Joyce Carol Oates: The Wonderland Quartet, Nietzsche, and Lewis Carroll

Dorota Horvath

Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

American literature

School of English

University of Kent

February 2021

Word Count: 76 328

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to my supervisor Professor David Ayers for supporting my research, his constructive criticism, and valuable guidance that helped me to finalise my thesis. I am also grateful for inspiring discussions on Lewis Carroll with Professor Kiera Vaclavik, for reading my work, and for her encouragement during my visiting research at the Queen Mary University of London and beyond.

I would also like to thank Professor Peter Nicholls at New York University, for reading my writing, his encouragement, and for his insightful comments that helped structure my argument at the crucial point of my research. I am grateful to the Fulbright Association which generously supported my research at New York University, research visit to Oates' undergraduate institution that installed The Joyce Carol Oates Archives at Syracuse University, and prompted my correspondence with Professor Stanley Corngold at Princeton University who helped me understand Walter Arnold Kaufmann's scholarship on Friedrich Nietzsche and its consequent cultural reception in the United States. I am indebted to the author Joyce Carol Oates for the generosity of her time during my interview, as well as her illuminating and encouraging correspondence. I am also thankful to Professor Ken Gemes for reading my work and his advice on the philosophical aspect of my work.

I am also grateful for the CSSAH Postgraduate Research Grant from the University of Leicester that supported my philosophical research at the University of Vienna, for The Sidney Perry Foundation Award, and for the Further Education Award from Professional Aid Guild. I would like to extend my thanks to Aaron Walter and Janet Wilson-Sheppherd who supported my research at the most testing moments.

Abstract

This thesis discusses the aesthetics of a mode of survival in light of the postmodern reading in The Wonderland Quartet of Joyce Carol Oates (1938-). Oates is a prominent American critic and writer of fiction, whose texts encompass novels, short stories, poetry, and plays. Her oeuvre has been translated into multiple languages, and she holds an array of literary and other awards. Additionally, Oates has been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize five times, and has been the recipient of prestigious Nobel Prize nominations.

Her writing takes on abundant influences of literary and philosophical intellectuals, mirrors her life observance and poses altering forms of her artistic imagination. What may be delineated as Oates' original literary scholarship is her ability to reflect on the cultural reception of Walter Arnold Kaufmann's Nietzsche in her fiction, while enabling her characters to decide their purposes. Echoing Nietzsche, her characters are not limited by any normative standards. The author's narrative techniques let the characters' polyphonic voices dominate the fabulation. In the context of societal margins from the 1950s until the early 1970s, the tone of The Wonderland Quartet progresses into a buoyant climax of human pursuit in its last text.

Oates aestheticizes cultural experiments after the proclamation about the death of God that mould postmodern social theories of the American culture after 1950. She depicts the philosophical transition of Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche, as a shaping influence on society, into postmodern sentiment. In her fiction, Oates juxtaposes the concept of unity with the postmodern concept of decentralisation that affirms pluralism. Her fictional perspective of blurred lines between fantasy and reality is influenced by Lewis Carroll's texts that are celebrated for the element of absurdity and the images of jumbled nonsense by postmodern critics.

In The Wonderland Quartet (*A Garden of Earthly Delights* (1967), *Expensive People* (1968), the National Book Award-winning *Them* (1969), and *Wonderland* (1971)), Oates' characters epitomise the cultural margins, and push their boundaries, testing their limitations and striving to go beyond them. The author celebrates the aesthetics of playful fictions that corresponds to the postmodern reading. However, her dramatisation of the power games invites an element of terror to depict the tragedy of disordered human domination. While the protagonists from the first three novels of the Quartet correspond to the postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche's ideas, in the last text, the protagonist achieves integrity, and centralises authoritative influences into his internal control, fashioning Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION **1**

INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND **1**

THE POSTMODERN CONCEPT 8
CULTURAL RECEPTION OF NIETZSCHE IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE 1960S 11
WHY NIETZSCHE, CARROLL, AND OATES? 24
THE INTEREST OF OATES IN LEWIS CARROLL'S ALICE 33
THE NIETZSCHEAN HERITAGE IN OATES' OEUVRE 38
OATES' INTELLECTUAL LINK TO KAUFMANN'S NIETZSCHE 42

CHAPTER ONE **47**

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE AND THE DEATH OF GOD **47**

INTRODUCTION 47
THE RECEPTION OF NIETZSCHE IN EUROPE BEFORE KAUFMANN 48
The Reception of Nietzsche in France *49*
The Reception of Nietzsche in Germany *52*
THE RECEPTION OF NIETZSCHE IN THE UNITED STATES BEFORE W. A. KAUFMANN 56
THE DEATH OF GOD 66
THE EMERGENCE OF NEW VALUES 72
THE POSTMODERN READING OF THE DEATH OF GOD 76

CHAPTER TWO **81**

SYMBOLIC GAMES IN *A GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS* **81**

CARD GAMES IN THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS 85
HEROIC ISOLATION 92
THE ABSENCE OF MORAL STANDARDS 95
CONCLUSION 98

CHAPTER THREE **101**

COMIC NIHILISM IN *EXPENSIVE PEOPLE* **101**

ETERNAL RECURRENCE IN EXPENSIVE PEOPLE 104
THE CHAOS OF EXPENSIVE PEOPLE 110
JOHN BARTH'S "COMIC NIHILISM" 121
"DO YOUR OWN THING" ETHICS 126
FICTIONS AND SOCIAL MASKING 131
CONCLUSION 136

CHAPTER FOUR **139**

***THEM*: JULES WENDALL'S LIFE AS FICTION** **139**

THE FICTION OF JULES 146
THE MORAL AMBIGUITY OF THEM 151
CHAOS AND TRANSFORMATION IN THEM 162

Conclusion 167

CHAPTER FIVE **170**

JESSE IN *WONDERLAND* **170**

The Aesthetic Map of Re-invention 176
Transformation and Changing Proportions 185
The Chaos of Wonderland 192
Conclusion 201

CONCLUSION **204**

APPENDICES **216**

JOYCE CAROL OATES: AN INTERVIEW AND CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE AUTHOR **216**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **227**

Introduction

Intellectual Background

In my thesis, I explore Joyce Carol Oates' (1938-) Wonderland Quartet, which consists of four novels: *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (1967), *Expensive People* (1968), *Them* (1969), which won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1970, and *Wonderland* (1971). Initially, Oates only intended to create a trilogy. In her written correspondence from 2019, the author explains her motivation for adding *Wonderland* to the collection, and the subsequent naming of the entire quartet after Lewis Carroll's imaginary world. Oates says:

> The title "Wonderland Quartet" was added after the original publication, by me. My motivation in adding further novels has been to explore the roots of America through the post-modernist "gothic" sensibility".[1]

I consider how Oates was inspired by *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871) in the context of the American reception of Lewis Carroll's Alice in the 1960s, which draws on the dark aspects of Carroll's texts. Often called the "Dark Lady of American Letters", sharing the tag with Mary McCarthy and Susan Sontag, Oates depicts the ambiguity of the terror that blends with passion.[2]

The philosophical logic behind both of Carroll's books and Oates' Quartet corresponds to the postmodern interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche's principle of identity after the proclamation of the death of God. In her texts, Oates aestheticises creative ideas of personal autonomy on her ambitious protagonists who experiment with their identity. When asked about the subject of personal re-invention in her fiction in a personal interview in 2017,

[1] Joyce Carol Oates, "Re: The Muchness of the Wonderland Quartet", Correspondence with the author, 24 April 2019.
[2] Joe David Bellamy, "The Dark Lady of American Letters", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*, edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), pp. 18-25.

the author explained, "that {identity re-invention} is something in parallel with Nietzsche, the idea of making oneself a higher person".[3] Confirming the influence of Nietzsche on her writing, Oates recalled her intellectual link saying, "I discovered Nietzsche and it may be the Nietzschean influence […] that characterizes some of my work".[4] By advancing hallucinatory visions of American culture in her Wonderland Quartet, Oates reconciles both significant influences, of Nietzsche and Carroll, to dramatise the philosophical transition of American cultural forms in the 1960s.

Elaborating on the earlier reception of Nietzsche, Walter A. Kaufmann intellectually rehabilitated Nietzsche in the post-war aftermath commencing with his first publication on Nietzsche, entitled *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950) that was followed by his other texts. The scholarship of Kaufmann considerably impacted the Anglo-American readership in revisiting Nietzsche's canon, including the reading of Nietzsche by Joyce Carol Oates, and has enjoyed wide currency in subsequent decades. In his interpretation of Nietzsche, Kaufmann advances the notion of *Dionysian enlightenment*, the process of mutual harmony between two elements, in which the Apollonian logic controls Dionysian passion. However, almost a decade later, a *new* reading of Nietzsche was initiated by the postmodern critics. The latter solves the philosophical conflict of the death of God by celebrating Dionysian prevalence in Nietzsche's canon, a model which diverges from Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche that pioneered Nietzsche studies worldwide in the 1950s.

Therefore, I use the terms "Kaufmann's Nietzsche" in juxtaposition with the phrase "postmodern Nietzsche", which refers to postmodern readings of Nietzsche that emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s.[5] While Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche proposes the internal

[3] Joyce Carol Oates, "RE: The Influence of Nietzsche on JCO", Correspondence with the author, October-November 2017.
[4] Robert Phillips, "*Joyce Carol Oates: The Art of Fiction LXXII*", in *Conversations with Joyce Carol Oates*, ed. by Peggy W. Pernshaw and Lee, Milazzo (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1978), p. 74.
[5] Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), p. 3. The exact periodisation of the postmodern movement is not critically agreed on. For instance, Marianne DeKoven indicates the emergence of the postmodern in the "long sixties, extending from the late fifties to the early seventies" in her text *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 3.

organisation of chaos, the postmodern reading of Nietzsche advances the *affirmation* of chaos. I will employ these contrasting perspectives on Nietzsche to analyse characters' development and their urge to succeed in different ways. Both interpretations of Nietzsche are explained in more detail in Chapter 1 that informs about the reception of Nietzsche from the philosophical perspective.

My primary research question is to examine the development of the Wonderland Quartet's protagonists in the wake of the death of God. I will consider the protagonists from a Nietzschean perspective which both reflects the exposure of Oates to Nietzsche and also general cultural reception of Nietzsche in the United States in the 1960s. Historically and conceptually relevant to my analysis is, therefore, the comparison of Kaufmann's interpretation of Nietzsche with the postmodern reading of Nietzsche and their contrasting perspectives on the death of God.

The secondary research question will examine the relevance of Oates' inspiration by Carroll's Alice in the context of postmodern playfulness in terms of the underlying aesthetics of the postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche. In order to compare the relevance of Kaufmann's and the postmodern interpretations of Nietzsche, my analysis will focus on the Wonderland Quartet characters' fictional singularities and symbolic games, and their reconciliation of moral decentralisation after the death of God.

My methodology involves two elements of enquiry: (1) **empirical claim** - an examination of the explicit references to Nietzsche's terminology in Oates' Quartet and direct influence of Nietzsche on Oates, (2) **interpretative claim** - an analysis of Oates' depiction of the shaping influence of Nietzsche had on general American society after the proclamation of the death of God, and an interpretative reading in which I employ the postmodern lens of dissenting Nietzschean sentiment to conceptualise cultural forms of that time.

This thesis therefore develops a dynamic argument that the aesthetics of Carroll's texts correspond to the postmodern elements, which Oates uses predominantly in her first three novels of the Wonderland Quartet. The protagonists are characterised by moral ambiguity that is not reconciled by the author. Oates depicts uncanny images of postmodern antagonism that blur the lines between binary oppositions. The aspect of moral development is transformed into an aesthetic concept where a hero transforms into a sympathetic villain and ultimately challenges the validity of traditional values. However, in the last novel, the development of the protagonist corresponds to a shift towards "Kaufmann's Nietzsche", which differs in its approach and in its level of playfulness. The protagonist who embodies the ideas of the latter achieves the integrity of his character by internal control.

Throughout this study, I use mixed research techniques to collect and analyse the substantial references of Oates to Nietzsche and Carroll. My research findings from the literature review on Oates' and Carroll's canon and the philosophical literature review of the concepts of Nietzsche's thoughts will be applied to the close reading of Oates' Wonderland Quartet. This will be supplemented by an interpretation of the qualitative data collected from published interviews and correspondence with Oates. My critical arguments will also be supported by personal correspondence and the interview with the author, the latter of which were conducted in 2017 in her office at New York University's Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House, and is annexed in this thesis.

I am predominantly drawing on the scholarly work of Alexander Nehamas, Ken Gemes, and Kaufmann on Nietzsche, and Gillian Beer and Juliet Dusinberre, among others, on Carroll. To prove Oates' intellectual link to Nietzsche, I also reflect on the critically overlooked claims of Greg Johnson, John Updike, Brenda Daly, Ellen Friedman, and Elaine Showalter, as well as Oates' own correspondence that confirms her attraction to the works of and scholarship on both Carroll and Nietzsche. Fundamentally interdisciplinary, this research

contributes to contemporary studies in the field of American literature and philosophy. Finally, by attending to the formation and transformation of individual experiences that represent mainly marginalised populations, this thesis contributes to the field of cultural studies.

This thesis, in short, is organised in a way that aims to demonstrate the complexity of the cultural reflections of Nietzsche's Madman's proclamation of the death of God in Oates' Quartet. The new concept of freedom that was determined by the loss of value foundation and external authority challenged the grasp of human autonomy. In Chapter 1, I succinctly comment on the early reception of Nietzsche in the United States of America, Germany, and France. Next, I examine the scholarship on Nietzsche by Kaufmann who catapulted Nietzsche into the Anglophone intellectual audience in the aftermath of World War II. Relevant to the historical relation of his systematic research of the development of Nietzsche's ideas over time is also the analysis of existential reception by Kaufmann. In the last part of this section, I indicate the key aspects of Kaufmann's and subsequent postmodern interpretations of the death of God to determine their diverse reading of the principle of identity after the death of God.

These diverse perspectives on Nietzsche's scholarship will allow me to analyse Oates' articulation of American experience in her narratives. Before *Wonderland,* she observed that what the earlier "three novels, which differ considerably in subject matter, language, and tone, have in common is the use of a youthful protagonist in his or her quintessentially American adventures".[6] In a postmodernist fashion, the linearity of the characters' development is transgressed by a wishful identity re-invention that is biased by social conventions in each text. Echoing Nietzsche, the characters of Oates are not limited by any normative standards. The narrative techniques of the author enable the characters'

[6] Stig Bjoerkman, "Conversations with Joyce Carol Oates", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006,* edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), p. 184.

polyphonic voices to remain dominant, and the characters lose their moral existence in favour of aesthetic singularities. Despite dramatising the concept of personal re-invention and the notion of power in the context of societal margins in the 1950s and 1960s, the tone of the Wonderland Quartet progresses to a buoyant climax of human pursuit in its last text.

In Chapter 2, I will examine Oates' *A Garden of Earthly Delights*. I will consider the protagonist's social advancement through the lens of the concept of symbolic games which was advanced by the postmodern reception of Nietzsche. I will relate postmodern interpretations of Nietzsche's thoughts and Carroll's texts imagery to the corresponding aesthetic map of Oates' depiction of self-improvement.

Looking at the second text of The Wonderland Quartet in Chapter 3, I will focus on the postmodern articulations of nihilism after the death of God. In the context of 1960s American counterculture, Oates depicts the societal experiments of individual playfulness in *Expensive People*. Richard W. Noland's term "comic nihilism" responds to John Barth's postmodern reaction to existential discourse on the death of God, and Oates employs this in her storyline.[7] The author also refers to the concept of eternal return, which is satirically fictionalised in her text. In contrast to the innocent young heroine of Carroll's Wonderland, Oates' protagonist is a young boy whose innocence is turned into violence in order to advance the chaotic setting of her postmodern narrative. In her text, the underlying dimension of terror is manifested through the images of violent assassinations and the self-destructive aspirations of the protagonist, as I will analyse.

In Chapter 4, I will shed more light on Oates' third Wonderland Quartet novel *Them*. I will explore the moral ambiguities of the text's protagonist in light of Nietzsche's concepts, and will predominantly apply Alexander Nehamas' postmodern reading of Nietzsche that is entitled *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985). It is the invention of the protagonist's fictional

[7] Richard W. Noland, "John Barth and the Novel of Comic Nihilism", *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1966), p. 239.

adventures that sets him apart from stereotypical convention in Oates' text. Furthermore, I will examine Oates' depiction of the pursuit of individual fulfilment, which she sets against societal bias, by referring to Simon May's articulation of Nietzsche's ethical compass.

Looking at *Wonderland* in Chapter 5, I will explore Oates' depicted restoration of the Nietzschean image that corresponds to a shift from a postmodern to previous model of Nietzsche by Kaufmann, while elaborating on Oates' explicit references to Nietzsche's terminology. I will demonstrate the affinity between the last section of *Wonderland* and Carroll's texts. In my analysis, I will draw attention to Oates' particular depiction of Carroll's themes, such as identity, transformation, and changing proportions, as well as related imagery.

In the final chapter, I will conclude the thesis with a section on Oates' depiction of shifting approaches of human creativity and the drive for improvement in the aftermath of World War II, which distinctively shaped twenty-first-century thought. Oates maximises the philosophical conflict after the death of God, which ignited the interest of social activists and contemporary scholars. Oates explores profound metaphysical queries of marginalised populations by creatively experimenting with the postmodern interpretations of Nietzsche in her fictional texts. In depicting the images of terror in her novels, she employs the historical setting of the 1950s that was defined by a prevailing Western moral bias, and which clashed with social and racial turmoils in the 1960s.

Alfred Kazin, one of the New York Intellectuals, considers the density of "the social violence" in the fiction of Oates that reflects "her sweetly brutal sense of what American experience is really like".[8] G. F. Waller positions Oates in the American Gothic genre,[9] while Julia Stein aligns Oates' blending of history with fiction and various modernist techniques in

[8] Alfred Kazin, "Oates", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*, edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), pp. 10-12.
[9] G. F. Waller, *Dreaming America: Obsession and Transcendence in the Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 5

Blonde to those of John Dos Passos.[10] Early literary scholarship traces the element of naturalism in her work and the affinity with D. H. Lawrence in terms of Oates' sympathy with characters and the recurring theme of identity and sexuality.[11] The textual experimentalisation and response of Oates to the conditions of postmodernity on the American fictional scene is called "singular" by Walter Clemons.[12] In The Wonderland Quartet, Oates reflects on the shaping influence of philosophic transformation of society from *Kaufmann's Nietzsche* to *new Nietzsche.*

The Postmodern Concept

From the extensive repertoire of its definitions, I predominantly employ the term "postmodernism" in philosophic terms, to address the wake of the *new Nietzsche* described as "the central figure in postmodern thought", and also its cultural representation in art in the deacade of the 1960s.[13] Initiated at the five-day conference on Nietzsche that took place at Royaumont Abbey in France in July 1964, following the rehabilitation of Nietzsche by Georges Bataille in France in the 1930s and 1940s, and in disagreement with Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche, the *new Nietzsche* advanced Dionysian illogic and decentralisation of the character. In the late 1970s, Jean-François Lyotard represented a leading voice in postmodern theory. Hans Bertens argues about the openness of the postmodern position expressed by Lyotard:

> Lyotard's postmodern aesthetic is based on a never-ending critique of representation that should contribute to the preservation of heterogeneity, of optimal dissensus. The sublime does not lead towards a resolution; the confrontation with the unrepresentable leads to radical openness.[14]

[10] Julia Stein, "Joyce Carol Oates's *Blonde*: Modernism and the Working-Class Heroine", in *A Class of Its Own: Re-Envisioning American Labor Fiction*, ed. by Laura Hapke and Lisa A. Kirby (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), p. 171.
[11] Waller, p. 4.
[12] Walter Clemons, "Joyce Carol Oates: Love and Violence", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*, edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), p. 34.
[13] Cornel West, "Nietzsche's Prefiguration of Postmodern American Philosophy", in *Why Nietzsche Now?* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 241-270, p. 242.
[14] Bertens, p. 133.

In terms of postmodern eclecticism, Lyotard celebrates Dionysian desire and all its possible manifestations.[15] In his study, Bertens distinguishes between the postmodern readings of Nietzsche by Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari. Bertens elaborates on the assumption of the contemporary critic Scott Lash in his *Sociology of Postmodernism* (1990), who identifies a Nietzschean camp of postmodern critics.[16] According to Lash, they emphasise power and desire in their texts and are represented by Deleuze, Guattari, and Michel Foucault.[17] Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God considerably impacted the Anglo-American audience by Kaufmann's translations of Nietzsche's work in the 1950s. In the late 1960s, postmodern theorists such as Deleuze and Foucault, appropriate Nietzsche's ideas of anti-foundationalism, plurality, decentralisation, disunity, and playful aspect of fictional games. Subsequently, the shaping influence of anti-foundational sentiment affects American society on all levels, the articulations of which I explore in Oates' Quartet. As in philosophy, according to Patricia Waugh, postmodernism in literature exhibits the "sense of crisis and loss of belief in the external authoritative system of order".[18] Thus, the philosophical aspects of postmodernism permeate literary techniques of fragmentation, unreliability, carnivalisation, short circuits, metafiction, and intertextuality, among others.

The critics have vigorously contested the term postmodernism and its periodisation. It is important to notice that no critical consensus about the postmodern has been established, and therefore, introductory clarifying remarks about its scope, periodisation, and the employment of the term in connection to Oates' oeuvre are necessary. Marianne DeKoven argues about the emergence of postmodernism in the "long sixties, extending from the late fifties to the early seventies" and she links the term with countercultural movements that

[15] Bertens, pp. 135-136.
[16] Bertens, p. 134.
[17] Bertens, p. 134.
[18] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 21.

include "Civil Rights and Black Power movements, the New Left, anti-war and student movements, second-wave feminism, and gay liberátor" in the United States.[19] In her *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of Postmodern* (2004), DeKoven considers the opposing arguments of Ihab Hassan who identified postmodernism in the twentieth century, Brian McHale who argued for its emergence in the wake of World War II, clashing with the periodisation of Linda Hutcheon who dated postmodernism to the 1970s and 1980s.[20] In her study, DeKoven determines postmodernism as the transformation and continuation of, rather than, departure from modernity.[21] DeKoven employs the same periodisation as Hans Bertens, however, he argues about the postmodern concept in art that:

> It [postmodernism] refers, first of all, to a complex of anti-modernist artistic strategies which emerged in the 1950s and developed momentum in the course of the 1960s. However, because it was used for diametrically opposed practices in different artistic disciplines, the term was deeply problematical almost right from the start.[22]

In his study, Bertens further points to the decade of the 1980s when the term postmodernism was redefined, and its associations with feminism and multiculturalism were critically established.[23] Singular attention to postmodernism was devoted in the philosophical departments in the late 1960s and 1970s, when postmodernism was particularly associated with deconstructionist practices, poststructuralism, and *new* postmodern interpretation of Nietzsche by the French scholars, such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze who are discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis.[24]

Proposing a similar claim, DeKoven and Bertens assert that there is no clear recognition of the start of the postmodern movement, nor a critical consensus about the scope of postmodernism.[25] Bertens further argues that for American literary practitioners who were associated with postmodernism in the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, John Barth, Donald

[19] Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of Postmodern* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 3.
[20] DeKoven, p. 8.
[21] DeKoven, p. 12.
[22] Bertens, p. 3.
[23] Bertens, p. 8.
[24] Bertens, pp. 5-6.
[25] Bertens, pp. 15-16.

Barthelme, and Vladimir Nabokov, the postmodern movement translated as a "radical aesthetic autonomy", implying a move towards self-reflexiveness.[26] The author elaborates on the term and recognises two main postmodern strategies in transcendening modernism. The first strategy aims at "undermin{ing} the idea of art itself" by critiquing the autonomy and self-sufficiency of art.[27] However, relevant to my research is the second postmodern strategy of Bertens that he defines as follows:

> Here postmodernism has been defined as the 'attitude' of the 1960s counterculture, or somewhat more restrictively, as the 'new sensibility' of the 1960s social and artistic avant-garde.[28]

The *new sensibility* was popularised by Susan Sontag and considerably impacted the American writers in the 1960s. Her aesthetic theory, influenced by the reading of Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Norman O. Brown, was established in the collection of essays *Against Interpretation* (1966) where the author advances, according to Bertens, the "authentic experience of art itself" by calling for recovering senses in art, and favouring aesthetics above morals.[29] Bertens appreciates the interdisciplinary aspect of the postmodern position advanced by Sontag and considers her an important early theorist of the postmodern.[30]

The Cultural Reception of Nietzsche in the United States in the 1960s

In 1981, Gordon O. Taylor observed that Oates was, "early tagged 'the dark lady of American letters'" for her preoccupation with violence and grotesquery.[31] Compiling her Quartet in the 1960s, Oates shares the tag with her contemporary Susan Sontag who was praised by the postmodern movement. The American critic Norman Podhoretz gave singular attention to Susan Sontag among New York Intellectuals in *Making It* (1967), by calling Sontag the next

[26] Bertens, p. 4.
[27] Bertens, p. 5.
[28] Bertens, p. 5.
[29] Bertens, p. 27.
[30] Bertens, p. 29.
[31] Gordon O. Taylor, "Review: *Joyce Carol Oates* by Ellen G. Friedman and *The Tragic Vision of Joyce Carol Oates* by Kathryn Grant, in *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Dec.,1981), pp. 442-444, p. 442.

"Dark Lady of American letters" after Mary McCarthy in the 1930s and 1940s.[32] In her collection of essays *Against Interpretation*, Sontag promotes the aesthetic theory of a "new sensibility" that elevates artistic form by promoting senses and downplays ethical responsibility and moral judgements. Sontag elaborates on her theory of *new sensibility* in art by explaining that:

> The new sensibility understands art as the extension of life – this being understood as the representation of (new) modes of vivacity. There is no necessary denial of the role of moral evaluation here. Only the scale has changed; it has become less gross, and what it sacrifices in discursive explicitness it gains in accuracy and subliminal power.[33]

Sontag read Norman O. Brown, whose then-prominent interpretation of Freud promoted the Dionysian symbol of sexual liberation and dominated the countercultural readings in the United States.[34] Brown's *Life against Death* (1959) and her reading of Nietzsche who promoted senses over reason, had a formative effect on Sontag. In *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), Nietzsche argues that, "'reason' is the cause of our falsification of the testimony of the senses."[35] Sontag endorsed the rejection of sublimation of the Dionysian by the Apollonian logic advanced by Brown and promoted passion over rationality. John Carlevale argues that Brown's "synthesis of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche" promoted Dionysian revival in American literature in the 1960s.[36] According to Carlevale, Brown controversially advocated for "holy madness" and promoted Dionysus as a god of madness.[37] In this context, Brown elaborated on the metaphor of power required to transform human consciousness in his later work *Love's Body* (1966).[38] In her paraphrase of Brown, Sontag says that, "what is

[32] James Penner, "Gendering Susan Sontag's Criticism in the 1960s: The New York Intellectuals, the Counter Culture, and the Kulturkampf Over "The New Sensibility"", *Women's Studies*, 37:8, (2008), 921-941, 927, <DOI: 10.1080/00497870802414579>, [accessed 07-05-2020].
[32] Penner, p. 921.
[33] Susan Sontag, "One Culture and the New Sensibility", in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* by Susan Sontag, (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), p. 300.
[34] John Carlevale, "The Dionysina Revival in American Fiction of the Sixties", in *International Journal of the Classical Tradion*, Winter 2006, 364 - 391, [accessed 13-02-2020], p. 369.
[35] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated and edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 480.
[36] Carlevale, p. 364.
[37] Carlevale, p. 369.
[38] Carlevale, p. 373.

wanted … is not Apollonian (or sublimation) consciousness, but Dionysian (or body) consciousness."[39] Patrick Hayes called Sontag's concept of art "Nietzsche-infected discourse on art and experience" and defined it as follows:[40]

> [It is a] culturally-specific discourse on experience established by Norman O. Brown and popularized by Susan Sontag in the mid-1960s, in which the aesthetic was positioned as a way of liberating repressed affective intensities from the will to power of the disciplinary ego.[41]

Literary scholar James Penner examined the analogy of the cultural reception between Freud and Nietzsche in the 1960s. In his research, Penner argues about the development of the Dionysian element in Brown's text by relating it to Sontag:

> In many respects, Brown's reading of Freud could be described as Nietzschean in that it emphasises the reclaiming of Dionysian consciousness. Similarly, Sontag's notion of rejecting "hermeneutics" in favour of "an erotic art" has a Nietzschean valence in the sense that it implies the embrace of the primitive Dionysian "feminine"- the irrational, the intuitive, and the sensual - and the rejection of Apollonian emphasis on rationality, order, control, and restrain. However, unlike Nietzsche, who advocates a synthesis of the masculine Apollonian and the Dionysian feminine, Brown proposes "the construction of a Dionysian ego".[42]

Reviewing *Against Interpretation*, Robert Mazzocco calls Sontag a "provocative" author.[43] Making an analogy with Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Mazzocco points out that Sontag likewise "looked beneath the surface" in her preference for the experience of the body over the mind.[44] Sontag advanced the aesthetic value of the Dionysian sentiment by associating it with a feminine element and promoted, according to Penner, the "aesthetic revolution" in art, which was celebrated by postmodern critics.[45]

The interest in the Dionysian sensibility became popular in American literature in the 1960s. Covering the same historical period as Oates' Wonderland Quartet, Richard W.

[39] Robert Mazzocco, 'Swingtime', *The New York Review of Books*, 9 June 1996, [accessed 12-05-2020].
[40] Patrick Hayes, *Philip Roth: Fiction and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 102.
[41] Hayes, p. 92.
[42] Penner, p. 928.
[43] Mazzocoo.
[44] Mazzocco.
[45] Penner, p. 924.

Noland draws on the literary reception of Nietzsche in John Barth's postmodern writings. In his essay from 1966, Noland argued:

> When Nietzsche announced the death of God toward the end of the nineteenth century, he also added further stimulus to one of the obsessive themes of contemporary literature - the problem of the loss of value and meaning in human life and the search for new value and meaning to replace the old. And since Nietzsche's conception of the Dionysian was generally misinterpreted as a call for the abandonment of reason and intelligence (the Apollonian), one of the most frequent answers to the problem of value has been an effort to return to the primitive, the anti-intellectual, and the irrational.[46]

Noland discusses the existing literary tradition that, "replace{s} the Western Apollonian ego with Dionysian consciousness".[47] Finding this concept unsatisfying, Noland includes John Barth among the nihilist writers of the 1960s, next to "Lawrence, Miller, the surrealists, some of the existentialists".[48] To assert new values, according to Noland, Barth engages with Apollonian rationality to substitute the void after the death of God, that proves ineffective in the characters' development, and leads to, what Noland calls, *Dionysian nihilism*. In Barth's novel *The Floating Opera* (1956), Noland examines the ultimate embrace of Dionysian sentiment as a supplement to Apollonian rationality, the act of which, according to Noland, saves the main character from planned suicide.[49] Barth's first book *The Floating Opera* is followed by *The End of the Road* (1958) and the trilogy is concluded by his first postmodern novel *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960).

Later, Barth significantly revised his first two realist books into postmodern texts in 1967. Confirming the influence of Nietzsche in Barth's corpus, Christopher Conti considers the nihilist characters of Barth who struggle with the "ontological insecurity" that, in Barth's postmodern texts, translates into the recurring trope of the impostor character, identity masks,

[46] Richard W. Noland, 'John Barth and the Novel of Comic Nihilism', *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 7 (3), (1966), 239-257, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/stable/1207142> [accessed 06-07-2017], p. 239.
[47] Noland, p. 239.
[48] Noland, p. 240.
[49] Noland, p. 243.

and unattained authenticity in search of self-creation.[50] In her Wonderland Quartet, Oates uses related themes in the trajectories of her ambitious protagonists.

Reflecting on the decades of the 1960s and 1970s in his experimental *Sixty Stories* (1981), Donald Barthelme also engages with Nietzschean ideas. The collection of short stories includes "On Angels" where the author discusses the accumulated chaos and the unsatisfactory position of self-praising angels after the death of God.[51] Robert Waxman examines Barthelme's recurring depiction of the search for a new principle, "a meaningful set of values" in the absence of external authority.[52] Relating to the Dionysian and Apollonian dichotomy, Waxman argues that the Dionysian element is represented by music, children, or women who defy Apollonian men in Barthelme's texts, nevertheless, aspiring for the ultimate harmony of both elements.[53]

Also permeated by Nietzschean ideas, according to Patrick Hayes, Philip Roth's composition for *The Counterlife* (1986) reflects on "the key to the Dionysian personality".[54] In this text of Roth, Hayes mentions references to Dionysian "free spirits" and links Nietzschean ideas with the conceptualisation of the relationship between identity and power.[55] Considerable attention was given to, what might be called the depiction of Dionysian unbound sexual energy, in Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969). Defining the 1960s as "the national education of the irrational", Roth argues about *Portnoy's Complaint*:[56]

> [The end of the decade] that had been marked by blasphemous defiance of authority and loss of faith in the public order, I doubt that a book like mine would ever have achieved the sort of public renown that it did in 1969.[57]

---

[50] Christopher Conti, "Nihilism Negated Narratively: The Agency of Art in *The Sot-Weed Factor*", *Papers on Language and Literature, 47*(2), (2011), 141-161, 150, <http://ezproxy.uws.edu.au/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=60914787&site=ehost-live&scope=site > [accessed 07-05-2020].
[51] Donald Barthelme, "On Angels", *Sixty Stories* (New York, NY: Dutton, 1982), p. 135.
[52] Robert Waxman, "Apollo and Dionysus: Donald Barthelme's Dance of Life", *Studies in Short Fiction*, 33:2, (Spring 1996), pp. 229-43, p. 229.
[53] Waxman, p. 236.
[54] Hayes, p. 131.
[55] Hayes, p. 132.
[56] Philip Roth, "Imagining Jews", *The New York Review of Books*, 3 October 1974, [accessed 13-05-2020].
[57] Roth, "Imagining Jews".

In the cultural atmosphere of rising reluctance towards social order, the artistic scene depicted the loss of external authority in public life and welcomed repressed subjects from the previous conservative decade of the 1950s. In the 1960s, moral systems in art lost their authoritative influence over self-selective preferences of aesthetic values. Unveiling the subject of masturbation and uncanny sexual fantasies in *Portnoy's Complaint*, Roth earned popularity and a substantial critique from orthodox fellow New York Intellectuals, such as Diana Trilling and Irwin Howe, whose ideas aligned with the collection of essays *The Liberal Imagination* (1950) of Lionel Trilling. In his essays, Trilling argues for the triumph of ego and reason over emotion, and promotes the sublimation of instincts.[58]

Adding to the controversy of the text, Roth emphasises the *Jewish* conscience of the intellectual protagonist who faces self-resentment caused by his liberated sexuality that opposes his religious conscience. Roth explained about his main character Alexander Portnoy:

> He [Portnoy] cannot supress the one [passion] in the interest of the other [reason], nor can he imagine them living happily ever after in peaceful coexistence. […] In Portnoy the disapproving moralist who says "I am horrified" will not disappear when the libidinous slob shows up screaming "I want!".[59]

Recalling the aesthetics of the Dionysian liberátor of Brown and Sontag, Hayes describes Roth as the more benign middle ground of American letters in the 1960s, a "toned-down version of Sontag's more full-blown erotics of art".[60]

Based on Roth's notes, Hayes pointed to the earlier drafts of Roth's *American Pastoral* (1997) dated to 1972 following Oates' *Wonderland*'s publication in 1971. The analogy between the third part of Oates' *Wonderland* and Roth's Pulitzer prize-winning *American Pastoral* mirrors the prevailing cultural reception of Nietzschean ideas in the 1960s. The particular texts by Oates and Roth share not only the historical perspective of the

[58] Penner, p. 929.
[59] Roth, "Imagining Jews".
[60] Hayes, p. 107.

American setting, but also a thematic parallel of the countercultural chaos and Dionysian celebration in the decade of 1960s.

Hayes regards Roth's adaptations of "some distinctively Nietzschean ideas about the self" to function for *"primarily aesthetic"* purposes in Roth's texts.[61] A common denominator here is the preference of aesthetic existence of the protagonists that is challenged by the moral order of their fathers. Thematically resembling the conflict of the protagonist's daughter Meredith (Merry) Levov from *American Pastoral*, Jesse Vogel's daughter Shelley in *Wonderland* exhibits disagreement with her authoritative father that extends onto the fatherland, America. However, the cultural backdrop of the 1960s interferes with the plot more ostensibly in Roth's book.

