

Portrayal of an Execrable Violence in Joyce Carol Oates' *Demon*

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Abstract: This paper advocates the impact of the socio psychology on an individual's psychology with reference to an eminent and prolific American writer Joyce Carol Oates's *Demon* from the anthology *The Collector of Hearts: New Tales of the Grotesque* (1998). It unpacks Oates's issue based approach to writing short stories and their impact on the postmodern world filled which is with repressed desires, emotional conflicts and fragmented thoughts. Through this much interesting genre, Joyce Carol Oates has suggested the possibility of transcendence for the entire womanhood.

Key words: Obsessive Love, Gothic, Grotesque.

I. Introduction

1.1 Features of Short Story

The ancient form of short story, 'the anecdote' was popular under the Roman Empire. In Europe, the oral story – telling tradition began to develop in the written form in the early 14th century. At the end of the 16th century, some of the most popular short stories in Europe were the tragic "novella" of Matteo Bandello's The novels of Matteo Bandello translated by John Payne in six volumes in 1890. The short stories of today emerged as an individual genre in the early 19th century. Authentic examples of the contribution of the southern short fictions in the United States are of Charles Brockden Brown's *Somnambulism* (1805), Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* (1819) and Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales* (1842).

Short stories, for all the dazzling diversity of the genre, are of two general types: those that yield their meanings subtly, quietly, are as nuanced and delicate and without melodrama as the unfolding of miniature blossoms in Japanese chrysanthemum tea, and those that explode in the reader's face. Flannery O'Connor came of the American scene in a time when subtlety and "atmosphere" in short stories were fashionable. As in the finely wrought, understated stories of such classic predecessors as Anton Chekhov, Henry James and James Joyce, American contemporaries as Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Peter Taylor, Jean Stafford, and Joyce Carol Oates – all these writers have clearly utilized the chaotic American scene for their literary contributions.

1.2 Gothic to Grotesque

Gothic is a literary genre that affords a partial sense of the grotesque, the sense of horror or terror. Gothic, which means 'medieval', is an offspring of eighteenth century rationalism and morality, displaying the seamy side of the civilized mind. Gothic novel or Gothic romance is a type of prose fiction. Gothic is said as a hybrid form of many things such as the romance, graveyard poetry, treatment of sublime, and permanence of architecture. Gothic aims at creating uncanny effects and chilling horror by having recourse to medieval settings, devices and events. It is ambiguous about the nature of power, law, society, family, and sexuality.

'Grotesque' is an ever interesting term. The word 'grotesque' has been coined to designate the ornamental style on the murals, which were excavated during the late fifteenth century in different parts of Italy. The grotesque evokes dormant emotions, particularly the negative ones of fear, disgust, revulsion and guilt, says Robert Penn Warren. Kayser observes and shifts it gradually to the new concept to mean the, "distortion of all ingredients, the fusion of different realms, the coexistence of beautiful, bizarre, ghastly, and repulsive elements, the merger of the parts into a turbulent whole, the withdrawal into a phantasmagoric and nocturnal world" (79). Walter Bagehot in his essay has employed the term grotesque in the meaning of 'ugly' or 'monstrous'.

Nathanael West, Nelson Algren, Paul Bowles, James Purdy, William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, Carson McCullers and many have exhibited the term grotesque in many of their works. Though a considerable number of short fiction writers have emerged out in the 20th century Joyce Carol Oates, an American multi - pronged writer, occupies a prominent compartment by writing in the short fiction genre.

Joyce Carol Oates experiments her writing by exploring her vast store of experience. This experience she gains through her long and deep association with her society. Her experiences form the nucleus of her

novels. It necessitates for the reader to have a thorough knowledge of the society in which Joyce Carol Oates was born and brought up. One of the United States' most prolific and versatile contemporary writers, Joyce Carol Oates focuses upon the spiritual, sexual, and intellectual decline of modern American society.

Oates's writings revealed the tragic disappearance of a stable society and a common set of values prevailing in the American society during the later years World War I. Sociology impresses itself with more force during this period. The influence of this can be found in the works of Joyce Carol Oates. In her writings, she gives her own tragic vision of America. Her themes are always imposing and they are always thickly imagined in the minds of the characters. She has also explored the themes of guilt, innocence and victimization.

II. Execrable Violence

The short story *Demon* deals with the superstitious, religious and spiritual impact in the life of a woman. A woman begot a child in the morning of January. The child's face seemed strange to the woman. It resembled as a, "Sign of Satan: flamey-red ugly-pimply birthmark snake-shaped. On his under jaw, coiled below his ear" (122).

