



Research Paper

Body Language and Its Implications in Joyce Carol Oates's Short Fiction: A Discursive Reading

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Abstract

Joyce Carol Oates has pictured the human body in almost all its different forms and shapes. Human bodies, although treated differently as male or female, black or white, healthy or diseased and strong or weak, are all subject to pain in similar ways. The differences in bodies range from injured and tormented bodies, diseased bodies, gendered bodies, and reproducing bodies to modified and deformed bodies. This study aims to shed light on the versatility of the body and its implications in Oates's short fiction. Excerpts from her fiction presented here, prove that Oates has been concerned with human physical manifestation and the contradictions associated with it. She has speculated on how human beings are treated differently based on what body they dwell in. For this study, Oates's collections of short stories in different periods have been investigated. The collections studied in this research are: *I Am No One You Know* (2005), *Dear Husband* (2010), *Sourland: Stories* (2010), *The Corn Maiden* (2011), *Black Dahlia and White Rose* (2012), *Lovely, Dark, Deep* (2014), and *High Crime Area* (2014), *Night Gaunts and Other Tales of Suspense* (2018).



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چکیده

جویس کارول اوتس داستان‌های کوتاه متعددی درباره بدن نوشته است. او بدن انسان را در تمام اشکال و شرایط مختلف به تصویر کشیده است. اگرچه با بدن به عنوان مرد یا زن، سیاه پوست یا سفید پوست، سالم یا بیمار و قوی یا ضعیف به صورت متفاوتی رفتار می‌شود، اما هر کدام به شکلی در معرض درد هستند. تفاوت‌ها در بدن شامل بدن‌های آسیب‌دیده و رنج‌دیده، بدن‌های بیمار، بدن‌های جنسیتی شده، بدن‌های در حال تولید مثل و بدن‌های تغییر شکل‌یافته می‌شود. هدف این تحقیق این است که نشان دهد اوتس تا چه حد در بازنمایی بدن‌ها بر اساس واقعیت موفق بوده است و در داستان‌های کوتاه خود بیشتر به چه نوع بدن‌هایی توجه دارد. او برای هر نوع از بدن که معرفی می‌کند شواهدی ارائه کرده است و این مطالعه به جزئیات داستان‌ها پرداخته است تا شواهد را برجسته کند و آن‌ها را با واقعیت و نظریه‌های علمی تطبیق دهد. برای این پژوهش از مجموعه داستان‌های کوتاه اوتس در دوره‌های زمانی مختلف استفاده شده است تا نگاهی اجمالی به آثار او در دوره‌های مختلف کارش داشته باشیم، نه صرفاً در زمان یا مجموعه‌ای خاص. مجموعه‌های مورد مطالعه در این تحقیق عبارتند از: من کسی نیستم که بشناسی (۲۰۰۵)، شوهر عزیز (۲۰۱۰)، شوره زار (۲۰۱۰)، دوشیزه‌ی ذرت (۲۰۱۱)، کوکب سیاه و رز سفید (۲۰۱۲)، دوست داشتنی، تاریک، عمیق (۲۰۱۴) و منطقه‌ی جرم‌خیز (۲۰۱۴).

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1. Introduction

The Analysis of Oates' short stories shows that she is one of those few authors who have been capable of narrating pain without losing the track of body and its deformation, evolution, modification, and consistency. Her stories describe experiences of pain, illness, rape, murder, abortion, torture, and death not only through the mental state of characters but through their bodily state of existence. While science could improve human life in a tangible way which majority of people could use, the significance of reading literary works has been hidden in a shade of suspicion and doubt. Reading short stories that picture the body with snippets of human emotions and reactions towards it can, however, raise awareness and improve self-image. To know how bodies are different in any forms and aspects could help to figure out what we should expect in facing related problems.

Theories on body studies have their roots in the 17th century. Some philosophers were among the few pioneers to introduce the significance of the body and what it experiences apart from the mind and spiritual or religious experience. David Hume in *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1999), claims that the full experience of the world happens through the bodily senses. Hume separated experiences of the world into two sections, the Impressions and the Ideas (1999, p. 67). Ideas have roots in the mind, but impressions in the body instead. This way, Hume has separated the mind from the body and then by making a relationship between the two, claims that ideas are, in fact, grounded in the body as well as the mind. Hume also draws a line between "relation of ideas" and "matters of fact" (pp. 31, 163). In short, matters of fact refer to anything that has a physical existence, while the relation of ideas takes place only in the mind. Expanding this to the physical pain could lead to an understanding of how physical pain could affect or cause mental pain and prove that physical pain in the long term, has to be taken more seriously regarding the fact that enduring pain damages the senses.

Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790) argues that it is through embodied sensors that one experiences the pleasure of beauty and this must be valued just like rational and moral aspects of human existence. "Embodiment," is the term that is highlighted in this regard. In the Heideggerian approach, the emphasis is on how essential the body is to fully grasp a knowledge of the world. Jean-Paul Sartre highlights the concept of torture and the experience of pain with body and flesh. Through cultural studies of body, the significance of the body as a means of dealing with society becomes more comprehensible. There are several ways by which individuals become a part of society or escape it. People change their body forms and shapes to be accepted or to stand out. Tattoos, diets, workouts, and cosmetic surgeries are all examples of how the body is valuable to individuals and societies. Although these are some positive and constructive ways of treating the body, not all the activities regarding the body are potentially for the better. Sometimes, the body becomes the source of pain and reflects the pain. Destructive activities such as committing suicide, self-harm, rape, or murder also take place which can damage both individuals themselves or the ones around them. In Michel Foucault's theory, the body is represented as the subject of discipline through punishment. This could be self-punishment or a mechanism to deal with interior pain and aching by punishing others to seek cure and relief. René Descartes in his book *Treatise of Man* (1662), describes pain as a perception existing in the brain and separates the neural sensory from the perceptual experience of pain.

Burn (2021) in "The Gender of Neuronovel: Joyce Carol Oates and the Double Brain" has mainly focused on the concept of "Double Brain" and argues that the split-brain research is a test case to explore how Oates's work highlights the limitations of the label neuro-novel. Neuro-novel is a type of Anglo-American novel also known as the novel of consciousness or the psychological or confessional novel which has replaced the mind with the brain and its functions. Although this study takes a step forward to make a practical use of Oates's novels in psychology, a greater part of

Oates's writings which is concerned with the role of the physical body in man's life has been ignored.

A thesis submitted to The University of North Carolina has taken a feministic approach towards five of Oates's short stories, mostly from her *Haunted* collection under this title: "Gender and the Grotesque in the Short Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates." In this study, the focus is on gender roles and their relation to committing acts of violence. The researcher claims that in Oates's stories, individuals who try to accept the forced gender roles are often "grotesque and problematic" (De Nittis, 2008, p. 4). However, the short stories discussed in this study are few and limited to only two collections.

Other scholars have mostly approached her work from a psychological perspective, including the image and definition of self in her works or the crisis and construction of identity in one of her novels. Wang Jin has worked on the concept of identity in Oates's *The Tattooed Girl*, comparing the privileged Jews and a marginalized white group of people known as white trash. The character in this novel according to Jin, turns to literature in order to build a new identity. Violence and the female body are also addressed in his study. The body in this novel is a representation of Holocaust victims, and the tattoo on the body is an act of vandalism. Harold Bloom in his *Introduction to Modern Critical Views*, compares Oates with Dreiser, Lawrence and Conrad in her treatment of violence, death and women issues, and writes: "What I myself find most moving in Oates is her immense empathy with the insulted and injured" (Bloom, 1987, p. 14).

The concept of the body has been represented and defined in various ways. Our bodies have a social form as well as an individual and physical one. The physical situation of a body affects the social life of the body directly and indirectly. An individual could possess all these forms at once. In other words, each person can perform different bodily actions relating to these bodily categories. On the other hand, Hughes and Lock (1987) in their essay "The Mindful Body," categorize bodies in three forms:

“the lived-in, individual body, the social and representational body” and “the controlled and disciplined body politics” (p. 14).

DeMello in her book *Body Studies* (2014) has categorized the physical body itself into many other sub-categories and later she has applied them to other aspects like social aspects concerning the individual body. Some of her categories are biological bodies such as healthy and diseased bodies, disability and normative bodies, freak bodies, reproducing bodies, gendered bodies, sexualized bodies, modified bodies, tortured and punished bodies.

