is "an attraction of person to person so violent that it expresses itself as obsession and takes on the quality of fatality." Kazin further comments " . . . The emotions of her characters are stark and physical truths, like the strength or weakness of one's body."⁵ In many, if not all of her stories, Oates emphasizes the starkness of her characters' emotions. In almost all cases the love toward which her characters strive is a more self-centered and possessive love than what is normally recognized as *real* love. Oates, however, is trying to do more in her stories than merely relate qualities of the various individuals in her works. As she herself says, she is trying ultimately to tell us about love. By describing the love that possesses, the love that is never fulfilled, or the love that is never satisfying--in a word, through her detailed and macabre description of what love is not, Oates attempts to tell the reader exactly what *real* love is.

Although the problems of the characters differ in their manifestations in the various stories, in most cases the difficulty seems to be related to poor self-image. In some cases, these negative feelings have been suppressed by the individual and only surface as a result of some extremely bizarre and tragic circumstances matched only in small degree by daily newspaper headlines which feature the sensational aspects of a story.

"The stories that make up The Wheel of Love are dominated by characters whose hold on reality is weak."⁶ As several critics suggest, there seems to be a touch of insanity in each of the main characters, yet on closer scrutiny it appears that the psychosis is nothing more than a neurosis related to their inability to allow themselves to love or be loved. In a few cases one finds the main character to have reached the point of being psychotic. Of the six stories being dealt with in this paper, Pauline, the protagonist in "Bodies," is the only main character who reaches a point of psychosis and whose prognosis seems to be grim. The degree of weakness of a hold on reality varies for the other characters of the six stories being dealt with, but in no other case does it reach the point of insanity.

In the case of the antagonists, however, there is often present a definite psychosis which alienates them totally from reality and any possible relationship with another. One sees this in the case of Allen Weinstein, in "The Region of Ice," Anthony, in "Bodies," and Arnold Friend in "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"

Other characters: Nadia, in "The Wheel of Love," Frank, in "Shame," and Conrad, in "The Heavy Sorrow of the Body," also show loss of touch with reality to the point of psychosis.

Robert Emmet Long states that Oates' protagonists often go insane or commit suicide, and although this has heretofore been refuted, this opinion would lead a reader to believe that the problems of the characters are more severe than everyday hang-ups.⁷ One may fairly say, however, that the problems are common among people today, and it is only the setting in which Oates puts these characters, along with their peculiar mentalities, that makes her stories so bizarre. In this way, Oates employs her own didactic method as she had written in The Writer magazine which says: "I agree that the essential thing will always remain what people--in fiction or in life--actually do; but nearly as important for the writer is the environment in which they perform."⁸ It is rare that the main character is the one who goes insane or commits suicide. It is more often his or her marital partner, lover, or aggressor who takes the plunge. The problem that Oates gives to her protagonists, though, is not entirely uncommon and is one which is easily recognized even outside the context of her detailed fiction.

What Robert Emmet Long has to say regarding Miss Oates' work partially clarifies this point. He states: "Her characters are two-dimensional improvisations; they flicker in the consciousness of the reader, and then are as easily forgotten. Miss Oates is not really interested in people, only in mental states . . ."⁹

It is the weird detail of her stories that makes the problems of the main characters seem so unusual and foreign to man's everyday experience. Alfred Kazin says much the same with his comment: "Oates' many stories resemble a card index of situations; they are not the deeply plotted stories that we return to as perfect little dramas; . . . "10 One could view Oates as a reporter, as in a sense, she describes herself when she says: "Fiction and poetry celebrate the *unique*--what the writer has experienced or thought, personally; without this personal private experience, the story or poem would be simply manufactured. . . . One cannot manufacture emotions."11 Three of the six stories make use of a setting familiar to Oates' personal experience, namely the university milieu. Several of the protagonists in the six stories selected reveal a poor self-image, as suggested earlier in this chapter. Sister Irene says many things that indicate this feeling to the reader --". . . she was on trial and that the excuses she made to herself about her discomfort were only the common excuses made by Guilty people."12 Sister Irene is presented as the main character in "In the Region of Ice." In "Shame," Father Rollins often hides behind his black suit and Roman collar. It is clear that he would feel very vulnerable without it. One also notes that in "In the Wheel of Love," David never feels himself worthy of his wife, Nadia. These characters corroborate Oates' belief that "A person is deeper, more talented, and more intelligent than he probably believes. He is transformable. She tries to keep aware of delicate relationships between what is

unique, perhaps even eccentric, and what is universal--what will transcend, hopefully, the finite nature of newspaper headlines. Only in this relationship is there a subject, worthy of long hours of work."¹³ After reading an Oates short story, one tends to remember not the plot but the characters. As Kazin remarks, her stories are ". . . haunting rather than 'successful,' because the mind behind them is primarily concerned with a kind of Darwinian struggle for existence between minds, with the truth of the universal human struggle."¹⁴ The question that inevitably arises here is: What is this universal struggle if it is not a struggle for love?

CHAPTER II

An analysis of each of the six stories under consideration helps to substantiate the thesis that Joyce Carol Oates' main characters suffer from a psychic impotency which prevents them from achieving love.

i

In "In the Region of Ice," Joyce Carol Oates presents as protagonist, Sister Irene, exteriorly a brilliant professor knowledgeable in her field of literature. Interiorly, however, she lacks confidence in her ability to cope with the world outside the classroom. Her work becomes an excuse, a means of supressing the conflicts within her. The story also says that she has been chosen for her present college teaching position because it is a chance for the administration to save money and because the other choice was a man "of rather dubious religious commitment " (W.O.L. p. 11). Sister Irene's knowledge of this only increases her unsureness of herself and adds to her low self-esteem.

When the new semester starts, Sister Irene is suddenly presented with the disruptive person of Allen Weinstein, a young Jewish boy who, through his eagerness to learn, presents a very real challenge to her while in her class. She finds his mind to be much on the level of hers in many ways because of his ability to bring to the discussions an integration of previously aquired disciplines. She finds this flattering as well as stimulating.

While sensing this and being almost uncontrollably drawn to him, she also senses his terrible loneliness and yearning. At this point it becomes evident to the reader that, in a very real way, Allen stirs the affective side of Sister Irene and awakens in her a special kind of love which she hitherto has suppressed by remaining in the "region of ice." In his search, Allen gradually awakens passions in Sister Irene which she must control because of her more serious desire to remain true to her vocation.