Nevertheless, disillusioned daughters, Meredith and Shelley, voice their concerns by neglecting the authorities of their fathers and consequently abandoning them. In both books, it is the fathers who seek their lost daughters. However, while Shelley is depicted as a victim of Jesse's obsession for control, and is eventually saved by him after his transformation; Meredith becomes a murderer, and her father does not succeed in saving her. The disproportion between victim and violator calibrates the power rhetoric of the texts and affects their narrative mood. Despite *Wonderland*'s ambiguous ending, the victory of Jesse kindles optimistic hope for his daughter, and thus for America, while Roth's dramatisation of the Levovs implies pessimistic finitude:

> They'll never recover. Everything is against them, everyone and everything that does not like their life. All the voices from without, condemning and rejecting their life!"[62]

Roth's image of an ideal American man which is epitomised by Swede extends into Swede's image of an American climate which has been re-invented, unimpeded by history. Swede says, "This is a new generation and there is no need for that resentment stuff from anybody,

[61] Hayes, p. 133.
[62] Philip Roth, *American Pastoral (*New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, 1997), p. 395.

them *or* us".[63] All the positive attributes of Swede in Roth's text pose a question about the nature and longevity of an American ideal, which characterises the decade of the 1950s, and is epitomised by Swede, however, it clashes with the the Dionysian chaos, which is embodied by Merry. While Swede is characterised by orderly achievements, his daughter stammers, which foreshadows her inability to organise her instinctive impulses. In Oates' narrative, it is Jesse who epitomises the post-war amelioration of the United States, while his daughter embodies the angry youth culture of the 1960s decade.

By catalysing decentralised opinions, Dionysian chaos and passion, the postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche inspired aesthetic experiments in art and culture. In the countercultural setting of the 1960s, Oates aestheticises violence and materialistic desires for self-improvement that leads to negative consequences. In Wonderland Quartet, the life trajectories of the ambitious protagonists correspond to the celebration of vitalism by Gerald Graff. In his text *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (1979), that was originally published in 1973, Graff argues about the Nietzschean sentiment in societal experiments:

> Here are the 'men of profusion', the '*masters*' of today: marginals, experimental painters, pop, hippies and yippies, parasites, madmen, binned loonies. One hour of their lives offers more intensity and less intention than three hundred thousand words of a professional philosopher. More Nietzschean than Nietzsche's readers.[64]

In her texts, Oates depicts the underprivileged characters who epitomise the postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche. In her written correspondence from 2017, Oates once again admits the influence of Nietzsche. However, she reluctantly relates the influence to her work, saying:

> Nietzsche has had a profound — pervasive — influence on my thinking, if not inevitably on my work, which tends to be about highly intense personal relationships, of a sort Nietzsche did not experience & did not write about.[65]

[63] Roth, *American Pastoral*, pp. 310, 311.
[64] Gerald Graff, *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1979), p. 53.
[65] Oates, "RE: The Influence of Nietzsche on JCO".

Read through postmodern lenses, the author maximises the shaping postmodern influence on emerging cultural forms in the 1960s by setting the ideas of Nietzsche in a new context. Oates' eccentric characters correspond to postmodern antagonism, which deems acceptable the complete permissiveness and decentralism in the anti-foundational context. By aestheticising violence, Oates combines the images of romantic dreams with dark visions of human pursuits.

In his study of postmodernism, Bertens argues about the influence of Nietzsche and the postmodern conception of desire by Lyotard:

> Unlike Deleuze and Guattari, who offered a similarly Nietzschean philosophy in their *L'Anti-Oedipe* of 1972 (trans. 1983), Lyotard celebrates desire even in its negative manifestations. Deleuze and Guattari see desire as an essentially positive force, but are not unaware that positive forces can be appropriated for negative ends.[66]

Kaufmann's translations and critical collection on Nietzsche opened the floodgates of an anti-foundationalist sentiment initiated in 1950. In the late 1960s, the death of God as a concept grew in prominence through popular culture, and impacted all societal levels in the United States. In 1966, the cover of *Time* featured the question "Is God Dead?" (Fig. 1) and the issue "had the highest newsstand sales in more than twenty years".[67] Reflecting on anti-foundationalism after the death of God in Oates' Quartet, the author depicts a currency with the marginalised protagonists to a greater extent than *Kaufmann's Nietzsche* might have intended.[68]

[66] Bertens, p. 136.
[67] Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 254.
[68] Ratner-Rosenhagen, p. 254.

Figure 1. "Is God Dead?" Cover of *Time*, April 8, 1966

Along with the explicit references to Nietzsche, it is a cultural-philosophical transition that is conceptualised in the Quartet. In her interview, Oates says:

> In my fiction, the troubled people are precisely those who yearn for a higher life - those in whom the life-form itself is stirring. By singling out individuals who are representative of our society and who, as people, interest me very much, I attempt to submerge myself in that foreign personality and see *how* and *why* and *to what end* the behavior that people call "anti-social" or "neurotic" is actually functioning.[69]

When asked about compiling her fiction, Oates observed that "it is mostly pre-imagined, pre-experienced, and I only have to record it".[70] Oates regards herself as "primarily a fiction writer", and her ambitious array of narrative techniques, forms, genres, topics, and

[69] Dale Boesky, "Correspondence with Miss Joyce Carol Oates", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*, edited by Greg Johnson, (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), pp. 51-52.
[70] Greg Johnson, "Transformation of Self: An Interview with Joyce Carol Oates", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006.* Edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), p. 46.

philosophical and psychological allusions have been the subject of distinguished critical readings.[71] In this thesis, I examine Oates' depiction of social experiments that textually correspond to the intellectual articulation of the "New French Nietzsche" by the French critics that was primarily pioneered by Derrida and his former mentor, Foucault, on American ground in 1966.[72]

In October 1966, Derrida delivered his lecture "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" at the conference on structuralism at the John Hopkins University in Baltimore.[73] In his lecture that was published in the collection of lectures and essays *Writing and Difference* (1967) by Derrida the following year, the author refers to Nietzsche, next to Freud and Heidegger, in his explanation of decentering. Derrida argued for the substitution of metaphysics by the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign. He advances the "joyous affirmation" of Nietzsche explaining it as follows:[74]

> *This affirmation then determines the non-center otherwise than as loss of the center.* And it plays the game without security. For there is a *sure* freeplay: that which is limited to the *substitution of given* and *existing, present,* pieces.[75]

In his lecture, Derrida mentions the critique of truth by Nietzsche in support of his theory about decentering.[76] Derrida proposes joyful games of substitution that occur in "absolute chance", and that are popularised by Deleuze and Lyotard.[77] According to Ratner-Rosenhagen, Lyotard considered Nietzsche an intellectual force behind "the postmodern condition" that challenged any God-centred metanarratives.[78] Advanced by Foucault who presented his *new* reading of Nietzsche at the "Schizo-Culture" conference at Columbia University in New York City in 1975, Derrida delivered his lecture on Nietzsche at the University of Virginia the following year. In 1977, the French-inspired scholar David B.

[71] Oates, "RE: The Influence of Nietzsche on JCO", message to the author. 2 November 2017.
[72] Ratner-Rosenhagen, p. 266.
[73] Ratner-Rosenhagen, p. 266.
[74] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan *Bass* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 292.
[75] Derrida, p. 292.
[76] Derrida, p. 280.
[77] Derrida, p. 292.
[78] Ratner-Rosenhagen, p. 266

Allison edited *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, which shed more light on postmodern interpretations of Nietzsche.[79]

French thought on *new* Nietzsche attracted American readership including Kaufmann's former student, Alexander Nehamas. Forming a distinct trend in Nietzsche studies, the keen academics confronted Kaufmann at Princeton by sending him the caricatures of Nietzsche that introduced the image of Nietzsche as a flying superman or represented Nietzsche by the image of a moustachioed King Kong.[80] The correspondence was supplied by the filled questionnaires, in which the authors "identif{ied} themselves as 'disciples', 'rightful heirs'" of *new* Nietzsche.[81]

The philosophical transformation of society that followed the announcement about the death of God impacted American art that launched new creative platforms for taboo subjects. Engaging with the intellectual narratives that informed the decade of the 1960s, cultural representations of postmodern sentiment resonate in The Wonderland Quartet that is written in the same decade by Oates. While in her short story collection *Upon the Sweeping Flood* (1966) that precedes the quartet, the author depicts destructive patterns of "repressed internal chaos" of the protagonists, in the last novel of her Quartet, the protagonist achieves internal control of his passion.[82] Greg Johnson points out that the title *Upon the Sweeping Flood* recalls the first reaction of Oates to her reading of Nietzsche at the age of eighteen.[83] Describing her reading of Nietzsche at that point of time as, "visceral unease! - as if the very floor were shifting beneath one's feet", Oates depicts her characters drifting from certainty to madness in each story from the collection.[84]

[79] Ratner-Rosenhagen, pp. 264-267.
[80] Ratner-Rosenhagen, p. 269.
[81] Ratner-Rosenhagen, p. 269.
[82] Greg Johnson. "Out of Eden: Oates's *Upon the Sweeping Flood*". *The Midwest Quarterly* (Summer. Volume 35. 1994), p. 436.
[83] Johnson, p. 436.
[84] Joyce Carol Oates, *(Woman) Writer: Occasions and Opportunities*, (New York, NY: Dutton), p. 59.

Following the quartet, Oates published her collection of essays, *The Edge of Impossibility: Tragic Forms in Literature* (1972), about the authors whose common denominator is critically established link to Nietzsche. Included authors are, among others, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, William Butler Yeats, and Thomas Mann. In the introduction, Oates cites Nietzsche claiming fictional substitution of God by "hallucinations" in artistic form.[85] In the same year, Oates published her essay "New Heaven and Earth" (1972) where she references Nietzsche. In this text, her critical reading corresponds to the Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche. Oates reflects on the re-creation of a mind that yearns for unity. She argues:

> Everywhere, suddenly, we hear the prophetic voice of Nietzsche once again, saying that man must overcome himself, that he must interpret and create the universe. (Nietzsche was never understood until now, until the world caught up with him, or approached him.) In such a world, which belongs to consciousness, there can be no distracting of energies from the need to push forward, to synthesize, to converge, to make unity out of ostensible diversity.[86]

In her critical account, Oates advances her urge for the integrity of character in time of personal and social challenge that defined the decade of the 1960s:

> In the Sixties and at present we hear a very discordant music. We have got to stop screaming at one another. We have got to bring into harmony the various discordant demands, voices, stages of personality. Those more advanced must work to transform the rest, by being, themselves, models of sanity and integrity.[87]

By depicting the themes of social challenges in the United States, the author queries the permissive decentralisation of individual pursuits in the context of American cultural unrest. In *New Heaven and Earth*, the author calls for unity and harmony that opposes postmodern decentralised values in the context of social turmoil in the 1960s. The author

[85] Joyce Carol Oates, *The Edge of Impossibility: Tragic Forms in Literature*, (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1972), p. 8.
[86] Oates, "New Heaven and Earth", in *Arts in Society*, Vol. 10 (4 November 1972), p. 54.
[87] Oates, "New Heaven and Earth", p. 54.

explains the process of her creative writing and argues about the link between art and culture in her texts:

> I think that art, especially prose fiction, is directly connected with culture, with society; that there is no "art for art's sake" and never was, but only art for more conscious, formal expression of a human communal need, in which individuals seem to speak individually but are, in reality, only giving voice and form to the intangible that is in the air around them.[88]

The self-driven life trajectories of Oates' protagonists represent authentic shaping of society in the 1960s. They detach themselves from any social authority. By depicting the tangible consequences of passion-driven disillusions with flawed logic, the author ridicules postmodern tendencies that are advanced by the cultural forms in the United States.

Why Nietzsche, Carroll, and Oates?

It is undeniable that the works of both Carroll and Nietzsche shape the postmodern vision of Oates. In the introduction to her collection of critical essays that followed the Quartet, Oates mentions Nietzsche and cites his influence on her definition of the "thinkable" death of God and tragedy:

> If communal belief in God has diminished so that, as writers, we can no longer presume upon it, then a redefinition of God in terms of the furthest reaches of man's *hallucinations* can provide us with a new basis for tragedy.[89]

In her Wonderland Quartet, Oates' morally ambiguous characters blur the borders between reality and their wishful self-fictionalisation. The antagonistic characters repudiate the master value of societal conventions and individually calibrate their purposes. Showalter says, "it makes sense to call these novels the Wonderland Quartet", and points out their historic

[88] Oates, "New Heaven and Earth", p. 52.
[89] Oates, *The Edge of Impossibility: Tragic Forms in Literature*, pp. 7-8; emphasis added by the author.

connection and allusion to Carroll's work.[90] Oates employs the symbolism of dreams from the Alice texts and postmodern images of games to depict her protagonists' uncanny identity quests.

The postmodern solution of the philosophical conflict of the death of God refers to the principle of identity. In substituting a fictional God who disappears, a new game is required. Because there is no external authority, the game is playful with flexible rules. The plurality of opinions and self-controlled actions create decentralised chaos. Carroll's work evokes a game through the dream vision of Alice, along with the nonsense rules of strange creatures in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. However, in *Through the Looking-Glass*, it is Alice alone who enters the chess game.

Postmodern games unlock the space for fictional singularities and celebrate plurality. They are not determined by the dialectics of a good and bad character, when fiction is played out in game form, all is permitted. Neither Carroll's animal characters nor Oates' human protagonists conform to the existing rules of conventional culture, instead inventing new rules. In her essay, Oates says about Carroll's texts:

> Underlying Alice's adventures is a strategy of improvisation, an animistic sense of fluidity, flux, constant metamorphosis: amusing at times and at other times highly disturbing.[91]

The creatures in Wonderland invent new rules as they go, to suit their situations. For instance, the Duchess realises that pepper makes people hot-tempered, and she is "very much pleased at having found out a new kind of rule".[92] Alice responds cautiously however, identifying a new rule that is invented to manipulate her when she is to be sent away from the royal court because of her size:

[90] Elaine Showalter, "Introduction: The Wonderland Quartet", in *Wonderland* by Joyce Carol Oates (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), p. xv.
[91] Oates, "Wonderlands", *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 55/56, No. 4/1 (Winter 2001/Spring 2002), pp. 150 – 169, p. 159.
[92] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 94.

> At this moment the King, who had been for some time busily writing in his notebook, called out "Silence!", and read out from his book, "Rule Forty-two. *All persons more than a mile high to leave the court*."
> Everybody looked at Alice.
> "*I'm* not a mile high," said Alice.
> "You are," said the King.
> "Nearly two miles high," added the Queen.
> "Well, I sha'n't go, at any rate," said Alice:
> "Besides, that's not a regular rule: you invented it just now."
> "It's is the oldest rule in the book," said the King.
> "Then it ought to be Number One," said Alice.[93]

In addition to Alice's opposition to royal authority, Juliet Dusinberre asserts that Carroll's protagonist refuses to see the world "in terms dictated by the Duchess, Humpty Dumpty, the Mad Hatter, the Walrus or even the Carpenter".[94] In her essay called "Wonderland", Oates says that Carroll's texts depict "the enduring charm of the story precisely in its being contained by a child's deeply moral consciousness".[95] In Carroll's text, Alice seeks a safe categorisation but encounters nonsense rules designed to strengthen the dominant position of the authority figures who constantly redefine them. Alice recognises the trap of these rules and therefore repudiates them. The effect of unreliable rules in Carroll's Wonderland symbolises a resistance to conventional values that were fostered by the Victorian middle-class, its educational system, and the church. Martin Gardner[96] and Beer observe the way in which Carroll presents Victorian conventions as travesties.[97]

Furthermore, Dusinberre says that "the first real rebels against Victorian stuffiness were children, and the first rebels in print wrote books for them".[98] The power relationships in Victorian society are mirrored in the relationship between a child and authoritative fictional characters in Carroll's Wonderland. The section "The Mock Turtle's Story" in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* begins with the conversation between Alice and the

[93] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 125.
[94] Juliet Dusinberre, *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 73.
[95] Oates, "Wonderlands", p. 159.
[96] Martin Gardner, *The Annotated Alice*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001).
[97] Gillian Beer, *Alice in Space: The Sideways Victorian World of Lewis Carroll* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 37-38.
[98] Dusinberre, p. 94.

Duchess, the latter of whom is obsessed with morals that constitute rules. However, her morals are caught up in wordplay, where the literal and figurative meaning has to be discerned. For instance, the Duchess says, "birds of a feather flock together", referring to a flamingo and mustard, or "the more there is of mine, the less there is of yours", which refers to a "large mustard-mine".[99] When discussing a vegetable that does not look like one, the Duchess says:

> And the moral of that is – 'Be what you would seem to be' – or, if you'd like it put more simply – 'Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than that you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise'.[100]

In this passage, Carroll hints at the identity theme that constantly occurs with the transformation trope in both of his texts. But instead of a clear moral instruction, the message appears rather confusing. Located in a place that is stripped of order and foundation, Alice is struggling with her identity. Her memory of what she was in the previous setting fails, and her present recognition is a process that unfolds as the plot develops. She asks herself, "who in the world am I?"[101] The transformation of her size and hostile reactions of Wonderland creatures add to her confusion.

Carroll's textualisation of Alice's identity conflict corresponds to the philosophical conflict after the proclamation of the death of God by Nietzsche. According to Kaufmann's model, Nietzsche encouraged the sublimation of unconscious chaos to become who one is. According to the postmodern reading of Nietzsche, the philosopher advanced the affirmation of the chaos and multiple singularities of ourselves.

Alice's memory fails her, and she struggles to connect with her conscious logical processes. Therefore, according to Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche, the organised sublimation is irrelevant to Alice at her current state. However, she is adept at pretending to

[99] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 96.
[100] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 96.
[101] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 22.

fictionalise herself and to re-invent her singularity. Alice's "favourite phrase is 'Let's pretend'", and it finds its way into Wonderland, which is characterised by imagination and the playing of games.[102] Alice ultimately achieves her affirmation in the permissive chaotic void. The vast range of possibilities in Wonderland, Alice's playful attitude and her resilient character represent ideal conditions for postmodern permissiveness and decentralisation. She is not able to control the chaos of Wonderland, but she is able to invent herself in every situation to align with the chaos.

Both postmodern and Kaufmann's readings of Nietzsche suppose that Nietzsche perceives the identity principle to be a life process that requires courage and strength to avoid the oppressive environment. Nevertheless, the approaches of these readings vary. In Kaufmann's model, the internal control (i.e. sublimation of vices into virtues) is postulated to advance and confront the environment, while in a postmodern reading, permissive imagination to playfully ignore external authority is proposed. Despite her initial uncertainty, Alice ultimately dismisses royalty as a pack of cards in the final section of the text.[103] Alice accesses her logic in the process of waking up from her dream, and therefore, she perceives the royalty from a different perspective.

To echo Nietzsche and his thoughts on excellence, Alice relies on her will and takes control of her life. This references the sheep's strategy in *Through the Looking Glass*, as the sheep says, "I never put things into people's hands – that would never do – you must get it for yourself".[104] Another encouraging piece of advice that Alice gets is from Humpty Dumpty, who cuts to the core with his statement: "which is to be master – that's all".[105] Humpty Dumpty explains his power to give meaning to words as their creator during a discussion with Alice about semantics. On a deeper level, the master position is discussed

[102] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 147.
[103] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 129.
[104] Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, p. 216.
[105] Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, p. 224

by Nietzsche in the context of his suggestion that people become autonomous to achieve the potential for excellence, which is to master one's own life.

When talking with the Mad Hatter, Alice encounters a "riddle with no answer" about the raven and the writing desk,[106] and also with the Red Queen about warm nights.[107] The concept of a riddle with no answer becomes the metaphor of identity in Carroll's texts, one that opens up countless possibilities for the affirmation of singularity. In this context, it is essential to note that Nietzsche does not convey a universal way, or answer, but postulates an individual effort to construct and self-cultivate individual excellence.

According to Beer, what Alice seeks from rules is order, yet in Wonderland she finds only unfair domination. The Red Queen's characteristic "Off with her head!" represents a severe universal rule to please the queen's interests.[108] Thus, by not relying on unfair rules, Alice leaves her moral existence and enters her aesthetic existence by becoming her simulacrum. In a playful attitude, her simulacrum represents her creative attempts to solve the riddle of life.

It is the feature of affirming chaos that postmodern critics assign to or derive from Nietzsche. Such a repositioning of affirmative energy that shapes plural singularities is referred to in Carroll's text as "muchness". In Alice's conversation with the Dormouse, the March Hare, and the Mad Hatter, the Dormouse says to Alice, "you say things are 'much of a muchness' – did you ever see such a thing as a drawing of a muchness!"[109] In his annotation of Carroll's text, Gardner explains that the colloquial British phrase means that "two or more things are very much alike, or have the same value".[110] On a deeper level, the term 'muchness' may be held to refer to an unconscious repository of plural possibilities the subject may consequently affirm.

[106] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 75.
[107] Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, p. 269.
[108] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 129.
[109] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 80.
[110] Gardner, *The Annotated Alice*, p. 82.

It is due to her creative flexibility and courage that Alice is able to advance to a queen from a pawn, the position she was assigned in the chess game in *Through the Looking Glass*. In this text, she is more familiar with the dream environment that attends to the underlying level of prescribed chess rules than in the first book, where she establishes herself as a girl who challenges royalty. Nevertheless, her identity changes in both texts through the portrayal of the creative process of becoming. She does not constitute order in a chaotic environment, but she playfully acts out her singularity by playing according to her own rules in Wonderland, and playfully navigating through the images in *Through the Looking Glass*.

The boundaries between sense and nonsense do not matter and this is the next essential feature of postmodern critics. In singularities, the borders between sense and nonsense blur, yet each singularity becomes valid. Therefore, in this context, it is unnecessary to dismiss the nonsense as inaccurate, less effective, hurtful and dangerous, or *bad* in moral terms. In Wonderland, instead of solving the nonsense riddles, Alice proceeds to a new adventure by leaving the chaos behind. For Alice, a precise location is no longer important, as she says, "so long as I get *somewhere*".[111] Indeed, in all directions madness awaits her. What becomes important is the process of Alice's proactive movement, which symbolises her transformation, the process of becoming.

Her encounter with nonsense and illogicality does not paralyse her, she continues on her journey through Wonderland. Wonderland's disorganisation represents the disorder of postmodern plurality and permissiveness that is associated with the concept of a normative void, which allows for the constant invention of rules or merely the lack of them. If a Queen wants to be happy, for example, she simply invents a rule for constant happiness that Alice may apply to herself:

[111] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 67.

> "I wish I could manage to be glad!" the Queen said. "Only I never can remember the rule. You must be very happy, living in this wood, and being glad whenever you like!"[112]

The Queen's wood represents the world where one can receive things by simply willing them. If there is not a rule to grant what is desired, such a rule is invented. Individual desires are not subordinated in favour of governing rules, but rather they govern the rules and are therefore free to be achieved.

In Oates' fiction, chaotic behaviour is observed through the lens of terror, predominantly in *Expensive People* and at the end of *Them*, although they are distributed in a non-linear fashion throughout the whole Quartet. In *Expensive People*, Richard kills his mother and decides to overeat himself to death. In the final section of *Them*, Jules Wendall co-organises a riot and becomes a murderer. In *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, teenage Clara Walpole seduces a married man and manipulates his sons in order to climb the social ladder. In *Wonderland*, the only survivor of a family massacre, Jesse, rebels against his adoptive father, and later marries the daughter of a prominent physician to gain professional prestige. The characters of Oates playfully pursue their desires while encountering cruelty on their way, yet Jesse manages to steady the course of his life.

In Oates' Quartet, scepticism is directed against the American middle-class ideology of the 1950s that is rooted in traditional morality. Nevertheless, both Carroll and Oates portray the conventional normative value system that is put into question by Nietzsche after the death of God and its substitute, uncertain chaos. The consequent void is open to the plurality of singularities, yet both authors portray the unreliable nature of disorder that rises and how their protagonists navigate themselves through the chaos.

Kaufmann's student, Alexander Nehamas, discusses Nietzsche's advice to live life as literature, seeing the world as art and characters and their relationships as the fictional

[112] Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, p. 173.

constructions that require textual interpretation.[113] In this sense, Carroll retains Alice's playfulness in a fantastical setting, however, Oates experiments with the externalisation of the internal symbolic games and sets fictional singularities of her characters in conventional life. The aspect of art is highly valued by Oates' protagonists in all four Wonderland texts. In *A Garden of Earthly Delights,* Clara Walpole emphasises the healing nature of art in her life.[114] In *Expensive People*, Richard Everett decides to write a memoir to free himself from his oppressive environment. In *Them*, the character of Maureen Wendall uses a creative writing course to set her life back on track and gain a new direction. In *Wonderland*, it is the creative letter writing of young Shelley Vogel that sets her father, Jesse Vogel, on a path towards the powerful affirmation of his personality.

Oates' protagonists are caught up in an identity game, one in which they seek the validation of their pursued identity. Apart from *Expensive People*, The Wonderland Quartet deals with identity re-invention in terms of economic and social progression. While the characters' circumstances vary, the techniques they use to fulfil their chosen destiny correspond to postmodern readings of Nietzsche. All characters simulate their own rules and reject authoritative figures. The characters pursue self-fictions that are morally unconditioned, and social limits are subject to change as a result of personal enquiry. It is their creativity that formulates the process to answer the riddle of their life. However, in her last text, the model of postmodern Nietzsche transfers into Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche.

In *Wonderland,* Jesse attempts to organise the chaos in his life. In this context, the protagonist is in contrast with the characters from the first three texts. It is also in *Wonderland* where Oates' imagery alludes to Carroll's texts in terms of changing physical proportions when questioning one's own identity. I base my argument on the scholarship of Ellen G.

[113] Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).
[114] Joyce Carol Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), p. 208.

Friedman and Joanne V. Creighton, who examine the different sizes of the protagonists in both texts. It is the philosophical interplay of the postmodern view that predominately unites Oates' first three books of the Quartet with Carroll's canon.

The textual adaptation of postmodern philosophy emphasises the valorisation of rejection of all authority after the death of God, plurality of opinions and moral decentralisation. The environment in Carroll's Wonderland and *Through the Looking Glass* is filled with chaos that suppresses violence, and the blurred lines between sense and nonsense results in Alice's playfulness. Therefore, the permissiveness of Carroll's setting allows for smoother progress than that experienced in the repressive decades after the 1950s. Oates maximises the harsh reality of a traditional setting through the images of terror and aestheticises violence in her narratives. Liberating ideas of Nietzsche are put to trial by economically marginalised protagonists who are preconditioned to failure in the stereotyped culture. Only in Oates' last text, *Wonderland*, does protagonist Jesse conquer the chaos. Thus, Oates moves from cynicism to a happy ending, one that celebrates human life and unending fortuity.

The Interest of Oates in Lewis Carroll's Alice

Confirming the influence of Nietzsche and Carroll on Oates, the latter calls attention to Carroll's imagery, which inspired her during childhood. Naming her Quartet and its fourth text after *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Oates acknowledges the significance of the term that she uses for her texts. In an interview, she says about Carroll's text:

> The admixture of the real and the surreal; the sense of normality shading into nightmare and back again; a strong female protagonist; bizarre, comic, threatening, mysterious figures – these are all elements in my own writing. It can't be a coincidence that one of my early novels is titled, *Wonderland.*[115]

[115] Joyce Carol Oates and Julie Vadnal, "Joyce Carol Oates on the Enduring Influence of *Alice In Wonderland*", 4 February 2010, *Elle,* ,< https://www.elle.com/culture/movies-tv/news/a3498/joyce-carol-oates-on-the-enduring-influence-of-alice-in-wonderland-4680/ > [accessed 19 April 2019].

Oates voices unrepresentable aspects of self and reality, and dramatises the metaphysical query. The author's intentional choice of the decades for her Wonderland Quartet place the characters in the setting of post-war ideologies that suffocate them in contrast to the concept of permissive chaos. Like Alice, who according to Beer represents "infinite readiness", Oates' morally ambiguous characters blur the borders between reality and fiction through their creative approach towards identity re-invention in her narratives and the author portrays their steadfast determination in arguing their way out of the predicaments.[116]

Stuart Mitchner calls Oates "Alice's American Cousin", pointing out the Oatesian version of Alice in Dallas Piotrowski's watercolour illustration that accompanies the former's article (Figure 2).[117] The original Tenniel sketch of Alice is black and white and shows an enlarged Alice with a long neck and bare hands. After finishing the cake, Alice says, "Now I am opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! {and exclaims with surprise} Curiouser and curiouser!"[118] The same phrase is echoed in Piotrowski's painting, in which Oates' head is placed on Alice's body. In her right hand she holds a pencil, and in her left she holds a book, titled *Wonderland*.

[116] Beer, p. 5.
[117] Stuart Mitchner, "Alice's American Cousin", *Princeton Magazine* (Princeton, NJ: Witherspoon Media Group, August 2011).
[118] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 20.

Figure 2. *The painting is from a series of Dallas Piotrowski's "Alice in Wonderland" paintings, which were exhibited in 2004 at Ellarslie, The Trenton City Museum.*

Piotrowski is a member of the Lewis Carroll Society of North America, an association to which Oates paid a visit to present her essay *Wonderlands* (2001). In the essay, Oates recalls the early influence of Carroll on her writing, and additionally explains the term 'wonderland' in Gothic terms. She relates the nightmarish articulation of the term to "the

phenomenon of the inverted wonderland – the child's wish turned inside-out, forever irretrievable".[119] Carroll's decision to change the original title of his work from *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* invites comment. The fictional layers in Wonderland complete the profound logic of Carroll's work. Beer argues that in his edited version, Carroll manages to address an unknown reader and thus extends his audience.[120] She says that in Carroll's Wonderland, "everything becomes possible and nothing is unlikely because all forms of being have presence and can argue".[121] By distancing the narrator from the text in the published version, Carroll allows the diverse characters to voice their own experiences.

Likewise, Oates detaches herself from the polyphonic voices of the characters who dominate her novels. Through the aspect of diversity and the dialectic of the images of sense and nonsense, the author establishes the currency of the postmodern antagonism that links literature with philosophy. About her employment of the term 'Wonderland', Oates states that it "refers to both America, as a region of wonders, and the human brain, as a region of wonders. And 'wonders' can be both dreams and nightmares".[122]

In the context of the 1960s, the American readership of Carroll's Alice texts favoured psychedelic images that support the cultural reception of returning to nature as a reaction to the urbanisation and the promotion of the suburban middle class. Documented by John Markoff in *What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry* (2005), the author established the link between the countercultural psychedelic culture of the American 1960s, social experimentation, and political protests with the reading of Alice texts that promote the dark aspects of bohemian sensibility.[123]

[119] Oates, "Wonderlands", p. 169.
[120] Beer, p. 4.
[121] Beer, p. 4.
[122] Joyce Carol Oates, *Wonderland* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), originally published in 1971, p. 482.
[123] John Markoff, *What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry* (New York, NY: Viking, 2005).

Consequent adaptations of Carroll's Alice that advance the image of a pipe-smoking Caterpillar allude to the psychedelic experiences that attracted the hippies' movements and countercultural expression of liberation in the United States. Reclaiming lost childhood and true images that became accessible through psychedelic experiences inspire new readership of Carroll's texts to view the original content through a psychedelic lens in music and art. While the British audience associates Carroll's texts with nostalgic childhood innocence, positivity, and dream states, the psychedelic aesthetics of the American readership prompt a preoccupation with the surreal perceptions of countercultural drug scenes that Oates depicts in the third part of her *Wonderland*.[124] In this text, Oates juxtaposes the childhood innocence of Shelley Vogel with her adolescent promiscuity and drug abuse.

Within the countercultural environment that became the touchstone of American social liberation, the complex representation of Wonderland by Oates engages with violent interplay and the horrors of aggressive human choices. Oates says:

> Nightmares not specifically identified with childhood are given memorable dramatic shape by Lewis Carroll in both of the *Alice* books.[125]

In the introduction to the Wonderland Quartet, Elaine Showalter comments on Oates' four narratives that share the "hallucinatory vision that Oates had highly valued in her favourite childhood book, *Alice in Wonderland*".[126] Showalter's conclusion of Oates' aesthetic vision in the Wonderland Quartet is relevant to the reception of Carroll's text in the 1960s, although it is not identical to the perception of Oates' first reading of the text in 1947.

At the age of nine, Oates was given the copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that was published by Grosset and Dunlap in 1946.[127] As a young reader, Oates was attracted to the heroine's adventures and absence of fear, with Alice becoming a lifelong role model

[124] Sophia Satchell-Baeza, "Carroll in the Psychedelic World", London: The Lewis Carroll Society, 26 April 2019.
[125] Oates, "Wonderlands", p. 159.
[126] Elaine Showalter, "Introduction: The Wonderland Quartet", p. xv.
[127] Joyce Carol Oates, *The Lost Landscape* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2015), pp. 41-43.

for her. Carroll's upper-class Victorian setting, complete with royal images, was particularly appealing to the young Oates, who grew up in an American farmland setting.[128]

In *The Lost Landscape* (2015), she acknowledges that her reading of the novel immediately triggered the desire to produce her own creative writing, but it was only decades later that she added intellectual rigour and hallucinatory visions to her initial fascination with Alice. This resulted in her choice to borrow Carroll's term 'Wonderland' for her fiction after 1970. Another significant influence occurred in the late 1950s when she read Nietzsche, describing her exposure to his theories as a life-changing experience during her undergraduate studies.[129]

The Nietzschean Heritage in Oates' Oeuvre

Oates' intellectual kinship with Nietzsche tends to be critically overlooked, yet it permeates her characters' existential inquiries and process of self-development. During an interview with Oates in London, on the occasion of the publication of her nineteenth novel *American Appetites* (1989), her interlocutor Hermione Lee attempted to elaborate on the Nietzschean quotation in Oates' novel *Marya: A Life* (1986), in which a female survivor undergoes a multitude of tragedies.[130] The protagonist notes Nietzsche's 89th aphorism from his *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886): "terrible experiences give one cause to speculate whether the one who experiences them may not be something terrible".[131] The same cross-reference is formerly mentioned by John Updike in his essay in *The New Yorker* on Oates' scholarship, *What You Deserve Is What You Get* (1987).[132] In his review, Updike additionally relates Nietzsche's corresponding quotation to Oates' protagonist Enid Maria in Oates' text *You Must Remember*

[128] Oates, *The Lost Landscape*, pp. 41-43.
[129] Joyce Carol Oates, *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates 1973-1982*, edited by Greg Johnson (New York, NY: Harpers Collins Publishers, 2007), p. 97.
[130] Joyce Carol Oates and Hermoine Lee, *Writers Talk Series*, dir. by ICA (The Roland Collection, 1989) [Video].
[131] Joyce Carol Oates. *Marya: A Life.* (New York, NY: E.P Dutton, 1986), p. 226.
[132] John Updike, "What You Deserve is What You Get", *The New Yorker,* 1987 Issue (28 December 1987), p. 119.

This (1987).[133] Updike acknowledges "a saying of Nietzsche's that appears in Miss Oates' *Marya* a recent book of linked short stories that presents, as it were, the academic, intellectually achieving aspect of Enid".[134] Nietzsche's aphorisms permeate Oates' oeuvre, which confirms the linkage between the aesthetics and the intellectual interplay in her creative writing. *You Must Remember This* is set in the backdrop of the 1950s and dramatises the clash of incest and illegal abortion against the decade's conservatism.[135] Oates' characters display intellectual insights and confront them with their distressing life situations. Through the dramatisation of the metaphysical conflict, the author employs the aesthetics of human transgressions.

Another text where the same aphorism of Nietzsche is cross-referenced is Oates' *Soul/Mate* (1989). The narrative, written under Oates' pseudonym Rosamond Smith, depicts the character of Dorothea Deverell who is victimised by a serial killer. In the text, the protagonist remembers the aphorism but is not able to recall the name of the philosopher, only that he must be German.[136] Oates highlights the transatlantic influence that stimulates Dorothea's existential pursuit. Thus, the narrator provides a space for alternative voices in the texts, one that emphasises the heterogeneity of the thought and which interferes with the national idealisation of the American soul.

In her London interview, Oates demonstrates insightful knowledge of Nietzsche's work and challenges the aspect of unconsciously internalised self-hatred that leads to the external projection. Additionally, she paraphrases Nietzsche's proclamation from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1891),[137] that "when you go to a woman, do not forget your whip".[138] Oates does not relate herself to feminist movements, yet she repeatedly voices the concerns

[133] John Updike, "What You Deserve is What You Get", *The New Yorker,* 1987 Issue (28 December 1987), p. 153.
[134] Updike, p. 119.
[135] Joyce Carol Oates. *You Must Remember This* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 1987).
[136] Rosamond Smith, *Soul/Mate* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, 1989), p. 21.
[137] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche, t*ranslated and edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1982), originally published in 1954, p. 179.
[138] ICA.

of women throughout American history. Therefore, she consequently comments on the two aphorisms of Nietzsche, saying "we can forgive him because he said so many other wonderful things".[139] Oates reiterated her excuse of Nietzsche in a recent interview, which is annexed to this thesis.