2. Body Types in Oates's Stories

2.1. Tortured and Injured Bodies

Torture is defined as “using pain or the threat of pain to cause someone to give in to their captor or tormentor” (DeMello 2014, p. 251). Scarry, in his book, “The Body in Pain,” claims that there is more behind the nature of torture than to cause only pain; it is used to decrease “human dignity” (1987, p.220). The methods and the reasons for torture are varied in Oates's stories. In “The Corn Maiden,” a young girl has been abducted and tortured by another young girl. The reason for abduction remains in a haze of mystery. The same torment has been described in “The Girl with the Blackened Eye” where a fifteen-year-old girl is abducted by a man. She has been raped and beaten several times. One of her eyes is still not cured many years after the incident. This kind of violence and tortured bodies are more explicitly highlighted in Oates's *Sourland: Stories*. In “Pumpkin-head” a widowed woman is raped by a guy she has recently met when she invites him to her house.

However, violence against women is not the only kind of torture or injured bodies represented in the stories. In “The Home at Craigmillnar” a nun who used to work at an orphanage is killed at the elderly care. A young man, who is a nurse in elderly care, knows her past and how they used to torment the children physically because his uncle had died there as a kid. His father and his other uncle tell him the truth about her. One of the examples of tormenting kids explained by his father and uncle is being bound by towels which caused blood circulation to be cut off. Then they

threw water on the towels so that they shrink and get tighter and it caused unbearable pain. Consequently, one of the uncles died because of untreated pneumonia. As they declare, it should have been cured by oxygen. He always coughed or puked. He coughed until his ribs cracked.

2.2. Gendered Bodies

Apart from the physical differences in men's and women's bodies, there are some differences that are created culturally or socially. The expectations from men and women in society have affected body image. Men are expected to be masculine and strong while women are expected to be frail and feminine. These expectations when not fulfilled lead to many physical or mental damages such as the Adonis complex. "Deceptive distinction" refers to the differences in genders that are created by culture. The woman's body is valued by its looks. There are several references to women who want to remain beautiful and behave unnaturally in order to look young. There is also a reference to the American culture of Youth. Aging is considered differently in different cultures. In America it is like an illness to be avoided; in traditional cultures, it is respected and even a sign of wisdom. In "Bonobo Momma," for instance, the mother has left her husband and daughter in order to become a Vogue magazine model. After leaving this job she is still dressing to impress and tries to look young and sexy in the public eye. She has been ashamed of her daughter's physical problem before and is still trying to teach her how to look desirable. In another story "Me and Wolfie," the mother of the thirteen-year-old boy is constantly changing men for sexual relationship. She takes strong pills and tries to harm herself when things do not go well. She wants to believe she is still young and desirable by having random relationships with men. In another story, "Cutty Sark," again the image of a mother leaving her family for fame has been repeated. Kit's mother is now a famous writer and writes about her personal life and women shamelessly. She is described as a very thin woman with pale skin and red fleshy lips who always wears striking clothes and jewels. Her son is mad at her for her public show-offs. After he finds out the dark secrets in her past, Kit ends

up attacking his mother and tearing his mom's clothes as they fight and finally leaves her.

Apart from differences in female and male appearance, there are also differences between them regarding the gender roles in society. A male body generally symbolizes power and this power is sometimes dominant to the female body. In "The Instructor" the female instructor is constantly aware and terrified of a specific man's presence in her class. He writes alarming notes, but despite this fear of his power, she is attracted to him. This man ends up attacking another man whose behavior had been insulting to the instructor. In order to defend her, he attacks the guy one night after the class. The protection role in the male's body is forced by society and designed gender roles. The same protecting role is observed in another story "Mrs. Halifax and Ricky Swan: A Ballad." Although the boy is only fifteen, he falls in love with his teacher and they start an affair. The boy is constantly thinking about killing the teacher's husband who has been suspicious towards her. If a male body does not have the expected qualities of strength and masculinity, there would be problems. In "Demon," a boy whose mother used to drink and smoke when she was pregnant, is born with physical disorders. People call him a demon and he gets raped at last. After the incident he takes his eye out to pay for what he believes is his fault.