When Allen is placed in a mental institution, this incarceration mirrors Sister Irene's suppression of similar feelings. Her desire to help Allen by going to his parents to plead the case, which he has carefully defined to her in a letter, is in a very real sense a pleading of her own case, an attempt to cope with her own recently awakened feelings of passion and need for love. By turning to Sister Irene, Allen was "trying to force her into a human relationship" (p.18).

For Sister Irene, at this point, not even her religion offers her the comfort and security that it once had. She finds herself being called in an unaccustomed way to become a *real* Christian. "She wanted to cry out in fear that she was being forced into the role of a Christian." "...he was making her into a Christian, and to her that was a mystery, a thing of terror, something others slipped on the way they slipped on their clothes, casually and thoughtlessly, but to her a magnificent and terrifying wonder" (p.19). "She understood now the secret, sweet wildness that Christ must have

felt , giving himself for man, dying for the billions of men who would never know of him and never understand the sacrifice" (p.21). Allen's parents do not understand what Sister Irene is going through when she comes to them, pleading for their son, who is a personification of many of her own feelings.

After Allen is released, and returns to Sister Irene, it is quite clear that he wants help and love from her. In order to keep her first commitment, however, her commitment to God and herself, she must say "no" to Allen's request. Later in the story Allen commits suicide, and although it is not a complete surprise to Sister Irene, yet she is stunned. "If she could have felt guilt, she thought, she might at least have been able to feel something" (p.28). There is no need for Sister Irene to feel guilty, however, since she truly has gone out to this boy as much as her commitments would allow her. The result is that she is able to lay to rest those feelings within herself which were awakened by Allen (and had to be understood and dealt with). Her final rejection of Allen is also her rejection of these feelings within herself to love in a way that is not in keeping with her vocation. The term "rejection" in this context sounds somewhat harsh, but in effect it is rejection in order to keep her commitment, a commitment to love in a special way. Surely, Sister Irene does go out of herself to love in a Christian way. However, the person to whom she offers this very real love is unable to accept it because of his evident psychosis. For Sister Irene, the experience represents a departure from the "region of ice."

"Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" tells of a young girl who is going through the "know-it-all" stage as a teenager. Connie is aware of her attractiveness and of her attraction to boys her own age. She is at an impatient age, not knowing her place in the newly discovered world of sexual emotions. She has little patience with her older sister, who is unmarried and whom Connie sees, with her narrow understanding of what attractiveness is at this point, as unattractive. She sees her mother as one who knows all and has advice regarding all and does not hesitate to share this "knowledge," simply because she is "mother." For a young teenager, a person such as this is somewhat threatening, since indeed, Connie, at the mature age of fifteen, knows many of the answers herself! Connie's father now holds a rather inconsequential position in her life, since she sees him as one who is only interested in coming home from work eating supper, reading the paper, and going to bed, only to get up the next morning to repeat the procedure. He is only part of the furnishings of the household in her busy, self-centered world.

The story describes a typical "fun weekend" for Connie, and how, when she gets away from her home, she is a different kind of girl. "Everything about her had two sides to it, one for home and one for anywhere that was not home: her walk, which could be childlike and bobbing, or languid enough to make anyone think she was hearing music in her head; her mouth,

which was pale and smirking most of the time, but bright and pink on these evenings out; her laugh, which was cynical and drawling at home--'Ha, ha, very funny,'--but high-pitched and nervous anywhere else, like the jingling of the charms on her bracelet" (p.30). Connie's world spins closely around her, and she sees only herself at its center. When noticed by a boy who is less than what she "wanted," she ignores him. "It made them feel good to be able to ignore him"--she and her girlfriend in town on a midsummer night. (p.31). It is on this midsummer's eve that Connie encounters her would-be assailant, Arnold Friend, who turns out to be anything but a friend. One a Sunday following that encounter, this fellow shows up at Connie's home with a carefully laid plan to take Connie from her home and, as the story suggests, rape and likely kill her.

Of course at first this is not apparent to Connie [nor to the reader] and so for a period of time, while dialogueing with Arnold, she plays her usual "I-hope-you're-noticing-me" game, only to find that indeed he has noticed her. Once his plan becomes clear to her, she becomes frightened and quickly abandons her toying with his feelings. He tells her: "Connie don't fool around with me. I mean--I mean, don't fool around, he said, shaking his head" (p.39).

As Arnold continues to tell his intentions to have her come with him, Connie takes a new look at her values, her family, her ideas of who and what is at the real center of her world. "She thought, I'm not going to see my mother again. She thought, I'm not going to sleep in my bed again.

Her bright green blouse was all wet" (p.44).

Arnold responds to her feelings [symbolically, it seems] by saying: "The place where you came from ain't there any more, and where you had in mind to go is cancelled out" (p.44).

Connie knows, and Arnold reminds her at this point, that she must go with him--"and get away before her people get back." (p.45) She realizes her real love for her family which before now had been smothered in her love for herself. Although in deep fear of what may happen to her, her consciousness is raised through this fear. A whole new perspective is gained by the thought of imminent death. What once was a love for self is now a new-found love for those who indeed love her. Connie, like Sister Irene, has the opportunity to go out of herself in a love that is more truly Christian, and she sees the value in this and instinctively follows this path of good.

iii

"Bodies" is the only story being treated in which the protagonist, Pauline, meets with a fatal blow psychically, and withdraws into a state totally apart from reality. It may be noted, however, all six stories suggest a main character who is, in varying degrees, in a similar state. All deny reality to a point; thus one comes to expect a grim outcome.

Pauline is a person who is interested only in the "intellectual" aspects of those around her. She has no concern for their total selves. She is depicted as one who is attempting to cut herself off from the real world of "bodies."

Pauline is introduced to Anthony, whose last name is Draier, Drayer, something like that. It isn't important to her anyway. She notes his striking face, his eyes, eyebrows, and his smile. Her thoughts are given in narration as she notes the passing students in the cafeteria line whose faces are serious, intense and prematurely aged. This attention given to facial expressions is noted in almost every paragraph. This is an important clue to the reader revealing Pauline's character. She notes: "His face, in the mottled light of the broad, marble-floored hall, looked sullen. . . . His hair was curly, black but tinged with gray, and it fell down around the unclean neck of his sweater lazily, making her think of one of the heads she herself had done a few years ago . . . in imitation of a Greek youth, the head of a sweetly smiling child" (p.224). Pauline notices this of Anthony as they stand in the art museum.