In the introduction to *The Portable Nietzsche,* Kaufmann says that "He [Nietzsche] challenges the reader not so much to agree or disagree as to grow".[140] In her interview correspondence, Oates articulates a comparable view to Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche, reiterating "even if one disagrees with Nietzsche, one can be under his influence".[141] The sentiment of improvement from victimisation is what Oates continually depicts in her canon. By dramatisation of the traumatic subject matters, the author emphasises the creative progress of re-invention, release from destructive character patterns, and queries the forms of triumphant transformation.

That Nietzsche's ideas underpin Oates' writings, either deliberately or unconsciously, is demonstrable. For instance, Brenda Daly elaborates on the quotations of Nietzsche that Oates uses in her texts. In her essay, "The Art of Democracy: Photography in the Novels of Joyce Carol Oates/Rosamond Smith" (2006), Daly comments on Oates' technique of intertextuality and intermediality.[142] In Daly's notes, the author finds a common feature of two of Oates' novels: *With Shuddering Fall* (1964), which is Oates' first novel, and Oates' narrative *The Barrens* (2001). Both texts contain a different epigraph of Nietzsche on the subject of love. Nietzsche's 153rd aphorism from *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), "what is done out of love always takes place beyond good and evil",[143] prefaces *With Shuddering Fall,* and his 175th aphorism, "one loves ultimately one's desires, not the thing desired",[144] opens

[139] ICA.
[140] Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1982), originally published in 1954, p. 19.
[141] Joyce Carol Oates, "RE: The Influence of Nietzsche on JCO", Correspondence with the author, October-November 2017.
[142] Brenda Daly, "The Art of Democracy: Photography in the Novels of Joyce Carol Oates/Rosamond Smith", *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (2006), pp. 457–477.
[143] Joyce Carol Oates, *With Shuddering Fall* (New York, NY: The Vanguard Press, 1964).
[144] Joyce Carol Oates, *The Barrens* (New York, NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2002).

The Barrens. Furthermore, Daly briefly addresses the character Professor Byron Savage's paraphrase of Nietzsche in Oates' book *Because It is Bitter, and Because It is My Heart* (1990).[145] The epigraphic allusion to Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* is additionally echoed in the film *Vengeance: A Love Story* (2017), which is based on Oates' narrative *Rape: A Love Story* (2003) where the author returns to the idea of female victimisation. However, in this case it is the screenplay writer John Mankiewicz rather than Oates who adds a tagline that says, "Beyond Good and Evil there is Justice".[146]

The influence of Nietzsche's thoughts in Oates' early short story collection *Upon the Sweeping Flood* (1966), which precedes her Quartet, is documented by her biographer Greg Johnson. In his article "*Out of Eden: Oates's Upon the Sweeping Flood*" (1994), Johnson discusses the way in which the title corresponds with the Nietzschean sentiment in Oates' recurring theme of identity search and self-assertion, drift from institutionalised religion, and destructive exploitation for personal advancement.[147] Therefore, Johnson asserts, "at this stage of her career, Oates shows most of her characters in defeat".[148] The protagonists in *Upon the Sweeping Flood* and in the following first three texts of the Quartet recall the forfeited characters who affirm themselves by exploitative power. The sense of tragedy in Oates' earlier works is additionally explored by Alice Conkright Martin in her dissertation 'Toward a Higher Consciousness: A Study of the Novels of Joyce Carol Oates' (1974).[149] In this study, Martin links both Oates' first novel, *With Shuddering Fall* (1964), and the Quartet with the influence of Yeats and Nietzsche. Oates also links her second novel *A Garden of Earthly Delights* to her first novel *With Shuddering Fall*.[150]

[145] Daly, p. 463.
[146] Joyce Carol Oates, *Vengeance: A Love Story*, dir. by Johnny Martin (FilmRise, 2017) [Motion Picture]
[147] Greg Johnson, "Out of Eden: Oates's *Upon the Sweeping Flood*", *The Midwest Quarterly*, Vol. 35 (Summer 1994), p. 436.
[148] Johnson, "Out of Eden: Oates's *Upon the Sweeping Flood*", p. 449.
[149] Alice Conkright Martin, 'Toward a Higher Consciousness: A Study of the Novels of Joyce Carol Oates' (DeKalb, IL: Northern University Illinois, 1974).
[150] Joyce Carol Oates, "Afterword" in *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2003), originally published in 1967, p. 400.

Oates' Intellectual Link to Kaufmann's Nietzsche

Kaufmann's *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* was published at Princeton University, where his research on Nietzsche culminated. In 1978, two years before Kaufmann's sudden death while still a member of the Princeton Philosophy department, Oates joined the faculty of the Princeton Creative Writing Program.[151] Personal correspondence between Oates and Kaufmann, stored in Oates' Syracuse archives in upstate New York, attests to the pair's friendship and casual luncheons. In the annexed interview with Oates, she confirms communal dinner arrangements between Kaufmann and his wife, as well as Oates' first husband, Raymond J. Smith. Oates employs a brief humorous description of Kaufmann in her short story *Princeton Idyll* (2009).[152]

Moreover, Oates' "enduring interest in philosophy" led her to audit "courses taught by her friend Walter Kaufmann" at Princeton.[153] In her interview that is annexed to this thesis, Oates confirms that the subject of these classes was Nietzsche, and that the reading included Kaufmann's *Existentialism* anthology and his other books. Her first contact with Kaufmann's Nietzsche occurred during her undergraduate studies in the late 1950s; it is the late 1970s when she enters into discussion with Kaufmann at Princeton.

Oates read Kaufmann's poetry while at Princeton, and it was her own text that made Kaufmann "see more clearly that a passionate interest in the individual has been a, if not the, central motive in {his} work".[154] Oates sympathises with the elaboration of critical questioning in both authors' oeuvre, that of Nietzsche and Kaufmann. I do not have space to elaborate on the entire subject matter of Kaufmann's oeuvre in this thesis, yet I will point out

[151] Johnson, *Invisible Writer: A Biography of Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 277.
[152] Joyce Carol Oates, "Princeton Idyll" in *Dear Husband* (New York, NY: Ecco Press, 2009), pp. 92, 101.
[153] Joshua Pederson, ed., "'You Are Crucified Too': Joyce Carol Oates, Atonement, and Human Behaviour", in *The Forsaken Son: Child Murderer and Atonement in Modern American Fiction* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016), p. 91.
[154] Walter Arnold Kaufmann, '*Walter A. Kaufmann's Correspondence with Joyce Carol Oates'* (Princeton, NJ, 1980), Walter A. Kaufmann Collection, available via Joyce Carol Oates Papers at Syracuse University Library.

the three keywords that Corngold uniquely associates with Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche, the impact of which can be observed in Oates' *Wonderland*.

First, Kaufmann's rehabilitation of Nietzsche is responsible for the *coherence* of the reading of Nietzsche.[155] Second, Kaufmann postulates the aesthetic value of *self-perfection*, which differs from conquering others.[156] Emphasising self-mastery over external violence is, according to Kaufmann, a faithful reflection of Nietzsche. The last important characteristic of Kaufmann's Nietzsche in cultivating the self, identified by Stanley Corngold, is *organisation*. According to Corngold, it is the *organisation of chaos* that needs to be established for internal balance and unity to be achieved, and this is central to Kaufmann's Nietzsche.[157]

The impact of Oates' initial encounter with Nietzsche, and apparently with many other intellectuals, begun during her undergraduate minor in Philosophy at Syracuse University two decades earlier.[158] In her autobiography *Journal of Joyce Carol Oates 1973-1982* (2007), Oates describes the vivid effect of Nietzsche's thoughts on herself in the late 1950s as "the process of … changing. To read Nietzsche and become a different person, in part, in a mere hour".[159] It was the same decade when Oates' undergraduate studies were commencing, and therefore, the model of Nietzsche she was exposed to would have been Kaufmann's inheritance.

Set parallel to the decades of the abundant intellectual recognition of Kaufmann's Nietzsche, and its consequent interpretations, Oates' underprivileged protagonists experiment with the idea of personal re-invention to improve themselves. It is the post-war climate of harsh Cold War ideologies that Oates depicts in her fiction, which welcomes

[155] Stanley Corngold, *Walter Kaufmann: Philosopher, Humanist, Heretic (*Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 15.
[156] Corngold, p. 23.
[157] Corngold, pp. 35-36.
[158] Updike, p. 119.
[159] Oates, *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates 1973-1982,* p. 97.

Kaufmann's Nietzsche as a "liberating thinker".[160] Depicting the concept of individual re-invention in Oates' narratives, the author asserts that defeat is only temporary because each failure is a preparation for later success. The author says, "we are all cats with nine lives or even more. We must rejoice in our elusive catness".[161] She celebrates the courage to re-create and highlights the potential to progress from every situation.

In 1961, Oates majored in English literature, which led to a career in writing. However, her fascination with Nietzsche did not stop during this time. Before coming to Princeton, both Oates and her husband Raymond taught in the English Department at the University of Windsor. In *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates 1973-1982* (2007), she mentions covering Nietzsche in her literary lectures at Windsor.[162] Later she reiterates, "at the University of Windsor, I taught *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* A most riveting text!"[163] Furthermore, a sequence on Nietzsche opens Oates' book review of Kasia Boddy's *Boxing: A Cultural History* (2008). In this text, Oates bridges the theme of boxing, which she fictionalises in *On Boxing* (1987), with Kaufmann's interpretation of Nietzsche's artist, who is "*only as engaged in a personal fight*".[164]

Oates elaborates on the distinction made by Kaufmann's Nietzsche between a personal contest and its antidote, which is, according to Kaufmann, a "pre-Homer abyss of a terrifying savagery of hatred and the lust to annihilate".[165] Thus, quoting Kaufmann's *The Portable Nietzsche* (1954), Oates accords Kaufmann's Nietzsche's rejection of cruelty as being misleadingly ascribed to Nietzsche's canon and his concept of will to power and personal re-invention.[166]

---

[160] Ratner-Rosenhagen, p. 233.
[161] Joyce Carol Oates and Alan Scherstuhl, "Joyce Carol Oates: Failure is Just Preparation", 22 January 2019, *Guernica*, < https://www.guernicamag.com/joyce-carol-oates-failure-is-just-preparation/> [accessed 10 May 2019].
[162] Oates, *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates 1973-1982*, p. 170.
[163] Oates, "RE: The Influence of Nietzsche on JCO".
[164] Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 37, emphasis original.
[165] Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 38.
[166] Joyce Oates Carol, "The Mystery of the Ring", 29 May 2008, *The New York Review of Books,*<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/05/29/the-mystery-of-the-ring/ >[accessed 12 July 2018], pp. 1-2.

In Kaufmann's words, Nietzsche is the "best bridge between positivism and existentialism".[167] Nevertheless, Kaufmann's positive spin on the scholarly interpretation of Nietzsche consequently became the subject of manifold contestations. Oates witnessed the intellectual interplay of Kaufmann's Nietzsche within the broad academic and societal experiments.[168] It is precisely the interplay of Kaufmann's Nietzsche on the grounds of the changing setting of materialistic obsessions in the 1950s, of the rise of the counterculture of the 1960s, and of the 'Do your own thing' imperative of its postmodern sensitivity, that Oates' Wonderland Quartet depicts.[169] Oates' purpose in experimenting with the depiction of the compelling personal re-invention, along with its tragic alternatives, is aesthetic. In her textualisation of the decade's concerns, the first three novels of Oates' Wonderland Quartet correspond to Nietzsche's thoughts through the postmodern lenses of Kaufmann's successors. It is in her *Wonderland,* however, where the link to Kaufmann's Nietzsche is used with a particular emphasis.

> Greg Johnson argues about the intellectual link between Oates and Nietzsche:
>
> > Oates insists, again with Nietzsche, that turbulent conflict can be tragically destructive or an occasion of personal growth, depending on the individual's spiritual readiness and strength of will.[170]

To fictionalise an infinite notion of power and the existential tension in the process of self-overcoming, Oates includes societal experiments of the decades that claim Nietzsche's inheritance. However, as Ratner-Rosenhagen and the contemporary scholar Stanley Corngold demonstrate, Kaufmann's understanding of Nietzsche, which highlights the latter's particular non-violent means, had a tremendous impact on the ensuing cultural crises in post-war America.[171] Nevertheless, whether cultural altruism is merely a utopian vision or a

[167] Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 18.
[168] Ratner-Rosenhagen, p. 249.
[169] John Harmon McElroy, *Divided We Stand: The Rejection of American Culture Since the 1960s* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 25.
[170] Johnson, "Out of Eden: Oates's *Upon the Sweeping Flood*", pp. 448-449.
[171] Stanley Corngold, *Walter Kaufmann: Philosopher, Humanist, Heretic. An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

reachable potential for all, either according to Nietzsche's or Oates' scholarship, challenges future critics' projects.

Chapter One

Friedrich Nietzsche and the Death of God

Introduction

The concept of the death of God and the consequent loss of fundamental values remains Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844 – 1900) principal philosophical and aesthetic idea, and one that has had a broad impact, not only on philosophy but on intellectual and cultural discourse more widely. Nietzsche's work has attracted the attention of numerous scholars and artists from the nineteenth century to the present. The historical reception of Nietzsche elucidates the development of contemporary theories that identify their intellectual roots with the ideas of Nietzsche.

In this thesis, I will examine two appropriations of Nietzsche's work: that of Walter Kaufmann, and the later and broadly 'postmodern' reading of Nietzsche. I will focus in particular on the theme of the death of God and its consequences in these two contrasting interpretations. The aim is not to present my own evaluation of Nietzsche but to report on aspects of the critical reception of his work in the mid - and late - twentieth century which were to influence his reception more broadly. From this platform, I will go on to address the development of Joyce Carol Oates' protagonists in her Wonderland Quartet, from a Nietzschean perspective which both reflects her own exposure to Nietzsche and also certain trends in the general culture of the United States in the 1960s.

The two strands in the reception of Nietzsche I identify had a significant impact on American culture in the 1960s and Kaufmann in particular had a significant influence on Oates herself. I use this philosophical-cultural background to analyse Oates' aesthetic modelling of the sequences of the death of God in the context of the period. To shed more

light on the contemporary perspective of the historical reception of Nietzsche, I will also examine the analysis proposed by a contemporary scholar, Ken Gemes. Gemes presents a more recent philosophical view of Nietzsche as he examines the position of Nietzsche in postmodernism, and also reflects on Kaufmann's reading in a manner which is useful for the present inquiry.

The Reception of Nietzsche in Europe before Kaufmann

To examine the context of Nietzsche's work, let me start with his early reception, essential as it is for any analysis of his later reception. In 1869, Nietzsche was offered the position of Professor *extraordinarius* of classical philology at the University of Basel and promoted to a full professorship the following year.[1] Despite the deteriorating health condition which motivated his resignation from his academic duties in 1879, Nietzsche remained productive and published new work every year for the next ten years.[2] His major publications in chronological order commence with *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872); the first two parts of *Untimely Meditations* (1873), followed by the third essay in 1874 and the fourth part in 1876; *Human, All-Too-Human* (1878); *The Gay Science* (1882); the first and second part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), followed by the third part in 1884, and the last part in 1885; *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886); and *Toward a Genealogy of Morals* (1887).[3]

Nietzsche remained intellectually engaged after this, as far as his health allowed, and produced updated editions of his published texts with new prefaces. In his recent study, *European Intellectual History from Rosseau to Nietzsche* (2014), Frank M. Turner argues that it was Danish scholar George Brandes who initiated the process by which the reputation

[1] Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1954), p. 20.
[2] Kaufmann, The *Portable Nietzsche*, p. 21.
[3] Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 20-23.

of Nietzsche was to spread worldwide during his lifetime.[4] In 1888, Brandes lectured on Nietzsche in Copenhagen, the same year that *The Wagner Case* (1888) was published and while *Twilight of Idols* (1889) and *Ecce Homo* (1908) were being written by Nietzsche. However, the texts of Nietzsche earned a significant recognition posthumously.

In 1889, Nietzsche collapsed into the insanity that lasted until his death in 1900. While Nietzsche was mentally incapacitated, his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche managed her brother's manuscripts. She delayed the publication of *Ecce Homo* until 1908, and edited the earlier notes of Nietzsche in *The Will to Power* (1901).[5] Matthew Edward Harris says:

> Appropriated by the Nazis through the influence of his sister, Nietzsche's thought had fallen somewhat into disrepute by the end of World War Two.[6]

Not in editorial charge himself, the early reputation of Nietzsche remained open to the false accusation of proto-Nazism that caused a rejection of his work and ideas among philosophers and scholars during World War II.

The Reception of Nietzsche in France

The French translations of his work were not as successful during his lifetime as Nietzsche had hoped.[7] Marie Baumgartner worked on two projects of translating Nietzsche into French, but only her French translation of *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* (1876) was published, in 1877. The French translation of *The Case of Wagner* by Robert Dreyfus and Daniel Halévy was published in 1892, followed by the reliable series of edited translations and articles on Nietzsche for *Mercure de France* by Henri Albert that first appeared in 1893.[8] The French

[4] Frank M. Turner, *European Intellectual History from Rosseau to Nietzsche*, edited by Richard A. Lofthouse (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 245.
[5] Turner, p. 246.
[6] Matthew Edward Harris, "The Reception of Nietzsche's Announcement of the 'Death of God' in Twentieth-century Theorising Concerning the Divine", *The Heythrop Journal*, 2018: Wiley & Sons Ltd, pp. 148-162, p. 151.
[7] Duncan Large, "Nietzsche and/in/on Translation", *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1, Special Issue from The North American Nietzsche Society (Spring 2012), pp. 57-67, p. 63.
[8] Large, p. 63.

academic who specialised in German literature, Henri Lichtenberger (1864 - 1941), examined the texts of Nietzsche for the first time in 1899, in *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Summary of his Life and his Teachings*.[9] Other titles of Lichtenberger on Nietzsche include *The Gospel of Superman: The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1910), and the author mentioned Nietzsche in *Germany and its Evolution in Modern Times* (1913) that was translated into English by A. M. Ludovici.[10]

What was recognised as the "second French moment of Nietzsche" in France, occurred in the 1930s and 1940s and was characterised by the reading of Nietzsche by Georges Bataille (1897 - 1962).[11] Bataille's interest in Nietzsche began in 1925. In 1936, Bataille founded a secret society with journal publications that promoted "Nietzschean" anti-Christian ideas.[12] In parallel with Kaufmann in the United States, it was Bataille who depoliticized Nietzsche after World War II in France. The pivotal work by Bataille was *On Nietzsche* (1945) followed by further texts on Nietzsche. In the later publications, Bataille predominantly engages with the concept of sovereignty to elucidate Nietzsche's will to power, discusses morality, and challenges notions of community and communism in light of his reading of Nietzsche.[13]

Though Bataille criticised Nietzsche, he nevertheless constantly returned to him. Agreeing with Nietzsche, Bataille rejected all dogma, and criticised Christian hypocrisy.[14] However, Bataille's Nietzsche insists on the dualistic striving between good and evil, rather than thriving beyond.[15] Furthermore, Bataille saw sin and guilt as a necessary condition that precedes redemption.[16] His significant disagreement with Nietzsche translated in Bataille's

[9] Lucio Angelo Privitello, "Josiah Royce on Nietzsche's Couch", *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society*, Vol 52, No 2 (2016), pp. 179-200, p. 184.
[10] Privitello, p. 184.
[11] Yue Zhuo, "Bataille's Nietzsche", in *Interpreting Nietzsche: Reception and Influence*, edited by Ashely Woodward (London: Bloomsburry Publishing, 2011), p. 37.
[12] Zhuo, p. 37.
[13] Zhuo, pp. 41-45.
[14] William Pawlett, *Georges Bataille: The Sacred and Society* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), p. 124.
[15] Pawlett, p. 120.
[16] Pawlett, p. 122.

reading of morality. Bataille critiqued *The Genealogy of Morals* by Nietzsche in his early work and excised the text from his *On Nietzsche*.[17] Contradicting Nietzsche's repudiation of guilt and resentment, Bataille requires turning violence inward by offering both self-sacrifice and the sacrifice of God.[18] According to Bataille, a consequent ecstasy proceeds, however, not by willing, only by chance.[19]

The Chance is celebrated in Bataille's reading of Nietzsche, and fortuity found its currency in the concept of decentralised chaos by the postmodern critics in the following decades. Disengaging from the theological pondering of Bataille, however, postmodern readings of Nietzsche consider fortuity in the cultural context after the death of God. The work of Bataille was succeeded by the "third French moment of Nietzsche", marked by The Royaumont Conference on Nietzsche that took place in July 1964.[20] This period was recognised more notably than its forerunner by the anglophone audience. It was represented by Michel Foucault (1926 - 1984) and Gilles Deleuze (1925 - 1995), among others, whose critical accounts have been frequently referenced in deciphering the concepts of post-structuralist and postmodern thought worldwide.

Particularly in *The Logic of Sense* (1969) that followed his *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962), Deleuze elaborated on the concept of chance in the context of the postmodern games that he called "an ideal game".[21] In this text, Deleuze referenced Nietzsche to examine the logic in the Alice texts by Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871). Deleuze meant by the ideal game the postmodern solution of the philosophical conflict of the death of God. In this text, the author explains a psychological process of affirming fortuitous thoughts in replacement for cognitive reasoning. To define an ideal game, Deleuze advocates for *new principles* which

[17] Pawlett, p. 122.
[18] Pawlett, p. 122.
[19] Pawlett, p. 124.
[20] Zhuo, p. 37.
[21] Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), p. 62.

replace the pre-existing moral order, and which need to be *imagined*.[22] According to Deleuze, it is possible only in thought by the affirmation of chance.[23]

The Reception of Nietzsche in Germany

In his native Germany, the reception of Nietzsche was marked by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 - 1911) who discussed Nietzsche in the cultural context.[24] The Austrian philosopher, Alois Riehl, addressed Nietzsche in *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Artist and the Thinker* (1897). An attempt to systematise the works of Nietzsche was conducted by the German philosopher Hans Vaihinger. However, his *Nietzsche als Philosoph* (1902) remained subject to scholarly critique for inaccuracies with the original texts of Nietzsche. The claim was indicated, for instance, in the review of *Nietzsche als Philosoph* by the American philosopher Grace Neal Dolson in *The Philosophical Review* in November 1902.[25]

In the 1930s and 1940s, Martin Heidegger included Nietzsche in his academic lectures, and the impact of Nietzsche on the theoretical thought and metaphysics of Heidegger remains subject to scholarly discussions.[26] Summarising his influential lectures in an essay "Nietzsche's Word: God is dead" (1943), Heidegger prioritised the posthumously published *The Will to Power* (1901) over the publications of Nietzsche that Heidegger also attended to.[27] Elaborating on the ideas of Nietzsche, Heidegger compared Nietzsche to the German poet and philosopher Friedrich Hölderlin (1770 - 1843) in terms of their poetic expressions in the philosophical texts.[28]

[22] Deleuze, p. 62, emphasis added.
[23] Deleuze, p. 63.
[24] Sean Ryan, "Heidegger's Nietzsche", in *Interpreting Nietzsche: Reception and Influence*, edited by Ashely Woodward (London: Bloomsburry Publishing, 2011), p. 15.
[25] Privitello, p. 184.
[26] Ryan, p. 16.
[27] Ryan, p. 18.
[28] Ryan, p. 18.

Heidegger was praised for the incorporation of Nietzsche into philosophy. However, he received a mixed response for his enthusiastic speech as a Rektor at Freiburg shortly after Hitler came to power.[29] Sean Ryan argues about the sequencing of Heidegger's work on Nietzsche:

> After the abandonment of the course on Nietzsche and Hölderlin late in 1944, and Heidegger's post-war suspension from teaching by the French deNazification committee, he resumes lecturing in 1951, and once again returns to his interpretation of Nietzsche, though in a mood markedly different from that of ten years earlier.[30]

Harris confirms the argument of Ryan and highlights the scholarship of Kaufmann in Nietzsche studies:

> Serious attention had been afforded to Nietzsche's legacy by thinkers such as Martin Heidegger […] {and} Karl Jaspers, although Heidegger, too, had been tainted to some extent due to his membership of the Nazi party. […] However, Walter Kaufmann spearheaded efforts by philosophers to rehabilitate and de-Nazify Nietzsche's thought in the 1950s.[31]

A refined return to Nietzsche by Heidegger in Germany occurred in 1951, a year after Kaufmann's first publication appeared in the United States. Heidegger's Nietzsche reconciles the eternal return both, as a "psychological and cosmological concept".[32] Seeing it as a circle, Heidegger emphasises the *right* way to enter it.[33] According to Heidegger, the overman enters the circle willingly and thoughtfully while conforming the cycle of coming to be and passing away. However, Heidegger leaves the room for *nothingness* in being that contradicts the ontological argument of Nietzsche about the world that *is* in its becoming.[34]

In contrast to the complete rejection of the true world by subsequent postmodern thinkers, Heidegger elaborates on three conceptions of truth in his reading of Nietzsche. Heidegger recognises a necessary truth as an error (1), an arbitrary truth that demonstrates as

[29] Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, edited by W.A.Kaufmann (New York, NY: New American Library, 1975), p. 34.
[30] Ryan, p. 23.
[31] Harris, p. 151.
[32] Ryan, p. 19.
[33] Ryan, p. 19.
[34] Ryan, p. 20.

an artistic creation (2), and the third is called a subjective truth as justice (3). In this context, however, Heidegger, conceptualised justice metaphysically.[35] The intense study of Nietzsche by Heidegger became a life-long matter, and before his passing in 1976, Heidegger confessed to his former student Hans-Georg Gadamer that Nietzsche "destroyed" him.[36] Highly influential, nevertheless ambivalent, elaborations on Nietzsche by Heidegger, have been contested by academics worldwide.

A student of Heidegger, Karl Löwith, published *From Hegel to Nietzsche* (1941). The text represents a substantial account of nineteenth-century German philosophy, and contributed to the reception of Nietzsche before Kaufmann. In his reading of Nietzsche, Löwith demonstrated that it is not Nietzsche who killed God. According to Löwith, Nietzsche merely declared the murder of God that had preceded the announcement.[37] In the time of social transformation that challenged Christian values, Löwith emphasised the "honest atheism" of Nietzsche.[38] Löwith's Nietzsche celebrates the natural world, which is presented as accidental and in which man liberates himself from guilt and duty. Löwith further advocates for self-redemption that substitutes God's sovereignty and that is achieved by "pride and sagacity", rather than by moral order.[39]

The German-Swiss psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) referenced Nietzsche and is frequently mentioned as a leading voice of existentialism next to Heidegger, Søren Kierkegaard, and Jean-Paul Sartre. In his essay "On My Philosophy" (1941), Jaspers said that "My *Nietzsche* was to be an introduction to the shaking up of thought from which Existenz philosophy must spring".[40] The essay was published for the first time in English in

[35] Ryan, pp. 20-21.
[36] Ryan, p. 14.
[37] J. Harvey Lomax, "Löwith's Nietzsche", in *Interpreting Nietzsche: Reception and Influence*, edited by Ashely Woodward (London: Bloomsburry Publishing, 2011), p. 27.
[38] Lomax, p. 27.
[39] Lomax, p. 28.
[40] Karl Jaspers, "On my Philosophy", in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, edited by Walter A. Kaufmann, translated by Felix Kaufmann (New York, NY: New American Library, 1975), p. 157.

Kaufmann's anthology *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956). In his anthology, Kaufmann concluded about the reading of Nietzsche by Jaspers and Heidegger:

> In Heidegger's eyes, Jaspers is as inconclusive as his Nietzsche, philosophizing endlessly without ever evolving a philosophy; to Jaspers, in turn, it seems that Heidegger who began by using terms that look existential and who once spoke with an existential pathos is really a metaphysician like his Nietzsche.[41]

Like many others, both Jaspers and Heidegger confirmed the legacy of Nietzsche in their work, however, their elaborate readings of Nietzsche reached distinctive articulations.[42] Heidegger called Nietzsche the *last* of the metaphysician, but Kaufmann considered Nietzsche the *first* in the myriad of theories.[43] According to Kaufmann, what Jaspers translated into his *Existenzphilosophie,* Heidegger developed into his metaphysics and its overcoming.[44] Jaspers claimed to establish the unity of Nietzsche's thoughts, however, Kaufmann advanced criticism against Jaspers' Nietzsche. Kaufmann asserted:

> First, Jaspers admittedly discounts Nietzsche's philosophy as opposed to his 'philosophizing'; he refuses to take seriously superman and recurrence, will to power and sublimation, or any other definite concept. [45]

While Dilthey considered Nietzsche a "psychologist, moralist, and cultural critic", Heidegger escalated the ideas of Nietzsche in the philosophical reasoning of metaphysics.[46] Heidegger's Nietzsche orders the chaos by truth and knowledge; however, Heidegger's Zarathustra stays undecided in his extended writings on Nietzsche that end in ambivalence.[47] There is more clarity in Kaufmann's Zarathustra who is associated with joy, "in which he {Nietzsche} had composed it".[48] Challenging Heidegger's claims in his later texts, Löwith

[41] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 34.
[42] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 34.
[43] David Rathbone, "Kaufmann's Nietzsche", in *Interpreting Nietzsche: Reception and Influence*, edited by Ashely Woodward (London: Bloomsburry Publishing, 2011), p. 57.
[44] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 34.
[45] Walter Arnold Kaufmann, "Jasper's Relation to Nietzsche", in *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, ed. by Paul Arthur Schilpp, First edition (New York, NY: Tudor Publishing Company, 1957), p. 431.
[46] Ryan, p. 14.
[47] Ryan, pp. 20-23.
[48] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 65.

engaged with the doctrine of eternal recurrence and nihilism.[49] For Löwith, Nietzsche's superman achieves autonomy by substituting obedience to God with pride. For Kaufmann, Nietzsche calls for the integrity of the character that is achieved by non-violent harmony of the Apollonian and Dionysian element.

The Reception of Nietzsche in the United States before W. A. Kaufmann

Michael Bell discussed the impact of the so-called "Anglophone Nietzscheanism" in his article "Nietzscheanism: The Superman and the All-Too-Human" (2003).[50] According to Bell, the first phase of influence appeared in the nineteenth century. The second phase was marked by the attempts of scholars, such as Walter Kaufmann, in the 1950s. In his text, Bell points out the diversity of the respective periods of both phases and emphasises the latter to provide a clearer understanding of the previous period.[51] Turner argued about Nietzsche reception after the Second World War:

> Only after the First World War did a somewhat less distorted view of Nietzsche emerge in German academic circles, and it was really only after the Second World War that American scholars began to examine and teach Nietzsche systematically.[52]

Nietzschean thought became a popular subject of literary and philosophical magazines in the United States in the late 1890s.[53] The earliest English language translation of Nietzsche occurred in 1895. It is *The Case of Wagner* in the *Fortnightly Review* translated by Thomas Common and followed by the translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by Alexander Tille in 1896.[54] An introduction to Nietzsche appeared in an article "The German Character" in the *International Journal of Ethics* by Richard M. Meyer in 1893.[55] A more philosophical

[49] Lomax, p. 33.
[50] Michael Bell, "The Superman and the All-Too-Human", in *A Concise Companion to Modernism,* edited by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 56-74.
[51] Bell, p. 56.
[52] Turner, p. 246.
[53] Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, "My Own Private Nietzsche: An American Story", *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter 2012), pp. 22-29, p. 22.
[54] Large, p. 63.
[55] Privitello, p. 182.

account of Nietzsche was conducted by C. M. Bakewell who referenced English translations of Nietzsche in his article "The Teachings of Friedrich Nietzsche" (1899).[56] The editor of the philosophical journal *The Monist,* Paul Carus, directed his readers' attention to Nietzsche in the same year.[57]

H. L. Mencken (1880 - 1956) wrote *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1908, 1913), the first American monograph dedicated to Nietzsche's life which impacted general culture in the United States; however, the reception of Nietzsche by Mencken remains under heavy criticism.[58] The critique was also due to Mencken's pessimistic reading of eternal return that Mencken calls "a cosmic year", and his advocacy for aristocracy as a form of exploitation.[59] In his texts, Mencken promoted Nietzsche as an advocate for cold-blooded selfishness and individualism indifferent to inferred inferiority of specific populations in the United States of America.[60] Clashing with modern interpretations, Mencken's Nietzsche is called "vulgar misrepresentation of Nietzsche's work" by Lucio Angelo Privitello approving the argument of William Mackintire Salter (1853-1931).[61] In his scholarship, Salter frequently praised the work of Dolson and Bakewell, however, reprimanded the reading of Carus for his journalistic superficiality. Contributing to the Harvard Divinity Alumni Association, Salter's article "An Introductory Word on Nietzsche" (1913) is followed by his comprehensive study "Nietzsche's Moral Aim and Will to Power" (1915). Salter scrutinised inconsistent interpretations of Nietzsche's doctrines and promoted the urgency of the virtues in his reading of Nietzsche.[62]

An advancement in English translations of Nietzsche was achieved by the collection of edited complete works of Nietzsche by Oscar Levy, in 1913.[63] According to Duncan Large,

[56] Privitello, p. 182.
[57] Privitello, p. 182.
[58] Privitello, p. 186.
[59] Henry Louis Mencken, *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, First Edition (Boston, MA: Luce and Company, 1908), pp. 102, 119.
[60] Ratner-Rosenhagen, "My Own Private Nietzsche: An American Story", p. 25.
[61] Privitello, p. 186.
[62] Privitello, p. 187.
[63] Large, p. 63.

these English translations dominated "over forty years" in the anglophone culture until Kaufmann established his authority with his first book on Nietzsche that encompasses his English translations *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950).[64]

Publishing in Britain from 1961, R. J. Hollingdale significantly contributed to the English translations of Nietzsche's work and collaborated with Kaufmann.[65] In his recent study, David Rathbone provides an account of the translations of Nietzsche by Kaufmann and Hollingdale:

> Alongside the successive editions of his *Nietzsche* (1956, 1968, and 1974), Kaufmann published translations of almost all of Nietzsche's works, beginning with *The Portable Nietzsche* in 1954, collaborating with Reg Hollingdale on translations of the *Genealogy of Morals* and *The Will to Power* in 1967, in 1968 publishing a second anthology of translations called *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, and then finally in 1974, *The Gay Science.* This meant that together with Hollingdale's translations of *Dawn* in 1982, *Untimely Meditations* in 1983, and *Human, All Too Human* in 1986, Hollingdale and Kaufmann between them had succeeded through their trans-Atlantic friendship in making all of Nietzsche's published works, and some of his unpublished notebooks and letters, widely available in English translation.[66]

Kaufmann included the English translations of Nietzsche's letters to his sister and his friend and a colleague Franz Overbeck in *The Portable Nietzsche* (1954*).*[67] In *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Kaufmann appendixed his commentary on Nietzsche's "suppressed" manuscripts, and closed with the chapter entitled 'Four Letters: Commentary and Facsimile Pages', in which Kaufmann elaborated on short letters of Nietzsche that are encompassed in the chapter.[68]

Worldwide popularisation of a "Nietzsche vogue" in the 1910s transformed into the "Nietzscheanization" in American academia in the 1980s.[69] The latter term came from the American scholar Allan Bloom, the author of *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). Bloom comments on the influence of Nietzsche's thinking in American consciousness with

[64] Large, p. 64.
[65] Large, p. 63.
[66] Rathbone, pp. 49-50.
[67] Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche.*
[68] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*.
[69] Ratner-Rosenhagen, "My Own Private Nietzsche", p. 23.

the arrival of German intellectual émigrés in the decades of the 1930s and 1940s.[70] In 1939, an eighteen years old Kaufmann emigrated to the United States, and his PhD dissertation 'Nietzsche's Theory of Values' was submitted at Harvard University, in 1947.[71] His article 'Nietzsche's Admiration for Socrates' was published in *Journal of the History of Ideas* in 1948, a year after his teaching position at Princeton commenced. In 1950, the edited copy of his dissertation *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* was published anchoring the increasing prominence of Kaufmann in the Nietzsche studies in the United States.[72] Kaufmann said:

> Nietzsche was well known but little understood in the United States since at least 1900, and unreliable translations of all of his works had appeared in England before World War I. Many writers paid tribute to him, but when George Allen Morgan, Jr., published *What Nietzsche Means* in 1941, hardly any American philosophers were as yet taking to Nietzsche seriously. […] In the late forties some American academicians were still astonished that a young man should be working on a book on Nietzsche, and an incredulous remark "I thought Nietzsche was dead as a doornail" voiced a common feeling.[73]

Reflecting on the forerunners of Kaufmann in Nietzsche studies, it was Kaufmann who pioneered a systematised account of Nietzsche's oeuvre. Ratner-Rosenhagen said:

> He [Kaufmann] presented a Nietzsche for the enlightened everyman – a philosopher of unmistakable unity and clarity, unimpressed with physical manifestations of power and scornful of ideologies.[74]

According to Kaufmann, Nietzsche's sceptical and non-conformist aspirations made Nietzsche "a critic of hypocrisy" in the era of suffocating ideologies.[75] In his popular text *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre* (1956), Kaufmann attempted to reclaim Nietzsche from what he considered to be misleading interpretations and established the importance of Nietzsche in the philosophic arena.[76] In his reading, Kaufmann's Nietzsche proposed a

[70] Ratner-Rosenhagen, "My Own Private Nietzsche", p. 23.
[71] Rathbone, p. 49.
[72] Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Existentialism, Religion, and Death: Thirteen Essays* (New York, NY: The New American Library, 1976), p. 101.
[73] Kaufmann, *Existentialism, Religion, and Death: Thirteen Essays,* p. 101.
[74] Ratner-Rosenhagen, "My Own Private Nietzsche", p. 28.
[75] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 19.
[76] Ratner-Rosenhagen, "My Own Private Nietzsche", p. 28.

controlled passion for forming the integrity of a higher character.[77] Kaufmann highlighted the concept of the unity of the Apollonian and Dionysian elements in the whole context of Nietzsche's texts. He rejected the interpretation that tyranny over others was part of Nietzsche's mission, and promoted a non-violent self-mastery.[78] Kaufmann argued:

> [The Übermensch] has overcome his animal nature, organized the chaos of his passions, sublimated his impulses, and given style to his character – or, as Nietzsche said of Goethe: "he disciplined himself to wholeness, he *created* himself" and became "the man of tolerance, not from weakness but from strength," "a spirit who has *become free*".[79]

Kaufmann sequenced the development of the ideas of Nietzsche and made them more accessible than any other philosopher before him in the United States. Kaufmann's work made Nietzsche newly available not only to the academics but also to the general culture in the United States in the following decades.[80]

Kaufmann focused his main scholarly attention on Nietzsche and also examined existential thought, though he consistently sought to differentiate Nietzsche from the existential movement. The key text in his articulation of this claim was his volume of edited translations with the introduction and prefaces, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*.[81] The opening chapter consists of the essays of Kaufmann on Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre, and therefore is called 'Kaufmann: Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre'. The selected works of Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Rilke, Kafka, Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus are individually included in the following chapters and are edited by Kaufmann. In each chapter, Kaufmann considered the intellectual contribution of the authors in shaping the meaning and working definition of the existentialism. In the introduction to the chapter on Nietzsche, Kaufmann asserted that the

[77] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 235.
[78] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 316.
[79] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 316.
[80] Ratner-Rosenhagen, "My Own Private Nietzsche", p. 28.
[81] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*.