2.3.Reproducing Bodies

Gendered bodies and the differences in men and women bodily mechanisms were explained earlier; however, reproducing bodies are different yet closely related to gendered bodies. Woman's body as the body in which reproduction happens in its full form, is subject to dramatic changes; surgeries to help or prevent giving birth are one of the reasons for the changes. Apart from the physical and emotional effects on the body, there is a social aspect to reproducing bodies.

2.4.Diseased Bodies

In "Dear Husband" the protagonist is a woman who suffers from insomnia and anxiety. In the story "The Rescuer" a girl goes all the way to Trenton to see her brother and find the reason for his leaving university and living in a bad neighborhood. Her brother is sickly-looking, and she is suspicious that he is an addict. Parts of his ear have been injured by a dog. He has lost weight. She starts taking care of him. While staying in that neighborhood she experiences terrible events and eventually she gets raped. Finally, she finds out that her brother is suffering from HIV. The fact that the brother is hiding the truth about his HIV is not surprising. In the real world, it is the case with many HIV patients. The reason goes back to the society and the culture where people judge those infected with HIV harshly, for it is related to sexual relationships or drug abuse. People tend to hide the truth. This not only affects the treatment process but also leads to the spreading of the disease even more. HIV is not the only serious health issue that has been addressed in Oates's works. One other major disease addressed by her many times in several of her short story collections is cancer. For instance, in her short story "Stephanos is Dead," the writer has subtly covered a real and overwhelming condition such as cancer under a pile of seemingly trivial information. In this story, a university Professor called Mickey is the protagonist who is in the process of treating her cancer with chemotherapy, but nobody knows about her illness other than her husband who is not loyal to her. In "Disappearing" a woman suspicious of her husband after 41 years together, follows him to the cancer section of a hospital and still the truth about his problem remains not directly mentioned at the end.

If mental problems cause severe health or physical problems, they must be taken care of immediately. In "Jorie and Jamie: A Deposition," one of the three kids of a family is sick with dyslexia and attention deficit disorder. Dyslexia refers to a situation when the person has problem learning the words. They cannot speak or read and also it affects their memory, time understanding and communication. Attention deficit disorder or ADHD with H standing for hyperactivity causes the lack of attention, impulsive actions and of course hyperactivity. The girl makes a lot of trouble

for the family. She keeps shouting and Kicking when triggered by simple things. The mother ends up locking her up in the basement where she grows an eating disorder which means she avoids food and gets weak until the day her sister, afraid of her situation and what they might have done to her, talks to the school consultant and they take the mother and the sister away. This is not, in fact, the only story that revolves around a disease of that kind. In “Special,” there is a reference to the same disease again. The symptoms are the same as the ones in the previous story, but more severe because they are provoked by the slightest things such as her sister’s glasses color or her sister’s scars from the burning or even an image on TV. She finally attacks and stabs their mother with scissors and the mother leaves her and her husband but takes the other daughter with herself.

2.5.Racialized Bodies

Oates’s short stories have a lot to offer about how societies treat races. The negative outlook towards male black bodies is present in many of her stories. They are subject to cruelty, fear, violence and punishment even when they have not done anything wrong. Apart from the stereotypical sides of the matter, the differences in the quality of life between white people and people of color have been brought up in Oates’s works. One example of racialized bodies appears in “The Rescuer” from her collection *High Crime Area*. In this story, a white girl follows her brother into a neighborhood in Trenton only to find that he has become a drug addict and is suffering from HIV. His friends are a group of black guys who are drug dealers and criminals. The whole area is known for its high crime rate. This story is significant for ways in which it describes the black people’s lives in the area and the crimes they commit. The protagonist is attacked and raped by a male black guy and at the end, she finds a dead body, wrapped in a carpet in his brother’s house. The low quality of life and the circumstances they have, present the racial differences between white and black people. The black people are represented as prone to crimes which shows the society’s perspective towards them.

In “High,” Agnes, a middle-aged woman, who has recently lost her husband, tries to find one of her former students she finds herself attracted to. The guy is a black man called Joseph Mattia. She drives to a neighborhood in Trenton which is mostly an area with many black residents. On her way she asks herself: “why did race matter so much? The color of skin. She could love anyone, Agnes thought. Skin color did not mean anything to her, only the soul within.” (2014, p. 32) This explains why she has dressed up so fearlessly to drive to such an area alone. She does not judge people by their skin color. This makes her ignore all the possible threats she might face in the area. The question of why skin matters so much has been so explicitly asked by Oates that it holds the motif of race in the story.