One recognizes a leitmotif of "heads" throughout the story. To illustrate the psychic impotency which prevents Pauline from showing any interest in Anthony, it is necessary to "pick up" on this leitmotif. These references lead the reader to the conclusion that Pauline is unable to accept that which is related to the body.

Oates describes Pauline's manner of dress--for one who obviously has money enough available to buy what she wants--as tattered and shabby. Once they were expensive, but now old and uncared-for. The reader may note that "once" was likely before her father died.

It is clear, in fact, that the reader is to note that Pauline is indifferent towards her appearance with regard to her clothes. ". . . her face was cool, slow to awaken to interest, held always in a kind of suspension, she wore the standard casual clothes of girls who were artists or wanted to be. . . . She wore dark stockings, leather shoes that had been ruined by this Winter's icy, salted sidewalks, a dark, rather shapeless skirt, and a white blouse that had once been an expensive blouse but now looked as old as Anthony's sweater and blue jeans, its cuffs rolled up to her elbows, its first button hanging by a thread" (p.224). By such details Oates paints an I-don't-care-attitude of Pauline's feeling for her body.

When confronted with this new person, Anthony--one who obviously wanted to meet Pauline--she "was anxious to get back to work, her fingers actually itched to return to work, and this man was a pull on the edge of her consciousness, like something invisible but deadly blown into her eye" (p.225). Anthony is indeed a pull on her consciousness; a consciousness one later finds to be a lapsing aspect of Pauline's personality. She had no interest in him, not even his "head" since she had already done a head like his once before and would not want to repeat herself. But it seems to be more the case that suddenly this particular head is one which is attached to a body which she feels poses a threat to her. "She felt very nervous beneath his frank, blunt scrutiny, but her face showed nothing" (p.225). Yet her feelings do show, and Anthony senses her eagerness to get away. When he confronts her with this in

question, she in a distant and judgmental manner, thinks him to be insane.

Anthony wants to convey the feeling to Pauline which he has for her, and at this point the reader is given only a clue to the fact that Anthony is indeed as Pauline thinks him to be --insane, or at least troubled in some way. Anthony points out a particular statue to Pauline. Leading her over to it--depicting a young man lying on a cushion with a winged woman at his side--he asks Pauline if she feels these two are in love. Since she suspects Anthony sees himself in the image of the man, Pauline's reply is very quick and is clearly a turn-off, since she also senses he sees her as the winged woman by his side. She says:

"No, they're not in love," wondering if her tone could rid her of this man forever. "The man is dead. The woman is an angel of death, or a demon of death. You see how her hand is broken off--she was holding out a scroll with his fate written on it. This is a monument to adorn a tomb. It isn't about life, it's about death. They're both dead."
(p. 226)

This is meant to be a final word to Anthony regarding any interest he may want to believe she had in him. Yet, one senses at the same time that she is also admitting to herself that she too is dead. "They're both dead " she states. Anthony appeals to her saying, "But they look alive their faces look alive" Pauline responds by alluding to the bodies--they look unnatural, twisted, organically impossible, and out of shape from the waist down. She comments on the artist suggesting he was not interested in that part of the body, rather only in the head, the face and the torso (p.227).

At this point, Pauline feels she had made herself clear--made her interests clear--and these interests do not allow for Anthony. When he asks if he can see her again, she is already walking away from him, hurriedly, leaving him calling out to her. Her position is clear to him, yet he is unwilling to accept it. Anthony continues to follow her, waiting for the right moment to show her that he has not accepted her "turn-off." Indeed, his response comes in a most dramatic and drastic manner; a manner which proves his insanity.

If one were to speculate as to the reason why Pauline has eliminated "bodies" from her life and is able to relate only to the intellectual and "head", one may note the fact that "Pauline had never been able to accept the memory of her father in the hospital after his stroke, suddenly an elderly man, trembling, with tiny broken veins in his face" (p.229). The strong, handsome symbol of love and security--her father-- was no longer physically alive to her. While in the hospital, he was a "dead body" which had been victimized by a stroke. The traumatic effect this has on Pauline is not without foundation in the story.

Thus, since her father's death, Pauline has progressed into a withdrawal from reality, away from "bodies" and into the recesses of her own mind. She is "efficient" with her students, yet "she felt no interest in her students' lives, no jealousy for the girls with their engagement rings and wedding bands" (p.230). Pauline is not interested in the real world of marriage, men, or anything that would be a satisfaction

to the body as well as the mind. She is interested only in the mind- the cranial--and this interest is only in what she finds present and useful to her in her work. She is in the process of detaching herself from all other aspects of the world of "bodies."

After the shock of Anthony's slashing himself with a butcher knife while lunging for her legs, she sinks into an abyss of unconsciousness, detached from the rest of the world. No one is able to reach her, and she goes out to no one. The reader is posed the question, "Why had she walked straight toward him?" That which she feared most in her life is, in part, splattered down the front of her in the form of blood. Immediately after arriving home, Pauline had purged herself of this; scrubbing, cleansing, and then falling onto her bed and going into a deep sleep.

Pauline has a feeling inside her as though she is pregnant; in fact, she is convinced she is pregnant although she knows this is not possible. To Pauline, Anthony, through his demonstration of his feelings for her--strange and sick as they may have been--has performed an act of adultery. Pauline senses a feeling of having been raped, and the result is a feeling of the horrible fate of pregnancy. "Bleeding from the loins, she aches with cramps, coils of cramps. The blood seeps through the embryonic sack, not washing it free. How to get it free? She has a sudden vision, though she is not sleeping, of a tweezers catching hold of that blood-swollen little sack and dragging it free . . ." (p.242).

Because of Pauline's withdrawal from reality--the reality of "bodies"--Anthony has made the ultimate assault on her; he has raped her, and now she feels the most feared result of rape--pregnancy. Of course this takes place only in the world of her mind, but for Pauline, this is the only world she ascribes to. She now sees herself as the beautiful woman in the sculpt in the art museum, disfigured from the waist down, holding her hand out to the young man, holding her hand out to Anthony who is dead; they are both dead. Yet in her illusion there is a life like the life Anthony had seen in the statue. She lusts for him with "tenderness that is violent, like pain . . ."