"inclusion [of Nietzsche] in the story of existentialism [is] imperative. […] {However}The existentialism of Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre is only one facet of this multiple impact [of Nietzsche]."[82] The same concept was introduced in the first chapter 'Kaufmann: Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre', where Kaufmann addresses the legacy of the Nietzschean ideas on the scholars as mentioned earlier.

Kaufmann did not limit Nietzsche to the existential movement, and in this passage from his existential anthology, Kaufmann argued for the broader extent of the impact and applicability of the ideas of Nietzsche:

> In the story of existentialism, Nietzsche occupies a central place: Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre are unthinkable without him, and the conclusion of Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* sounds like a distant echo of Nietzsche. Camus has also written at length about Nietzsche; Nietzsche is the first name mentioned in Sartre's philosophic main work, *L'être et le néant*; Jaspers has written two whole books about him and discussed him in detail in several others; and Heidegger, in his later works, considers Nietzsche even more important than Jaspers ever did. As we shall see, however, Heidegger's and Jasper's Nietzsche pictures tell at least as much about the German existentialists as about Nietzsche. Existentialism suggests only a single facet of Nietzsche's multifarious influence, and to call him an existentialist means in all likelihood an insufficient appreciation of his full significance. […] Existentialism without Nietzsche would be almost like Thomism without Aristotle; but to call Nietzsche an existentialist is a little like calling Aristotle a Thomist.[83]

In his later published collection of essays *Existentialism, Religion, and Death: Thirteen Essays* (1976), Kaufmann confirmed his previous position on Nietzsche and existentialism. He also mentioned other intellectual figures that the ideas of Nietzsche were critically associated with, and even manipulated by:

> I presented Nietzsche neither as an existentialist nor in the perspective of existentialism. While Nietzsche is now often studied as a precursor of existentialism, he has been linked even more often with other movements and currents; and earlier generations associated him with Darwin and evolutionary ethics, with Freud and psychoanalysis, with Schopenhauer or Spengler, Shaw or Gide, or Mussolini and Hitler; and in the mid-sixties the "death of God" theologians drew inspiration from him while some philosophers began to claim him as a precursor of analytic philosophy. It seems safe to predict that interest in Nietzsche will outlast the fashionable concern with existentialism.[84]

[82] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 100.
[83] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, pp. 21-22.
[84] Kaufmann, *Existentialism, Religion, and Death: Thirteen Essays,* pp. 101-102.

Kaufmann pointed to the complexity and wide-ranging nature of Nietzsche's thought and questioned those accounts which were too focussed on a narrow or selective narrative. Nevertheless, reading Nietzsche as a philosopher whose principles had impacted modern theories, Kaufmann considered the validity of the intellectual heritage of Nietzsche that may be claimed by various streams. If the existentialist movement limited the longevity and the extent of Nietzsche's ideas, then it is plausible to apply this proposition also to the later defined movements that have referenced Nietzsche. Therefore, returning to Kaufmann, it appears safe to call his reading of Nietzsche 'Kaufmann's Nietzsche'. His interpretation of Nietzsche can be concisely characterised as a model for non-violent psychological mastery that is achieved by Dionysian enlightenment, the unity of the Apollonian *ratio* and Dionysian desire, and leads to the integrity of the character, that Nietzsche calls "higher".[85]

Kaufmann claimed that Nietzschean ideas impacted the development of the thought that is identified as existentialist. In the first sentence of his chapter in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, Kaufmann argued that existentialism is "a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy".[86] He recognised a common ground for existentialism, which he characterised as "perfervid individualism".[87] Kaufmann further elaborated on the claim by examining the texts of the selected authors in his *Existentialism* anthology. Contained in the book is an unabridged translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's famous lecture "Existentialism is a Humanism" (1946). The lecture is the reaction of Sartre to criticism in 1946. In agnostic terms, Sartre employed the term "existential humanism" to describe a man as a legislator of his or her values.[88] In his definition, Sartre described

[85] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 1954), p. 286.
[86] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 11.
[87] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 11.
[88] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism", in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: New American Library, 1975), p. 310.

humanism as "a theory which upholds man as the end-in-itself and as the supreme value".[89] Sartre argued for ambitious self-commitment:

> It [existentialism] cannot be regarded as a philosophy of quietism since it defines man by action; nor as a pessimistic description of man, for no doctrine is more optimistic, the destiny of man is placed within himself. Nor is it an attempt to discourage man from action since it tells him that there is no hope except in his action, and that the one thing which permits him to have life is deed. Upon this level therefore, what we are considering is an ethic of action and self-commitment.[90]

Kaufmann also drew attention to the definition of existentialism that was based on the assumption of Sartre in "Existentialism is a Humanism" informing that "*existence* comes before *essence*".[91] The statement of Sartre, however, is repudiated by Kaufmann, just as it was by Jaspers, and Heidegger.[92] According to Kaufmann, the unfortunate phrase of Sartre "obstructs the understanding of this [existentialist] complex movement as well as of Sartre's philosophy".[93] Kaufmann considered the arguments in Sartre's lecture to be reminiscent of Kantian ethics and emphasised some "misstatements of facts" by Sartre.[94] Furthermore, Kaufmann commented on the idea of confining the aim of existence to its usefulness, as proposed by Sartre. According to Kaufmann, Nietzsche does not define usefulness as a necessary attribute of existence, but in a more complex perception of existence, perceives usefulness as optional.[95] The conclusion of Sartre might have emerged from the ideas of Nietzsche, nevertheless, the notions of Nietzsche exceeded the finite formulations by Sartre.

Despite the conflicting understandings of existence in the work of Sartre and Nietzsche, in his *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, Kaufmann identified five main features shared by both thinkers. These included a variety of styles to express a new experience (1), the value of existence (2), passion and its mastery (3), independence from

[89] Sartre, p. 309.
[90] Sartre, p. 302.
[91] Sartre, p. 289.
[92] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 44.
[93] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 45.
[94] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 45.
[95] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 42.

convention (4), creative freedom in expressing self-law (5), and the weight of self-deception (5).[96] However, contradicting Nietzsche's rejection of guilt, Sartre proposed *inescapable* guilt that may become productive. According to Sartre, guilt can be managed, and such controlled guilt consequently becomes a catalyst for personal integrity.[97]

Confirming the impact of Nietzsche on the existential movement, Kaufmann was an important advocate of the idea that Nietzsche's thought constituted a unity.[98] His revival of Nietzsche's ideas received significant critical attention.[99] Ratner-Rosenhagen commented:

> Kaufmann catapulted to prominence after the 1950 publication of his *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist.* From 1950 to 1974, the book went through four editions, and from its first printing onward established its hegemony in Nietzsche studies. Many regards it as the single most important – certainly the most popular – study of the German philosopher ever written in any language.[100]

According to Ratner-Rosenhagen, Kaufmann's thoughtful dialogue between Europe and America "helped American readers at midcentury to hear their own concerns and to think about their own thinking".[101] In her *American Nietzsche*, Ratner-Rosenhagen mentioned the thinker Daniel T. O'Hara and his delineation of Nietzsche's "move toward demythologization of the [American] Myth", which according to O'Hara raised "questions of value".[102] After the death of God, the ultimate value that determined all other values was lost, and therefore, alternative value or set of values were inquired.

A current scholar, Stanley Corngold, argues about Kaufmann's impact:

> [Kaufmann] is so often quoted appreciatively - or attacked angrily - and putatively corrected - that all of modern Nietzsche-scholarship begins to read like so many footnotes to Kaufmann.[103]

[96] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, pp. 41-43.
[97] Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 47.
[98] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 235.
[99] Robert. C. Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great "Immoralist" Has to Teach us* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 6.
[100] Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche*, pp. 220-221.
[101] Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche*, p. 250.
[102] Daniel T. O'Hara, ed., "Preface", in *Why Nietzsche Now?* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. vii.
[103] Stanley Corngold, *Walter Kaufmann: Philosopher, Humanist, Heretic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 11.

Kaufmann's rehabilitation of Nietzsche primarily impacted the anglophone context; nevertheless, with Kaufmann's scholarship, Nietzsche's works have gained considerate worldwide appraisal. Ratner-Rosenhagen further argued about the impact of Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche:

> Walter Kaufmann may have reopened the floodgates of Nietzsche interpretation in postwar America, but he did not control his subsequent canals, streams, and eddies. One of those channels became known as the "French Nietzsche", the "New Nietzsche," and the "New French Nietzsche," though all these names broadly refer to the academic surge of interest in postmodernism that began in language and literature departments in the 1970s, and moved into various cultural studies programs and departments during the 1980s.[104]

However, the claim of Kaufmann's legacy in the postmodern reception of Nietzsche by Ratner-Rosenhagen is challenged by Yue Zhuo. Zhuo argued that French philosophers who represented the 'third moment of Nietzsche' in France during the 1960s and who established the concept of the "New Nietzsche", were primarily influenced by Bataille who is a significant representative of the "second moment of Nietzsche" in France starting in the late 1930s.[105] Zhuo argues that:

> Bataille's reading of Nietzsche dialogued closely with those of his friends, Pierre Klossowski and Maurice Blanchot; collectively, they inspired the next generation of interpreters such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.[106]

French philosophers Foucault and Deleuze, cornerstones of what is now labelled as postmodern thought, might have been, therefore, essentially influenced by Bataille whose texts were easily accessible and could reach their attention earlier than Kaufmann's texts. French thinkers unfolded a novel reading of Nietzsche by celebrating the Dionysian sentiment, and their work has been strongly attended to by an Anglophone audience. From the French thinkers, it was Foucault who presented "Nietzschean-inspired theories of cultural deviance and transgression" that shaped the postmodern interpretations of Nietzsche at the

[104] Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche*, p. 266.
[105] Zhuo, p. 37.
[106] Zhuo, p. 37.

"Schizo-Culture" conference at Columbia University in the United States of America in 1975.[107] By 1975, the French scholars reached an American continent with their *new* interpretations of Nietzsche that attracted American academia which had, nevertheless, been significantly shaped by Kaufmann's oeuvre on Nietzsche by then. Furthermore, by shaping a popular reception of Nietzsche in the United States in the 1960s that extensively experimented with the idea of the death of God, Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche enjoyed wide currency in the arts and culture.[108]

The postmodern Nietzsche substitutes integrity of character with a decentralised playfulness of Dionysian passion. It is defined by *affirmation* of chaos, absolute permissiveness, the rejection of all authority, and playful fictions. After the death of God, the postmodern Nietzsche drew attention to the loss of traditional morality and asserted decentralised chaos as a positive phenomenon. I refer to the reading of Nietzsche that originated from French postmodernist thought as the *postmodern Nietzsche*.

The contrasting interpretation of Nietzsche by Kaufmann, that I refer to as *Kaufmann's Nietzsche,* determined the preoccupation of Nietzsche with a self-mastery that might be achieved by the harmony between the Apollonian and Dionysian element, as an internal matter calling attention to the self. It promotes the internal *organisation* of chaos, personal integrity, and life-affirmative ethics. While postmodernists advance fashioning *playful* fictions, Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche recognises the *serious* process of creation.

The Death of God

The interpretations of Kaufmann and postmodern thinkers of the death of God and their ways of addressing the subsequent thought of Nietzsche vary. Nietzsche associates the cultural

[107] Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche,* p. 267.
[108] Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche,* pp. 266-267.

concept of God with moral values. With the death of God, these values are no longer valid. Therefore, man navigates his autonomy in an unprecedented context. According to Kaufmann, it is relevant to correlate values, moral and aesthetic, to the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy that is a key concept in Nietzsche's first text *The Birth of Tragedy*.[109] The reason for that is that the perceived Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy determines the approach to the calibration of the new values that people pursue to advance the void after the death of God.

The Apollonian aspect represents the rational, while irrational intuitions are characterised by the Dionysian nature. Whether Nietzsche postulates the fusion of both character elements or suggests the domination of either of these two elements, invites further philosophical arguments by both Kaufmann and postmodern thinkers that I will examine in this passage. First, I will analyse the context of the death of God in *The Gay Science* and relate it to the relevant passages from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by Nietzsche. Then, I will examine Kaufmann's interpretation in *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (1950)* where Kaufmann relates the death of God to morality, and the Apollonian and Dionysian dialectics. Finally, I will examine postmodern logic after the death of God.

It is essential to read the death of God in the broader context of the oeuvre of Nietzsche to follow the complex development of his thought. The author relates the death of God to nihilism, morality, and Dionysian and Apollonian dichotomy in his other passages and texts that significantly elucidate its conceptual development. Starting with *The Gay Science* (1882), the text was divided into five books, and in the third book Nietzsche explicitly announced the death of God. The first mention occurs in section 108, where Nietzsche presumed that the shadows of God after his death will remain in the caves.[110]

[109] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist,* pp. 96-118.
[110] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882), translated and edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1974), p. 167.

Nietzsche paralleled the unfolding after the death of God to the death of Buddha whose shadow remained in caves for centuries. In the next passage, Nietzsche elaborated on the shadows of God that "darken our minds", and therefore Nietzsche called section 108, "New Struggles", denoting the urgent contest of men to vanquish the old images of worship.[111]

The most extended passage about the death of God appeared in section 125 in the same book where the Madman declared the death of God, and then again, the death of God was mentioned in section 343 in book five. In section 124 that preceded the Madman passage, Nietzsche emphasises the abundance of possibilities that he compared to an "ocean", and called the section "In the Horizon of the Infinite". Nietzsche said:

> Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom* - and there is no longer any "land."[112]

In the context of the next chapter on the death of God, the term *land* in this section denoted all Western values that were based on Judeo-Christian fundamentalism. The author used the metaphor to indicate the stability of the culturally accepted system of values. Nietzsche also warned about the sense of overwhelmedness and disorientation with no previous reference point that was previously linked to God. The limiting aspect of former values was presented parallel to the sudden infinity of options after the death of God.

In the following section 125, Nietzsche employed the terminology of "sea" and "the bright morning hours" to extend the concept of infinity.[113] After the announcement of the death of God, the Madman asked, "How could we drink up the sea? […] Do we need to light lanterns in the morning?"[114] Nietzsche referred to the constraining attempts to conceptualise a regenerating aspect of infinity that was represented by the natural elements of "sea" and "morning". The Madman passage opened with the following sentence:

[111] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 167, 169.
[112] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 180-181.
[113] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181.
[114] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181.

> Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cries incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!"[115]

A lantern was significantly inferior to natural daylight and an unnecessary item to shine on a bright morning. The lantern symbolises the ridiculing image of God that was tailored into the moral and religious tradition to navigate human values. The uneven distribution of light that might have been produced by the lantern and the sun implied that the cultural product was a false representation of the infinite source. The Madman became anxious, and consequently, is mocked by the by-standing crowd, described by the author as "those who did not believe in God".[116] Next, the Madman insists on accusing the audience of the murder of God. Experiencing a revelation, the Madman said, "I will tell you. *We have killed him*– you and I. All of us are his murderers."[117] However, it is not only the audience of non-believers who the Madman accuses. By adding, "and I" while carrying the lantern, he points out to the ones who believe in a cultural caricature of God to be also responsible for the murder of God.[118] Querying the reason and technique of the murder, he further asks:

> How did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?

The absurdity of his rhetorical questions demonstrates the powerful manipulation of humanity by religious systems that reduce the infinite source into a limited concept. The impossibility of drinking the endless sea by a human being and wiping the abstract horizon by a human-produced object symbolises the ineffective cultural effort to conceptualise an infinite concept of God into an inadequate religious framework that enforces its calibration of moral values. The aspect of the impossibility in both situations refers to the overwhelming capacity of the higher source that exceeds any culturally produced system.

[115] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181.
[116] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181.
[117] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181.
[118] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181.

The Madman continued describing the void that followed from the absence of God. In section 346, Nietzsche reflected on the period after destroying old reverences, referring to nihilism.[119] The Madman described the precarious state as following:

> Are we not plunging continually? Backwards, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing?[120]

Challenging cultural self-reflection, the Madman queries the meaning of all values. Humanity appeared displaced from a secure environment with the perpetual sense of lost direction. The Madman astonished the audience into silence, and his frustration about the lack of cultural self-reflection prevails in the passage. In his disappointment, he breaks the lantern, "at last he [the Madman] threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out."[121] The proclamation of the Madman about the death of God is thus physically manifested by the broken glass pieces of the lantern that symbolises a culturally constructed image of God. The author emphasises that the lantern "went out" indicating the light, its life-giving purpose being terminated. The passage ends with the "*requiem aeternam deo*" that the Madman sung in the churches.[122] Singing his requiem on God whose death was symbolised by the broken lantern, the Madman is "led out and called to account" by churchgoers.[123] The Madman points to the inability of the religious system to grasp the magnitude of the life-giving force, therefore, calling the churches the "tombs" of God.[124]

It is important to point out that there was a progressive mood in the context of the death of God in *The Gay Science*. While in passage 108 from book three, a heavy mood prevailed, the difficulty of overcoming the shadows of God was replaced by the cheerful state in passage 343 that was established in book five of the same text by Nietzsche. The positive mood shift in book five was emphasised by its title "We Fearless Ones".[125] Not undermining

[119] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 287.
[120] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181.
[121] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 182.
[122] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 182.
[123] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 182.
[124] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 182.
[125] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 277.

the uncertainty after the death of God, the passage 343 was called 'The Meaning of our Cheerfulness' because Nietzsche called the death of God "the greatest recent event" in its opening line.[126] In this passage, the state of expectation and amazement before the "open sea" of the "free spirits" succeeds fear of the unknown from the previous sections on the death of God in book three.[127] Thus, Nietzsche celebrated overcoming of the initial frustration of the uncertainty to enjoy the benefits of the available possibilities.

Returning to the extended passage about the death of God, in section 125, Nietzsche's Madman inquired: "Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it [murdering God]?"[128] Succumbing to a master narrative, the Madman challenged the readers with the possibility of overcoming a nihilist mood by imposing a creative character to foster autonomy. According to Gemes, an ultimate value represented a master value that gave meaning to life and subordinated other values. Therefore, it is essential to formulate metanarratives in which humans, as gods, take upon themselves the responsibility for creation and mature into autonomy.[129]

The other text where Nietzsche mentioned the death of God is his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883-1885)*, the idea referenced once in the first book, twice in the second book, and four times in the fourth and final book. The first two books of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* were published the following year after *The Gay Science* (1882), the third and fourth book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* were consecutively published in 1884 and 1885. Elaborating on the death of God in his next four books of Zarathustra, Nietzsche introduced the overman who replaced an old God whose death was announced in *The Gay Science*. In the prologue to the English translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Kaufmann who edited and translated the text, emphasises the link between both of these texts:

[126] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 279.
[127] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 280.
[128] Nietzsche. *The Gay Science*, p. 126.
[129] Ken Gemes, 'Nihilism and The Death of God', Birkbeck, University of London: Academic Podcasts, 2013, <https://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2013/05/ken-gemes-nietzsche-on- nihilism-and-the-death-of-god/> [accessed 13 April 2019].

> Zarathustra speaks of the death of God and proclaims the overman. Faith in God is dead as a matter of cultural fact, and any "meaning" of life in the sense of a supernatural purpose is gone. Now it is up to man to give his life meaning by raising himself above the animals and the all – too - human.[130]

To chart the flow of Nietzsche's thought: in *The Gay Science*, the death of God was proclaimed, while in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, following the proclamation of the death of God, the overman was proclaimed. Regarding Nietzsche as an anti-foundationalist, it was not only the spiritual authority of God that was removed from humankind. What followed, also, was the implication of the loss of a foundation that calibrated long existing societal and cultural values.

The texts that Nietzsche published after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* were *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), and *Toward a Genealogy of Morals* (1887), both of which addressed the misconceptions of moral concepts that were ingrained in the Western tradition over centuries. In his genealogy, Nietzsche argued for the incorrectly interpreted moral norms by the power elites that derived from their intended false image of God and manipulated humanity. According to Nietzsche, the Judeo-Christian moral tradition navigated the moral values only until the death of God, and Nietzsche emphasised the limiting aspect of morality in light of actual infinite alternatives. Nietzsche associates the death of God with the loss of the cultural foundation of moral values, and consequently, by understanding these cultural misconceptions, Nietzsche suggests a man to proceed with the affirmation of alternative human autonomy.

The Emergence of New Values

The formulation of new Nietzschean values by Kaufmann principally contradicts the postmodern theory because of their different approach to the dialectical inquiry into the

[130] Walter Arnold Kaufmann, "Translator's Notes", in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* by Friedrich Nietzsche, translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 1954), p. 3.

Apollonian and Dionysian element in Nietzsche's texts. First, let me illustrate how Kaufmann attends to the dialectical inquiry into the Apollonian and Dionysian elements by linking it to the philosophical conflict of the death of God, and Nietzsche's critique of moral values. In light of Kaufmann's scholarship on Nietzsche, it is, for instance, Ratner-Rosenhagen who advanced the reception of Kaufmann's Nietzsche as inventing "Dionysian Enlightenment" in the 1950s.[131] The claim was confirmed by Stanley Corngold, who explained the internal organisation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian elements as proposed by sublimation of individual values in Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche.[132]

Kaufmann addressed the death of God for the first time in his anthology *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* in 1950. He translated the entire book *Gay Science,* but it is only in 1974 that his English version of *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882), where the death of God occurred for the first time in the German text of Nietzsche, was published. In *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, the translation of Kaufmann of the famous Madman's passage about the death of God from Nietzsche's *Gay Science* (1882) appeared with his commentary in the third chapter that was called 'The Death of God and the Revaluation'.[133]

In the next chapter of the anthology called 'Art and History', Kaufmann elaborated on the death of God by associating it with Nietzsche's inquiry of moral values. According to Kaufmann's examination of the link between these two ideas of Nietzsche, the existence of moral values is questionable because they lack the sanctions in the absence of God.[134] Therefore, according to Kaufmann, Nietzsche, rather descriptively than normatively, advanced aesthetic values instead.[135] By shifting the discussion from moral to the aesthetic

[131] Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, "'Dionysian Enlightment': Walter Kaufmann's *Nietzsche* in Historical Perspective", *Modern Intellectual History*, 3, 2 (2006), pp. 239–269, [accessed 01-05-2020], p. 243.
[132] Corngold, pp. 35-36.
[133] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist,* pp. 96-118.
[134] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist,* p. 128.
[135] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist,* p. 130.

level in reading Nietzsche and delineating the aesthetic values, Kaufmann examined the Dionysian and Apollonian elements in Nietzsche's first text *The Birth of Tragedy*. In *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Kaufmann said:

> In *The Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche did not extol one at the expense of the other; but if he [Nietzsche] favours one of the two gods, it is Apollo. His thesis is that it took both to make possible the birth of tragedy, and he emphasises the Dionysian only because he feels that the Apollonian genius of the Greeks cannot be fully understood apart from it.[136]

Notwithstanding that Kaufmann indicated the latter, i.e. the dialectical harmony of the elements, in his edition and translation of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science,* Kaufmann admitted that Nietzsche was not willing to denounce Dionysian impulses in his later works.[137] In *Will to Power* (1901), Nietzsche said that, "only Dionysian joy is sufficient".[138] However, in *The Gay Science,* Kaufmann pointed out that the Dionysian celebration was an "illicit" reading of the conception of Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy*. [139] The reason for that was, according to Kaufmann, inserted parentheses in the posthumously published editions of Nietzsche's original ideas when discussing the Apollonian art.[140] Kaufmann further clarified:

> The later Dionysus is the synthesis of the two forces represented by Dionysus and Apollo in *The Birth of Tragedy* […] Only the name remains, but later [in the texts of Nietzsche that were published after *The Birth of Tragedy*] the Dionysian represents passion *controlled*.[141]

In the context of emphasising the lack of faith of Nietzsche in the moral system and thus culturally imposed moral values that emerged from the misconstrued religious articulation of God and the consequent manipulation of power, Kaufmann reflects on the preference of aesthetic values instead. According to Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche in this passage, these might be healthily attained by the Dionysian enlightenment of each individual who becomes

[136] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 128.
[137] Kaufmann, ed., *The Gay Science* by Friedrich Nietzsche, p. 111.
[138] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* translated by Walter A. Kaufmann and J.R. Hollingdale, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1967), p. 531.
[139] Kaufmann, ed., *The Gay Science* by Friedrich Nietzsche, p. 330.
[140] Kaufmann, ed., *The Gay Science* by Friedrich Nietzsche, p. 330.
[141] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist,* emphasis original, p. 129.

his own self-law giver after the death of God that discredited moral values. In contrast to the proposed control of the passionate Dionysian impulses by Apollonian rationality after the death of God in Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche, the postmodern logic favoured the Dionysian disorder and decentralised reactions to navigate autonomy after the death of God.

Historical development of the postmodern term and its distinct implications on societal levels as defined by major cultural theorists and philosophers are examined in *The idea of the Postmodern: A History* (1995) by Hans Bertens. In his theoretical map, Bertens outlines the progression of the postmodern discussion emerging from the art, culture, and architecture in the 1950s and 1960s into serious attention of the professional philosophers that culminated in the 1980s. Grasping French post-fifties theory of Foucault and Deleuze that remains influential in postmodernism in representing a Nietzschean camp that "emphasises power and [Dionysian] desire", Jean-François Lyotard originally frames desire in language games in his *Postmodern Condition* (1979).[142] The text succeeds his *Discours, Figure* (1971) where Lyotard outlines his theory of desire and his later "highly aggressive Nietzschean philosophy of affirmation" in *Economimie Libinale* (1974), where Lyotard approves even negative manifestations of the desire that represents Dionysian irrationality and passion.[143]

Bertens reflects on the reception of Lyotard by the anglophone audience and parallels the "almost completely obscured" logic of Lyotard's texts with their delayed English translations.[144] For instance, *Economie Libinale* by Lyotard of 1974 is published in English in 1992. Including German philosopher Jürgen Habermas into the discussion on postmodern theory, Bertens concludes with the view of Habermas on modernity and postmodernity

[142] Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 134.
[143] Bertens, p. 135.
[144] Bertens, p. 113.

asserting that, "what Lyotard calls the postmodern is not much more than a throwback to Nietzschean irrationalism".[145]

By preferring Dionysian decentralised illogic and desire, the postmodern naturalisation of Nietzsche is opposed by many but is also endorsed by the philosophers David Kolb and Lyotard, among others. Ratner-Rosenhagen analyses Nietzsche's reception by French thinkers who position Nietzsche in postmodernism, in the context of Kaufmann's scholarship on Nietzsche. She argues:

> Fronting essays by French thinkers Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, and Pierre Klossowski along with a few Americans, most notably the composer John Cage, James Leigh's introduction announced that they had come to "Free Nietzsche" from Kaufmann's (weakening) grip.[146]

In her text, Ratner-Rosenhagen also mentioned O'Hara's and Cornel West's scholarship on Nietzsche as a method to explain the latter's postmodern position. O'Hara highlighted Nietzsche's "freely-playful perception" that fashioned decentralisation and plurality of opinions.[147] West regarded Nietzsche as prefiguring new American postmodern thought and granted him a central position in this aspect. In his text, West celebrates Nietzsche's aspect of plurality and "countermovement" to overcome postmodern nihilism.[148]

The Postmodern Reading of the Death of God

Returning to *The Gay Science*, another significant aspect that Nietzsche's Madman exposed to the reader was the concept of games and inventive fiction, which the postmodern audience highlighted in Nietzsche's writing. To cope with the loss of God, Nietzsche's Madman asked in *The Gay Science*, "what sacred games shall we have to invent?"[149] It is important to note

[145] Bertens, p. 113.
[146] Ratner-Rosenhagen. *American Nietzsche,* p. 267.
[147] O'Hara, "Preface", p. x.
[148] Cornel West, "Nietzsche's Prefiguration of Postmodern American Philosophy", in *Why Nietzsche Now?* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 241-270, p. 242.
[149] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 126.

that the postmodern avenue from the philosophical conflict considered Nietzsche's advocacy of the realm that consisted of merely symbolic fiction. In his *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), Nietzsche promoted "the testimony of the senses" because, according to him, the senses show becoming while reason and unity represent lies.[150] He argued:

> [...] being is an empty fiction. The "apparent" world is the only one: the "true" world is merely added by a lie.[151]

Postmodern thinkers relied on Nietzsche's rejection of the real world, as he explained further in the section "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable: The History of an Error":[152]

> The "true" world – an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating – an idea which has become useless and superfluous – *consequently*, a refuted idea: let us abolish it![153]

In his posthumously published *Will to Power* (1901), Nietzsche contended that, "everything is in flux, incomprehensible, elusive; what is relatively most enduring is – our opinions".[154] He pointed to the plurality of opinions that constituted the normative value system. The permissive postmodern vision suggested the idea that there is merely symbolic fiction, and encouraged individuals to enjoy the fiction playfully in order to affirm the chaos that we create in ourselves.

For Kolb and Lyotard, Nietzsche's postmodern appropriation celebrated the concept of games and "playfulness" with fictions that fashion identities.[155] To this end, Nietzsche's following statements supported the postmodern concept of symbolic disunity. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche argued that, "the doer is merely a fiction added to the

[150] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated and edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1954), pp. 480-481.
[151] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 481.
[152] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 485.
[153] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 485.
[154] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter A. Kaufmann and J.R. Hollingdale, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1967), p. 327.
[155] David Kolb, *Postmodern Sophistications* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 100.

deed".[156] In this context, self-sabotage is imminent, and people are defined by their senses and the symbolic fictions they create. The aspect of Nietzsche's fictional plurality and his assertion of deception, therefore, find their way into Kolb's definition of the postmodern self. Kolb argued:

> The central self is a myth and its pure rationality gives way to a diversity of language games and practices that are irreducible to each other. Amid this plurality we should play our games lightly, ironically, inventing new rules as we go. No one game can define us and there is no pure meta-game above them all.[157]

Thus, Kolb denied any universal master narrative that determined singular narratives and presupposed their unconditional creation. The emphasis was on the playful nature of the narratives, and therefore the symbolic narratives were called games that were subjected to constant change. In these symbolic games, everything was permitted, and thus consequently realised while fixed rules were excluded. The plural aspect of fictions did not strive towards ultimate unity, and the chaos was therefore not controlled because there was no superior authority. The disorder was affirmed in its decentred plurality.

Gemes agreed with the aspect of fiction and self-deception in postmodern reading, asserting that "deception for Nietzsche is an inevitable part of life".[158] However, Gemes referred to Nietzsche's essential advice to consider the holistic approach of the actual end towards which a lie was told. Gemes rejected the postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche because the destination postmodernism arrives at was, according to Gemes, a nihilist end. On the other hand, Gemes proposed Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche which highlighted the human pursuit of integrity that was achieved by internal control of the chaos. Here, cognitive control represented the Apollonian element and chaos represented the Dionysian element. In this context, Kaufmann presented Nietzsche as an advocate for overcoming nihilism, which

[156] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1969), p. 13.
[157] Kolb, p. 100.
[158] Ken Gemes, "Postmodernism's Use and Abuse of Nietzsche", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (March 2001), 337-360, p. 341.

was achieved by unity (i.e. the sublimation of nihilistic drives and values). Alternatively, the postmodern concept of accepting merely symbolic fiction endorsed an attempt at playful enjoyment of Dionysian chaos.

In *Twilight of Idols*, Nietzsche promoted a cheerful attitude in combating life challenges.[159] He further argued:

> Excess of strength alone is the proof of strength. *A revaluation of all values*, […] to shake off a heavy, all-too-heavy seriousness. Every means is proper for this.[160]

Nietzsche celebrated the creativity of positive attitude in the midst of difficult situations and deemed acceptable all means to arrive at this state. The *selective* process of opinions, values and perspectives was involved, and it was the selection of *re-evaluated* perspectives that Nietzsche discussed. In this context, the playful attitude of the postmodern sentiment corresponded to this passage of Nietzsche; however, there is not enough textual evidence of Nietzsche approving complete decentralisation apart from the emotional transformation. In the same text, Nietzsche promotes audacity:

> Is it not precisely the state without fear in the face of the fearful and questionable that he [the tragic artist] is showing? […] Courage and freedom of feeling before a powerful enemy, before a sublime calamity, before a problem that arouses dread - this triumphant state is what the tragic artist chooses, what he glorifies.[161]

In this passage, Nietzsche highlighted the healing condition of art through which tragic perspectives may be creatively transformed into constructive cheerfulness. It is a victorious state in conquering the problem that involved the intentionally selective process of an improved life vision. It is the rational re-evaluation of the irrational emotions where the excess of the will to power is manifested, that postmodern thinkers did not consider.

[159] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 465.
[160] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, emphasis original, p. 465.
[161] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 530.

Conversely, this process was emphasised in Kaufmann's oeuvre while advancing the aesthetic values derived from the Apollonian and Dionysian elements' agreement.

While postmodernism promoted the affirmation of disunity and decentred plurality of Dionysian desires, it was the ultimate unity of the character that Kaufmann emphasised in Nietzsche's canon. Kaufmann and Gemes understood unity as psychological self-mastery through the sublimation of drives. Further, they argued for the self-imposing of new values generated after the traditionally accepted, and consequently invalidated, moral values in God's absence. Gemes also argued that alternative chaos and fragmentation that was affirmed by postmodernism indicated the nihilism of the last man. Therefore, as Nietzsche encouraged the overcoming of nihilism, according to Gemes, the postmodern reading of Nietzsche repressed the principle of the latter's thoughts.[162]

[162] Gemes, "Postmodernism's Use and Abuse of Nietzsche".

Chapter Two

Symbolic Games in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*

The novel *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (1967) is the opening volume in Joyce Carol Oates' Wonderland Quartet and the second novel of her prolific career. Following the aftermath of the Great Depression in the 1930s, the core action of the plot stretches into the post-war boom of the fifties. In her text, the narrative voice is detached from the voices of the protagonists to portray a vivid characterisation of her underprivileged protagonists. In *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, the themes of social exploitation and power games between sexes are elaborated upon by the fictional playfulness of the protagonist that leads to a progressive breakthrough.

