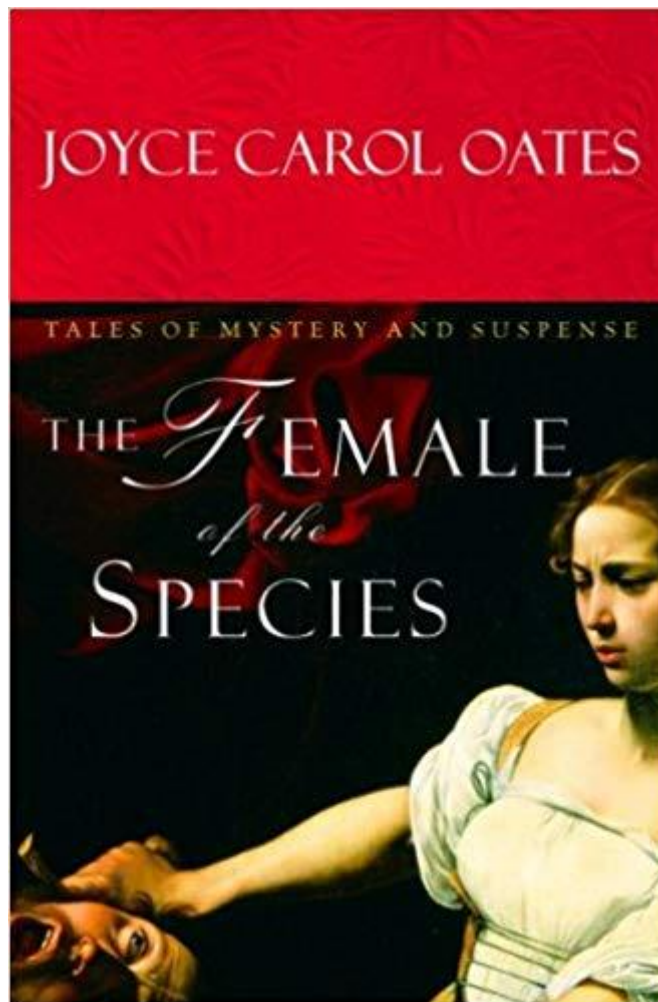


**Enigma and Disquiet in Joyce Carol Oates'
*The Female of the Species***

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Abstract

The present paper discusses about the physical and mental analysis of women characters in Joyce Carol Oates's 'The Female of the Species'. Oates makes it clear how women are entrapped in the environment. In this collection, the writer points out the pathetic condition of woman; they are confronted by the destructive force around them. Mostly women are surprised by the same within themselves. Oates demonstrates practically how and why women are haunted by nature in various stages, from childhood, young girls, devoted wives and aged mother, sometimes old aged women. Women seem more deadly than males. That is the reason; commonly women are being called the weaker sex. The present paper focus on the theme of haunting and how women suffer from fevered imagination, struggling to get rid of terrible fear which is hidden within them. Violence and Sexual Abuse are the two key problems of women in different ages highlighted in each tales. the women characters of the short stories 'Haunting' and 'Hunger' reveals the darker side of the female mind in suspenseful by exploring sexuality, violence and redemption. They are having abusive relationships with men either physically or mentally that resulted in death; sometimes the stories ends with the 'abuser' being killed and are focused as pitiless perpetrators.

Keywords: Joyce Carol Oates, *The Female of the Species*, Violence, Haunting, Abuse, and Sexuality.

Literature is a term used to express the experience of the writer in written or spoken material. Broadly speaking, Literature is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific works, but the term is most commonly used to refer to the works of creative imagination, including the works of poetry, drama, fiction and non-fiction. At the turn of the twentieth century, Non-Fiction works by authors such as W.E.D Du Bois and Booker T. Washington debated how to tackle the difficulties of racist in the United States.