"We kneel together. We press our faces together, our tears slick and warm" (p.244). One is left with the feeling Pauline has slipped totally into an unconscious state apart from any reality, a state where her world, her passions, her pain, is all within her mind. It is clear that her prognosis is not hopeful as the story closes.

iv

In "The Heavy Sorrow of the Body", Oates tells her readers of a lazy, ironic, calculating, and yet quite lovely young girl by the name of Nina. Her description of Nina stresses the notion of laziness as well as irony, and both aspects of her personality are mentioned a number of times throughout the major part of the story. The reasoning behind Oates' mentioning this will become clearer as this analysis of the story progresses.

Nina looks upon herself as "dirty." "With Conrad in her life, everything became dirty. She herself was a little dirty. She was no longer really a girl, she was a woman, and yet she lived in dirt with a dirty careless man and did not mind it" (p.271). Conrad is Nina's lover. Conrad is thirty-five, going on thirty-six, but has the appearance of a man in his mid-twenties. He is described as a man with blond hair and blue, ironic eyes. "He looked military and Teutonic, . . ." (p.272) For Nina, ". . . it was his body she loved and his body that possessed his soul" (p.270). Oates makes it quite clear to the reader that Nina is infatuated with Conrad's body. Her descriptions of Conrad's body are very sensual, giving particular emphasis to his strength, his very virile appearance. The purpose of these descriptions is to prepare the reader for the necessary comparisons which must be made between Conrad and the man that Nina's father "used to be", since, for Nina, Conrad is an embodiment of her father who had also been a strong and virile man in his day.

One is also given the impression that Conrad is also more interested in Nina's lovely body than he is in her as a person. He asks Nina, "Is your soul shaped like your face, sweetheart, would I recognize you?" (p.272) Nina sensed this with Conrad as she has always sensed it with other men. "He had the cool, transfiguring look of a sculptor, eying material. She complained that he was always looking at her and thinking about her as an object, and she wanted nothing more than their union -- a continual closeness, a magical intimacy" (p.273).

The continual closeness Nina refers to in her reflective thought is not a closeness of the mind, however, but more a closeness of their two bodies, a sensual closeness.

Besides Nina's intense desire for physical closeness to Conrad, she wanted to be his best friend, not just his lover. One may again make a comparison between Conrad and Nina's father. To a little girl, a father is usually a best friend. In Nina's case, however, the reader finds that this had not been the kind of relationship Nina experienced with her own father. Oates does not reveal this until near the end of the story. Only then does it become clear to the reader why Nina has chosen Conrad to be her lover, why she craves the closeness of his body. Nina is looking, searching, for a man to replace the father who never was a part of her life in the way she wanted--a father who was never really present to her as a father, and this takes the form of lust for Conrad. Nina's father had led the "queer life of handyman, town gossip, everyone's friend, [except for Nina's] an embarrassment" (p.278-9). She recalls a time in her childhood where "she felt a sudden pang of fear that her father had forgotten her" (p.284).

Nina takes only a part-time job, a part-time participation in any real form of life. Even then, in her reflections of her occasional day or two a week spent as a substitute teacher, she finds it "crazy"--the crazy lessons, what a crazy place it was, what a crazy system" (p.274). One sees in assessment of her other actions as presented in the story that this view is more than just her view of the educational process; it

is her attitude towards life. Nina describes herself as one of a group of "sluttish" girls, even though this choice of words may be a "parody of what respectable people might think about them" (p.287). She feels both then and now that she must give this sort of life up and "get serious" about life. It is not until Nina is faced with her father's need for her and the fear of his imminent death that this change comes about.

When Conrad suggests to Nina that man is nothing more than water and cellulose, she becomes offended. Although Nina's interest in Conrad at this point is only for his body, she is upset to hear him describe man's body in such simple terms. When he asks if she is nothing more than water and cellulose, Nina feels slighted, since this shows on Conrad's part a failing to see her as anything more than this, failing to see her *real* beauty, failing to see her as a friend. Sensing this, he quickly apologizes, yet only recognizes her outer beauty, which is adequate for the time; but his words indicate that this is indeed all he sees in her (p.276).

Oates appears to be telling the reader something important when she describes the very sensual way Nina's "curious hand" examines all of Conrad's body when lying in bed together.

" . . . Nina who saw nothing but felt everything. When their passion spent itself out, she still returned to him, as if looking for an answer to the mystery of their love; it was so intense, surely they were more than water and cellulose. How could water and cellulose perform such miracles? She touched the hard strong muscles of his thighs, wondering why he had muscles there, why, since he never did any work? The mystery of his being was not explained in his body, but it lay deep inside his body, in himself. (p.276-7)

Nina's father was much like Conrad. He was a muscular figure as she recalled him from her youth, yet he didn't really work--he was a handyman, never anything "professional." Nina found much more in Conrad than she did in Peter, for example. Peter was in no way like her father; Conrad is. In comparison to the above quote where Nina continues to run her hands over Conrad's body even after "their passion spent itself out", one recalls the manner in which Nina washes her father's body even after the nurse attending tells her, "that's good. That's a good job" (p.285). The realization, the acceptance that comes to Nina while ministering to her father in his time of need--a time when he required and asked for her presence--is what transforms her. She has accepted the heavy sorrow of the body--mortality--which is her first awareness of life. From this point, Nina no longer needs Conrad; she has transcended him; she has reached a point of understanding and acceptance which he has not.

The psychic impotency which prevented Nina from really loving Conrad is clear. The level of love she had felt for Conrad was not that of real love. She had only found in him what she had never found in her father prior to his need for her at the time of his death. Once she was needed by her father, once a reconciliation was made between her and her father, her search was ended.

It is interesting to note that Nina wears her father's clothes after his death. It would seem this is her way of continuing to feel the closeness of her father, the physical

closeness, which, after such a long wait, was such a brief experience. Nina had to continue this experience, feel this acceptance in some way, and this was her method.

CHAPTER III

i

In "Shame", the reader is introduced to a priest and a young widow. Rather Andrew Rollins, a Jesuit, is described as one who feels he has been given a gift: a new life away from his old ghetto neighborhood. He is back in this neighborhood as the story opens, looking for an old friend he hasn't seen in years who has failed to reply to his letters. The widow is the wife of this old friend, and the relationship between these two is the focus of Oates' story.