In this chapter, I will closely examine *A Garden of Earthly Delights* through the lens of a postmodern reading of Nietzsche's theory of identity re-invention, which involves pluralism of opinions, the transvaluation of traditional morals, and heroic isolation. I present my interpretative claim to elucidate the development of the aspirational protagonist Clara Walpole. Read through the lens of postmodern theory that appropriates the ideas of Nietzsche and proposes playful games, I will explore the fictional identity re-invention of the protagonist. In the first section, I will shed more light on the card imagery of Oates that the author employs to depict a fictional power game of Clara while drawing on Lewis Carroll's Alice texts *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871). Through the lenses of the principle of heroic isolation and the rejection of morality by Nietzsche, I examine the character of Clara in the last two sections of this chapter.

By reflecting on the shaping effect of postmodern sentiment on the American cultural forms after 1950, the author dramatises the social experiments that employ the ambitious

ideas of Nietzsche. Originally written between 1965-1966, the author revised the text for the The Modern Library edition in 2002. Such subsequent and substantial editing added the dramatic effect to the third person narrative voice and served to "allow singular voices [of the protagonists] to infuse the text".[1] By rewriting more than three-quarters of the book, Oates restored "some of the language that had been thought too obscene in 1967", when the first edition was published.[2] Read from the perspective of the twenty-first century, Oates' characters employ culturally insensitive language. The aggressive tone of the characters' conversations represents internalised violence that is consequently projected externally in a form of physical violence.

Raised in a simple farm environment, Oates recalls the hard-living conditions of her grandparents and violent memories from the media and the neighbours. In her stories, the author tests the permissive context of cultural articulations of the death of God on the underprivileged protagonist Clara Walpole, depicting her as someone in search of liberating selfhood. Clara experiences a crisis of identity, detaching herself from her original setting and pursuing a new life that can be seen as a form of postmodern aesthetics.

The postmodern reading of Nietzsche highlights his consideration of the world as an illusion. Nietzsche says that "the world with which we are concerned is false, […] it is 'in flux', as something in a state of becoming, as a falsehood always changing but never getting near the truth".[3] It is essential to note that Nietzsche considers the falseness as an inevitable part of human life that continually occurs. Ken Gemes approves the postmodern claim about Nietzsche's perception of falseness and emphasises that it is necessary to distinguish the end

[1] Joyce Carol Oates, "Afterword", in *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), originally published in 1967, p. 398.
[2] Elaine Showalter, "Introduction: The Wonderland Quartet", in *A Garden of Earthly Delights* by Joyce Carol Oates (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), originally published in 1967, p. xx.
[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* translated by Walter A. Kaufmann and J.R. Hollingdale, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1967), p. 330.

towards which the false statement is told.[4] In this context, the postmodern critic Michael Haar says:

> The self, the individual are just so many false concepts, since they transform into substances fictitious unities having at the start only a linguistic reality. Moreover, the "self," once brought into relation with the Will to Power, proves to be a simple illusion of perspective insofar as it is posited as an underlying unity, permanent center, source of decision. Rather, the "self" and the individual are fictions concealing a complexity, a plurality of forces in conflict.
> Conscious and personal identity, aside from being but a "grammatical habit," hides the original and fundamental plurality constituting Will to Power in bodily form.[5]

In the context of Oates' text, Clara decides on the creation of her new singularity by fictionalising, which corresponds to the postmodern sentiment. However, the depicted identity simulation serves the protagonist's economic aspirations, which Nietzsche neither spoke nor wrote about. In the context of moral restraints, Oates aestheticises the philosophical conflict of the death of God, imprinting it on the characters of Clara and Swan, and I will explore their distinctive development through the lens of the postmodern Nietzschean reading.

The entire first section of the novel depicts violence, manifested as harsh language and images of domestic abuse. Reduced to the societal margins, Clara, the child of a migrant worker, is born in the opening scene. In her migrant camp, the hostility of Carleton Walpole, Clara's father, towards his wife Pearl increases with the arrival of each new child. After Pearl's death, Carleton takes as a substitute mistress, the young Nancy, who has run away from her family. Humiliated by the wider community, including teachers, medical professionals, and the church from her early childhood, overburdened Clara learns to fictionalise her new identity to escape the embarrassing stigmatisation of her underprivileged upbringing. Still underage, she playfully attracts men in a bar and consequently escapes from

[4] Ken Gemes, "Postmodernism's Use and Abuse of Nietzsche", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 62, No. 2, (March 2001), p. 341.
[5] Michael Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language", in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, edited by David B. Allison, Vol. 1 (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1985), p. 18.

her violent father with Lowry, a stranger she meets and who helps her to settle down. Clara hopes for a romantic relationship despite the refusal of Lowry due to her age. Yet a few years later, while Lowry continues to assert his independence, the pair nevertheless form an intimate relationship.

Shortly after, Clara becomes pregnant and Lowry, unaware, announces his departure to Mexico. Heartbroken, Clara hides her pregnancy from Lowry, who leaves, and Clara attempts to break into the world of power and wealth. Married, Curt Revere secures a small farmhouse with a garden for Clara, supporting her despite the judgements of the conservative community. When Lowry returns and declares his love for Clara, she rejects him and fictionalises her advantageous marriage to the now widowed Revere. She lies to Lowry and pretends that Revere is the father of her son Swan, known as Steven to Revere, and so Lowry leaves for good.

Clara cultivates a new social standing by manipulative cunning, and with time, Revere's three sons from the first marriage leave the farm. One of the sons, Robert, is killed while on a hunt with Swan, which although accidental is nevertheless the result of an altercation between the two. Another son, Jonathan, becomes estranged from his father, and the eldest, Clark, makes a pass at Clara and is subsequently asked to leave. Thus, Clara and Swan are left alone with Revere, and so the former's ambition to install her child is fulfilled. However, Swan does not share Clara's enthusiasm for their life improvement and challenges her aspirations. He aims to organise the chaos of his life, but can only gain control through violence. Out of desperation, he kills Revere and then himself, leading the previously active Clara to isolate herself in a nursing home. The element of fiction is reduced to the exposure of Clara to violent television images that she passively observes. Thus, Swan turns her victory into ultimate misery.

Oates' frequent references to poverty and material differences in her novels cause Harold Bloom to celebrate her recognition of and, "her immense sympathy with the insulted and injured" in her texts.[6] Her characters strive to escape their low economic status and improve their circumstances, as does Clara in *A Garden of Earthly Delights.* In relation to Oates' intensive study of philosophy and her engagement with Nietzsche, Harold Bloom comments on Oates' abundant imagination and moral self-contradiction, noting her fictional urge to accept limitations and contrasting it with her suggestion to worship a life-force.[7]

Oates' writing contains the underlying moral concept, which Oates' characters return to or are confronted by at different stages of their development. Regarding her as a former Catholic, for Greg Johnson, it is the Christian practices that "provided [Oates] a system of belief against which to measure and develop her own philosophical views".[8] *A Garden of Earthly Delights* suggests a system of moral judgements in line with Christian spirituality, which posit a reason for alternative philosophical theories and societal experiments after Kaufmann's translations of Nietzsche in the 1950s[9].

The proclamation of the death of God shook traditional values in the United States and changed its historical narrative. It was the time when Nietzsche's thoughts uncovered the traps of manipulative ideologies and consequently fashioned the roots of American heroic individualisation. A postmodern understanding of Nietzsche permissively validates adventurous concepts banned by traditional morality. By aestheticising violence, Oates maximises the permissive concept of postmodernism.

Card Games in The Garden of Earthly Delights

[6] Ian Gregson, *Character and Satire in Postwar Fiction* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2006), p. 81.
[7] Harold Bloom, ed., *Joyce Carol Oates* (New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), pp. 1, 6.
[8] Greg Johnson, *Invisible Writer: A Biography of Joyce Carol Oates* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1998), p. 41.
[9] Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974).

Oates depicts blurred lines between fiction and reality where sense is extended by nonsense. In her text, Oates recalls Carroll's Wonderland dream setting imagery and the element of absurdity that is celebrated by the postmodern movement. Relating to Carroll's Alice, card games are commonly played in Clara's camp, proposing a literal meaning of games with the pre-existing categorised rules, as Nancy or Carleton do. However, Clara's interest in card games is mentioned only in reference to card images. At one stage, she remembers the image of men playing cards in the camp, "while in another cabin, Clara's mother [Pearl] was bleeding to death" during childbirth.[10] In this image, the author contrasts the card game and its fixed rules with the life game metaphor. While playing with cards, the men calculate their chance of winning, whereas, within the complexity of life, Clara's mother loses her chance to live and dies. The author depicts the gender stereotypes that characterised the 1950s on the character of Pearl, who passively accepts her vulnerable position of an impregnated female on societal margins with no voice. Witnessing the damaging effect of her mother's inferior position in a camp, Clara conditions her survival and self-improvement upon her victory over men. Read through the postmodern lens, the game between sexes is represented as an inevitable form of escapism for Clara in the text.

Elaborating on the figurative meaning of a fictional game between the sexes, the author depicts children who interact at school. Playful teasing of the schoolboys to win the attention of the girls symbolises a game for Clara.[11] Confronting the passivity of her mother, Clara actively invents a *card* life game in which she plays against men and aims to win. Clara decisively fashions a seductive female role as a form of pretence. After leaving the Methodist church, she enters the bar where she sees Lowry for the first time, and immediately likens him to a playing card:

[10] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 206.
[11] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 45.

> You were supposed to value the king the highest but Clara had an eye for the jack. Jack of spades was her favorite. The blond man {Lowry} had a look of the jack of spades, Clara thought.[12]

Alluding to Lewis Carroll's imagery of card game figures, the scene is reminiscent of Alice's response to the Queen who threatens her life: "You are all a pack of cards!".[13] In Oates' text, it is Clara's male partners who are decoded by the card game images and it is Clara who determines the value of her companion in her game. Thus, she fictionalises her own rules to the game that she enters. When asked about her age by the barman, she replies, "How old do you need to be?"[14] With a playful attitude, she invents what suits her. She pretends to be older than she is because Lowry avoids her advances and calls her a child, nevertheless, drives Clara away from her father the next day.

At the age of 17, Clara gives birth to a baby boy while Lowry leaves. In her existential game with Lowry, Clara's risk of losing him permanently increases, and so she generates a new strategy and alters the rules. A new rule translates as the replacement of the opponent in Clara's game. Clara's instrumental game recalls the chaotic setting in Carroll's Wonderland, where new rules are constantly invented to satisfy the characters' fictional development and affirm her existence. In Oates' text, it is Clara's next pursuit of Revere, who provides a farmhouse for her. Though Revere says that "the land's no good", it pleases Clara.[15] She does not accept the conventional perspective of the land but generates her own:

> the slightly shabby farm with its tilted and moss-specked barns, the wild grass that to Clara was so beautiful, the wildflowers and weeds and bushes sprung out of other bushes like magic.[16]

The author employs the visualisation of a disorganised garden of Clara in the text. Instead of cultivating systematic arrangements of flowers, Clara prefers to leave it to grow wild. Her

[12] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 102.
[13] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 129.
[14] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 101.
[15] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 201.
[16] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 194.

perspective of an unkempt garden corresponds to the affirmation of chaos of the postmodern aesthetics. Recalling Carroll's element of magic in his fictional universe, where animals talk and dream substitutes reality, it is also "magic" that attracts Clara in her garden.[17] It is also her autonomous perception that assigns meaning to things or people. By swapping Lowry for Revere, Clara exchanges the jack of spades for the king. She thinks:

> If Curt Revere was a playing card, Clara thought, he was one of the kings. Heavy-jawed, inclined to brooding. Not fast and sexy-treacherous like the jacks. You were supposed to think that the king of spades was stronger than the jack of spades, but that wasn't so.[18]

Clara thus considers the value of the men by comparing them with playing cards, but in a way that opposes traditional game rules. The rules that Clara invents resemble traditional card games; however, she changes the pre-existing values of the cards, and she determines new card values on the level of emotional engagement with the opponent. In her game, it is safer to play with Revere whose traditionally highest power rank of a king implies an increased risk for his opponent.

For Clara, however, it signifies a more relaxed game that leads her to a secure victory. It is Revere who is in love with her, and therefore, his emotional involvement significantly decreases his power while the absence of Clara's affection increases her power. Conversely, to play with an opponent who has a lower rank in normal card games, such as a jack, would be a more accessible contestant. Lowry being a jack in her game, this, however, becomes a highly risk-taking move because the power of Clara decreases due to her love for Lowry. According to the postmodern aesthetics, the player is aware that the game is not serious, and therefore, playfully pursues the fictional visions. However, by deep emotional involvement, Clara is not able to detach herself to flex her perspective which consequently weakens her position in the game.

[17] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 194.
[18] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 189.

To win with Revere, she displays happiness to please him.[19] She creates a fictional narrative that Swan is Revere's most beloved son, a situation that makes Swan feel awkward, despite Clara being "playful, laughing. Making a game of it".[20] Her playfulness permeates her life, even while performing mundane tasks such as cooking and serving food: "She made a playful ceremony of it, placing strips of bacon and tiny sausages on napkins to soak up the excess grease".[21] Clara playfully fictionalises her new identity in the power game she willingly enters.

According to Rick Mayock, who links Carroll's Alice with postmodern Nietzschean thoughts, it is the state of instant becoming that Nietzsche proposes. Mayock says:

> According to Nietzsche, we all face a similar identity crisis {to the one that Carroll's Alice experiences}. Nietzsche suggests that there is no real "self" or "ego" apart from our experiences. We are constantly changing and becoming new people, and there is no part of our selves that doesn't change. In effect, our concepts of "I" and "self" are static, unchanging mental constructs. But they are mere *fictions*.[22]

With the previous announcement of Lowry to leave for Mexico, Clara experiences a crisis of personal identity. In Carroll's text, the changing physical proportions of Alice indicate her identity transformations. Recalling Carroll's shrunk image of Alice that symbolises her low point of confusion and fear, Clara, lying in bed next to Lowry before he leaves, "retreated from him, grown small. She felt small […] She had shrunken far inside her body and could not control its trembling".[23] The image of size reduction implies the diminishing control of Clara in her game. Consequently, she internalises self-hatred, "She cried, and cursed herself for her weakness!"[24] However, after two weeks of "the [passive] dreaminess", she regains her power by changing her perspective on Lowry.[25] She re-valuates her opinion, and thinks

[19] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 276.
[20] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 276.
[21] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 280.
[22] Rick Mayock, "Perspectivism and Tragedy: A Nietzschean Interpretation of Alice's Adventure", in *Alice in Wonderland and Philosophy: Curiouser and Curiouser*, edited by Richard Brian Davis (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), p. 158, emphasis added.
[23] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 194.
[24] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 195.
[25] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 195.

that, "he [Lowry] did love her, in his way. She would always believe this".[26] Initially angry with him, now she declares him innocent and believes he meant no harm to her.

Like Carroll's Alice, Clara changes the perspective on the course of her game and contrives new rules in the existing chaos that is caused by the absence of Lowry.[27] After meeting Revere, Clara initiates their roles:

> They acted out two roles, not quite consciously: Revere was the guilty one, because he believed he had made her pregnant, and Clara was the victimized one, made softer and gentler by being victimized.[28]

It is a game of pretence that Clara invents, using it to accommodate her aspirations. In regular card games, the rules are fixed and it is important to remember them in order to maximise the chance of victory. When Revere visits her with his cousin Judd, they teach her regular card games that she never wins:

> Clara made mistakes because she could never remember the rules. […] Staring at a hand of cards newly dealt to her, trying to make sense of the numbers and suits, Clara understood that her brain could go so far and no further.[29]

In her forgetfulness, Clara resembles Alice, who fails to remember the multiplication table she had learned in school.[30] Clara is described as being an intelligent member of the Walpole family, yet her early departure from the educational system results in limited literacy and numeracy skills. It is also pleasing to Clara that in her invented game she does not need to remember the rules, but rather is free to invent her own because she does not follow any pre-existing rules of social convention. When she plays her fictional game, there is no danger of losing, only winning: she takes the place of Revere's dead wife, gaining all of his possessions and social benefits, and makes Revere's sons leave the farm.

[26] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 196.
[27] Mayock, p. 163.
[28] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 206.
[29] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 212.
[30] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 23.

In Oates' text, it is Clara who corresponds to the chaotic navigation that represents the Dionysian consciousness. She pursues her victory not by establishing the moral order, but by multiplying the pretence. However, ultimately her son Swan does not play his assigned part in her fiction. He chooses instead to organise the chaos created by his mother. According to the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy, it is Swan who prefers rational control. He consciously denies Clara's vision, thus representing the traditional sentiment from which Clara liberates.

In contrast to Clara, Swan relies on conventional ethics. Therefore, he feels responsible for her consequent punishment. In the context of games, Swan prefers an alternative view on life. He thinks, "Living was a game with *rules* he had to *learn* for himself by watching these adults as carefully as possible".[31] Swan perceives living a fictionalised vision of his mother to be illogical, unable to express his state verbally. He merely utters, "no words, no logic".[32] Unlike Clara, it is Swan who demands logic, preferring sense to nonsense: "All I want, he thought, is to get things straight. Put things in order".[33] Swan epitomises Western morality and is unable to grasp an autonomous perspective which merely feeds his negative emotions.

Ultimately, Swan attempts to release himself from his mother by taking desperate measures. Internally stored anger is directed at Clara; however, at the last minute, instead of killing her, Swan murders Revere and afterwards commits suicide. In this way, Clara's passive aggressivity is externalised by her beloved offspring, which turns into a means of her destruction. Clara succeeds in her simulacrum, but her son chooses not to. Read through postmodern lens, Oates juxtaposes her binary contrast of creative life force and its life-denying opposite.

[31] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 267, emphasis added.
[32] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 277.
[33] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 349.

Heroic Isolation

In the second part of the novel, Clara corresponds to Nietzsche's instructions for a person to isolate himself to solves life difficulties. He says, "go into your loneliness, my brother. I love him who wants to create over and beyond himself."[34] According to Nietzsche, a solitary man can become a god-like creator of himself. Nietzsche claims that people are afraid to stay alone and penetrate deeper into their inner selves. But as stated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), this is necessary in order to arise anew:

> But it is with man as it is with the tree. The more he aspires to the height and light, the more strongly do his roots strive earthward, downward, into the dark, the deep- into evil.[35]

It is Nietzsche's view that this is precisely what is needed in order to abolish what we know and own, and to break into something beyond. Similarly, Clara is raised in an atmosphere of constant motion of migrant work that supports the sense of detachment. She is not accustomed to stable relationships where affection and compromise are generally nurtured. After leaving her family, in a relationship with Revere, she isolates herself from the Tintern community because it labels her a mistress.

During the conservative period after the Great Depression, Clara experiences hostility from the community. People reject her and children throw mud on her new car. Her new house provides her only shelter, a safe space where she feels, "herself *sinking down to a depth* that was quite unconscious but where all feelings, emotions of love and hate, blended together in a single energy".[36] Clara's "single energy"[37] corresponds to Nietzsche's state of

[34] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* in *The Portable Nietzsche,* translated and edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1982), p. 177.
[35] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 154.
[36] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 227, emphasis original.
[37] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 227.

transformative solitude where "new values have always dwelt",[38] to conquer the strength of others that leaves a man "like smoke from a dying fire."[39] She also separates from the perspectives of others and meets the depths of her inner self. Clara wonders:

> at the power of her body and at the deep vast depths of herself where there were no names or faces or memories but only desires that had no patience with the slow motion of daily life.[40]

As postulated by Nietzsche, a new psychological entity, a potential self-invention arises only after facing inner depths where the human energy transforms as if through fire.[41] In *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, Revere introduces the area they are passing through to Clara and Swan, the latter of whom is curious about smokestacks being set on fire. Revere explains that, "The smokestacks are not on fire. […] It's self-consuming – the smokestacks won't burn".[42] The image of smokestacks here symbolise humans who are able to dominate their weaknesses which can be transformed into creative drives. The process of sublimation involves self-consumption whereas the human shell is not destroyed.

In a similar manner, such smokestacks transform the material into ashes symbolising the human transformation of psychological processes. The main function of the smokestacks is to burn items repeatedly, as people are able to actively turn their weaknesses, emotions, memories, and irrational passion into creative forces. As smokestacks are designed to endure in high temperatures, so people are able to dominate their challenges. In line with Nietzsche's theory, this is what is required for an improved identity to emerge - a new psychic version of the same physical body.

In the second part of the text, Clara self-invents herself. She chooses fiction to affirm her simulacrum. Apart from Clara's physical isolation, she detaches herself from her personal

[38] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 164.
[39] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 166.
[40] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 228.
[41] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 166.
[42] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, pp. 284-285.

history and learns to ignore her past. The American critic Elle G. Friedman proposes that Oates "depicts this denial of the past through her characters' denial of the names with which they were born".[43] Also according to Friedman, names indicate the fate of the character and a name change implies fate reversal in Oates' texts. Clara refuses to use and subsequently renounces her surname because it indicates her roots. Instead, she introduces herself as "Just Clara. I don't have any last name".[44] Therefore, Swan learns his surname only by accident. Gambling on marriage with Revere, Clara gains his surname for herself and Swan, and thus affirms her re-invention.

Finally freeing herself from the humiliation of migrant camps, the meaning of her new surname evokes respect and admiration. The surname resembles the historical figure Paul Revere, and the symbolic nature of Clara's new identity is based on the historic rebellion that led to the United States' Declaration of Independence from Great Britain in 1776. Thus, the same surname defines Clara's new simulacrum that is affirmed by her disagreement with the nationally recognised moral conventions. Additionally, Swan's first name is changed from Steven to Swan as Clara considers the latter to be a stronger name. The image of a swan is connected with water and thus implies fluidity, creative life pursuits, and harmony. However, Swan does not like this name, and immediately before committing his final act of violence he emphasises the extent of his dislike: "I said, don't call me that! I can't stand it!"[45] Swan feels trapped between his two names which denote his two identities. He cannot bear the "moral repugnance" with which he is filled, and is disturbed by his transformation to resemble Clara:

> He would fight it. He knew how. He'd isolated it – this sensation, as of imminent helplessness – as the way in which a fetus grows in its mother's belly: tiny head taking form, tiny arms, legs, torso, fish-body becoming human; sucking its energy from the

[43] Ellen G. Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates* (New York, NY: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1980), p. 37.
[44] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 209.
[45] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 391.

> encasing flesh and growing. Mysteriously growing. If he knew where this demonic energy came from, he would know the secret to all things.[46]

Oates' language "fish-body becoming human" evokes the hybrid image in the process of physical transformation .[47] The author lists the growing body parts that represent the shaping of a character that concern Swan. Swan feels that, unwillingly, his life takes the mental form of his mother and experiences a crisis of identity. The pretence of Clara disturbs Swan, and instead of affirming it, he approaches it morally. In the Afterword of *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, Oates says that Swan's "life of the imagination […] is finally repudiated".[48] Unable to shift his perspective, the frustration of Swan leads to self-destructive resentment and the final nihilist act of physical murder.

The Absence of Moral Standards

Swan's moral consciousness disapproves of the unconventional ethics of Clara. His thinking contradicts Nietzsche's thoughts that reject social conventions of traditional morals and celebrate the uniqueness of individuals. Nietzsche rejects any universal way to achieve perfection. He argues:

> "This is *my* way; where is yours?"-thus I answered those who asked me "the way." For *the* way–it does not exist. Thus spoke Zarathustra.[49]

This indicates that Nietzsche encourages individuals to explore creative ways of self-improvement. He invites them to seek their own set of standards and values as long as the will to power is life-affirming for the subject.

[46] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 374.
[47] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 374.
[48] Oates, "Afterword", in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 402.
[49] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 307, emphasis original.

In her narrative, Oates aestheticises individual pursuits in American society that contradict moral judgements. The author transforms the moral consciousness of Clara into her aesthetic existence. By aestheticising the materialistic pursuit of Clara, the author reflects on the authentic cultural forms that formed after 1950 in the United States of America. Confronted with Nietzsche's ambitious thoughts, the formally uneducated population experimented with Nietzsche's principles to alleviate their harsh conditions. The author questions the postmodern forms of self-improvement that appropriate the ideas of Nietzsche and bear destructive consequences. In *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, the narrator says, "The last thing you wanted to feel for Clara Walpole was *sorry*".[50] Swan also challenges a sympathetic reading of Clara. There is no emotional colouring of Swan involved, and by the last part of the text, their relationship appears to have become merely formal. Swan perceives his mother negatively: "*I hate you. You are a bitch.* He would have liked to punish her, and that name was a punishment".[51] Swan's desire to punish Clara is consequently manifested in the text by his physical act of violence.

Seeking help from Dr Piggott, Swan complains about his condition:

> *Sometimes when I'm driving I feel my – I guess it's my brain? – my 'consciousness'? – start to go out. Like a candle flame. I want only to close my eyes. The yearning is so strong.*[52]

Swan experiences the pressure of transformative power on a physical level. However, he does not fictionalise his simulacrum and holds on to his rational reasoning. In comparison, Clara guards her chosen identity, persevering in her aspiration for success. Her life energy is durable and persistent, and thus clashes with Swan's fragile nature. As Friedman insists, Oates creates a prototype of the character of Clara that suggests an imperialistic avatar. In

[50] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 331.
[51] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 338, emphasis original.
[52] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 378, emphasis original.

this sense there is no space for attributes such as vulnerability, self-pity or despair.[53] Clara thus corresponds to Nietzsche's higher man who:

> "exploits bad accidents to [her] advantage; what does not kill [her] makes [her] stronger. [She] knows how to *forget* – [she] is strong enough; hence everything *must* turn out for [her] best".[54]

Nietzsche promotes the idea of the strength of character, which, as I will show, corresponds to the nature of Clara in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*. Clara succeeds for most of life in spite of economic hardship and social rejection. She is assertive and determined to playfully fictionalise her desires. To shed more light on Clara's development in the text, it is important to notice that her character embraces self-reliance. She says, "She figured that God had more important things to care about than Clara Walpole".[55] She dismisses spirituality as something too distant and does not follow any human role models. Instead, Clara relies on her vision and dreams, confidently announcing, "I can take care of myself".[56] The only comfort that Clara accepts is an artistic representation that offers an alternative vision of reality. Therefore, Clara is interested in art:

> "Paintings and music were meant to turn things into other things, Clara thought, so that the sunset in pictures could make you cry while the real thing had no meaning at all".[57]

She experiences art as something to help her endure challenges and tragic events. Art offers a new perspective that she considers transformative. As art is timeless, it mirrors creative perspectives that can serve at different occasions in life.

[53] Friedman, p. 43.
[54] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Dover Edition, trans. by Anthony M. Ludovici (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), p. 13.
[55] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 131.
[56] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 159.
[57] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 208.

Swan grasps the intention of his mother and thinks that "Clara had married [Revere] because he had money, and he was older and would die".[58] About the eventual death of Revere's first wife, Clara says, "it took her so long to die",[59] which suggests the self-interest of Clara. In Clara's games, she is determined to win, she thinks, "If a person wanted something bad enough, Clara thought, he should get it. If he wished for something hard enough, he should get it."[60] She desires an economic improvement, and she achieves it. Clara says, "If nobody gives me what I want, I'll steal it. I want somethin – I am gonna get it".[61] Mary Allen calls Clara's acts "deterministic responses to negative conditions".[62] In her games, Clara ignores the moral aspect of her actions. Not selecting the values according to their ethical determination, the character of Clara corresponds to the postmodern sentiment of permissiveness, that leads to her character decentralisation and affirms the plurality of opinions.

Conclusion

In Oates' text, the traditional is avoided by the protagonist in order to pursue her desire. In order to do that, Oates' aspiring character fashions a new identity and reinvents herself. By reflecting on American society in her text, Oates says:

> *A Garden of Earthly Delights* is a wholly realistic portrayal of that world, but it isn't so much a novel about victims as it is about the way in which individuals define themselves and make of themselves "Americans" – which is to say, resolutely not victims.[63]

[58] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 380.
[59] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 271.
[60] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 164.
[61] Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 135.
[62] Mary Allen, "The Terrified Women of Joyce Carol Oates", in *Joyce Carol Oates*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 62.
[63] Oates, "Afterword", in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 401.

Oates' texts are described by Calvin Bedient as "overreaching, the 'experimental' excitement, in human relationships".[64] Not only within human relationships, but also in relation to an inner self, Oates' characters seek to affirm their unique singularity that they prioritise. The author depicts the emotional tension between the assertion of selfhood and the pull of society by the postmodern lens.

Mirroring Nietzsche's criticism of conventional morals, Clara manifests her desire, ignores moral conventions, and isolates herself from the community. She shapes her own future by eliminating her past and roots. The characters of Oates frequently detach themselves from their history, which Friedman identifies as their "lost [original] identity", and re-invent a new one.[65] The author depicts the ambiguity of Clara's preferences, which clash with conventional ethics.

Under her influence, Swan feels that he can succeed only by fictionalizing himself. He recognises that there is an inner will struggling to get out which is, according to Friedman, "threatening to overcome his life".[66] However, Swan despises his resemblance to Clara and the chaos that she creates. He aspires to organise the chaos of his life, however, extends himself only to become the killer of both himself and his presumed father. In contrast, Clara defeats the unfair circumstances of her life, but she loses her friends, husband, son, and gains the reputation of being a manipulating individual. She seduces a married man whose wife is on her death bed, and intentionally enjoys her new life at the expense of others. Faced with the choice of love or money, Clara prefers affluence. Others tolerate her only because of her husband's social standing, so after his murder and Swan's suicide, Clara remains alone. In the Afterword of *A Garden of Earthly Delights,* Oates says:

> The trajectory of social ambition and social tragedy dramatized by the Walpoles seems to me as relevant to the twenty-first century as it had seemed in the late 1960s, not dated but bitterly enhanced by our current widening disparity between social

[64] Calvin Bedient, "Sleeping Beauty and the Love Like Hatred", *The New York Times* (14 October 1973), p. 17.
[65] Friedman, p. 110.
[66] Friedman, p. 51.

> classes in America. *Haves and have-nots* is too crude a formula to describe this great subject, for as Swan Walpole discovers, to *have*, and not to *be*, is to have lost one's soul.[67]

Oates sets the novel during the unstable aftermath of the Great Depression, and the plot culminates during the consequent decades that are challenged by the philosophical conflict of the death of God that encouraged individual self-determination and pluralism of opinions. Read through postmodern Nietzschean lenses, Oates' characters experience tension between individualism and community and can be interpreted as archetypes that place themselves beyond good and evil, create their own values, and put forth an innovative attitude that opposes social pressures. Corresponding to the postmodern reading of Nietzsche, Oates' Clara experiences an urge to fictionalise herself, her game of re-invention advancing as the text unfolds. About composing *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, the author says:

> The novel-to-be springs into a visionary sort of life like something glimpsed: an immense mosaic, a film moving at a swift pace. You "see"-but you can't keep up with that pace. The novel opens before you like a dream, drawing you into it, yet it's a dream in which you are somehow participating, and not merely a passive observer.[68]

By Oates' vision of the United States, the author identifies her role of novelist as one that must, "dramatize the nightmares of [her] time".[69] In her Quartet, the author designs space for the polyphony of dreams whose pursuits clash with the authentic setting. According to Oates, an idealised picture of America obscures harsh realities. Her fiction emphasises the human struggle between a societal majority of moral consciousness and the minority that is represented by individual valuation in the 1950s. She portrays the journey of individual re-invention as a relentless process. Besides this, Oates also articulates the ultimate effects of the fictional re-invention that affirms chaos upon individual characters as well as the community.

[67] Oates, "Afterword", in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, p. 404.
[68] Oates, "Afterword" in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, pp. 398-399.
[69] Gregson, p. 95.

Chapter Three

Comic Nihilism in *Expensive People*

Joyce Carol Oates' *Expensive People* (1968), the second novel in her Wonderland Quartet, explores the American suburban setting. In contrast to her earlier *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (1967), which depicts the established conservatism of different classes in the 1950s, in *Expensive People* Oates satirises the cultural concerns of the following decade. This includes the economic prosperity of the era, epitomised by the middle class and intelligentia, clashing with social upheavals of the countercultural movement in the 1960s.

In this chapter, I will examine the direct reference of Oates to Nietzsche that supports my empirical claim that the ideas of Nietzsche directly influenced Oates. In this text, Oates explicitly acknowledges "the Nietzschean 'eternal return'" in her novel that I will examine.[1] In my analysis, I will also present my interpretative claim to consider the postmodern philosophy that appropriates the ideas of Nietzsche. Through the postmodern lens, I will examine the development of the protagonist, the concept of disorder and permissive fictions in Oates' text, and her employment of the term "comic nihilism".[2] Recalling the imagery of Lewis Carroll's texts *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), I will shed more light on Oates' application of the element of wordplay and the chaotic fantasy visions juxtaposed with the real-world images in *Expensive People*. I will analyse Oates' references to Carroll's Wonderland, along with the underlying symbolism of the latter that support my interpretative claim about Oates' aestheticisation of violence in the context of the postmodern games advanced in the 1960s.

[1] Joyce Carol Oates, *Expensive People* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2006), originally published in 1968, p. 6.
[2] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 98.

To substantiate my interpretative claim, I will examine Oates' literary concept of comic nihilism as a method to ridicule the aspirations of the era after the death of God. The term "comic nihilism" was established in the study of Noland on the corpus of John Barth a year after the publication of *Expensive People*, in which Noland explores Nietzsche's influence on Barth's application of social parody in his text *The Floating Opera* (1956). In *Expensive People*, the term "comic nihilism" is used by Richard's mother Nada Everett, a writer, who scribbles the expression down in her notes.[3]

Influenced by Lewis Carroll's Alice texts, Oates combines puns, metaphors, literary parodies, and allusions. She depicts her characters in American suburbia's chaotic environment, an idealised locale that allows the author to dramatize her reflection on the shaping influence on the cultural forms emerging in the 1960s. It is not a young, innocent heroine at the centre of this novel, but rather a male child who engages in violence. Oates questions the theme of juvenile delinquency in the search for autonomy within the adult world through a young Western man, Richard Everett, and according to Richard W. Noland, Oates presents Western literary discourse in "a form both tragic and comic".[4]

Expensive People starts with the eighteen-year-old Richard admitting to having killed his mother in his childhood. His parents are Elwood Everett, a constantly happy father, and Natashya Romanov, a fiction writer who changes her name to hide her working-class origin. They frequently move throughout American suburbia, in pursuit of more expensive houses. In the settings of economic abundance, Richard's friend Gustave Hofstadter, deceased neighbours, and his dog Spark magically re-appear in their new locations. In a confusing setting, Richard experiences parental coldness and the artificiality of suburban community cultivated by adult pretence. A close reading of the novel reveals that everyone wears a social

[3] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 98.
[4] Richard W. Noland, "John Barth and the Novel of Comic Nihilism", *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1966), pp. 239–257, p. 257.

mask of happiness and perfection. The author portrays an artificial setting in which the laws of physics do not apply. In Oates' text, through the rite of passage – both biological and social – from childhood to adolescence, the protagonist develops into an individual with a sense of societal apathy.

It is essential to note that through her use of satire and parody, Oates critiques the articulations of American cultural forms of the decade, which I will explore through the lens of postmodern ideas. I will argue that the character of Richard corresponds to a nihilistic figure set within the idealised suburbia of the 1960s. He attempts to fictionalise himself through *Űberwindung*, his personal overcoming of nihilism. However, his development in the text is depicted in a form of social parody, evoking human loss. According to the American critic Eileen Bender, Oates juxtaposes passive acceptance and an individual's active autonomy as a reaction to *Sehnsucht* (longing), and questions its forms in the quest for life-affirmation.[5]

Narrated from the first-person perspective, Richard's voice mixes with that of the author. Oates says about the novel:

> The "I" of my protagonist Richard became so readily the "eye" of the novelist that, at times, the barrier between us dissolved completely and the voice in which I wrote was, if not strictly speaking my own, an only slightly exaggerated approximation of my own.[6]

The proximity between the author and the narrator, nevertheless, diverges in terms of the character's disturbance and self-destruction. Oates depicts a storyline that confronts the "fractured sense of our {American} national identity", in which Richard sets out to find logic in the suburban nonsense of the adult world, but like Carroll's Alice, Richard is constantly frustrated.[7] In the face of unanswerable questions, Oates says that "Alice is strengthened by

[5] Eileen T. Bender, *Joyce Carol Oates, Artist in Residence* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 30.
[6] Oates, "Afterword" in *Expensive People* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2006), p. 222.
[7] Oates, "Afterword" in *Expensive People*, p. 224.

her experiences" while Richard's weakness leads him to violence.[8] The author depicts the antagonist character of Richard to cultivate the element of terror.