The child had an ugly appearance than the other children. It made the neighbouring big girls to laugh at the child as, "Demon! demon! Look it, sign of the demon!" (122). Hence everyone hated him, mocked him, teased him and he was tortured in the school and ridiculed as, "Sullen and nasty-mouthed" (122) by the teachers. To the contrary, his mother was so affectionate towards him and showed much care to him. Sometimes he seemed depressed because of the co-passengers' insults while he was traveling in the buses. The appearance of the child itself was vigorous as too small, too short and stunted legs.

The child could not bear all these insults and painful events. He often regretted his appearance and habits. When he saw his face in the mirror for the first time, "This January morning bright and windy and he's staring at the face floating in a mirror. Dirty mirror in a public lavatory, Trailways bus station. Where at last the demon has been released" (123). The something other has been inside that is "In his right eyeball a speck of dirt? Dust? Blood?" (123). he was shocked at his horrifying countenance. It increased his worries.

The boy worried a lot and prayed to God to rectify his sadness. Gradually the boy landed up to a state of dejection. Having lost his control he "Goes wild rubs with both fists, pokes with fingers. He's weeping, shouting. Beats at himself, fists and nails" (124). He came to the conclusion that his staunch faith in religion and God had not done any good to him. He continues to regret that even his pleadings to Jesus had failed. He was firm that, "the sign of the demon would return, absorbed into his blood but must one day re-emerge" (124).

He lost all his hopes and started lamenting to himself as, "Away Satan! Away Satan! God Help!" (125). Finally, he came to decided to act at once. Hence, he looked at the mirror "He's sawing with the sharp blade of the steak knife. Cuts the eyeball free" (125). Thus, at last by the carved knife, he dug out the eyeball very casually, which was a sign of Satan in his body. It created a great shock and horror to everyone. After digging out the eyeball, he prayed to the God, "Thank you God! Thank you God!" (125). He thought and said "the demon is gone" (125). Now the boy felt very happy about his one eyed sight and felt confident that he would float and go wherever he liked to enjoy the world without any insults.

Inflicting pain to get rid of the agony by dragging the eyeball, though creates an horror amidst the neighbours has served as a relief to the boy as he is satisfied with the absence of the eyeball which had been a symbol of satanic attitude. According to the expectations of the societal norms, if one is denied the normal psyche or the normal physic, the individual has to necessarily encounter sarcasm and ridicule which results in his grotesque behaviour that lands up in horrifying acts. The ejecting of the eyeball might creates a horror yet it proves as a relief to the boy thereafter he might not be ridiculed.

Uncanny or anxiety – arousing qualities also may turn a character into grotesque. For instance Mrs. Clennam in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1853-57) is made a grotesque by using the technique of degradation or ridicule. This frightening parental figure's narrow Calvinism is expressed in her aggression against others. Self – abuse always leads to self-inflicting pain. This story parallels with Edgar Allan Poe's *Berenice* (1840). The sociological expectation, when it cannot be fulfilled by individuals, forces them to indulge in horrifying acts, witnessed in the plucking of the eyeball in *Demon*.

Joyce Carol Oates has left no pack untouched. Her eminence in portrayal of violence which is the component of socio psychology is witnessed in *Demon*. The picturization of love is also not a new countenance to Oates. Hundreds of scholarly articles have been written out on the motifs of violence, which are termed as the allies of love. The varied aspects of love leading an individual to grotesque behavior in Joyce Carol Oates's short fiction exclusively in her *Demon* from the anthology entitled, *The Collector of Hearts: New Tales of the Grotesque*.

III. Conclusion

Obsessive love is a state in which an individual feels an overwhelming obsessive desire to possess another person. This pattern has been clinically equated to a mental illness. Perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart. Poe is called the pioneer employer in terms of perverseness. The process of this

type of love will probably be as is to do wrong for wrong's sake only. The realization of true love which a man could crave would certainly be only from legal relationships. This understanding which a man gains is certainly at the time of crisis. Williams pleads for the love of his wife and owing to sympathy the woman too reciprocates though not whole heartedly.

The obsessions, distortions, dislocations, familial misunderstandings loneliness leading to isolations have led both men and women to enter into the world of psychological depression leading to horrifying visions, obsessed love relationships and has forced them to indulge in violence actions have been exemplified with reference to the American short fiction writers.

Of the few American writers, who have experienced the regressive patterns of human relationships like Flannery O' Conner, Eudora Welty, William Faulkner, Joyce Carol Oates reigns supreme in experimenting the intricate workings of the human mind. The select story under sociological horror presents the character to adhere to horrifying acts to which the societal patterns have been their prime cause.

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