The reader is told that Father Rollins has taken his role as priest as a kind of transformation. "Wearing the collar and the black suit did it, it was a complete transformation, and it pleased him because he was able to learn tenderness...". "...He was called Father Rollins and sometimes just 'Father', which was a magical name, and he felt complicated in coming back here" (p.90). Does this possibly suggest a kind of dichotomy between life and role for Father Rollins. "As a priest he was always being tossed things, even in the midst of his own private grief, burdened with clumsiness and pain he had to make right through magic words" (p.91).

It is interesting to note also Father Rollins, Andrew, remembers his old friend, Frank, in a rather selfish way. "Frank was his own age and had been his closest friend for many years,

at a time in Andrew's life when he had needed a friend and had not understood what his life was to be" (p.92). Frank's role was magical, and it was difficult for Andrew to explain the importance of Frank in his life. Even though they had drifted apart and had not heard from each other for years, there was still something special about Frank for Andrew. "They had been friends as children and as young teenagers and in a way they were closer than brothers; Andrew was sure that he had loved Frank more than he would have loved any brother of his own" (p.92). And now Frank is dead, yet it seems for Andrew that Frank lives as he has always lived. Frank has filled a special void in Andrew's life. A question recurs throughout the story of just how Andrew really viewed Frank. Was Frank really a friend that he loved in a fully loving way, or was it a love possessed by Andrew, filling his need at the time? After all, Andrew admits that for years they have had little in common.

When Andrew goes to the apartment of Frank's widow and is met by a rather tall, banally pretty woman, he "himself felt ungainly and coarse and suddenly dirty" (p.93). Undoubtedly, Andrew is somewhat uncomfortable in the presence of a strange woman, but not in the ordinary sense that one would feel discomfort. There is a different kind of uneasiness. "He was accustomed to this mechanical jumping-up and running-out from women [when she got up to get him a glass of water.] Service like that was a way of not quite seeing him as a priest, not listening to him or dealing with him; he supposed that he understood" (p.94). And, when sitting in her livingroom and

noticing the furnishings of the room, his mind quickly makes comparisons to the elegant furniture of his seminary. The music--"The jazzy music rose from the other room and he thought wildly that he had to get out of this place" (p.94). Andrew, indeed, "was not accustomed to women in such informal situations. There was something naturally jerky and alarming about women, particularly this kind of woman; his college students were rather different" (p.95). One can almost make a comparison to Sister Irene in "In the Region of Ice." Father Rollins, like Sister Irene, feels security when in the "role" of teacher and religious. He feels much more at ease in his priestly role. Both seem to find security in their positions, and when defrocked of this shelter, they find themselves naked when they must relate to other people as persons.

When the subject of the letters Andrew used to write to Frank and his wife comes up, one notes these spoke of Italy, Florence, the Vatican, and the European languages. This conversation, although seemingly understandable for one who is residing in Europe, is totally unrelated to the concerns of Frank and his wife. Excited though Andrew may have been to tell of his travels, it seems Oates is telling the reader that much of Andrew's world revolves around Andrew.

Frank's widow, Toni, sees Andrew as everything that her husband was not. She notes his travels by commenting on his letters, and his education by questioning him about his profession, all the while making comparisons between him and Frank. She asks Andrew if Frank could have accomplished this or that;

if he indeed could have been capable of succeeding as Andrew had done. Before the evening is over, Toni is attracted to Andrew in a strange manner, considering his vocation. She is aware of his commitment to the priesthood, yet she likes what she sees--his intelligence, his gentleness--and she likely senses a kind of security in his presence.

It is when Toni tells how Frank died and allows the terrible grief she feels to come out into the open that Andrew finds himself totally lost as a priest or as a person. "He was trembling. For her sake he wanted to get this conversation going in another direction. What sorrow this girl had had to bear! He felt like a coward, he felt shame for himself, his achievement, and his security and his adulthood--it was shameful that he sit here so divorced from her, unable to take any of her suffering onto himself" (p.99). In light of what Oates tells of Andrew throughout the story, however, one senses that his shame is more related to his inability to love this woman, who reaches out to him not so much as a woman, but more as a person to whom she suddenly feels a closeness because of his longtime relationship with her deceased husband, the source of her grief. In many ways, Andrew has never accepted himself as a person, but rather only as a priest. His security lies in his ability to relate to himself and others through the role of priest and teacher, but now, possibly, for the first time, he becomes conscious of this. When he is asked to relate to another as a person, this means he must first see himself as a person capable of giving what is being asked of him.

He must see love, a Christlike love, within himself, a love with which he feels sufficiently comfortable to give to another who asks for it. The real shame Andrew feels then is the shame of not being able to give of himself in this way, a way that he very much wants to be a part of his personality but which is not.

At the close of the story, Toni gives Andrew a Robin's egg which is symbolic of her wanting to give herself to him in some way or another, possibly sexually but more likely as a woman seeking security which she sees present in Andrew through his role as priest and teacher. Receiving the egg from Toni, Andrew is bewildered, amazed. "Downstairs in the foyer he opened his hand again, dreading what he must see, and there the egg lay--a tiny, perfect egg, a lovely blue, a miracle achieved by some forlorn, enslaved robin" (p.109). He crushes the egg in his palm, leaving a mess which he cleans off with a tissue. One may compare Andrew's crushing the egg to Sister Irene's drawing back of her hand when Allen reached out to her in a similarly symbolic gesture. Both must maintain a fidelity to their commitment to a religious life steeped in a tradition which did not allow for any interpersonal relationships with one of the opposite sex.

ii

"The Wheel of Love" introduces the reader to another of Oates' characters whose "impotency" to love is found in his own low self-esteem. At the end of the story, one clearly sees that David, the protagonist, never thinks himself worthy of

his wife, Nadia. As a result, David loses Nadia through her suicide. She is never satisfied with her marriage to him, as is illustrated throughout the story by such signs as her continuing to cling to the material things her mother offers her—clothes, new suits and dresses; vacations away from David, etc. As one may suspect, the result is that Nadia never feels a total person either, needing to constantly reassure herself of her worth by taking these gifts her mother offers.