In “Curly Red” a thirteen-year-old girl is exiled by her family because she has reported the murder of a black guy by her brother to the police. Her brothers come home late at the night of the murder, and she could hear them talking about hiding “the bat” which is the crime weapon. She also hears them referring to the victim as “the nigger.” Later when the police come to investigate the brothers, the parents try to deny everything. However, she could not ignore what she had observed. She becomes an outcast from her family and nobody, including her sister, wants to see her face again for defending a black guy against her own family, but she does not regret it. Years later when she is telling the story, she still believes that she had done the right thing. She sacrifices her life to defend justice.

Finally, in “High Crime Area,” a woman explains why she thought she is being followed by one of her black students. She teaches to a group of people with criminal backgrounds. She refers to that guy as “male, black” in the beginning of the story. She does not mention a name until almost the end of the story. She is walking dreadfully at night thinking that she might be attacked by him anytime. She is thinking about ways she can defend herself and if she can use the gun she has in her purse. She declares: “it is a reversal, a tacit insult: the instructor younger than the student. This seems wrong. This seems unjust. Perhaps it is ‘racist.’ Yet, it

is unavoidable.” (2014, p. 55) This statement seems to be referring to the age gap between them, but in fact, the key term is racism. Racism is what she is referring to and not the age difference.

2.6. Aging Bodies

The human body goes through several stages throughout its passage through time the most feared of which is old age. Aging is not accepted by everyone as a natural human condition, and many try to prevent or postpone it by any means. The youth culture is created as a result of ageism; that is being against aging and taking a negative attitude towards it. It prevents societies from accepting older people and welcoming them as a respectable member of the society. The youth culture is removing the image of an old body from the media, fashion, cinema, and marketing businesses. The old body is only represented as a symbol of weakness and a wasted body image. In order to remain respected, old bodies must try to reverse their changes and regain their youth by any means. Alex Dumas proclaims that:

An anti-aging sentiment is currently being discussed in an unprecedented manner and has penetrated most spheres of society. In the wave of the ‘successful aging’ and ‘positive aging’ paradigms that are sweeping aging societies, there is a growing market that is capitalizing on anti-aging. Never to such extent have men and women attempted to resist or hide old age by undergoing aesthetic procedures or consuming beauty products associated with anti-aging properties (Dumas. Et al. 2005, p.885)

The refusal of aging and looking old has been forced on older people as well. The old people start to loathe their weaknesses and appearances and try to change the truth of their bodies. Sometimes they even deal with it by pretending it has not happened yet. They refuse any help or any act of sympathy, because they take it as a sarcastic reminder of their age and are offended by it.

The aging body is the subject of Oates’s stories, “I’m not Your Son, I Am No One You Know” and “The Blind Man’s Sighted Daughters.” In the first story, a boy is going to visit his old father

in an elderly care facility with his brother. The brother tells him that their father does not recognize them. They treat the old man as they would treat a child, with exaggerated expressions asking him to show them the plants he has grown. After the short visit, one of the old men in the care center, grabs the boy's hand and begs them to take him with them. This creates a tension and the boy yells at him and tells him that he is not going anywhere, and he shall die there alone. The cruelty in this sentence and the general setting of the story conveys the coldness and cruelty of society towards the aged bodies.

In "The Blind Man's Sighted Daughters" a girl has been left alone to take care of her old father for years because her sister had got married and the old man does not want to go to a nursing home. Her married sister comes back for a while to help her persuade the old man for going to a nursing home, but eventually they fail when he finds out about it and makes a fight. He attacks the girls violently and curses them. They struggle for a while and finally, the sister, Abigail, tells him that she hates him and hopes he dies. The old man in this story, like the previous one, has Alzheimer's, and the girl believes he is going to forget all of this by tomorrow. The theme of young people trying to get rid of their old parents is what the two stories have in common. The old body as something extra and an obstacle to the society and the younger generation have been pictured in both stories similarly.