Washington Irving (1783-1859) has regarded as the Father of American Literature. He is a curious label for Irving, for he was not all that at "home" with American life. His very early literary efforts are *The Letters of Jonathan Old style, Gent (1802)* and *Salmagundi (1807)* comic references and satirical thrusts at contemporary New York society. Almost everybody comes to know that they think about it a bit that the "children's story" that is his best known work, "*Rip Van Winkle*" (1819), really bemoans the fact that the Revolution marked the drastic change in America from bucolic paradise to commercial and political Babel. The birth of America in that story is described as a fall, and, in fact, Irving seemed more at home in the Old World and spent much of his life there. American democracy was no unalloyed advance in civilization. Today American literature has become accepted as an integral part of World Literature, with books such as *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, which won the Pulitzer Prize and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* are achieving both best-selling and Award-winning status.

Literature is the powerful medium to transform the words into deeds. Writers who supported for the wellness of women understood it. Writers' pessimistic view about women for achieving gender equalities and denouncing the injustices to women became the main goal for

feminist writers and activists. They started at creating a world, at least in literature, where women would be able to live as individuals.

Joyce Carol Oates lives in an Era of Postmodernism, which insists on the dominance of fiction over all the other forms of literature. A unique creative genius, Oates blends reality and vision of great comprehension trying to locate the fundamental maladies tormenting the times. Oates is an artist of incredible power of expression. She has special concern about America and its problems. Oates interprets the loneliness of American in the various tracts of their living, decisively touching, the American dream and its passion. From the journal: *The Indian Review of World Literature in English*, Vol. 3, No. I – Jan, 2007. The article was published by Prof. R. S. Shantaram titled as *Joyce Carol Oates – A Novelist with a Mission*: G.F. Waller observes the writing of Joyce Carol Oates as: “To live by obsession totally is to go mad, but at least as Oates articulates it except through facing and through fiction, reliving our obsessions, we will firmly be able to face the chances of transcendence that those obsessions yearn for. It may be that it is the source of this transcendence that she will turn in short fiction too”.

The article titled *Enigma and Disquiet* deals about women who are unaware of the destructive force bringing them into the state of anxious, disturbed, and embarrassing in their life. *Enigma* is to refer something mysterious to figure out in the real happenings of the story. Throughout the life, it is an inexplicable occurrence in the lives of women, in the story ‘Hunger’, Kristine is a woman hungry for passion, she is vacationing with her daughter on the Cape Cod, and she is being seduced by Jean-Claude, a stranger on the beach. This is the proof of enigmatic sense from the reference of Joyce Carol Oates. Whereas *disquiet* is to signify the upset feeling; due to the horrifying circumstances, women only suffered to the extent. In the story, ‘Haunting’, a small girl distressed from the phantasm. Later, she comes to know that her father burnt alive by her mother. This is the evidence of *disquiet* and frustrated state of the girl. Joyce Carol Oates portrayed that most of her female characters are in the state of *Enigma and Disquiet* in short fiction *The Female of the Species*.

Robert James Waller, an American author who said that Life is never easy for those who dream. He considers Oates to be a prophetic writer and compares her to D.H. Lawrence; she is able to loot into and beyond the human psyche, Oates’s writings mostly based on the development through an obsessive vision of horror and violence in American life to a pursuit of transcendence to some kind of affirmation that points to renunciation in Eastern philosophies. According to Oates, violence is portrayed through female characters in the form of sexual annoyance. Most of her famous short stories contain themes of violence and sexual abuse between the sexes. The meaning of the word ‘Haunting’ found in Merriam-Webster which makes the sense to have a disquieting or harmful effect on problems which we ignore now will come back to haunt us constantly and spontaneously too. In her short story, ‘Haunting’, a widow named Mommy was working as a Saleswoman in private and lived in a new place a thousand miles away from the house with her children – one daughter, and a son Calvin, ten years old boy. One fine day at night, there was wind’s blowing outside the house. They had pet animals i.e., pigeons and rabbits in the cellar. Calvin asked his mother what happened at the outside, by thinking that his dead Daddy has come back. Usually women and children are fear of darkness.