By emphasising the childhood period of the protagonist who is depicted as an adult at the end of the novel, the author fashions the sense of innocence clashing with the images of terror in her book. The theme of children's innocence was popular in the Victorian era in which Carroll wrote his Alice books.[9] However, the innocence associated with childhood conflicts with Richard's aggressive behaviour in Oates' narrative. It is the "nightmarish atmosphere of Alice's dreams" that Oates elaborates on in her Wonderland Quartet.[10] Thus, it is with a particular emphasis in *Expensive People* that Oates juxtaposes the element of terror and playful postmodern permissiveness.

Eternal Recurrence in Expensive People

In the next section, I will examine the Nietzschean influence palpable in *Expensive People*. Specifically, I will address Oates' direct engagement with the concept of eternal recurrence. Satirically, Oates conceptualises the concept of the eternal return in violence. A clear reference to Nietzsche and his doctrine of the *eternal return* can be found in the motiveless nature of a child murderer's crime in *Expensive People*. In the novel, Richard alludes to the historian Wren's speculation of "the Nietzschean 'eternal return'".[11] In the text, Wren references Nietzsche's doctrine to "nonsense [...] repetitions, throughout eternity, of the bizarre crimes of *Peter Luly*" who, in his childhood, murders his family.[12]

Through his research, Richard gains more material and inspiration for his own violent act, and consequently identifies himself with criminal children. Richards explains:

[8] Joyce Carol Oates, "Wonderlands", *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 55, No. 4/Vol. 56, No. 1 (Winter 2001/Spring 2002), p. 162.
[9] Martin Gardner, "Introduction to *The Annotated Alice*", in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. xx.
[10] Gardner, "Introduction to *The Annotated Alice*", p. xiv.
[11] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 6.
[12] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 6.

> I have compiled an alphabetical list of child criminals, beginning with Ajax, Arnold, and proceeding through Mossman, Billie, and ending with Watt, Samuel, all of the decently enough treated by society despite their obvious depravities. Oh, yes, I should mention Lilloburo, Anjette, the only girl on my list: she put insecticide in the grape drink she was selling on the sidewalk before parents' modest frame house, a child of only seven but already corrupt and damned.[13]

Encouraged by the repulsive slaughters, Richard audaciously recollects his "idea" about a matricide in the memoir.[14] Combatting his childhood innocence, Richard intentionally satisfies his ambition to become a child murderer to follow the cycle of repeated aggression in American history.

According to Shane Weller, the most extreme form of active nihilism is its affirmation, in other words the "eternal recurrence of the same".[15] Nietzsche clarifies that the eternal repetition is "the most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the 'meaningless'), eternally!"[16] The overcoming requires the acceptance of life as becoming by affirming gradually re-evaluated interpretations. In *Expensive People*, the author uses expressions clearly related to nihilism, for instance when Richard describes his mother and how she wants to "annihilate" herself before society.[17]

Richard publicly admits his matricide, and Nada consequently disappears from the text. However, no punishment follows and Richard is regarded innocent. Oates highlights the destructive nature of violence while ironically maximising the depiction of a murder with no legal consequence. Further, the author challenges the ambivalence of guilt and innocence, blurring the lines between the opposing values. Oates' text queries whether, when repudiating Western morality, the assassin should be deemed guilty or remain innocent.

Additionally, Oates' satirical usage of the eternal return includes the denial of physical death. Deceased characters enigmatically re-appear alive in the text or are replaced

[13] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 7.
[14] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 3.
[15] Shane Weller, *Modernism and Nihilism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 36.
[16] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter A. Kaufmann and J.R. Hollingdale, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1967), p. 36.
[17] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 46.

by different people. Only a week after the death of Nada, she is casually replaced by a different woman whose diamond ring from Elwood is "bigger, far bigger, than Nada's had been".[18] With each of Nada's escapes and consequent returns to the family, they move home to start afresh and affirm their sense of happiness, yet the neighbours remain the same in all locations to recall the the image of a closed cycle.

Immediately after moving to Fernwood, Nada is perplexed about the appearance of the Griggs family from their previous location in Brookfield, the Griggs having apparently moved to the same location at the same time. In her conversation with Elwood, she says about the Griggs:

> "Do you think he brought his wife so soon?" Nada said.
> "Honey, what would Griggs be doing in Fernwood?"
> "And his cook, that ugly cook? No, she must have been left behind."
> Nada had a tense, white, pained look, as if she were staring into a nightmare but could not make out of its terrors. "Why do these people keep following us around, Elwood?"[19]

When the Everetts meet Edward Griggs on his driveway, Elwood and Edward pretend not to recognise each other.[20] Elwood appears reluctant in discerning the re-appearance of the neighbours. However, Nada identifies the uncanny encounter of repetition saying, "the bastard [Edward Griggs] was just as terrified at seeing us as we were at seeing him [Edward Griggs]. None of us can ever escape".[21]

Another uncanny appearance of the Everetts occurs with the neighbours called the Veals. Although the Veals die in a plane accident, Richard's father persuades Nada to invite them for dinner in their new house. They have a conversation about the disagreement:

> "We'll have to have the Veals over," Father said.
> "The Veals, Honey?"
> "I know how you feel, but – "
> "But Elwood, the Veals are dead. They died in that awful plane crash, didn't they?"
> "What? Dead? No, Tashya. I just met them the other day at Vernon White's, didn't I mention it?"

[18] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 217.
[19] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 15.
[20] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 21.
[21] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 23.

> "Not the Veals, Elwood. You didn't meet them, hey are dead."
> "Who says they're dead?"
> "Everyone said what a shame it was, don't you remember?"
> "But they're not dead, I just met them! I just met them."
> "Are you sure it was the Veals?"
> "Of course. I think it was Thelma and Artie."
> "They might have relatives – "
> "But this looked like the Veals. You must remember them – middle-aged and sort of athletic? Always tanned?"
> "Yes, but - "
> "Well, we should invite them over. Thelma was very nice to you."
> "But they are dead."[22]

Oates' suburbia has the same feature of artificial uniformity. Richard says, "Everyone agrees with everyone else in Fernwood, or Cedar Grove, wherever we are".[23] Regardless of the names, the suburbs are interchangeable. Not only people, but also the surrounding re-appears with every move. When Nada announces seeing the Griggs in their new suburb, Richard explains:

> Not one mile away was the same house we had lived in for the last three years in Brookfield, present here in Fernwood like a miracle; and the Hunt Club was the same Hunt Club as Brookfield's, except that it had "Valley" prefixed to its name.[24]

Their artificiality of the setting appears unescapable, along with the Everetts' street name "Labyrinth Drive" symbolising the sense of being lost in their new location.[25]

The relocation becomes routine when the Everetts enthusiastically arrange local services by phone and consequently organise a housewarming party in the neighbourhood. Every move results in a bigger house thanks to the money associated with Elwood Everett's promotion. Oates ridicules the idealisation of domestic suburban life by having Elwood achieve prosperity through the ammunitions industry, a sector closely linked with death and destruction. The Everetts invent a "ceremony" that becomes an artificial tradition with each

[22] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 134.
[23] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 170.
[24] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 14.
[25] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 130.

move, and the family "baptize[s] the new house".[26] This event is a secular alternative to a Christian service determined by a religious belief in God, which is replaced by a postmodern fiction without God. Further to the baptismal event, the Everetts participated in what can be described as a ceremony of routine:

> *Oh, what do we want, darling?* – my husband says everything. Mowing, fertilizing, shrub and tree spraying, weed and insect spraying. Yes, what? Yes, fungus prevention, everything, edging, thinning, rolling, flattening. The usual. Everything.
> "Now the Gas Company," Father said wisely.
> And Nada called the Gas Company.
> "And the Insurance Company."
> And she called the Badger Insurance Company.
> "And Vernon White, to let his secretary know I'm here."[27]

Richard is involved in this ceremony, fixing the services that again remain identical in all the suburbs to which they move. He helps his mother search the phone books for numbers, and then she makes the calls. Oates' comic depiction of routine satirises the family's pretence of a happy beginning to a new stage in their lives. The uncanny repetition in the suburbs additionally recalls nonsense episodes in the dream vision of Carroll's texts.

The sense of repetition is also applied to pets. Richard recalls "tale" of his dog Spark.[28] Spark is hit by a car and is consequently replaced by a new but identical dog, allowing Richard's parents to pretend that it is the same one.[29] Richard describes the second car accident as follows:

> Out of nowhere came an aqua truck, not laundry truck this time but a delivery truck, and its brakes squealed and its [Spark's] body shuddered and swerved, and there was a scream of surprise from Spark and a scream of anger from Nada, who cried, "Oh, no!"[30]

The author employs the same action, only altering the type of the truck that hits the dog. The repetition of the event is supported by the same role of the characters. Both times, it is Elwood

[26] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 129.
[27] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 130.
[28] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 125.
[29] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 124.
[30] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 124.

who brings new Spark and it is Nada who cooks fudge for Richard while waiting on Spark.[31] The third Spark in succession is obviously not the same dog because Richard recognises that he is, "a lot bigger than he [Spark] was two days before. His [Spark's] coat was not so soft".[32] In the mode of cyclic repetition even death is satirically substituted by another living variant who experiences an identical life journey in order to keep the same life activity.

The artificiality of suburbia is intensified by Nada's abandonments of the family. Richard recalls traumatic disconnections from his mother that cause his emotional numbness:

> When she ran away from us the first time Father had told me sadly that my mother had died; I wasn't quite old enough to understand this. The second time she ran away I overheard his conversation (via an upstairs extension) with the private detective who was on her trail; but this time – no, I didn't think I could survive another time.[33]

Each time she returns, the Everetts move to another suburb, from Brookfield to Fernwood, and from Fernwood to Cedar Grove. Richard's friend Gustave also re-appears in Cedar Grove. Richard recalls their unexpected meeting in Cedar Grove:

> One day I went down to the library and there on the steps, clucking at some pigeons, was a boy who looked rather like myself. Skinny, hollow-chested, in a plaid shirt and wearing pink transparent-rimmed glasses. I looked again, and it was Gustave! We greeted each other warmly. "I didn't know you were moving here," I said.
> "I didn't know you were moving at all," said Gustave.[34]

The author uses the universal physical appearance and clothes of kids in her texts that support the concept of interchangeability and repetition. The re-union between Richard and Gustave appears unlikely and thus unreliable, as, despite being unaware of each other's movements, they have moved to new homes in the same suburb at relatively the same time. Despite the different locations, the personalised neighbours enigmatically remain identical in their type and also names. They all chat in an "old suburban style", dress up for cocktails and dinner

[31] Oates, *Expensive People*, pp. 122-124.
[32] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 124.
[33] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 71.
[34] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 135.

parties, and attend country clubs.[35] The suburban bond unites Oates' expensive people, who never argue at social occasions.

Oates portrays the Everetts as prisoners of the pretence that causes restlessness and discontent. Nada's method of satisfying the void is by her physical escapes, and Richard solves his discontent by chaotic violence. He desperately aims to break the nihilist cycle of suburban life, yet Oates' suburbia appears impenetrable. Richard says, "Fernwood does control everything, like it or not".[36] The impenetrable aspect that is assigned to God is shifted towards the chaotic setting in the postmodern context that cannot be controlled. Only by overeating and enlarging his body can Richard violate the physical ideal of beauty and eventually excludes himself from suburbia. Consequently, he physically detaches from Cedar Grove and lives alone in the city.

The author uses the image of disposability to undermine the authenticity of her characters. The constant replacement causes Richard's confusion. The author critiques artificial images of American culture that ignore the emotional aspects of personality. Oates depicts suburbia as a place of unfulfilled expectations and disappointment.

The Chaos of Expensive People

The parental neglect conditions Richard's position as a victim. He complains about artifice and is confused by the chaotic environment that his parents create. Richard's growing frustration recalls Alice's disappointment after entering the surreal garden. Oates says about Carroll's Wonderland that "the behaviour of the King and Queen turns out to be idiotic, a parody of inexplicable 'adult' behaviour".[37] The dominance of aristocratic power in Carroll's

[35] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 134.
[36] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 46.
[37] Oates, "Wonderlands", p. 158.

work translates as the adult dominance of Richard's parents in Oates' novel, and the power games are fictionalised in both texts.

As Alice becomes appropriately proportioned to enter the garden in Carroll's text, thus Richard changes his psychological perspectives. It is not a physical adjustment but rather mental transformation that Richard experiences. First, the innocent Richard passively suffers under suppressive parental coldness in the culture of fictional games in order to conform to the nationally proposed middle-class ideology. Rick Mayock, who explores the link between Nietzsche and Carroll's texts, contends that for Alice, "finding the right perspective on things makes them more tolerable, more aesthetically pleasing".[38] Alice's changing proportions symbolise her altering perspectives, and in *Expensive People* Richard develops a similar strategy, moving from passive frustration to active navigation in the fictional games. Consequently, he fictionalises his chaotic simulacrum and attains power. He creates an aggressive singularity that, nevertheless, conflicts with his underlying sense of morality.

Mayock says that, "Alice is catapulted into a world with no rules, which induces her (and us) to try to make sense out of the nonsense".[39] However, in Alice's Wonderland and also in Richard's suburbia, to induce logical sense out of chaos is impossible. When introduced to a chaotic caucus-race, Alice is advised by the Dodo that, "the best way to explain it is to do it".[40] To order external chaos is beyond the capability of either Alice or Richard. The masculine inability to conquer the chaos recalls the impotence of Swan from Oates' previous *A Garden of Earthly Delights*. Unlike Alice, both Oates' male protagonists express themselves in violence that defines their personal weakness. However, recalling the playfulness of Alice, Richard eventually pursues a life of fiction, aligns to the chaos, and establishes his voice. As Alice, Richard creates his fictional game in contrast with the

[38] Rick Mayock, "Perspectivism and Tragedy: A Nietzschean Interpretation of Alice's Adventure", in *Alice in Wonderland and Philosophy: Curiouser and Curiouser*, edited by Richard Brian Davis (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), p. 160.
[39] Mayock, p. 163.
[40] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 32.

normalised concept of games. In this context, Richard's animality can be contrasted with Alice's innocence.

Richard's life becomes a fictional articulation of his mother, a nationally acclaimed writer. Within this context, he assumes the fictional role of a "Minor Character", which results in nihilist resentment of Richard.[41] However, Richard consequently embodies the "doing your own thing" cultural imperative that arose in the 1960s, achieving this by his own fictional creation.[42] He writes a memoir in which he describes his matricide and explains himself to the reader.

Richard's pursuits epitomise violent articulation of the postmodern playfulness that lacks logic. By creating his fictionalised identity, Richard authoritatively changes the narrative of his parents, who he criticises. This occurs when Richard stops following the script of a minor character and decides on the fragmental script of a sniper that he secretly discovers in Nada's notes and which she intended for someone else. Thus, his mother's game becomes his own, one in which he autonomously establishes his dominant role. However, it is essential to note that while Alice awakes into the real world where the danger vanishes, Richard and Swan in *A Garden of Earthly Delights* face the tragic consequences of their permissive fictional game in the authentic setting.

Recalling Carroll's works, in *A Garden of Earthly Delights* Oates incorporates card games, but in *Expensive People* she shifts the focus of play to chess. In Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, that represents a distinct fictional setting from earlier Wonderland, Alice can move in a two-dimensional chess game that becomes her, according to Gillian Beer, "dream-time" with unconventional time shifts that Carroll's dream setting allows.[43] The

[41] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 194.
[42] John Harmon McElroy, *Divided We Stand: The Rejection of American Culture since the 1960s* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), p. 25.
[43] Gillian Beer, *Alice in Space: The Sideways Victorian World of Lewis Carroll* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 35.

chessboard image symbolises Alice's ideal game of fictions with the underlying level of the order of chess rules.

It is the aestheticisation of the fictional games of complete permissiveness in Carroll's Wonderland setting from his first Alice book, and the underlying order of the chess rules in Carroll's later book *Through the Looking Glass*, that Oates reconciles as a single fictional universe in the authentic setting in her narratives. It is only in *Expensive People* that her adaptation of Carroll's symbolism from *Through the Looking Glass* emphasises the chess game to represent the literal meaning of games with fixed rules. On a deeper level, the transition from complete permissiveness from Carroll's earlier Wonderland into its moderately limited permissivenes in *Through the Looking Glass* is addressed by Richard's inability to detach himself from his inner guilt that is caused by his moral consciousness.

In *Expensive People*, Richard respects the order and rules of chess and plays the game with his friends, observing:

> This precise and beautiful game, which leaves nothing to chance, unlike that hideous game, Bridge, which Nada *pretends* to like, or that still more hideous *game of life*. (You can trust a degenerate to turn philosophical).[44]

Richard compares his preferred logical game of chess with the trickery of life that constitutes his mother's pretence. By the implication of the philosophical coding in the text, Richard foreshadows his failure in the fictional world because he prefers the ordered game of chess. The chess game that he and his friends Gustave and Farley Weatherun admire represents their only link to logical order, sense, organisation, and thus moral safety. The author employs the chaotic setting of artificial suburbia where order is disrupted. Carrol's dream setting from both his texts is replaced in Oates' novel with the image of suburbia that, while confusing, appears real.

[44] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 56; emphasis added.

Richard experiences the need to fictionalise himself in order to survive. Rather than continuing to play the game of chess, he instead invents a thinking game in order to align himself to the chaotic environment in which he resides. Richard says:

> The Thinking Game helped if I was sinking so deeply into inertia that I was afraid I might die, then I would seize upon some forlorn trivial memory, of a shoe, of one of Nada's rings, or of the sheet music on the piano (just which specific pieces were out?).[45]

Thus, Richard supports his existence in the fictional realm of suburbia by playing games of his own. In his mother's life game, he accepts a subordinate position, and he is aware of the power games that his parents play with each other. He says, "I was sick of the game they [his parents] were playing", which always "began like comic-strip fights".[46] In their fights, Richard's parents pretend to be "stupid", recalling the comic Queen's croquet game and the nonsense arguments in Carroll's texts.[47] In a garden scene that precedes the croquet, white roses are painted red to please the monarch. The gardeners, who are afraid of the Queen, paint the roses and argue between themselves as to who will be beheaded, one argument leading to another.[48]

The silliness of the gardeners' power struggle parallels Nada and Elwood's arguments about obvious trivialities. In Carroll's novel, ridiculous arguing between Wonderland creatures indicates the power games that are played continuously through the course of the text. In *Expensive People*, the nonsense progression of the Everetts' fight starts with a strained silk cushion on a "Queen Anne chair". Oates thus employs the royal image in her book, yet positioning such references to Carroll's work in the background. The linguistic feature of *Expensive People* additionally evokes the royal dimension in two minor characters who are mentioned in the text. These are the "Dutchessa of Vilesia",[49] spotted in the

[45] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 190.
[46] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 69.
[47] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 69.
[48] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, pp. 83-84.
[49] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 82.

magazine, and "Princess Margaret"[50] to whom Nada's friend, editor Moe Malinsky, is introduced.

Nada pretends to belong to Russian émigré stock by calling herself Natashya Romanov. Her new surname recalls the last tsar family of Romanov that was executed by bayonets during the Russian Revolution. Thus, Nada unconsciously projects her assassination. Oates' minor royal characters do not develop in the plot of Richard's memoir and are merely externally observed by *expensive people*. Like the squabble between the gardeners in Carroll's text, Richard's parents continuously argue. Richard lists their arguments in the following manner:

> The fight over father's Negro jokes at a party.
> The fight over Father's "baggy trousers."
> The fight over Father's shirts, which were all dirty.
> The fights over Nada's correction of Father's pronunciation of "incognito".[51]

The anaphora emphasises the endless nature of senseless power games. The employment of disrespectful, racist language depicts the perceived sense of superiority by the suburban middle class. In Cedar Grove, Malinsky criticises cultural suburbia, saying, "this culture is obsessed with brutality: in its fixed aesthetic forms […] the basis of our evil is the selfish desire for *power*".[52] Oates uses Nada to depict obsession with power, as she pretends to be a member of the middle-class "élite". To bolster this pretence, she wants Richard to call her Nadia, but instead he calls her "Nada", denoting a sense of nothingness.[53] Thus, Richard passively denies his mother's existence, which she attempts to challenge: "Don't Nada me, you little fake".[54] In re-inventing his fictional role, Richard's verbal expression of nihilism is consequently transformed into the active act of muting his mother. He revokes her authoritative power to execute his own.

[50] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 177.
[51] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 68.
[52] Oates, *Expensive People*, emphasis original, p. 171.
[53] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 170.
[54] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 163.

In a nonlinear storyline, the characters are not able to hold on to rationality and logic in an artificial environment that fosters nonsense. When Gustave describes a chess game that he plays with an opponent from London, he is interrupted by the filming of a television scene that looks authentic. The attention paid to the logical chess game is thus shifted to a realistic seeming yet artificial life-threatening situation. A car flips over at tremendous speed, which shocks Richard and Gustave. Their initial terror is softened by Gustave's father, who says, "It's a rehearsal. Television show".[55] The fiction in Oates' text appears real, and the children are confused by the absence of distinction between the two domains. It is the adults who playfully navigate through chaotic situations that scare children, who are anticipating order rather than artifice. Recalling Carroll's text, Alice experiences threatening situations that Wonderland creatures consider reasonable. The strangeness of Carroll's dreamy wonderland is transformed into fictional images that confuse Oates' authentic suburbia.

Both authors, Oates and Carroll, depict the disagreement between children and adults. It is by an indirect manner that Carroll's unconventional creatures in Wonderland epitomise adult pretence and hypocrisy, while Oates' characters speak for themselves. To maximise the philosophic conflict after the death of God, the adults in Oates' text fictitiously re-invent themselves. However, in a real setting, their re-invention is perceived as hypocritical by children, who therefore criticise them. In *Expensive People,* Oates reverses traditional family roles between children and their parents, resulting in the parents rather than their children indulging in pretence. In a role reversal, it is the children who take care of their mothers. Gustave says about his mother, "I have to watch out for her […] eavesdrop, make sure she doesn't lose something or burst into tears".[56] Yet with the absence of the authentic realm in Oates' suburbia, children are left with a level of chaos that disturbs them.

[55] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 111.
[56] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 49.

To comprehend a confusing situation of coincidental moves to Fernwood by Richard and Gustave, they start a new "ingenious game of chess" that, in this context, represents their shared sense of order.[57] Nevertheless, Richard is fully aware of the fictional realm that constitutes his life, saying, "I hoped we would never stop dreaming this time".[58] However, Richard's dream-like flow of events leads to its nightmarish alternative. The surreal aspect of Carroll's work is depicted as a terror vison in Oates' text. Thus, the author employs violence and self-destruction as a recurring trope.

Through the technique of self-reflexivity, the narrator additionally engages the reader in the plot when Richard explains the writing steps of his memoir. He comments on his literary devices, and leaves his "elaborate scheme of symbolism" for the academic audience to decode.[59] The author meta-fictively includes the subtext of Nada's entire short story, "The Molesters". The author's employment of irony, Richard's psychological fragmentation of Nada's perpetual abandonment, and consequent moving of the family underpins the experimentation of Oates with postmodern techniques. Richard's unreliable narration confuses the reader, enhanced by a nonchronological sequence of events. As with his life, Richard's writing lacks order. Additionally, by confessing his well-planned matricide at the age of eleven in the opening line, Richard opens a discourse on his plausible mental underlying condition.

The author explains that it is "authentic names, and authentic entities" that she fictionalises in the plot. The locations of *Expensive People* are Birmingham/Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, which influence the author's invention.[60] Inspired by Carroll's dream-like Wonderland, the artificiality and corporeal unpredictability are significant features of Oates'

[57] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 135.
[58] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 135.
[59] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 75.
[60] Oates, "Afterword", in *Expensive People*, p. 224.

suburbia. In an invited talk about the wonderland concept that occurred at the Lewis Carroll Society of North America in 2001, Oates says about the Wonderland setting:

> How spontaneously our childlike excitement is aroused by the mere notion of a secret world – a secret garden, perhaps – a world of dazzling radiance – a spectral world that is yet authentic, plausible – contiguous with our own (otherwise how should we enter it?) yet altogether separate and unpredictable.[61]

The author depicts the authentic world that we know, yet imposes its variable aspects of pretence and hidden secrets. Nada's visitor, Malinsky, gains the insightful revelation of suburban superficial bliss and he asks Nada, "Is this a location in space or a condition of the brain?"[62] In *Expensive People*, Richard admits his amazement and admiration for Fernwood. His utopic description reveals a postmodern notion of complete satisfaction. It is a human fictitious invention that pleases all desires. Richard compares the location to God's creation. He says:

> If God remakes the Paradise it will be in the image of Fernwood, for Fernwood is Paradise construed to answer all desires before they are even felt. Heaven and earth converge like two friendly halos of perfume, overlapping, sinuous, and the crystal chandeliers and elegant automobiles are there to please you, just to please your eye.[63]

In Oates' setting that challenges physical laws, it is possible to fictionalise identity and playfully live out invented games. Everything is possible, as it is a plausible context for visions to be lived. Richard continues:

> There is never any contrast between what is said and what is done, what is done and what is intended, what is intended and what is desired – everything runs together.[64]

The logic behind this image recalls the wordplay at the 'Mad Tea Party' episode in Carroll's Wonderland text that challenges the order of thinking and saying. In Carroll's text, Alice insists on the same subject and the reversibility of the order of her thoughts and words.

[61] Oates, "Wonderlands", p. 150.
[62] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 174.
[63] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 103.
[64] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 103.

However, the strange Wonderland creatures the Hatter, the March Hare, and the Dormouse think otherwise:

> "Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!"
> "You might just as well say," added the March Hare, "that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like'!"
> "You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, which seemed to be talking in its sleep, "that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'!"[65]

Carroll depicts the interplay of the semantic relation between words while changing the orientation of the denotative meaning. He creatively challenges the laws of logic and language in his chaotic context of a dream setting. The influence of Carroll's semiotic transformations on Oates' *Expensive People* is introduced in the first sentence of her narrative. Richard says in his opening line:

> I was a child murderer. I don't mean child-murderer, though that's an idea. I mean child murderer, that is, a murderer who happens to be a child, or a child who happens to be a murderer. You can take your choice.[66]

The freedom of the narrator depicted by his wordplay is transferred on to the reader. Oates fictionalises the cultural aspirations that popularised the Dionysian consciousness after the proclamation of the death of God in the United States in the 1960s and maximises the discrepancy between the real world and human fantasy. Her setting is a place where dreams wondrously manifest before they are desired. In this permissive world, the consequences are always positive. Any negative actions magically vanish, and so everybody is constantly happy and satisfied. Therefore, the absurd concept of Fernwood and Cedar Grove leaves no space for punishment, which are determined by the concept of God and moral disobedience. In Fernwood, the characters represent their own individual authority, and dominance is

[65] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, pp. 73-74.
[66] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 3.

obtained by wishing and fictionalising the desire. In her essay, Oates argues about Wonderland:

> A veritable galaxy of fantasy worlds exist for us to explore in legends, fairy tale, and imaginative literature; and no less fantastic are the hypostatized worlds of singularities (in physics, "nonplaces" where all known laws of nature seem to be suspended) and counterfactual conditionals ("possible worlds" accessible only by way of logic).[67]

Recalling Carroll's Alice texts, the events in Oates' Fernwood and Cedar Grove in *Expensive People* lack logical conclusions, sense, and order. Dead characters magically re-appear alive, and the only character who leaves the plot is Nada, after she is killed by Richard. Nevertheless, she is substituted by a divorcee, Mavis Grisell, who represents a better suburban housewife than Nada. Oates' setting is an ideal place for the cultivation of characters' singularities; it is a world of becoming a better self, where improvement is imperative. Therefore, Nada forces Richard to re-take his IQ test to gain a better score, to raise it by "a healthy margin".[68] However, Richard discovers his IQ results are below the standards, and so his narrative of a degenerative process does not fit in the ideal suburbia and is consequently altered by him.

Richard describes Fernwood as a fantastic world. He says, "Everything in Fernwood is agreeable!"[69] The chaotic environment approves nonsense situations, for instance, Richard witnesses a chaotic bank robbery that leads to murder. After an initial disturbance, Nada concludes that the robbery is a rehearsal for a television show. Confused, Richard says, "I was still upset from the fake bank robbery. I had never seen anyone killed in front of me, even if it did turn out to be make-believe".[70] The interchange between reality and fiction in the context of violence introduces Richard's consequent destructive articulation that vanishes into fiction in Oates' text. The bank robbery appears real but later becomes fiction, and thus

[67] Oates, "Wonderlands", pp. 150-151.
[68] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 60.
[69] Oates, *Expensive People*, pp. 64-65.
[70] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 62.

Richard's capacity for the authentic act of Nada's murder is dismissed by the legal authorities as a delusion. The psychiatrist to whom Richard confesses his felony says:

> Richard, let me assure you of this: hallucinations are as vivid as reality, and I respect everything you say. I know you are suffering just as much as if you had killed your mother.[71]

Ambiguously lingering between fiction and reality, Richard's gun, which he buries in the neighbour's garden, also magically disappears. Additionally, at the time of the murder, Richard is absent from school, yet the official records report that his school attendance is "perfect".[72] Yet with no physical evidence, Richard loses proof to demonstrate that he is the murderer. The author depicts a complex fictional flux by the chaotic conditions of the suburbia in *Expensive People*.

John Barth's "Comic Nihilism"

After the death of God, Nietzsche anticipates nihilism as a natural consequence before it is overcome. The postmodern articulation of Nietzschean sentiment considers the void after the death of God to be a potential space for human autonomy, one in which they can affirm new values. Ken Gemes argues that the postmodern naturalisation of Nietzsche's ideas is misleading, and he claims that it does indeed lead to mere nihilism.[73] In literature, Oates experiments with the philosophical conflict of nihilism in the context of postmodern playfulness. The American critic Sanford Pinsker highlights Oates' adoption of John Barth's "emblematic phrase […] 'comic nihilism'".[74] Resembling the work of Barth, *Expensive People* remains Oates' most experimental postmodern and metafictional work. Her central

[71] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 217.
[72] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 191.
[73] Ken Gemes, "Postmodernism's Use and Abuse of Nietzsche", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (March 2001).
[74] Sanford Pinsker, "Suburban Molesters: Joyce Carol Oates' *Expensive People*", *Midwest Quarterly*, Vol. 19 (Autumn 1977), p. 95.

literary device is also a parody, and her main focus is the idealised image of the American suburban middle class and the means of its uprising.[75]

Oates' critique of the cultural phenomenon of the decade prompts her affinity with Barth's parody in *The Floating Opera* (1956). Both texts parody ideology, whereas *Expensive People* critiques the particular culture of American suburbia in the 1960s with its idealistic middle-class housewives.[76] To challenge this representation, Oates parodies the preoccupation of the "doing your own thing" ideology, which arose during the era and is maximised by Richard's matricide and his suicide attempt through overeating.[77] Likewise, both texts parody the legal and judicial procedure.[78] Despite Richard pleads guilty, the legal representatives claim that he is innocent, and therefore, no public punishment is ordered.

To understand Barth's literary techniques better, let me start with Noland, who claims that Barth has an affinity with Nietzsche. Noland debates the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy that has been ascribed to the aesthetic concept of Nietzsche.[79] The Apollonian aspect represents the rational, while the Dionysian nature is characterised by irrational emotions and intuitions. Although some critics argue that Nietzsche postulates its fusion, Noland points out the literary tradition that attempts "to replace the Western Apollonian ego with Dionysian consciousness" in order to depict, according to Noland, the unsatisfactory understanding of the interplay.[80] It is Noland's argument that Barth, in a form of parody, employs precisely this prevailing Dionysian dialectic as a literary device to explore the theme of identity, suicide, and innocence. However, Nietzsche's traces in Oates' text are more complex than those in Barth's text. Therefore, in her literary concept, Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return and nihilism are additionally explored in more depth in this chapter.

[75] Pinsker, p. 95.
[76] Noland, p. 248.
[77] McElroy, p. 25.
[78] Noland, p. 248.
[79] Noland, p. 239.
[80] Noland, p. 239.

The initial parallel between Richard and Todd, the protagonist from *The Floating Opera*, is their "imperfect communication" with their parents.[81] Todd is able to overcome this failure through the "interminable *Inquiry*", which is a written account and reflection upon the life of his father.[82] However, he is only able to achieve this after his father's death. Similarly, Richard struggles to communicate with his parents, and after the death of Nada, he writes a memoir to alleviate his need to establish his autonomy. Both Todd and Richard plan to commit suicide, yet both remain alive at the end of their respective texts. Todd changes his mind, not because of the prevailing Apollonian aspect, which prevents him from finding new value and meaning in life, but because he perceives that there is "no more reason to die than to live".[83] In the moment of his planned death, his possible daughter convulses. Consequently, Todd experiences a sentimental change. According to Noland, it is at this stage that, for the first time in Todd's life, he succumbs to the Dionysian aspect and therefore abandons his suicidal goal.[84]

In contrast to Todd, and contextualised in the American cultural uprising of the 1960s, Richard's inner feeling of nothingness leads to his personal re-invention with violent ends. The self-conscious Richard ultimately finds the courage to do "his own thing", through matricide and an attempt at suicide.[85] Thus, Oates dramatises the postmodern concept of fictional games that lead to murder and self-destruction. However, in an attempt to rationalise his murder, Richard is ready to bear the logical consequences that vanish in a permissive nonsense setting.

Through parody, Oates critiques American idealisation and ridicules the violent articulations of the decade in the context of the 'doing your own thing' ethics.[86] According

[81] Noland, p. 241.
[82] Noland, p. 241.
[83] Noland, p. 247.
[84] Noland, p. 243.
[85] McElroy, p. 25.
[86] McElroy, p. 25.

to Gillian Beer, it is puns and parodies that Carroll employs in his texts to evoke "doublelesness". She says, "Parodies live most fully alongside their original and need that original to reach the power of contradiction".[87] It is the doublelesness of perspective, a principle of double vision, real and fictitious, that Oates depicts through her use of parody. In her choice of chaotic setting, however, the double vision consequently blurs into merely fictitious games with nonsense rules. The real becomes fantasy and fantasy is always affirmed, thus the initial duality of the incoming concept is consequently unified into a fictitious image. Thus, in *Expensive People* Oates creates an ideal setting for the emerging simulacrum of re-invented identity.

Additionally parodied is the eloquent style of the recognised press, including "The New York Times Book Review, [and] Time magazine", in the form of posthumous reviews of Richard's memoir:[88]

> Confused and confusing tale of a child with a famous madcap socialite mother and a dear doddering foolish father, set in that well-covered terrain, Suburbia. Everett sets out to prove that he can outsmartre Sartre but doesn't quite make it. It is all great fun though.[89]

Oates refers to the philosophical existentialism that Sartre represents. However, Richard attempts a newer concept, the postmodern articulation of permissive fictions that highlights Nietzsche's *new* interpretation at the hands of French critics in the late 1960s and 1970s, an interpretation that outmodes Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche. The popular postmodern concept allows a fearless game of fictions, in which the player of an ideal game always wins. However, the author mocks Richard's permissive, self-destructive articulation. Thus, Oates parodies the cultural form of the 1960s that Richard epitomises by "*The New Republic's*" review:[90]

> [The] child narrator turns dizzily, dreaming not simply the manic dream of the middle class (which never wakes in the novel), but also the manic dream of the would-be

[87] Beer, p. 79.
[88] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 112.
[89] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 112.
[90] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 113.

> novelist who would reduce complex sociological material to a thalamic crisis. […] only at such points of moral infinity can this new energy find its proper mode in the creation of revolutionary substances. *Expensive People*, traditional as Charles Dickens, is therefore an irrelevant exercise.[91]

In his memoir, Richard ultimately achieves a dominant position. However, recalling Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky's character Rodion Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment* (1866), Richard describes himself as living a "life sentence of freedom".[92] In his existentialist pursuit, Richard is challenged with the moral conflict of identity. Both characters, Richard and Raskolnikov, struggle with the moral dilemma of committed murder, but unlike Raskolnikov, Richard is not able to reconcile his guilty consciousness by public punishment. The external authority that is represented by the concept of God, suburban parents and institutions is ridiculed in Oates' text. In an attempt to establish autonomy, Richard's fictional games are depicted as unsatisfying. He says, "There's nothing more terrible than to commit a crime and still be free, there's nothing more terrible than to be a murderer without a murderer's punishment".[93] The underlying moral consciousness of Richard yearns for external punishment to order his internal chaos. However, no punishments occur in an idealised suburban setting. Unable to exercise his autonomy to organise disorder, Richard decides to *affirm* his mental chaos by fatal overeating that will represent his ultimate liberation from environment.

He suffers in the postmodern void because the playful fictions clash with his underlying sense of order. After the loss of value foundation, he addresses his freedom. He concludes:

> That, and the fierce consolation of knowing that whatever I did, whatever degradations and evils, stupidities, blunders, moronic intrusions, whatever single ghastly act I did manage to achieve, it was done out of freedom, out of choice. This is the only consolation I have in the face of death, my readers: the thought of my free will. But I must confess that there are moments when I doubt even this consolation.[94]

[91] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 113.
[92] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 218.
[93] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 217.
[94] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 219.