As the story opens, the reader hears David's thoughts as he fantasizes about the way things used to be with him and Nadia before her death; however, one quickly realizes that things never were this way. David admits this to himself and thus to the reader: "So he thought clearly, 'I have to be careful. I have to remember what has happened and, because of that, what can no longer happen'" (p.167). One readily sees what can no longer happen never did happen! The fact of the matter is, and possibly what David is alluding to with this comment, that he no longer even has the chance to change what is amiss between him and Nadia. It is too late! This one may see as a major part of his grief, and it will continue to haunt him for some time to come.

One often finds David fantasizing throughout the story; a ploy used in order to make himself feel better about his self-image and the "game" that he had played throughout his marriage to Nadia.

To a man so newly lonely, so newly alone, an invitation out meant an evening in other people's lives, and therefore freedom from his own, and it meant the

possibility of laughter that would surprise him-- how good it was to be alive and healthy, to have a body that had not given up in spite of everything. When he was with other people he realized that he had not really died along with Nadia after all. (p.167-8).

David's feelings of "being alive" are lived vicariously through his experiences with other people. This is one of the few times David attempts contact with reality. Yet when he finds himself taking advantage of this ploy, he feels as though he is involved in a "game." To be invited out is an invitation to return to a childlike game of which he no longer wishes to be a part.

Oates describes the various settings surrounding David in such a way as to convey to the reader his mental attitude: Low self-esteem. This descriptive method is used by many contemporary authors today, having been adopted from French literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in an attempt to depict the psychological mind-set of characters involved. One sees an example of this in this story as David enters the apartment building of a former student, Jerry Randolph, with whom he is going to have dinner and "that evening out," away from his own apartment. "The apartment building was shabby, and he felt his suit sympathize with the building and grow limp, wrinkled. Yes, he was shabby, he was tired" (p. 168). There are several references similar to this in the story where Oates is obviously telling the reader something about David through her description of "stage." Another example may be seen when David is climbing the steps leading to Jerry's apartment.

"There was the awkward business of getting up the stairs with Jerry watching, but then they were on a level and it was all right" (p.169). Clearly, Oates, in mentioning "awkward" and "with Jerry watching" is trying to demonstrate to the reader how David sees himself in this situation--less than the one above him. When David was "on a level" it "was all right." This is a particularly good example of how Oates uses everything in the story to achieve a desired theme.

One senses a dichotomy between David and Nadia, and this is seen by the reader and presented by David when he says as a matter of narrative: "All his life David had melted into landscapes, just as Nadia had stood out from them Nadia had had the gift of eliminating all backgrounds" (p.168). Yet David seems to blend into any setting, whether it is rich or poor, elegant or simple. When David and Nadia are together, it becomes clear to the reader that David feels as though he is being "blotted out" by the presence of Nadia, and in the process, "blot out . . . all of the life he had led up to the time of her death" (p.169).

As strange as it may seem, one gets the impression that even though David feels lost without Nadia, since he credits her with making his life full and worth living, he also feels a sense of relief at the point of her death. This is seen in the following: ". . . at its feeble peak was the top of his life: those several minutes when they had explained to him that she was dead. Then time led downward again, the same modest cracked sidewalk" (p.169).

Why would her death be an apex, so to speak, if it was not also a relief, an opportunity to abandon the "game" he finds himself in? This may be further supported in David's words as he leaves Jerry's apartment. "'Like a slug, a filthy slug,' he said aloud. His dead wife was a slug that had trailed its slime across the whiteness of his life, and this was what he had wanted to tell his student and that worried little girl" (p.174). This symbol tells the reader of the intense bitterness he now holds. Although David never feels he is worthy of Nadia, now that she is dead, he realizes how she was like a parasite, draining rather than enriching the already fragile life, the rather vulnerable life which was David's.

There are several references to the anxiousness which David feels when in the presence of others, due to his inability to fully relate to reality, his inability to accept himself and be pleased with what he finds. "Eating was a pleasant distraction and he was able to relax a little" (p.171). The implication here is clear. Eating takes energy, energy is used in the act itself and in the process of digestion. This offers relief from the amount of energy which is centered on his anxiousness.

In many ways, David's desire to escape reality, thereby adding to his feelings of low self-worth, are made evident: "He no longer read the newspapers; he had just forgotten about them" (p.171). Another instance is seen when David is awaiting the offer of a drink after his arrival at Jerry's apartment. He thinks, "If he could get to the moment at which they

offered him a drink he would be all right" (p.169-70). In reflection, one may note David's desire to escape reality is not as great as Pauline's feeling in "Bodies", another story already treated in this paper. The desire is much the same in both cases, but the degree varies.

As David reflects on the afternoon, the day before Nadia dies, the reader is given several insights which tell him David feels less than equal to Nadia, which gives testimony to the statement of his having a low self-esteem. When seeing another gift from his mother-in-law, the gift of a dress or new suit--something for Nadia, "he always felt a mixture of anger and helplessness" (p.174). ". . . the power to turn her gaze upon him and excite him so that he felt shaken and helpless, as innocent as he had been when they had first met" (p.175). David had been unaware of Nadia's real reasoning for marrying him, and although much time had passed, she could return him to the same point of naivete with just a glance. From the time they first met, David feels himself unworthy of this woman--younger than he--this very beautiful and yet vague and exasperating woman. David feels that by Nadia's marrying him--one older and in some respects, of a different generation than she--Nadia "was a woman who had abandoned her own life, her own body, and David felt shackled to a corpse" (p.177). Nadia responds to David's feeling with her "no risk" attitude in saying: "I keep wanting to go away but I need you here. I need you back here, waiting" (p.177).

It becomes clear Nadia wants the security that David can offer her yet keep a life of one from a younger generation whose world and desires are different from her spouse's. Nadia has married a father-concept rather than a husband. And David? David has married a "possession" which he assumes through the nature of this bond will give him ownership of the very thing which will make his life complete. He feels "a wife was a kind of possession and no husband thought that way until something went wrong: There were things in life you had to have, to possess, you had to be able to depend upon" (p.177). At the same time David sees her as being "like a rich, complex gift bestowed upon him; one he had received without earning and so could not enjoy" (p.177-8). Again, the feeling presented is that David does not feel worthy of Nadia.