In the "Long Legged Girl" a woman is planning to poison a girl. Her husband and the girl (a dancer) which is one of his students appear to have an affair. The wife is highly insecure about her body that has changed a lot since when she was younger. Her body is getting fat unlike the girl she describes as her husband's new victim. The girl is in her opinion flawless without any pimples or lines in her face. She is young and beautiful. At the end of the conversation, the woman tells the girl the truth in a mean and cruel manner. This creates an awkward situation. However, the silence of the girl is proof of her guilt. The wife says:

It's a cruel world, dancing, you're already too old, I think. If you're twenty still less twent one, that's old. You'd have to have a genuine talent to overcome your age, but I have to say I don't think that you quite do. When you have your first babies, Tracy, you're a figure will slack in as mine did. You will become flaccid, flabby, you will gain fifty or sixty pounds. That's the point of the female body, to have babies and to become flabby. Following which the normal response of the male is to seek younger victims (2018, p 45).

This remark shows her perspective to her own and every other female body is the origin of her insecurities. And in fact, it is true that so many women experience the same situation as hers. They feel the trace of the time on their bodies, whereas the male bodies only see the female flaws and not their own flaws.

“The Woman in the Window” is a story about a woman who has a relationship with a married man. He thinks that she is 32 while in fact she is 39. She has insecurities about her aging body. She uses body lotion afraid of showing signs of getting old or gaining weight. The man is getting tired of her as he had gotten tired of his wife before. He is constantly looking for younger bodies while the woman must be worried about her own changing body which will not be accepted or desired anymore if she gets old, and she will not have the money to afford a good house then. She is jealous of his wife and the wife is suspicious and jealous of her. This shows women's constant struggle to keep the man's attention not to lose their source of support. All of these happen when both of them are thinking of killing the other to get rid of all the sensations of pain, shame, regret and guilt and to gain their peace of mind back. This is a daily struggle for all of them, but for the women mostly.

3. The Gendered Bodies: Further discussion

3.1. “A Book of Martyrs”

“A Book of Martyrs” is the story of a young woman (Drewe) who wants to have abortion. She has to fight the society, norms and rules in order to decide what she wants to do with her own body.

On one hand there is a man manipulating her to have the abortion and on the other hand, there are people who humiliate and blame her for what must be a personal decision to make. She is a twenty-six-year-old college student who has had an affair with a married man, old enough to be her father. This alone could be a crime in the eyes of the society, a taboo and, therefore, forbidden. But the decision she has made to lose the baby, is also another highly condemned crime she has decided to commit.

On their drive to the clinic in which the surgery takes place, they are stopped in a police checkpoint. The officers search the car while they try to keep calm. Abortion is an illegal surgery in the state in which they live; therefore, they are headed to Wisconsin where they can legally get rid of the baby and also do it somewhere far from where everyone knows them. In the car, waiting for officers to finish searching the car, they have this conversation:

Maybe they will arrest us. They will stop us.
Don't be silly, Drewe. Just don't talk that way.
'Conspiracy to commit murder.' That's a crime.
You're not being funny.
I'm not. In fact (2014, p. 50).

She refers to the act of abortion as "murder." This is what everyone else would say if they knew they are going to take a child's life. She might also be arrested for it. She secretly wishes that something or someone could stop them, even if it means for her to be arrested by the police. The woman is physically in pain. She has not eaten for many hours and is feeling nauseous. She has a headache and sweats a lot. She has so many insecurities. Her clothes, and the way she has covered her body reveal that she wishes to be invisible from anyone who is going to judge her and her decision: "deliberately plain ordinary clothes; none of her eye-catching consignment-shop costumes." (p. 42)

There are references to Milton's *Paradise Lost* that are significant in the story. Drewe is reading it on the way to the clinic, "of man's first disobedience, and the fruit/ of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste/ Brought death into the world and all our

woe...” (Milton, p. 43). These lines from *Paradise Lost* are the current situation she is in. She is believed to be doing the forbidden thing, being with a man, that has resulted in death, the death of the baby. The irony is in the final part of the sentence where it mentions bringing something into the world. This phrase is used as a replacement for giving birth but giving birth to death (a dead baby) is a tragedy. Another reference to *Paradise Lost* is the famous quotation “Better reign in hell than serve in heaven” (p. 67). The significant of it lies in the following lines Drewe reads from the book; when Eve sees her own reflection for the first time:

It stared back, but pleased I soon
returned,
Pleased it returned as soon with
answering looks
Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
Mine eyes till now and pined with vain
desire (p. 92).