The boy here felt to protect himself, but Mommy replied her son that your ‘Daddy ain’t coming back, dummy. Daddy is Dead’ (96).

At the morning, Mommy prepared their children for school, and the boy discussed about his dream that his Daddy’s shouting voice with his mother. Little sister was haunted and reflected at her face. Her school teacher found that little girl’s father was died, and they were afraid of darkness. After the school hours, Little sister and boy Calvin used to play Old guitar of his dead Daddy. They heard the fake news that Mommy would be arrested by the Sheriff’s deputies; soon released for one shred of evidence against her, at night, Little sister and Calvin were distracted and fallen asleep. They wanted to move the house of Aunt Estelle, Mommy’s half-sister, there she had quarreled with Aunt, because she is drunkard, smoking cigarettes and spent time with phone. Mommy felt that this is not good and peaceful atmosphere for the children.

At a new place, Mommy was helpless to lead the life and she thought well about the children, so she decided to quit her job. She then wandered over the streets for looking the jobs. She had a talent of singing songs by using her husband’s old guitar, so she changed her nature and always wanted to be young, later she named herself Little Maggie worked as a servant at cafe on the river but some nights, she worked as a waitress at bar. In cafe, men offered money; she readily accepted it by saying quietly ‘thank you’. She told the customers ‘I will take this money as a gift of my music. I will take this because of my children have no father, in turn you expect nothing from rather music and thanks’. She became popular and she was a beautiful singer at the café. When she started to sing everybody in the café went silent.

At night, Mother has gone to Café, Calvin and Little Sister were at home, and they were unable to sleep, but anyhow managed to sleep, the boy dreamt of rabbits grown up. The rabbits were entrapped inside, so that the boy thought the there is nothing difference between the life of human and the life of rabbits. The boy asked the rabbits who has locked them in these cages? He wanted to free them, so he opened the door, the rabbits came out the cellar and first time sensed the fresh cold air and the boy sensed the snow touches his face, and said that “Go on, Go out of here! You are free” (108).

Calvin changed his nature and responded to his Mommy like his Daddy, by using lighted the match, like a way son used to against her thumb and dipping from her mouth and later does the same as Father. This story deals about the fantasy, dream and illusion of haunting. It focuses on the incidents at night, haunting the characters Mommy and her son Calvin. Finally the cages have disappeared, but they heard the rabbits cry in the wind, the noise of the pelting rain, the whistle of train and so, it will be continued through the days. Thus, the life of human is compared to the life of rabbits in the cellar, our life in the modern society is mechanical, like a caged bird, the rabbits in the cellar, etc., and Oates portrays the sense of haunting at night not only to the children and also to adult women.

Another short story of Joyce Carol Oates’s *The Female of the Species*, *Hunger* which means an uneasy sensation occasioned by the lack of food and sometimes to have an eager desire. This short story is based on the translation of the novel *The Vice-Counsel*, by Jean-Claude

Ranier, a poet, an actor, photographer and dancer. It is mainly focused and revolves around the character Kristine, married woman and her husband Parker Culver, the COE of a prosperous computer software company in Boston and also a businessman. Parker Culver had married already and had a son 13 years old who is emotionally disturbed, because both father and mother left him remain uncared. Parker Culver was sixteen years elder than Kristine. They had a young beautiful baby named Ceci. Yet Parker Culver was solid, flame like, good-hearted man whom everyone adored him, whereas Kristine had a good opinion at first and later feel boring, tortured. Kristine stated her married life as: *“Marriage, a mystery. Why we love, and what we do to define and contain our love. To protect it, As if love is a flame that can be blown out”* (117).