David also senses Nadia's real reason for marrying him. The reader is given a clue to this reasoning in the following: ". . . but she remembered her first impression of him because of course he was someone special; even the least of professors is a public personality" (p.181). Nadia had looked to David as one who is looked up to by others; yet in her own mind she sees him as a "least" in his field. One realizes this feeling would be conveyed to David throughout their marriage. Another indication of what she had sought in David is brought out in narrative: "She asked him something sleepily, and he answered, telling her nothing but giving her all she wanted--the sound of his voice" (p.182). David had only wished this moment could be "sealed within itself" somehow, that he could

have this feeling of her as his possession for the rest of time. His fantasy was ". . . all the world must be sick with jealousy to know that it could never have what they possessed together" (p.182). Yet, David and Nadia never have possessed this either. She is too wrapped up in her own needs, and he is certain that he is not worthy of her. For that reason what he has desired to possess has only moved further from his grasp. David and Nadia found themselves chasing each other in a circle, in a wheel of love; yet, not love, since what they were seeking remained only a desire to possess.

CHAPTER IV

As has been suggested in the first chapter and shown by analysis in the second and third, the stories of Joyce Carol Oates deal with the subject of "love." For the most part, these stories deal with the failings of love or with that condition of psychic impotency which prevents the main character, often a woman, from attaining a fulfilling love.

Although Oates never brings in a theological understanding of what true love is, contemporary theological definitions of the nature of true love describe exactly what Oates tells us is missing in her characters' lives. In referring to the works of such writers as Eugene C. Kennedy, John Powell, and Eric Fromm, who deal with love in today's world, as Oates is doing, it becomes clear that all these writers are speaking of the same kind of love. In her stories, often Oates recognizes in the most depressing ways, the absence of the same kind of love which these other writers describe to their readers to aid them in understanding and achieving fuller human love. Although Oates does not trace her concept of love to a basic foundation of love in God and of God, it is at the heart of her definition of real love. One could assume this because of Oates' Catholic background. It would be difficult to believe that she could totally ignore this legacy in her concept of love.

A few references to the works of Fathers Powell, Kennedy, and other writers reveal their relevance to Oates' concept of love.

In his book The Secret of Staying in Love, John Powell states:

... there is a growing consensus of opinion that there is one need so fundamental and so essential that if it is met, everything else will almost certainly harmonize in a general sense of well-being. When this need is properly nourished, the whole human organism will be healthy and the person will be happy. This need is a true and deep love of self, a genuine and joyful self-acceptance, an authentic self-esteem, which results in an interior sense of celebration: "It's good to be me . . . I am very happy to be me!"¹⁵

In several of Oates' characters, the lack of self-esteem and self-acceptance is certainly apparent, as was pointed out in Chapters II and III. Powell goes on to say that one must first know love in order to have this good feeling about himself. At times it is unclear, as to which love Oates is saying must precede the other. That is why one must know and understand what love is in order to grasp fully the import of the story. It is possible that some readers see more clearly what is problematic with her characters than what she does in creating them.

The lack of a good self-image among Oates' characters, which results from a very limited understanding of love in their own lives, produces the effects of further self-hatred, misunderstanding of self, and often tendencies towards self-destruction. In some cases her characters are unable to be at peace with their respective husbands, wives or children because of their feelings about themselves. Bertrand Russell once said, "A man cannot possibly be at peace with others until he has learned to be at peace with himself." It is clear from chapters II and III that some of Oates' characters, if not all

of them, are not at peace with themselves. Rabbi Joshua Liebman advocated a rewording of the biblical command of love so that it read: "Love and believe in yourself properly and you will love and believe in your neighbor." A psychiatrist-spokesman for the Payne-Whitney Psychiatric Clinic in New York has been quoted as saying: "If people had a healthy love of themselves instead of hating themselves and feeling bad; if only they would love the child in themselves instead of despising the weakness, our case load would be cut in half."¹⁶ One reacts with spontaneity when there is a balance of the child and the adult in his personality.

As has been clearly pointed out in Chapters II and III, the most frequent 'psychic impotency' inherent in Oates' characters is that of a low self-esteem, poor self-image, and in general, an unhealthy feeling for themselves. Her characters become extremely resourceful in their attempts to adjust to their various situations. Behavioral symptoms appear in these people who have not yet learned to love and esteem themselves. The severity of the symptom, the extent to which the device [the various defense-mechanisms one uses] is employed will always be proportionate to the greater or lesser absence of true self-love and self-esteem. Hence the difference in the varying degrees of neurosis present in Oates' characters. In some cases the defense takes the form of shyness, rationalism, perfectionism, anger, alienation--in general, masks, roles, and facades which prevent the characters from ever becoming fully human and fully alive.

Eric Fromm offers an explanation as to why Oates' characters perform the destructive acts that are so often a gruesome part of her stories. It is also true that her characters are frequently the victims of others who perform such acts, but the question is "why do these characters end up in this situation?" Fromm says:

It would seem that the amount of destructiveness to be found in individuals is proportionate to the amount to which expansiveness of life is curtailed. By this we do not refer to individual frustrations of this or that instinctive desire but to the thwarting of the whole life, the blockage of spontaneity of the growth and expression of man's sensuous, emotional, and intellectual capacities. Life has an inner dynamism of its own; it tends to grow, to be expressed, to be lived. It seems that if this tendency is thwarted the energy directed towards life undergoes a process of decomposition and changes into energies directed towards destruction. In other words: the drive for life and the drive for destruction are not mutually independent factors but are in a reversed interdependence. The more the drive towards life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive towards destruction; the more life is realized, the less is the strength of destructiveness. Destructiveness is the outcome of un-lived life.¹⁷

This point of view certainly explains why Oates' characters experience feelings of self-destruction or, through their troubled love affairs, marriages, or relationships between parent and child, find themselves bereaved by the self-destructive death of their respective mate, parent or child. In one story, "Shame," for example, we see a priest who is saddened by the death of his estranged friend since it becomes clear that he never really understood his friend nor does he really understand himself. His life has been hidden by the facade of his priesthood, and he finds that even his past life is actually yet "unlived" in many respects.