Thus, Oates articulates the complexity of human desires. With the individual revolt of Richard, which breaches the law, Oates sarcastically underlines the tragic consequences of cultural hypocrisy and permissive playfulness but also draws attention to the aggressive attempts to solve such outcomes.

"Do Your Own Thing" Ethics

In the 'Afterword' to *Expensive People*, Oates contends that the novel:

> was perceived as an expression of the radical discontent, the despair, the bewilderment and outrage of a generation of young and idealistic Americans confronted by an America of their elders so steeped in political hypocrisy and cynicism.[95]

The author further says that the novel's "climatic episode of self-destructive violence" culminates with the protagonist's self-rejection.[96] Oates explores the prestigious image of the American middle class that contrasts American experiences outside the conventional patterns. The novel evokes the culture of social revolution after the death of God, which surpasses the inert traditionalism of the previous decade. In the consequent countercultural rise, Oates fictitiously dramatizes ostentatious modifications of the characteristic phenomena of the permissive era. The postmodern understanding after the death of God presents countless possibilities for personal advance as a reaction to cultural dissatisfaction.

It is undeniable that Nietzsche critiques conventionality, normative morals, and guilt-driven consciousness, and promotes the finding of one's own way in order to "become what one is",[97] by establishing the values "beyond good and evil".[98] Therefore, I explore *Expensive People*, in the aforementioned aspects, through the lens of postmodern Nietzschean reading.

---

[95] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 221.
[96] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 221.
[97] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Dover Edition, trans. by Anthony M. Ludovici (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004), p. 49.
[98] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Planet PDF), p. 108 <http://www.planetpublish.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Beyond_Good_and_Evil_NT.pdf> [accessed 25.3.2015].

Oates experiments with cultural aspirations, yet caricatures the postmodern manipulation of Nietzsche's ideas in the text. It is important to note that the author distances herself from the voice of the protagonist when Richard's re-invention ultimately serves his desperate decision to commit murder and attempt suicide.

As the American critic G. F. Waller asserts about *Expensive People*, "Oates's technique is not to analyse but to distort and caricature".[99] Oates sets the idea of the Nietzschean doctrine of eternal return in human violence to question the absurdity of desperate measures. Intertwining the 1960s with the image of the cycle of murder, Oates' text provokes the cultural memory of escalating public violence over the decade. *Expensive People* additionally evokes the subsequent societal uncertainty that is recalled by Richard's feelings of insecurity in a chaotic setting of artificial suburbia.

Eileen T. Bender asserts that *Expensive People* is "overtly comic, satiric, [and] shaped by the associations and digressions of a witty and articulate but claustrophobic self".[100] Oates articulates the process of fictionalised re-invention and hyperbolises societal attitudes of the decade. The nihilistic attitude of the eponymous *expensive people* is depicted by the inability of the protagonist to establish a meaningful relationship with his parents. Richard explains to the reader how he murders his mother:

> Idea for a short novel: the young man (like J?) leads two lives, one public, one secret. Buys a gun. Frightens people, doesn't hurt them. […] planned all along though maybe he didn't know it. (Too corny? Should he know it or not?) The sniper. "The Sniper." I'll think of a theme later.[101]

Richard gets inspired by Nada's idea for her next book, which is labelled "comic nihilism".[102] According to her notes about a fictitious secret assassin, Richard becomes an assassin himself and eventually writes a memoir about it. In this sense, Richard eclipses Nada, and

[99] G. F. Waller, *Dreaming America: Obsession and Transcendence in the Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 114.
[100] Bender, p. 30.
[101] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 98.
[102] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 98.

symbolically steals her identity as a writer for himself. He feels trapped in a trivial plot and, therefore, his development stagnates. Oates' language in this passage indicates Richard's projected insecurity and his lack of control. The employment of unconnected ideas represents Richard's chaotic thinking and unreliability of his narration. The short sentences evoke the natural flow of thought patterns, and invite the reader to question Richard's identity. After reading the passage from Nada's notes, Richard buys a rifle and secretly shoots at random neighbourhood inhabitants from his window.

Before Nada's murder, Richard tests the permissive flow between reality and fiction. Nada's note about comic nihilisms reads, "senseless manic behaviour in some natural setting. … woods, flower bed. mysterious meetings, parallels…".[103] The incorrect punctuation of Nada underpins the disruptive flow of ideas in the creative writing process. However, Richard does not complete the thoughts into an organised concept, but he addresses thematic fragments of Nada by his chaotic delivery. Inspired by Nada, Richard violently ruins the flower arrangements in front of the bank. The passers-by look at him in amazement, yet instead of a legal rebuke for public disturbance, they interpret Richard's chaotic behaviour as a sign that he is looking for his keys. No negative reactions are allowed in Fernwood and Cedar Grove. Richard says:

> Someone from the bank was standing nearby, smiling. "It's quite all right, officer. Quite all right, just an accident. Did you find what you were looking for, Son?" I nodded and began to walk away. It seemed incredible to me that they would let me go … but yes, they did, they let me go![104]

This chaotic context with its exclusively positive outcomes refers to Oates' suburbia that corresponds to the postmodern culture of permissiveness. After Richard's "mad spell in the flower bed outside the Cedar Grove Bank of the Republic", he returns home and shoots Nada

[103] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 98.
[104] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 188.

with his rifle.[105] The bank represents the dominant public body in the suburban landscape, where permission for a chaotic public disturbance is validated, thus encouraging Richard to pursue his crime. Consequently, the murder is perceived as a delusion by adults in suburbia.

According to the notes of Nada, Richard starts living two fictitious lives: one the good son, and the other a secret assassin in the suburbs. However, he makes sure his unknown sufferers are not fatally wounded, with the exception of Nada. The theme of assassination can be historically contextualised during the decade in large part due to the high-profile assassinations of liberal representatives, notably President John F. Kennedy in 1963, the civil rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Martin Luther King Jr in April 1968, and the purported presidential candidate Robert Kennedy in June of that same year.[106] All of the victims' influence is muted by force and consequently replaced.

In the afterword to *Expensive People*, Oates links Richard's playful violence with political assassination, presenting the two as gestures of desperate annihilation: "What is assassination but a gesture of political impotence? – what are most 'crimes of passion' except gestures of self-destruction, self-annihilation?"[107] In the context of *Expensive People*, Nada satirically represents an unwilling authority figure whose life is violently terminated. However, despite admitting his crime, Richard's confession is not believed by the public. Any concerns surrounding the legal consequences of his violence vanish, along with the significance of the justice system. Parallel to political executions, where the former authorities are instantly replaced by others, Nada's devaluated family position is smoothly substituted by "the second Mrs. Everett".[108] The artificiality of the setting is personalised by the characters who are able to replace their less-fitting predecessors. Similarly, the legal innocence of the assassins parallels the public naiveté of Richard's violence. Richard's initial

[105] Oates, *Expensive People*, pp. 177-178.
[106] Sharon Monteith, *American Culture in the 1960s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 145.
[107] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 221.
[108] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 216.

confession is shocking, but as the narrative develops, Nada's coldness and manipulation are gradually exposed. Thus, the protagonist's identity alters from that of an offender to a victim of his mother's fictional power game.

The narrative additionally questions Nada's moral character. Nada's sexuality corresponds to a major issue in the text and contrasts the image of stereotyped suburbia that is critically challenged by contemporary scholars.[109] The character of Nada stands up for its unconventionality and because of her affairs, she leaves Richard when he is six, nine, and eleven years old, returning to the family for the periods in between. Each abandonment is painful not only for Richard but also for his father. However, Nada's importance to her family's well-being is routinely reduced by her escapes, and finally by her death. In her study of absent mothers in modern culture, the Swedish critic Berit Åström uses the term "symbolic annihilation"[110] to indicate mothers' identity as "erased and devaluated through [their] death or absence".[111] In *Expensive People*, the symbolic annihilation of Nada challenges the maternal bond between Nada and her son.

This invites the parental initiative of his father, who says to Richard, "she's run out again and it's just us and we gotta stick together".[112] However, Elwood's fatherly attempt consequently fails, and he descends into alcoholism. Additionally, Nada's escapes and Elwood's passivity cause the parental coldness that Richard endures. For him, the emotional absence of his parents results in his desperate search for control and a re-invention of his identity.

To establish authority, Richard uses fiction writing as a form of artistic expression. The memoir he writes is designed to change such power dynamics, and Richard shifts from

[109] Berit Åström, "The Symbolic Annihilation of Mothers in Popular Culture: *Single Father* and the Death of the Mother", *Feminist Media Studies*, Vol. 15, Issue 4 (2015), 593-607.
[110] The term is currently used to combat social stereotypes in the media. It was originally used by Hungarian American journalist George Gerbner in 1976. In 1978, Gaye Tuchman developed its concept and classified it into *omission, trivialisation*, and *condemnation*.
[111] Åström, p. 594.
[112] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 89.

a minor character to the protagonist, enabling him to speak for and about his mother. Oates also uses the creative aspect of writing when Richard borrows Nada's notes for her next book to give life to comic nihilism. Bender states that "Nada becomes the author of her own death!"[113] Richard murders Nada by executing her own artistic creation: he acts outs the violence of the child murderers to establish his new identity.

Fossum points out that, "Richard is trying to re-create the person he thinks he has destroyed as well as seeking to order and control his life, past and present".[114] Richard re-invents his life by the creative aspect of art. From the memoir, it is difficult for a reader to distinguish truth from imagination. Oates' narrative style empowers Richard to establish himself as the precise character he wishes to be, by omitting or adding certain information in order to satisfy his own vision of himself. In a like manner, what happens in the concept of eternal recurrence, in the moment of writing, is that Richard establishes his new identity by fictitiously re-constructing his past. Thus, in the present moment he generates his future. Richard is no longer passive, but rather he accepts the responsibility of his own becoming.

Fictions and Social Masking

Nada personalises the "assault on the assumed moral purity of womanhood", which according to Martin Halliwell first permeated literature in the 1960s.[115] Halliwell highlights the contrast between the advertised housewife ideal, with the focus on traditional "feminine modesty", and the "glamorous superficial figures" of the decade.[116] Nada embodies the later characteristic of the female identity in the 1960s, epitomising the white middle-class ideal by "the coats, the clothes, the yellow cars, the house, the furniture, parties, country club etc."[117]

[113] Bender, p. 37.
[114] Robert H. Fossum, "Only Control: The Novels of Joyce Carol Oates", *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (summer 1975), p. 52.
[115] Martin Halliwell, *American Culture of the 1950s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 43.
[116] Halliwell, p. 42.
[117] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 77.

She is able to present herself as a perfect woman, whose appearance and life-style are admired by the community. However, Richard thinks that "she was what most American women would like to be".[118] He says:

> And you men, you would all like a Nada of your own. If your income is above a certain level you'd need her to show it off, wouldn't you? That pleasant, sandy-faced woman you married would fade into a living room's beige walls if Nada walked into the room.[119]

Richard is aware of his mother's pretence, as her social prestige and appearance fulfil the ideal she appears to achieve. She strives to maintain a good reputation in their suburbs by organising parties and participating in important social occasions. However, in reality her fabricated image of the ideal wife and mother clashes with her inability to express love and affection for her child.

Richard's sadness at the loss of Nada, both physical and emotional, develops in the narrative. He subsequently realises that "life without Nada was a surprise, because it was so much like life with Nada".[120] Her selfishness breaks the myth of the suburban stereotype, as her maternal role is questioned in the text and eventually reduced by her death. Additionally, as the narrative develops, Nada's vilification appears to reduce Richard's blame.[121] The escalating matricide becomes central to Richard's new identity and his life-affirmation. Oates contrasts the ideal image of a perfect suburban family with the human inability to achieve it. The Everetts become the victims of societal prestige, which is based on fictional inventions.

As a writer, Nada strives to be respected as an intellectual. Additionally, she is proud of her "*emigré*" family background.[122] It is only at her funeral that Richard learns that his maternal grandparents are still alive, and that Nada has lied about their deaths to hide the fact that they are underprivileged immigrants rather than members of the Ukrainian intellectual

[118] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 76.
[119] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 77.
[120] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 95.
[121] Åström, p. 602.
[122] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 213.

elite. Additionally, to obscure her origins, it is revealed that she had changed her name from Nancy Romanow to Natashya Romanov, hiding her true identity under a mask of deception that is only removed after her death. The national encouragement of the working-class aspirations towards middle-class values became popular in the United States in the late 1950s.[123] The fictional depiction of Oates is in line with the national idealisation of the middle class, and this is precisely what Oates questions and depicts as deceptive in her text.

Not only does Oates use Nietzsche's concept of the *eternal return* in her text, but she also uses it as an absurd context for her character's violent act of murder. Oates fictitiously experiments with the attainment of creativity during the innocent physical age of childhood which, in contrast, results in violence in *Expensive People*. In the artificial setting of chaotic suburbia, values and priorities are tangled. Oates' literary sketch of the cultural phenomenon of the decade, distinguished by a sudden growth of suburban areas, stems from the national idealisation of the middle class. Halliwell contends that suburbia was promoted for its safety, and he additionally mentions Richard Yates' satirical novel *Revolutionary Road* (1961), which critiques the proposed ideals of that era. In the context, Halliwell links the artificial vision of suburbia with the English author Richard Gordon's term "Disturbia".[124] In a similar fashion, Oates satirically employs suburbia as a backdrop for frustration, and its desperate conditions lead Oates' protagonist to self-destructive life games.

The artificiality of suburbia is commented on by the character of Malinsky who visits Nada. He is the only other character, apart from Richard, who critiques American hypocrisy and unmasks suburbia as a social hoax, calling it "the whitewashed society and its brainwashed morality".[125] Malinsky goes on to say:

> I can see that the suburbs of America are doomed. I am, frankly, amazed at the artificiality of this suburban world. Your very children look artificial, do you realize that?[126]

[123] Halliwell, p. 15.
[124] Halliwell, pp. 34-35.
[125] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 173.
[126] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 172.

According to Halliwell's study, the public image of suburbia in the 1960s was reserved for the white middle class. Human rights and anti-racist law were not appropriately distributed, ignoring diverse cultural needs. Therefore, the white population was encouraged to enjoy privileged suburban residences. For this purpose, the affordability of the housing market and the economy of the 1950s allowed the middle class to purchase their homes rather than renting them. The suburban national pathos cherished the American ideal of the happy family, which was economically stable thanks to the breadwinner father and complemented by the flawless housewife and content children.[127]

In *Expensive People*, suburbia is a world of fiction that is designed to meet the advertised standards of excellent appearance and manners. Therefore, the author depicts an artificial community that rests upon invented identities and relationships. In her novel, Oates parodies the utopian image by depicting Fernwood, the suburb where the Everetts live, as "*Paradiso*":[128]

> This is a story of the middle class: you see, the men worked. […] Fernwood is an angel's breath from heaven. […] no other society, no other world, is quite equal to it![129]

According to Bender, this image is merely "the monstrous joke of *Expensive People*, pseudo-paradise [or] man-made Eden".[130] Oates' depiction of the idealised setting parodies its condition of pretence. Nada personifies the pretentious middle class, standing in contrast to its high ideals of truthfulness and stability. The artificiality of suburbia is epitomised by its inhabitants, who appear perfect in the way they behave and act thanks to the help of fictional masks, yet in private their singularities backlash. For example, Richard's father drinks and curses, whilst Nada indulges in affairs and ignores her child. The chaotic and confusing

[127] Halliwell, p. 34.
[128] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 102.
[129] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 103.
[130] Bender, p. 31.

condition of suburbia, which Richard experiences, is upsetting. In his passive periods, he prefers sleeping to experiencing his life, and when active engages in violent matricide.

In addition to Fernwood being paradise, with every part of it being "kind, nice, generous, lovely",[131] so too is the appearance of the residents characterised by perfection:

> They were all handsome, handsome women. […] Most of them were slim women, you know that. In other areas you might see fat flabby women, with upper arms that jiggle, but in Fernwood everyone is healthy, tanned from Jamaica and Bermuda, and restrained and slim, and if their upper arms do jiggle, you can be sure that their sleeves are always decorously long.[132]

Fernwood and the Everetts' subsequent suburban residence, Cedar Grove, share the same characteristics. The "élite of Cedar Grove", and thus also Fernwood, parallel the upper echelons of the United States, and Oates contrasts this elite with Richard's self-destructive violence.[133] By overeating, he gains weight and excludes himself from the ideal suburban appearance.

At the end of the text, Richard also physically moves away from home and resides in solitude in a city. However, his detachment from suburbia does not comfort him. The author depicts the protagonist defeated in his sense of loss, "Sitting sadly on a park bench", he [Richard] cannot think of a reason to live."[134] Richard's psychological loneliness in Fernwood and Cedar Grove graduates into physical isolation in the city. Symbolically stepping away from the father's home, Richard personalises his estrangement not only from his father, the external authority, but also from suburbia that represents the chaos after the death of God. In light of the absent authority of God that is represented by his father in the suburbia, the Dionysian consciousness of Richard does not satisfy his sense for order. Relocated, Richard is unable to rationalise his existence.

[131] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 101.
[132] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 100.
[133] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 170.
[134] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 218.

Conclusion

In *Expensive People,* Richard experiences a conflict of identity because disordered suburbia becomes the ultimate authority that represents the consequence of the loss of foundation in the philosophic context of the death of God. Richard suffers under the culture of permissive playfulness. Combined, this lead him down the path of juvenile delinquency. The lines between reality and fantasy become blurred for Richard, and he tests their limitations. Recalling Carroll's texts, Richard is confused by the chaotic environment where fictions and nonsense are constantly present. Unlike Carroll, Oates' violent images of the impossible are set in reality and unreliably narrated by Richard in a nonlinear fashion.

In *Expensive People*, Richard's life trajectory results from the repetition of crimes that mirror those of American society. Through Richard's research into American acts of violence, set in the context of the 1960s when political assassinations not only occurred but were highly visible, Oates portrays American history as vulnerable to brutal acts. Richard, as an assassin, indicates that not only did assassinations take place, but they did so in front of the nation, becoming enormously documented events that permeated the home. Through the use of the elements of terror, the author pinpoints tragic disillusions in American culture. To depict the sense of repetition, Oates' literary technique ironically employs the imagery of the Nietzschean eternal recurrence. Particularly in the context of the decade, Richard's act of violence underlines the political executions of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr, and Robert Kennedy. Oates additionally questions the epitome of promoted suburbia and post-war female identification through the character of Nada.

The author satirises self-improvement in the setting of artificial suburbia. Exploring Richard's character through the lens of Nietzsche, Richard corresponds to the nihilist caricature, and instead of leading a happy life by playing an ideal game, he paradoxically intends to kill himself. Richard becomes a murderer while still a child, and in the same

context develops the desire to end his life that contradicts the process of *Überwindung*. Richard decides to affirm his internal chaos and uses memoir writing as a method to establish his new identity in "a confrontation with the truth".[135] By committing matricide, Richard's voice replaces that of Nada, and decreases her power in the narrative. He consequently leaves his father which symbolises Richard's rejection of his fatherland's ideals.

In contrast to Todd in Barth's *The Floating Opera*, Richard does not have anyone to love or with whom to bond. When his memoir is finished, Richard's creative process of becoming finishes as well, and he sees no other path ahead of him other than suicide. The text's open ending allows the reader to dwell on Richard's decision to affirm his life paradoxically by ending it. Oates satirically portrays a postmodern protagonist who strives for freedom and, consequently out of freedom, he paradoxically plans to end his life. The protagonist's declaration of having murdered his mother opens a satirical text which illustrates the blurred lines between offenders and victims, fiction and reality. Therefore, Oates' novel questions the permissive fictional games that are popularised by the American social experiments after the antifoundational claim of the death of God in 1950. The consequent permissive social climate initiates a human examination of the values and aspirational pursuits that Oates externalises in her fiction.

The author satirically presents an individual who progresses, and in the process of unmasking his artificial identity, he excludes himself from promoted suburbia. The process of unmasking becomes a method of his personal annihilation. Through muting his mother and becoming a fiction writer, he ultimately fictionalises his new identity. Ironically, as a sniper, he assumes suicide is the only authentic affirmation of his new self. In the context of the American 1960s, the author ridicules individual autonomy that lacks ethical integrity. Oates questions the cultural forms emerging in the 1960s and explores the relationships

[135] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 219.

between children and adults. Moreover, she ponders the responsibility for actions and the consequent inner feeling of guilt versus innocence, and its societal concerns.

Chapter Four

Them: Jules Wendall's Life as Fiction

In the National Book Award winning novel *Them* (1969), the third narrative of the Wonderland Quartet, Joyce Carol Oates offers an account of three decades in the United States, from 1937 until 1967. The critics and the author alternate the spelling of the title, both capitalised and lowercase. In this thesis, I present it capitalised. In the thematic tradition of the Quartet, the author reflects on the decades that advanced progressive American attitudes on the philosophical conflict after the death of God in *Them*.[1] By offering a mythical narrative of marginalised people searching for self-elevation in her text, the author reveals the historical roots of American society through a postmodern lens and maximises its tragic vision through images of violence.

In this chapter, I will present my interpretative claim and analyse the imagery of Lewis Carroll concerning Oates' text. Also, through the lens of a postmodernism that appropriated the ideas of Nietzsche, my reading of *Them* will explore the attempt of the protagonist Jules Wendall to become the author of his fictional life. In my analysis, I will relate Oates' term "*madman*", as it refers to Jules in *Them* to Nietzsche's terminology in his text *The Gay Science* (1882).[2] Referring to Nietzsche's passage about the death of God, the author employs the character of the "Madman" to declare the death of God.[3]

I will also examine the ambition of Jules in light of the postmodern permissive pluralism of opinions that emerged as a shaping influence on society in the 1960s. I will base my argument predominantly on the postmodern reading of Nietzsche by Alexander Nehamas,

[1] Joyce Carol Oates, *Them* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2000), originally published in 1969, p. 284, emphasis original.
[2] Oates, *Them*, p. 284, emphasis original.
[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882), translated and edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1974), p. 181.

and I will also attend to the scholarship of Simon May and Ken Gemes. Additionally, the critical readings of *Them* by Ellen G. Friedman, Joanne V. Creighton, and G. F. Waller, along with Oates' own assertions underpin my central argument that Oates employs the uncanny imagery of blurred lines between fiction and reality to reflect on the emerging cultural forms of the 1960s.

By eradicating moral rationales from the aesthetic vision of her protagonist, the author maximises the image of the countercultural American culture in the 1960s. Recalling *Expensive People* in *Them*, the author depicts the protagonist's desire for his fictional life to reflect on the prevailing Dionysian element popularised in American literature in the 1960s. However, she explicitly develops the vision of self-improvement that yearns for unity in her critical writing. In her essay published in 1972, she argues:

Everywhere, suddenly, we hear the prophetic voice of Nietzsche once again, saying that man must overcome himself, that he must interpret and create the universe. (Nietzsche was never understood until now, until the world caught up with him, or approached him.) In such a world, which belongs to consciousness, there can be no distracting of energies from the need to push forward, to synthesize, to converge, to make unity out of ostensible diversity.[4]

By depicting Jules as a self-fashioned hero and author of his life, the text corresponds to the postmodern reading of Nietzsche that emphasises a fictional pursuit in the permissive setting. It is Nehamas, the former student and colleague of Walter Arnold Kaufmann at Princeton University, who moves away from the proposed harmony between the Dionysian and Apollonian element and the integrity of the character in the texts of Nietzsche by Kaufmann.[5] Nehamas's reading of Nietzsche corresponds to the French interpretation of the

[4] Oates, "New Heaven and Earth", *Arts in Society*, Vol. 10 (4 November 1972), pp. 51 – 54, p. 54.
[5] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 128.

"new Nietzsche", which attracted the American postmodern audience due to the concepts of plurality, decentralisation, and valorisation of the rejection of all authority after the death of God in Nietzsche's oeuvre. In *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985), Nehamas integrates the themes of aestheticism and perspectivism in Nietzsche by celebrating the postmodern rhetoric. He argues:

> Like an artwork, the world requires reading and interpretation, "good philology", in order to be mastered, understood, and made liveable. The "death of God", both as hero and as author, allows Nietzsche to deny that the world is subject to a single overreaching interpretation, corresponding to God's role or intention. And its self-creation introduces the most paradoxical idea yet, the fact that the readers of this text are some of its own parts, some of its own characters, who in reading it further its self-creation.[6]

Nehamas elaborates on the doctrines of Nietzsche while interpreting Nietzsche as "a creature of his own texts".[7] In his posthumously published *Will to Power* (1901), in which the fourth part is called "The Will to Power as Art", Nietzsche says that "the world as a work of art gives birth to itself".[8] The entire "The Will to Power as Art" is translated in Nehamas' text *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. In this context, Nehamas understands the Nietzschean "self" as a constant self-construction shaped by the individual calibration of the relation between moral and immoral qualities.[9] The postmodern pluralistic view of the world as a form of art retains the fictional trope of Oates' Quartet.

I argue that the textual externalisation of the philosophic conflict after the death of God is depicted by the element of displacement on two levels in *Them*. First, it is the displacement of reality in favour of fiction, as it is the fictional actor-like performance of the protagonist that blurs the lines between the two worlds. The images of Jules' fantasy are mingled with reality to alternate the depressive vision of the setting. Second, the replacement of God with human authority is depicted in *Them*. The author metafictitiously appears in the

[6] Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 91.
[7] Nehamas, p. 8.
[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter A. Kaufmann and J.R. Hollingdale, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1967), p. 419.
[9] Nehamas, pp. 7-8.

text as a character, and it is the character of Jules who becomes the author of his fictional life. Therefore, Jules' autonomy in the absence of God is symbolised by his dominant position in the work of art that substitutes his real life. It is the fiction of Jules that appears in the fictional account of *Them*, which opens the literary discourse on the futility of the author in the text. In the philosophical context after the death of God, it is Jules who permissively navigates his authority through the void of his life. The character of Jules becomes the self-reliant author of his fiction and, in the passage in *Them*, displaces Oates, who becomes a character.

Oates aestheticises tragic forms of decentralisation and a plurality of opinions in *Them*, in a fictional attempt to self-improve in a manner similar to *A Garden of Earthly Delights* and *Expensive People*. The non-linear progression of Jules results in the moral discourse of *Them* remaining unreconciled at the intellectual level. The valorisation of the rejection of all authority after the death of God, deemed acceptable by postmodern thought, impacts the contradictory nature of the narrative in *Them*.

In each text of her Quartet, the fictional realm is confronted with the authentic while tangling the lines between them. Consider the playful invention of Clara's sex games as a way to socially advance in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, and the violent murder that vanishes from reality but is chronicled in a memoir in *Expensive People*. In *Them*, it is Jules who becomes the creator of his fictional hero. In this aspect, the common denominators of Oates' first three texts of the Quartet are decentralised morality, the plurality of the characters, undetermined fictional realms, valorisation of disorder, and the environment of chaotic permissiveness with tragic ends. The author employs the nonsense element in her narrative to liberate the protagonist.

In *Them*, Oates' modified elaboration on Lewis Carroll's imagery reflects a psychedelic reading of the latter's texts, an interpretation that dominated the American

reception of his work in the 1960s.[10] Oates adapts the concept of decentralised plurality in the context of social tensions, which symbolically recall Alice's chaotic endeavours. Unlike Carroll's textual semantics, the violent aspects of Oates' characters are externalised in the text. Oates addresses the violent impotence of those characters who are unable to master their internal drives in an attempt to elevate socially or personally, and *Them* concludes with images of disordered violence in the context of a psychedelic countercultural movement, which culminates in the Detroit riot of 1967.

By depicting the roots of American anti-foundationalism, Oates queries the forms of personal re-invention through the lens of permissive self-articulation. Set predominantly in Detroit, the novel offers the images of the chaotic urban dreams and nightmares of two generations of the Wendall family. The story begins in a small city in north-eastern Ohio, with the young and idealist Loretta Botsford experiencing the tragic death of her boyfriend, Bernie Malin. Shocked, Loretta wakes up next to Bernie's bloodied body, after her brother Brock had shot him. Following the murder, Brock escapes and Howard Wendall, a corrupt police officer, disposes of Bernie's body and makes love to Loretta at the crime scene. Desperate, Loretta marries Howard and gives birth to Jules, and later to Maureen. Howard's eventual suspension forces the family to move to a rural area, accompanied by Howard's parents.

When Howard is drafted in World War II, Loretta leaves with her two children for Detroit, where she is arrested for prostitution, an event that foreshadows the future lives of her offspring. After the end of the war, the family is reunited with Howard, who later dies in a factory accident. The Wendalls perpetually experience poverty, and Loretta remarries Patrick Furlong to provide for her now three children. Both Jules and Maureen initially attend

[10] Sophia Satchell-Baeza, "Carroll in the Psychedelic World" (London: The Lewis Carroll Society, 26 April 2019).

Catholic school, yet the former drops out and supports himself with occasional work and stealing, while the latter turns to prostitution. The first part of the book ends with Furlong learning about Maureen's secret life and, being drunk, violently beating her.

The focus of the second part of the book shifts towards Jules and Maureen as adults. Maureen remains in a coma for thirteen months after Furlong's violent attack, who is arrested and leaves the storyline. Living alone, Jules embarks upon fantasy adventures in Detroit, believing himself to be a fictional hero and thus immune to harm. His effortless adventures advance when he meets Faye and the wealthy yet criminal Bernard Geffen, who puts Jules immediately on his generous payroll as a driver. Jules falls for Geffen's niece, the affluent Nadine, and the pair escape to Mexico. To support their trip, Jules engages in crime and violent burglaries, but after becoming sick, Nadine leaves him delirious in a hotel room. Over the next few months, Jules remains unwell yet juggles occasional jobs. He writes home to extend his affection to Loretta and the still comatose Maureen. It is at this point that Brock re-appears in Loretta's life and cares for Maureen.

When Maureen wakes up from her vegetative state, she gets employed as a secretary and registers for a night course – "Introduction to Literature" – taught by "Miss Oates" who enters the text as a character to represent the professor at the University of Detroit. Maureen marries Jim Randolph, her teacher, who is married with three children, and divorces for Maureen. In the meantime, Jules returns to Detroit where he works for his successful uncle Samson Wendall. He randomly encounters Nadine in the restaurant and their romance resumes. However, Nadine is married to a lawyer and, unable to reconcile their affair, she shoots Jules and attempts to kill herself, although both characters survive.

The third part of the book depicts Loretta on welfare, melancholically enjoying her neighbourhood. Now married, Maureen has nothing to do with Loretta, who judges the former for breaking up the marriage of Jim. Jules is financially supported by his lover, single

mother Marcia, and turns the innocent Vera into a prostitute. He becomes a pimp and contributes to the organisation of the Detroit riot with Dr Mort Piercy, a radical professor of sociology. In the riot, Jules is attacked by a police officer, whom Jules then fatally shoots. The book ends with the images of chaotic looting that are followed by a television interview with Mort and Jules about the riot. Offered a governmental job in a corrupted organisation by Mort, Jules accepts and relocates to California. Before leaving, he visits Maureen who is agitated by his arrival. Jules sets out for his long-desired Californian adventure, with the aim to win back Nadine afterwards.

As a forerunner of *Wonderland*, the morally ambiguous reiterations of *Them* express "the inner lives of representative young Americans from the perspective of 'class war'".[11] Therefore, the theme of social and racial division is present in the story's foreground. Loretta recalls the backlash of the Great Depression her parents endured in the 1930s, family separation during World War II, and finally lives through July riot in Detroit in 1967. Descriptions of the riot are based on Oates' personal experience, as she lived at "the periphery of looting and burning" while teaching at the University of Detroit and living with her first husband, Raymond Smith.[12] Like in her previous novels, the unique fictional account of Oates mingles with considerable authentic elements, including her knowledge of the city. The author defines her book as "a work of history in fictional form", in which authentic places and periods of American history are epitomised in the novel.[13]

As a postmodern text, the story is narrated by a third-person narrator who speaks for the author. Because of sudden shifts in the narration between leading characters, the story appears fragmented in its sequences. The author signposts the plot episodes with dates that simplify the textual orientation. In comparison to the Quartet's previous two novels, Oates'

[11] Oates, "Afterword: Joyce Carol Oates", in *Them*, p. 540.
[12] Oates, "Afterword: Joyce Carol Oates", p. 543.
[13] Joyce Carol Oates, "Author's Note", in *Them* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2000), originally published in 1969, p. xxxiii.

nonlinear allusions to Carroll's text are considerably modified in *Them*, yet the chaotic riot at the end of the text and several minor episodes recall the elements of disorder and nonsense. Maureen refers to a passage from Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815), which supports the uncanny relationship between fiction and reality. Maureen describes the fictional setting and characters from Austen's text as real, while proclaiming the everyday conversations held by her family to be "not so convincing" and thus unreal.[14]

The Fiction of Jules

According to Oates' authorial note, the inspiration for the character of Maureen in *Them* was a former student of hers from the University of Detroit, who revealed her life to Oates. It is through this individual that Oates was able to fictionalise the harsh reality of the Wendall family, the eponymous "them".[15] In her "Author's Note", Oates informs about the Wendalls:

> Their lives pressed upon mine eerily, so that I began to dream about them instead of about myself, dreaming and redreaming their lives. Because their world was so remote from me it entered me with tremendous power, and in a sense the novel wrote itself. Certain episodes, however, have been revised after careful research indicated that their context was confused. Nothing in the novel has been exaggerated in order to increase the possibility of drama – indeed, the various sordid and shocking events of slum life, detailed in other naturalistic works, have been understated here, mainly because of my fear that too much reality would become unbearable.[16]

It is through letters that Maureen communicates with "Miss Oates", who appears as a character in *Them*.[17] The fictional name of the author character alternates with "Joyce Smith", which she used while teaching at the University of Detroit.[18] The author states that the letters are her own inventions, yet are based on the experiences of her real student. In her account, Oates metafictitiously depicts herself as Maureen's "masochistic" literature professor.[19]

[14] Oates, *Them*, p. 181.
[15] Oates, "Author's Note", in *Them*, p. xxxiii.
[16] Oates, "Author's Note", in *Them*, p. xxxiv.
[17] Oates, *Them*, p. 345.
[18] Oates, "Afterword: Joyce Carol Oates", p. 544.
[19] Oates, "Afterword: Joyce Carol Oates", p. 545.

Composing the narrative between 1968-1969, Oates fantasises about the bleak portrait of herself as the teacher who fails Maureen with vague comments in her night course.[20]

The work of art in which reality clashes with fiction recalls the literary technique Oates uses in depicting the life pursuit of Jules. The protagonist fashions a positive vision of himself. It is his invented image of a hero that liberates him from his limited environment. Jules thinks:

> He thought of himself as a character in a book being written by himself, a fictional fifteen-year-old with the capacity to become anything, because he was fiction.[21]

Fashioning fictional autonomy, the character of Jules is transformed into an aesthetic identity. He perceives himself as the author, fearlessly exercising his authority over his life and choices. Thus, Jules also establishes his dominant position to invent and order new characters and events in his life. Unlike Richard from *Expensive People*, Jules does not write a memoir, but the creative art of writing is depicted in the letters Jules composes to his family. This correspondence supports the adventurous character that he cultivates through a romantic escape with Nadine and their subsequent travelling encounters. To progress further on their journey, Jules steals and engages in violence. In the text, the dark vision of the aggression is softened by the romantic desires of Jules.

Another character who engages with creative letter writing and romanticising reality is Maureen. However, unlike Jules, the employment of Maureen's aestheticisation leads back to the natural world, which is ordered by morality. She marries a university professor who represents stability and a privileged social position. Friedman says about Maureen that, "by falling back into the limited but real world, [she] achieve{s} their {her} destinies{y}".[22] Maureen dreams about her improvement, but her vision is limited to an advantageous

[20] Oates, "Afterword: Joyce Carol Oates", p. 545.
[21] Oates, *Them*, p. 105.
[22] Ellen G. Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates* (New York, NY: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1980), p. 74.

marriage. She does not possess her own means of self-improvement but need men to secure to help her. By prostituting herself during her youth, she empowers men to save her from poverty. In adulthood her saving image of men occurs within the stable institution of marriage. Unlike Jules, her ambition is not adventurous, but recalls the character of Loretta who aspires to improve according to the moral conventions.