Oates used quite different approach to narrate this particular story, she used symbols, motifs and the story is discussed from the climax part that advancing the plot in a story. Kristine and her daughter Ceci moved to her mother’s elder sister’s cottage house nearby the ocean side at Boston, for vocation. Betsey, a home maker and her husband Douglas Robbins, a banker. He is the workaholic personality. There, while on vocation Kristine had an affair with a young man wounded dancer and an awkward, solitary man prone to irrational, violent rages. She was in a thought of seeking the love of younger men as if desperate for a carefree youth she never had. Kristine will think *“I’ve made the worst mistake of my life, when she would feel like a many-legged beetle whose nerve center has been cut - the paralysis is multiplied, with so many legs”* (111)

Kristine got news that DiParma, Austin, 61 years old was murdered and found decomposed dead body in Oceanside cottage house at Rocky Harbor, i.e. the Cape Cod, because DiParma, Austin had been robbed of cash, credit cards, a wristwatch and other personal effects. The robbery motive is secondary to the murder, but there was no evidence of a forcible break in at the victim’s house. The Police Detectives inquired Kristine and her aunt Betsey and Douglas’s house and tried their investigation about DiParma, Austin’s private affairs, in the Cape Cod, particularly on the morning of August 11 around 7.30a.m. Kristine could not be there on the same day. So that she was safe and interested to know the murderer. Kristine was love-making with the young man named Jean Claude, at first meeting when he was washing his hands, his forearms, splashing water upon his face. Next meeting with him would for dance practice, rehearsal. He begins making love to her another time, but Kristine refused that the young man is the translator, who limps and ashamed of his infirmity. The character of Kristine is portrayed as *“Kristine is a realistic woman. A mother, a wife. She vows not to be deluded. Not to fall in love with this beautiful young man. As a married woman she has never had a lover”* (134)

Kristine decided to leave the Cape Cod, i.e., The Rocky Harbor without informing to Jean-Claude, if Kristine were exposed as an unfit mother; an adulteress. She had an absurd physical sensation only, but Ceci was very close to Jean-Claude, so that Kristine made to wait for few days. They have returned to home and shared the experience interestingly to her husband Parker Culver; it’s a fact that Parker Culver was a man of some mystery, because he hasn’t cared to tell Kristine much about his previous disastrous marriage. The former wife is too a mystery, just a mistake, Kristine, the two of us married too young, Kristine thought that Parker Culver had insured for two million dollar to Ceci’s future life security. Kristine had to speak with Jean-Claude over phone, and assured to meet again in a luxury hotel arrange by him.

Kristine compelled her husband to go for the trip on September, as per the plan, they reached the Cape Cod, Kristine was mad on Jean-Claude, after the meeting; she has hidden .22 caliber pistol in her pocket. Kristine and Parker walked lonely together at the shore at Rocky Harbor. There, Parker was attacked and fatally injured with the weapon knife, a heavy rock. She was the only terrified witness. Kristine would treat and recovered Parker; she decided clearly why should I divorce Parker Culver, whom she loves much? She prayed to the Almighty “God help me to make things right” (159).

Thus, both Parker and Kristine have declined to have a romantic evening alone and, spent time in a deserted beach, wet, hard-packed sand. The sky is marred with bruised looking rain clouds. She has felt entrapped into the love affair, but could not predict what will happen to next moment. The story ends in a sad note with the death of either the lover or her husband. But the story ends with the pleading remark of Parker saying Kristine, “you are cold, darling, we would better turn back, but she replied “no, we can’t turn back” (161).

This article suggests clearly that women were exploited and haunted by their ignorance, they should have awareness and confidence from within, and then only women should lead the desired life in the modern society. Education, counseling and knowing of self can able to get rid of the haunting clutches. Self-control, dignity, social responsibilities are the keys to have reliable harmony in their life. in these two short stories, women, the weaker sex, are charred constantly and haunted sexually by the circumstances in a mysterious manner their lives slither easily towards calamity due to their too much of negligence in tracing social and moral codes personally.

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