This is the picture of a woman who is recognizing her own body for the first time and realizes she wants to be free and have control over her own body than to be dominated by others in order to go to heaven. Drewe has the impression that she does not want to be a slave of the society telling her what she is allowed to do. People are dictating rules to her. In front of the clinic are the demonstrators, a group of religious protestors who are against abortion. Drewe is surprised to see many of them are young women (even teenagers) and also men. They tell her that she is going to hell because she is committing murder. They use words from the Bible, and they mention Hail Mary, a biblical reference to the woman who had a baby, although there was no father present.

At the end, the woman isolates herself after the surgery. She does not let the man stay the night. She does not speak to him on the way back and ends up spending the night alone and in pain. This is how the story demonstrates the isolation of women who are driven from the society for the choices they have made.

3.2. “Woman in the Window”

From the very beginning of the story, an irony reveals itself, when the narrator describes the man she is waiting for. The man is

married yet having an affair with the narrator (the other woman). She describes him with a satirical tone: “he’s a gentleman, and he feels revulsion for vulgarity. Any sort of crude word, mannerism in a woman.” Then she continues: “It’s a masculine prerogative to say the coarsest cruelest words uttered with a laugh as a man will do” (2018, p. 9). The irony is in the term “gentleman.” A man who cheats on his wife and treats other women as a slave is described as a gentleman. And as “gentle” is in total contrast with the masculine characteristics she is describing, how can a gentleman use the coarsest and cruelest words?

Every morning the woman has to clean up and use body lotion and do her makeup to make her skin look younger. She is hiding her real age from the man. She has the constant fear of aging or looking older. Old skins as she puts it are “desiccated as snake’s husk of a skin, a maze of fine white wrinkles, terrible to behold.” (p. 10) The symbolic clock in the room depicts how she wishes the time to stop, preventing her from aging and looking older and losing her beauty. The clock on the wall always shows eleven A.M. She is the picture of a trapped woman, in the room always waiting for the man to show up.

On the occasions that he takes her out for dinner, she has to be always careful, as the man believes “nothing so disgusting as seeing a female who eats like a horse,” (p. 12) and not a “woman” but a “female” is the term he uses as if referring to the horse and not a human. His list of ideal female characteristics goes on: “his sensitive nerves are offended by a female shrugging her shoulders as a man might do or trying to make a joke, or a sarcastic remark. He hates a female grinning.” (p. 13) Another ironic remark is when the man tells her “of all the females he has known she is the only one who seems to be happy in her body.” (p.14) She repeats the word “happy in my body” over and over as if mockingly, for if she was truly happy in her body, she would not hide her age or other human features in order to look young, frail and feminine to him.

Finally, the woman is waiting for him with sewing shears hidden beneath the cushions, waiting for revenge, to stab him for treating her like that. Even the weapon she has hidden refers to how feminine she is trying to be, “a weapon of revenge, not a male

weapon but a female weapon: sewing shears.” (p. 18) She imagines if she could use her strong arms to strike the man without second thoughts, she would be free. Then she reminds herself that she is a romantic-minded girl, the opposite of what she wants to be. This contrast between the words is a resemblance of her inner struggle. The feminine side of her finally gives in to the strong woman within her.

4. Conclusion

The description of body in its various forms and conditions is a significant aspect of Joyce Carol Oates’s stories. Body studies provides a chance to read her stories from a different perspective. By focusing on the characters’ situations and comparing them with real-life examples, we can explore how bodily conditions vary and how living in different types of bodies can lead to different outcomes.

Body in Oates’s short fiction is an arena for struggle and solidarity. She has done her best in her fiction to represent its demands, its power and weakness and how this can limit or expand an individual’s experience of life. In two of the stories discussed above, society’s rules are considered as a weapon used against a woman, and society’s expectations from a woman are endless and cruel. What a woman must look like or what a woman is allowed to do with her own body has been controversial for years. A woman’s body is the target of physical and verbal harassment, and this has been pictured in Oates’s stories regularly.

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