His shame is brought about by his realization that it is too late to be a true friend to the one who is now dead or to his widow. Often Oates' stories explain, at least on a first glance, where love ends rather than where love begins. In her accurate description of the lives of people in contemporary American society Oates does what Eugene C. Kennedy speaks of when he says: "America seems to be a land in which love is mourned almost as much as it is celebrated. The solemn, set faces of the hurrying crowd mask a bitter-sweet secret: love may be full of life, but it can also die. Sometimes it dies after a long illness, sometimes unexpectedly."¹⁸ Truly the love experienced by many of Oates' lovers is a dying kind of love. It is sometimes clear from the beginning of the story that the death is imminent. For many of Oates' characters, love is desired so much as a possession that the desire itself becomes the "murder weapon" of the struggling love that is trying so desperately to live. As Kennedy goes on to say: "Love may be hard to find, and yet--perhaps the cruelest thing of all--it can be lost even though we stand guard over it."¹⁹

In another very real sense some of Oates' protagonists must themselves die in order that their love may live. An example of this is seen in the story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" where Connie is faced with her own death. In order that Connie may come to know what love is in her life, a life where love is to be directed for the most part towards family, she must be faced with her own death in order that she may live.

It is an echo of what John says in his Gospel: "I solemnly assure you, unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit." (John 12:24-5) Even though Oates makes no specific reference to religion, love of God, or theology in any form, it is clear that she is one who writes out of a background which was for her at one time Catholic, and Christian in its foundations. Oates often describes that which love is not, how love is not present, and this seems the direct counterpart to that which sacred scripture teaches about love. In so doing, Oates tells her readers what must be present in order for love to exist, just as scripture tells the Christian what he must do to find love as steeped in the teachings of Christ. Although love may take various forms; Oates, Kennedy, Powell, Russell, and others, ultimately suggest there is only one source for love and unless founded in that source, it will never become a fully satisfying love. Yet, without totally foisting a theological bent on Oates' definition of love as portrayed by her stories, one may say that they suggest love comes to life only for the individual who has a deep sense of his own identity. In giving fair analysis to what Oates is saying and what other authors uphold, one may say that this identity is founded in love of self through love of God. A Christian cannot avoid applying theological connotations to Oates' writing. For the Christian, God is love, and the simple, human reason that we have love at all is that we would never know who we are without it.

The thrust of many of Oates' stories is that love must start with self. One may further this belief by saying love must start with God.

CONCLUSION

This study has considered the concept of love as portrayed in six short stories from the collection, The Wheel of Love by Joyce Carol Oates. Although Oates uses both male and female protagonists, they face the same problem with regard to love in their lives, namely a kind of psychic impotency which prevents them from achieving a fulfilling or satisfying love relationship. Sister Irene finds herself "in the region of ice" created by a low self-esteem. Connie suffers from being caught-up in a world which she has revolving around her own selfish needs. The protagonist of "Bodies," Pauline, withdraws into a "heady" world apart from reality. Nina's love for Conrad is a replacement for a love she never received as a child--a desperate search for the love of a father which was never present in her life as a young girl. Father Rollins finds himself in a situation similar to Sister Irene; however, he remains in his "region of ice" to the point of "shame." David, in "The Wheel of Love," also is shackled by his feelings of low self-worth and finds himself a widower to a woman of whom he never felt worthy. In other words, by describing an absence of love in the lives of her characters, Oates suggests what *real* love should be, and at the same time makes a comentary on the perversion of love in contemporary society.

Although Oates is not a religious writer, she is not in conflict with contemporary theological definitions of the nature of true love. She demonstrates her agreement with them by the negation of love in her characters.

Father Matthias Neuman gives an enriching summation of Oates' short stories which enhances my thesis quite well:

Short stories, like those of Miss Oates, are particularly fruitful for reflection. They are cameos that marvelously reflect the intensity, range and conflict of emotions in individuals. She uses literary techniques which capture those "self-images" that occur at trying and difficult times in a person's life, self-images which bring the person sudden and deep realizations about his identity, and true valuations of both self and world. Her themes are those which haunt every human being at one time or another: the inability to reconcile oneself with the past or with one's family; the hesitant acceptance of responsibility; feelings of diffuseness, aimlessness, and dissipation of life; the fear of sudden violence and the agony of accepting and interpreting pain; the immense impact and significance of realizing human bodiliness; the struggles to attain realistic expectations instead of illusions; deep feelings of worthlessness and the fear of confronting people; the ability and inability to cope with senselessness and evil in life. . . . These are the obstacles which must be overcome to attain authentic human love, love which can exist in a world of space and time. Miss Oates also points the way toward an idea of conversion as the acceptance of time, personal history and bodiliness. Most of all, conversion and authentic love come in the commitment to caring, in the decision now to see preciousness and individuality in the person at hand.²⁰

A final inference to be gained from the study of Oates' short stories in this collection is the need for an understanding of *real*, Christ-like love in today's society.

In conclusion, although her stories are not the most pleasant reading and many of her characters neurotic and bizarre, they reveal insightful truths about love in contemporary America.

FOOTNOTES

1. Joyce Carol Oates, The Wheel of Love and Other Stories, ed. A Fawcett Crest Book reprinted by arrangement with Vanguard Press, January 1972, taken from the first page of the book which is unnumbered.
2. John Powell, S.J., The Secret of Staying in Love, (Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1974), p. 12.
3. Alfred Kazin, "Oates," Harper's Magazine, 243 (August 1971), p.81.
4. Ibid., p. 81.
5. Ibid., p. 81.
6. Robert Emmet Long, rev. of: The Wheel of Love and other Stories, by Joyce Carol Oates, Saturday Review, 24 October, 1970, pp. 36, contd. on 65.
7. Long, p. 65.
8. Joyce Carol Oates, "Background and Foreground in Fiction," The Writer, 80 (August 1967) No. 8, p.11.
9. Long, p. 65.
10. Kazin, p. 82.
11. Joyce Carol Oates, "The Unique/Universal in Fiction," The Writer, 86 (January 1973) No. 1, p.86.
12. Wheel of Love, p. 11. (from here on cited only by page number.)
13. Oates, Unique/Universal, p.86
14. Kazin, p.82.
15. Powell, p.13.
16. Ibid., p.16.
17. Eric Fromm, Escape From Freedom, (New York-Chicago-San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1941), p.183-4.
18. Eugene Kennedy, The Heart of Loving, (Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1973), p.1.
19. Ibid., p.1.

20. Matthias Neuman, O.S.B., "Monastic Theology and the Dialogue with Cultural Humanism," Monastic Studies, Number Twelve, Michaelmas, (Mount Saviour Monastery, Pine City, New York: 1976), pp.102-3.

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