The aspirations of Jules move into the imaginary realm of countless adventures through a rejection of the boundaries of the physical world. He constantly dreams about his future self, the improved image of his actual condition. Friedman elaborates on the image of the rebirth of Jules that is pointed towards his liberation.[23] Jules' desire is motivated by the fixed pessimism and negative judgements of external authorities. Grandmother Wendall, representing moral authority in his family says that Jules will "wind up in the electric chair and I'll pull up the switch!"[24] Depicting harassment of Jules by immediate authority figures represented by family and a Catholic school, the author questions the moral model of the religious and educational institution in her narrative. Her depiction of the manipulative power of the authorities recalls the dangerous atmosphere of Carroll's Wonderland, where the Queen and Duchess terrorise Alice with frequent threats of beheading.[25]

Moreover, parents do not represent reliability or provide a solid foundation for Jules. His estrangement from Howard follows the indetermination of the biological fathership of Jules. Later in the text, Howard dies, and the mental absence of fatherly image transfers into physical loss, which culminates in a feeling of insecurity for Jules that remains unrelieved by the presence of his mother. Jules perceives the expression of his mother as chaotic. The narrator observes, "if only he [Jules] could depend upon her".[26] Thus, lacking a positive role

[23] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, pp. 84-85.
[24] Oates, *Them*, p. 72.
[25] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 87.
[26] Oates, *Them*, p. 146.

model and secure environment, Jules fictionalises his future positive vision while cultivating self-reliance.

During his childhood, Jules disengages himself from parental supervision, and his frequent escapes from home lead him to the Children's Shelters.[27] Jules fictionalises a card game rather than following the rules of the established game. In his game, Jules:

> imagined a loose, complicated game in which a turn of a card meant victory for one army, a defeat for the other [...] the turn of cards was not something he had power over, though he turned the cards.[28]

Jules lacks control in his childhood games, but his power increases parallel to his maturing in the text. When small Jules acts as a magician in a barn, Maureen admires him because he confidently performs the tricks and pretends to make a rabbit appear out of a hat. The young Maureen believes in the magical powers of her brother as he boldly recites his invented spells, which include "vocabulary, mainly having to do with kings, queens, [and] jacks".[29] The mysterious power behind the cards recalls the imagery of Carroll's texts, yet Oates does not elaborate on them further in *Them*. When Jules lights a match, the initial power that he gains outgrows him and, losing control of it, the entire barn burns.[30]

As a teenager, Jules progresses in his ability to engage in fantasy, and imagines himself to be a hero while proclaiming his dominant position as the author. Thus, he establishes the powerful position and self-reliant authority in his life. While dreaming about his future, he is confident because "he could change himself to fit anything".[31] His imagination is predominantly influenced by images from the media. Substituting the lack of real role models, Jules day-dreams while listening to the radio and identifies himself with movie characters who become his fantastic role models, as "much of his language and his

[27] Oates, *Them*, p. 119.
[28] Oates, *Them*, p. 68.
[29] Oates, *Them*, p. 70.
[30] Oates, *Them*, p. 71.
[31] Oates, *Them*, p. 106.

good spirit" come from the movies.[32] Losing himself in fantasies, he wonders, "wasn't he Alan Ladd in *Shane*, wasn't he Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*?"[33] Thus, Jules changes the narrative of his life by inventing heroic images which displace his bleak reality. In his fictional image, Jules is immortal:

> He admired himself. Wasn't he Jules Wendall, knocked down and kicked around but not counted out? Hadn't he escaped from danger all his life? Hadn't his luck always bounced him back up happy, invulnerable, as if he were a rubbery ball, all one texture, one foamy, happy, invulnerable, rubbery texture that nothing could kill?[34]

In his pursuits, the character of Jules is transformed to generate an aesthetic existence that is free of physical and moral reasoning. His adventurous character attracts new encounters without the fear of losing, and invents new episodes as he goes. What he maintains is a positive vision that he projects. Unlike Loretta and Maureen, the dream-like fantasies of Jules do not involve money as the ultimate goal. Jules releases himself from the economic contest. He thinks that, "if he was a character in a book of his own making, why should money hold him back?"[35] The aspiration of Jules points to a more elaborate purpose than materialistic possession.

Elaine Showalter says about Jules that he has "grandiose dreams of greatness; he feels fated to become an important man".[36] Likewise, Friedman argues that Oates "depicts [Jules] as an aspiring Nietzschean Superman", one who is positively self-determined.[37] I argue that it is postmodern Nietzschean ideas that Oates reflects upon in *Them*. The author sets her narrative in the period that is influenced by the statement about the death of God, and it is the development of Jules into a Madman that is depicted in *Them*. Jules notes:

> *My life is a story imagined by a madman!* Of the effort the spirit makes, this is the subject of Jules's story; of its effort to achieve freedom, its breaking out into beauty,

[32] Oates, *Them*, p. 145.
[33] Oates, *Them*, p. 106.
[34] Oates, *Them*, p. 276.
[35] Oates, *Them*, pp. 105-106.
[36] Elaine Showalter, "Introduction: The Wonderland Quartet", in *Them* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2000), originally published in 1969, p. xxiv.
[37] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 86.

> in patches perhaps but beauty anyway, and of Jules as an American youth – these are some of the struggles he would have thought worth recording.[38]

It is the Madman who proclaims the death of God in *The Gay Science* by Nietzsche. Nietzsche's Madman accuses the readers of killing God and consequently opens the discourse on human autonomy to step out in God's place.[39] In *The Gay Science*, the Madman asks: "Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it?"[40] In *Them*, Jules rejects God as representative of his deliberate independence from the external authority. The narrator says about Jules:

> He had not liked Jesus. He had resented the nuns' interest in Him. He, Jules, would be a better man; or at least a cleverer man – why not all the kingdoms of the earth? Why not?[41]

By rejecting Jesus as God, Jules establishes his internal autonomous authority. This confidence is based on his dominant position as the author of his life, which constitutes the image of an omniscient God. Jules invents satisfaction in the pessimistic context of the aggressive language and poverty of his underprivileged environment.

In Detroit, Oates' naturalistic description of the setting depicts the limitations of human progression, which involves crime and aggression. The author dramatises nightmarish images of American society in which Jules pursues his adventurous fictions. Not only has Jules enough courage to claim his dominion over the creation, but he also demands his superiority over God. Thus, he establishes the superior position of his fictional life in anticipation of achievements and the moral decentralisation of his character yields the permissive actions to advance in the text.

The Moral Ambiguity of Them

[38] Oates, *Them*, p. 284, emphasis original.
[39] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882), translated and edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1974), p. 181.
[40] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p.181.
[41] Oates, *Them*, p. 102.

Mary Kathryn Grant contends that the texts in Oates' Wonderland Quartet were the last novels before Oates' articulation of her precise moral position. According to Grant, Oates' characters ponder moral "ambiguity and uncertainty".[42] The author fills her narratives with the influence of the moral prudence that victimises the protagonists, and depicts the tragic effects of consequent liberation.[43] Therefore, the title of the novel draws attention to social division and denotes the cultural inferiority of "them". Oates indicates her concern with the societal hypocrisy of moral calibration that attacks the marginalised population. Ian Gregson claims that:

> [Oates] draws attention to how the lives of the poor can be dismissed […] [and] how that imposition of mere alienness dehumanizes them so that the reality of their lives need not be thought about.[44]

Gregson mentions Oates' specific concept of *them* and *they* with the gang exclusion in her later novel, *Foxfire* (1993).[45] In *Them*, Loretta is influenced by the media to distinguish between "hopeless, losers, a big pack of them, and those headed *somewhere*".[46] In her narrative, Oates establishes the depiction of a social division in which the Wendalls are confronted with their marginalised status and their categorisation as "them".

In the afterword of *Them*, Oates says that the original title of the book was "*Love and Money*", but she regarded the thematic discourse of these attributes as too limiting.[47] Oates depicts stereotypical images of females as needing to be saved by males, such as Loretta and Maureen in *Them*. However, the character of Nadine represents affluent culture that betrays Jules. Although she becomes obsessed with him, according to Ellen G. Friedman, Nadine is not able to live with her "conventional morality", and so she "cannot tolerate the ambiguity that is life's perpetual predicament".[48] Her inability to reverse the values keeps her

[42] Mary Kathryn Grant, *The Tragic Vision in Joyce Carol Oates* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978), p. 5.
[43] Grant, *The Tragic Vision in Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 62.
[44] Ian Gregson, ed., *Character and Satire in Postwar Fiction* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2006), p. 86.
[45] Joyce Carol Oates, *Foxfire* (New York, NY: Dutton, 1993).
[46] Oates, *Them*, p. 7, emphasis original.
[47] Oates, *Them*, p. 541.
[48] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 83.

imprisoned in a state of resentment that negatively affects her mental condition. Her neurotic nature turns into chaotic disorganisation during the trip, and end in her violent shooting of Jules and herself. Her disturbed mind gets her hospitalised after leaving Jules in the hotel. Upon reconnecting, she says to him:

> "I couldn't sleep or eat. I kept crying all the time," she said impatiently. "All I could think about was you. I tried to starve myself. […] I wrote long letters for you, crazy things. They put me in a kind of hospital, a very nice place. I didn't ever go back to school in any ordinary way but took courses by myself. Well, it wasn't very nice, I don't know why I said that, it was a place for people sick in their head. We all carried ourselves like glass, we were very breakable".[49]

Nadine suffers from negative images about their affair. Her nightmares spring out of stereotypical rationales about marginalised groups. In her conventional thinking, she struggles with the image of her sexual sin and consequent punishment of sexually transmitted disease that she imagines Jules might carry, and who thus might infect her. Like Vera later in the text, Nadine discriminates Jules and African Americans denoting their putatively inferior status. Both Nadine and Vera epitomise the culture of racist prejudices in the United States of America.

The American critic G. F. Waller approves of the hopeful image of Jules at the end of the text, and Harold Bloom claims that Jules is "no longer one of *them*".[50] Jules does not engage with guilt and shame, which are the natural ends of Western moral notions of human imperfection. In a conversation with the wealthy Vera, Jules truthfully answers her questions and the girl is perplexed by his confident attitude and self-acceptance:

> Vera: Are you one on that program with them – what's it called – action against poverty? United Action Against Poverty? Do you work with them on that, getting money and faking reports, buying guns? Or are you one of the poor people?
> Jules: I'm one of the poor people.
> Vera: But you're not black. Are you very poor?
> Jules: You can't get much poorer.
> Vera: Then how do you live?
> Jules: I get along.

[49] Oates, *Them*, p. 381.
[50] Harold Bloom, *Joyce Carol Oates* (New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 5.

> Vera: But for a poor person, you talk as if … as if it didn't matter. I thought poor people were different, I thought they were mainly black…[51]

Vera's grasp of insolvency recalls stereotypical attitudes of the decades. Jules destigmatises himself and emphasises his socially indifferent pursuit.[52] Thus, Jules represents the lonely crusader against social stereotypes. In contrast with the morally disturbed Nadine and Vera, Jules maintains a cheerful character. On the one side, his positive aspirations yield adventures, as "he wanted a wilderness, a clearing in the wilderness".[53] Such uplifting images provide a positive yet fictional means of escape from the suffocating slums in which he lives, but the fantasies are juxtaposed to Jules' aggressive attacks and criminal encounters.

Jules' life alters into a fictional adventure when he meets elegant Faye, who randomly saves his life on the street by grabbing him before Jules runs into a city bus. Jules identifies Faye as a "fairy-tale princess, very cold, enchanting" who buoys him up in his fictions. She introduces him to Geffen, who immediately employs Jules. Arriving at financial abundance thanks to Geffen, the upgrade in Jules' life occurs effortlessly. He observes, "*did this really happen? How did this happen?*"[54] Shortly after, Jules finds Geffen dead lying on the floor with a cutthroat to learn about his ties to the underground. The unfolding of Jules' life recalls the scenes of the action movie that are inspired by his fictional fantasies. Adding a romantic element, Jules meets and falls for Nadine soon after meeting Geffen. The narrator says:

> He had a kind of hallucination – a flash of a blown-up photograph of himself. He sometimes thought ironically of himself as being photographed in the act of running, in a foolish situation, grinning idiotically, eating. Now the flash came to him, came and went. He did not really see it; he imagined it. He imagined himself leading this beautiful woman to a bed […] But the Jules of this photograph had been imagined in other roles, other positions less flattering. Endlessly Jules had pursued Jules, in endless stories and dreams.[55]

[51] Oates, *Them*, p. 493.
[52] Oates, *Them*, p. 536.
[53] Oates, *Them*, p. 106.
[54] Oates, *Them*, p. 244, emphasis original.
[55] Oates, *Them*, p. 406.

Jules imagines himself to be an actor who is being photographed in movie scenes, which represent his real encounters. Additionally, Oates' postmodern technique of depicting the character of Jules includes the aspect of plurality that translates into the different roles that he plays. One of his roles is "the real Jules" that is sometimes substituted by "the crazed Jules, a Jules in love".[56] The images of photographs that recall several plot events are contextualised as the fragments of life situations from his dream vision. The author depicts the enigmatic relation of the intertextual fiction within the story. Jules' fantasy vision exists in the fictional narrative of Oates. Both Oates and Jules are authors and at the same time also characters, yet the blurred lines between the fiction of Jules and the authorship of Oates are unreconciled at the end of the text.

Viewing Jules' life as fictional, let me use Nehamas' understanding of Nietzsche, who according to Nehamas looked at people as if they were "literary characters".[57] Nehamas argues:

> Nietzsche is clearly much more concerned with the question of how one's actions are to fit together in a coherent, self-sustaining, well-motivated whole than he is with the quality of those actions themselves. Any particular action, whatever its character, can be made to fit into a whole, provided the whole consists of actions to which one singled out is appropriately related. This consideration, and not the moral quality of their actions, is central to the understanding and evaluation of literary characters.[58]

Echoing Nietzsche, Jules directs himself and fashions his autonomy. Jules displaces traditional moral classification, and the absence of guilt and shame induces his confident self-affirmation. However, in the course of his life, he steals cars and money to survive. When necessary, he uses violence towards others to gain money. He acts as a pimp and hurts young Vera, and unnecessarily murders an officer who attacks him. If we consider the acts of Jules individually, it is easy to rank them as immoral according to conventional standards.

[56] Oates, *Them*, p. 285.
[57] Nehamas, p. 165.
[58] Nehamas, p. 165.

However, when we consider the acts of Jules in relation to his entire life, the conclusion becomes less obvious in light of Nehamas' reading of Nietzsche. Nehamas furthers states:

> [Nietzsche] believes that the significance of an action is not exhaustible and that it depends on the relation of that action to the whole of one's life. In this way a feature or an action of a literary character can be justified, and its significance perceived, only in relation to the rest of the features of that character and of the narrative to which it belongs.[59]

Nehamas asserts that the inherent risk that Nietzsche is willing to take is that Nietzsche realises the complex permissiveness of his "framework [that] is compatible with more types of life than he would himself be willing to praise".[60] Therefore, the postmodern fictional concept that is determined by the valorisation of rejection of all authority, invites the chaos of uncensored opinions and fantasies to be exercised. Oates' externalisation of the permissive ends of the marginalised population appear to fit in the postmodern permissive plurality. Oates' aesthetic dramatisation depicts the nightmares of humanity, which after the death of God destroys itself. In her Afterword to *Them*, Oates posits:

> Is Jules Wendall the pimp/murderer a hero? Can victories be salvaged out of the ruins of others' lives? These are questions the writer may ask herself, to which the work of fiction provides a complex, perhaps tragic answer. [61]

In answering Oates' question, it is essential to point out Nehamas' statement. According to him, Nietzsche does not take "one's misdeeds seriously for long", and he values the expression of one's "own will".[62] Nehamas argues:

> [These considerations] are relevant to the evaluation of literary characters. Their virtue as characters depends on just that coherence which Nietzsche insists is essential for people as well.[63]

Therefore, not the value of the singular actions but rather the entire process of the construction in the sequence of determining conditions should be considered. Additionally, the postmodern reading yields fictional immunity for permissive actions. In reality, the tragic

[59] Nehamas, p. 166.
[60] Nehamas, p. 166.
[61] Oates, "Afterword: Joyce Carol Oates", p. 546.
[62] Nehamas, p. 166.
[63] Nehamas, p. 166.

consequences of disorganised chaos are not supressed, and this is what is depicted at the end of *A Garden of Earthly Delights* and in *Expensive People*. Unlike the semantics of Alice's awakenings into the real world, which supress violence in Carroll's novels, in Oates' texts the murders occur and the characters tragically die. However, in *Them* the fictional image of Jules is spared negative criticism and he denies his responsibility for imposing violence:

> "Jules felt, he could not be blamed, he could not bear the consequences of real life; he was not a character in 'real life'".[64]

To evaluate the moral decentralisation of Jules, Friedman interprets him as an "ordinary" person who hopes for success in life.[65] Creighton argues that Jules liberates himself through violence.[66] It is also G. F. Waller who reads the character of Jules as a hopeful hero who purges his past.[67] All three interpretations are in favour of the postmodern understanding of Nietzsche, where the heroic wholeness of a fictional character dominates his individual actions. Jules' independent and creative life force breaks the social restraints and positions his ethics beyond good and evil. Oates' final depiction of Jules, on route to California in his own car, symbolises a hopeful future. The ownership of an air-conditioned car symbolises his alleviation from economic stigmatisation. Additionally, with the help of riot organisers and the government, Jules is promoted to a prestigious position and given a budget to support his relocation. For Jules, California represents the traditional Western symbol of fulfilled dreams, and therefore he achieves his personal aspiration.

On a less romantic note, James R. Giles calls Jules "a calculating nihilist who allows himself to be recruited by the federal government for a ridiculous social program in California".[68] According to Giles, Jules' interest in Nadine is a "conscious lust, having very

[64] Oates, *Them*, p. 396.
[65] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 93.
[66] Joanne V. Creighton, "The Trilogy of Social Groups: The Quest for Violent Liberation", in *Joyce Carol Oates* (Woodbridge, CT: Twayne Publishers, 1979), p. 72.
[67] G. F. Waller, *Dreaming America: Obsession and Transcendence in the Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 142.
[68] James R. Giles, "Suffering, Transcendence, and Artistic 'Form': Joyce Carol Oates's *them*" in *Arizona Quarterly*, 32 (Autumn 1976), p. 216.

little to do with love", and Jules fails to overcome his internal vices that he, out of resentment, violently expresses.[69] The final image of Jules does not convince Giles of the character's mental transformation as a way of generating new things that are determined by one's own authority.

In the final scene, Jules says, "everything that happened to me before this is nothing – it doesn't exist – my life is only beginning now".[70] Jules does not change his perspective, but rather rejects it in line with the postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche that celebrates a fragmentary decentred world. Nietzsche says for those who are unable to overcome the past in order to become a unified self, it is better than forgetting the past and cultivating "the art and power of forgetting".[71] According to Ken Gemes, it is an approachable alternative for less powerful individuals who "simply do not have the will to master the past and employ it to their own purposes".[72] Thus, the interpretation of Giles might be underpinned by the philosophic reading of Gemes, who calls the postmodern reading of Nietzsche an abuse of the latter's ideas, asserting that moral permissiveness is merely a nihilist concept.[73]

Nietzsche promotes traditional virtues that have been historically known throughout the centuries. What he dislikes about them is their steadfastly distorted value, not the virtues themselves. Nietzsche does not promote any universal good or bad aspirations, values, or wishes for life, as he prefers his own modification of them. In line with the argument of Nehamas about the wholeness of life, Simon May breaks down the understanding of Nietzsche's autonomous compass into two specific signposts.[74] According to May, aspirations and acquired values are approved by Nietzsche if they: 1) are chosen in a

[69] Giles, "Suffering, Transcendence, and Artistic 'Form': Joyce Carol Oates's *them*", p. 216.
[70] Oates, *Them*, p. 536.
[71] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, edited by Daniel Breazeale, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 120.
[72] Gemes, "Postmodernism's Use and Abuse of Nietzsche", p. 348.
[73] Gemes, "Postmodernism's Use and Abuse of Nietzsche", p. 339.
[74] Simon May, *Nietzsche's Ethics and His War on 'Morality'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 53, 111.

sovereign manner, not out of revenge and resentment, and 2) have a life-affirming, not life-denying, tendency for the individual's entire life.[75]

To affirm Jules' moral position with Vera and the officer, according to May and Nehamas, I intend to value Jules' life in its entirety. The idealist love of Jules for Nadine leads to betrayal and humiliation, as she deserts him with no car and while he is deadly sick in a hotel room in Mexico. Next, an officer beats Jules in the slums despite the fact that he is innocent and begs for mercy. Both times, Jules suffers due to his disadvantageous social rank. He mainly experiences hostility from those who are more privileged than he is. Therefore, his determination to defend himself and break through societal restraints corresponds to a life-affirming tendency. However, in his pursuits, Jules extends his self-confidence by abusing Vera and taking financial advantage of Marcia, which corresponds to a life-denying character. He also engages in frequent physical attacks and theft, with no serious consideration of the hurt or damage he inflicts on others.

All his actions could be read as life-affirming as they serve his personal advance. While he turns young Vera into a prostitute, her prestigious background, like that of Nadine, contrasts with Jules' daily life in the slums, and her stereotyped moral thinking mirrors the societal stigmatisation of the disadvantageous. However, in contrast to his experiences with Nadine, this time it is Jules who benefits from Vera's romantic naivety, since he gains money as her pimp. Additionally, Jules is attacked by a police officer for the second time during the riots, yet this time Jules is more powerful and fatally shoots the officer, who is begging Jules for mercy. The image recalls the previous incident of police violence, when the officer brutally hurts young Jules and steals his money. Therefore, in light of the corruption of legal authority that misrepresents the moral standards in *Them*, the pimping of Vera and murder of the second officer appear to be governed by revenge and internal resentment.

[75] May, pp. 111 - 114.

Holistically speaking, Jules may be seen as a life-enhancing character in certain aspects, but coloured by resentment in others. However, his romantic aspirations and adventurous playfulness distract from his violence. Jules' sympathetic attitude outweighs incidents that appear insignificant in comparison with the creative potential of his life. It is his altered perspective and the distance from normative conventions that permits the superior narrative of his life to his inferior individual actions. It is also important to point out that Jules does not condemn the immoral actions of others, accepting the prostitution of Maureen with not a word of judgement, cherishing his loving relationship with his sister. Additionally, when dreaming about his future, it is the altruistic element of prioritising the needs of his family that he plans to address before leaving for his own independent adventures. By being in control of his life, the morally ambiguous discourse becomes open to the reader.

To elaborate on Giles' interpretation, Jules' acceptance of the ambiguous job appears more life-affirming and autonomous than his previous occupation as a pimp. To differentiate between lust and love is a complicated matter, but based on various opportunities as a pimp, and yet desiring someone who attempted to kill him, I read Jules' passion for Nadine as closer to love than to lust, notwithstanding her disturbed character and several humiliating comments about Jules that he never reproaches. Thus, in the end Jules has progressed significantly, to the extent that he is able to move on to his next aspirational adventure.

However, before articulating a clear conclusion on the moral perception of Jules, it is essential to note what Nehamas considers to be important in evaluating fictional life. He argues:

> Someone might achieve Nietzsche's ideal life and still be nothing short of repugnant. This may not matter much for literary characters, who cannot affect us directly; but it does, one might think, matter for people, who can.[76]

[76] Nehamas, p. 167.

Nehamas seems to contradict his previous comments where he insists that Nietzsche intends to take life as literature. To avoid judgements when advancing an aesthetic position fosters the devaluation of caused damage and its moral consequences. In *Them*, Oates also challenges the aestheticisation of violence and the transgression of normative morality through Maureen. In her letter to Miss Oates, Maureen writes about her ambition to wed a married man who has three children willing to divorce for Maureen:

> We will have a bedroom together, we will have children, he will leave his own children behind. I am telling you these things even though you are a married woman and would not want any other woman to take your husband from you. But you are a married woman, I think, who would not mind taking someone else's husband, so long as it happened well enough, beautifully enough like a story.[77]

Thus, pondering the moral interpretation of her practice, Maureen opens the discourse on aesthetic validation of human behaviour that transgresses normative morality. Additionally, Oates' aestheticisation of Jules, despite his violent crimes, offers hope for his positive transformation. However, the author does not offer sufficient textual evidence to prove Jules' actual process of transformation. He merely rejects his past and starts a new life with the same playfulness and imagination.

Thus, a concise conclusion about Jules might correspond with Oates' experimental image of a romantic nihilist, the Madman with happy aspirations. In the postmodern context of textual transgressions, Oates achieves the depiction of the element of moral contradictions, violent excess, random encounters, and the unpresentable character fusion of a saint and a sinner. The random good luck that Jules effortlessly enjoys positively surprises him in reality. He thinks in astonishment:

> So this is the way life happens: a sudden ballooning upward. Jules swerved around the laundry truck in a dream, not even seeing the other driver's sour face. He was on his way up and nothing could stop him. The fluttery sensation in his chest was his heart expanding, or maybe his lungs giddy with too much oxygen.[78]

[77] Oates, *Them*, p. 352.
[78] Oates, *Them*, p. 259.

Oates celebrates the creativity of a life force that is inherent in every human being, an inviting power of positive self-transformation that is continuously available. In its precious creation, it absolves any immorality and is accessible to all. The underlying moral consciousness that defines her Wonderland Quartet, and to which her characters return, does not occur in the character of Jules, as his aesthetic consciousness prevails in the text.

Chaos and Transformation in Them

Oates' literary portrait of group exclusion targets two specific social dimensions: economic and racial division. In this context, the author additionally depicts the manipulation of the media and emphasises the vulnerability of the public. It is the changing rhetoric of power that Oates fictionalises in her Wonderland Quartet, revealing her "tragic vision" of the United States.[79] Due to unfulfilled promises made to those on the margins, the post-war economic boom was marked by social revolution in the United States, and racial tensions culminated in violence in bigger cities.

In this aspect, it is essential to address the genealogy of the institutionalised hypocrisy that manipulates humanity. Moral misconceptions consequently lead to segregations between the preferred group *we*, who present *they* as bad. It is the manipulative practices of the authorities that Oates' Wonderland novels challenge, and the texts depict the altering power rhetoric of the decades. In *Them* Oates reflects on the authentic social unrest that culminates in the riot, which results from the exclusion of marginalised population. In her narrative, hypocritical normative morality limits the ability of *them* to improve socially, and her protagonists confront alternative thoughts to advance. It is the morally unconventional marriage of Maureen that advances her to a middle class setting.

[79] Grant, p. 62

However, the social progress of Jules depends on Nadine, whose moral disturbance repudiates the former. Acting on internal moral prejudices during her affair with Jules, Nadine condemns herself and calls herself "a pig, a slut".[80] The moral self-reflection of Nadine leads to her chaotic desperation. Confronted with societal standards that she breaches, unlike Jules, Nadine does not cultivate her autonomy. Jules says,"Jesus Christ, what does that mean? A pig! I've never met a pig, never; that expression means nothing to me. In all my life I've never met a pig in human form, let alone you, never!"[81]Jules does not relate to judgements that shape Nadine's moral consciousness. He represents an unconventional character that is undetermined by moral consciousness.

In *Them*, Jules engages with the organisers of the race riot. Read through the postmodern lens, the author employs a carnivalesque image of the dialectic interplay of the polyphonic voices of various characters that do not develop further in the text. The narrator describes the atmosphere of confusion, saying, "everyone began talking at once. Mort pounded the table".[82] It is Mort who coordinates the meeting for the upcoming riot, and struggling to establish his authority, he says that, "I supply the money, I've got the know-how, I've got the kids anxious to pull some triggers, but you won't let me organise it!"[83] The corresponding transition between Kaufmann's Nietzsche and postmodern Nietzsche as a feature of the culture, is epitomised by the lack of organisation of Mort in the chaotic riot. The discussion opens a chaotic discourse about powerful individuals who, due to their positions in authority, are randomly considered for assassination during the riot.

The humorous short circuits are employed when navigating through the potential political victims of assassination, including the President of the United States Lyndon B. Johnson, the Republican representative George Wilcken Romney, the president of Wayne

[80] Oates, *Them*, p. 418.
[81] Oates, *Them*, p. 419.
[82] Oates, *Them*, p. 488.
[83] Oates, *Them*, p. 487.

State University William R. Keast (who increased the enrolment of African American students in the 1960s), lawyer Gary Warren Hart (who withdrew his presidential candidacy due to an alleged extramarital affair), human rights advocate Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mayor of Detroit Jerome Cavanaugh. In relation to the latter, the author depicts the semantic decanonisation of the sublime legal administration. It is ridiculed by the subjective standards of appearance possessed by the riot organisers. The anonymous characters say:

> "[Cavanaugh has] gotten too fat. It's a bad image."
>
> "Well, we can always kill him. He'll be in the city for a while."[84]

The use of humour and carnivalisation highlights the irrational reasons for human execution. In *Them*, the political assassination is ironically presented as "a political method that is respectable enough".[85] The description of a disordered execution ironically recalls the croquet game in Carroll's work:

> The players all played at once, without waiting for turns, quarrelling all the time, and fighting for hedgehogs; and in a very short time the Queen was in a furious passion, and went stamping about, and shouting "Off with his head!" or "Off with her head!" about once in a minute.[86]

However, the beheading orders in Carroll's novel occur from the position of highest authority, while Oates' riot aims to destroy this authority in the United States. Thus, the power rhetoric is reversed and enjoys more currency in Oates' text.

The power of Jules gradually develops in the text, and the author signposts its progression using fire symbolism, which denotes the transformation of power. While a child, the power of Jules is limited, and he is not in control when he plays his invented card game and performs as a magician, before accidentally burning down the barn. Prior to the incident

[84] Oates, *Them*, p. 485.
[85] Oates, *Them*, p. 484.
[86] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 89.

with the barn, Jules encounters the consuming power of fire when watching the tragic plane accident.

In his adulthood, he is again confronted with the symbol of fire when he reads in a magazine that, "fire burns and does its duty. It is for others to do theirs".[87] Reading this, Jules decides to be better than Jesus. He creates a heroic vision of himself and defines his self-confidence to achieve his aspirations. What he wants is:

> to live a secular life parallel to sacred life – a modern life, at all cost – to expand Jules out to the limits of his skin and the range of his eyesight. He could do it. He needed only time and some space to move around in. *Fire burns and does its duty* … He could believe in fire and in himself. He too would do his duty. He believed in himself. He did not trust anyone else.[88]

Thus, Jules reconciles his self-reliance by becoming an improved fictional vision of himself, which he fashions out of his dominant position of creator. The metaphorical transformation that is implied by the image of fire evokes Nietzsche's particular invocation for transformation in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche says, "you must wish to consume yourself in your own flame: how could you wish to become new unless you had first become ashes?"[89] Nietzsche emphasises the process in which vices are reformulated into virtues. Through the image of the phoenix, Nietzsche is concerned with the transformation of our mind. However, in Oates' text, it is the Indian philosopher Vinoba Bhave who refers to the transformative ability of fire, and Oates' eclectic references point Jules towards an active pursuit of his own development.

Jules' fascination with the transformative ability of fire occurs two more times in the text. The first instance is when he meets Faye, which marks his adventurous advance with Geffen and an escape with Nadine, and the second is during the riot. Both times, Jules recalls Bhave's statement about fire, and the author employs italics to emphasise the significance of

[87] Oates, *Them*, p. 102.
[88] Oates, *Them*, p. 102, emphasis original.
[89] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated and edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1982), p. 176.

the phrase. During the riot, Detroit is set on fire, and looting and street violence beset the city:

> The fires were spreading. People were running up the street, their arms filled with clothes and bedding and kids. A couple, arms entwined, ran by. Running, running! At the other end more fires waited. [...] Let everything burn! Why not?[90]

In a chaotic setting, the atmosphere of panic unfolds. Seeing the looting and confusion, Jules obtains a rifle aligning himself to the disorder. Later in his interview, he reflects on the riot, saying, "It is only necessary to understand that fire burns and does its duty, perpetually, and the fires will never be put out".[91] He indicates the necessity of power transformation in society. Watching him on television, Loretta is ashamed, and recalls his earlier experiences with fire:

> She remembered him burning down a barn, as a child. She remembered him pushing through a crowd to stare at a burning plane. *Why, he's a murderer!* She thought clearly, *He is a murderer*, and she had given birth to a murderer.[92]

The author juxtaposes the dialectical antagonism of human perception. In his fictional world, Jules reconciles his previous development that includes violence through the aesthetic lens. For him, fire symbolises life-affirming transformation, and so he undervalues the tragedy of fire to emphasise the consequent inevitable advance. On the other hand, Loretta's moral consciousness does not grasp the perception of Jules. By blurring the lines between fiction and reality, Jules playfully permits everything that enables him to progress towards life-affirming symbolism. By changing his perspective from moral to aesthetic, he maintains an efficient distance between his acts and his invented identity. His decision to become a hero defines him. It is his identification with the fantasy realm that Jules ironically uses to distance himself from reality.

[90] Oates, *Them*, p. 517.
[91] Oates, *Them*, p. 533.
[92] Oates, *Them*, p. 533, emphasis original.

Conclusion

In her afterword to *Expensive People* (1968), Oates reiterates that the first three novels of the Wonderland Quartet are thematically united and "were conceived by the author's critique of America – American culture, American values, American dreams – as well as narratives in which romantic ambitions are confronted by what must be called reality".[93] While Oates' characters become the objects of social scrutiny, the author does not advocate any particular moral position. Neither does she promote any political preference in her text.

Nevertheless, she depicts social tensions and the rigidity of the critical thinking during the post-war decades. Oates' fiction reflects the complex attitudes of the cultural forms that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, and the ethics associated with these attitudes have been examined in this chapter through the lens of the postmodern Nietzsche. Additionally, May's framework of moral consciousness was applied to evaluate the character of Jules and his development in the text.

In *Them*, the author depicts a lapse into human misery, as her characters are left unaided in their social rejection that deprives them of human dignity. They are outcasts as a result of their skin colour or economic hardship. The proposed state assistance is portrayed as ineffective, and the media dupes the public. Oates ponders the self-centred ambitions in society.

Considering Jules, Oates depicts him as a romantic Madman who, in the absence of God, creates his own life by pursuing adventures and blurring the lines between fiction and reality. However, it is a happy and sympathetic Jules who extends himself into a violent murderer and a pimp. Therefore, his progression yields the aesthetic perception of his invented character. Navigating through insecurity and chaos, he decides to fictionalise his

[93] Joyce Carol Oates, *Expensive People* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), originally published in 1968, p. 220.

life and affirms himself as a star in his narrative. By acting as both a character in and the author of his own story, Jules gradually achieves self-reliance, dominance, and power.

Jules' encounter with fire occurs first in his childhood, and becomes a repeated symbol of transformation in his life, accompanying him throughout his adolescence and into adulthood. The imagery culminates in the race riot, where the flames extend from the personal to a social level. In the tradition of the Quartet, Oates' protagonists fashion aesthetic identities to release themselves from the gloom in which they live. It is Jules who corresponds to a postmodern hero because he succeeds in his positive dreaming, and his visions are fictionalised into living. Nehamas elaborates on the postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche's ideas, and coins the phrase *life as literature*, which enjoys significant currency in Oates' *Them*. Oates depicts the protagonists' plurality and decentralisation that evokes ambiguous opinions that the author leaves unreconciled in the text. Additionally, short circuits, carnivalisations, and decanonisation feature in the Detroit setting, the riot, and the previous disordered formation, and recall scenes from Carroll's texts.

Jules changes the direction of his life. Oates depicts Jules as incompatible with social concerns and, consequently, the author questions the applicability of individual transformation upon society. Looking at the effects of individualism in the period and its supporting philosophies, it is the postmodern reading of Nietzsche that valorises the rejection of all authority, plurality of fictional singularities, and fearless playing of symbolic games. Therefore, when read through a postmodern appropriation of the Nietzschean lens, the author depicts Jules' fashioning of life-affirmation, which he expresses through excessive violence. However, the creativity of being and the relentless life force are celebrated in Oates' *Them*, and her aestheticisation of violence underpins the tragic vision of the era and its historical roots.

To depict the postmodern chaos and its valorisation of total disorder, the author employs the terror vision of riots and violent looting. Nietzsche's and Oates' critiques of society, where distorted values and societal exclusion are reinforced by means of traditional morals, explore the roots of the collective dismay. Oates contemplates the premise of whether self-seeking ambitions or moral obedience enhance improvement, and also questions the effectiveness of these positions in its extreme forms.

Chapter Five

Jesse in *Wonderland*

Joyce Carol Oates' novel *Wonderland* (1971) is the last narrative in her Wonderland Quartet. As its title suggests, the narrative involves a complex symbolic structure of wonders that the author juxtaposes with images of horrors. *Wonderland* unfolds the complex character of its orphaned protagonist Jesse Harte, who over time confronts his identity crises. The novel draws upon Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871), which had resonated deeply with Oates during her childhood. Oates taught Carroll's texts in her literature class at Windsor in 1967, the same year *A Garden of Earthly Delights* was published, and admitted the influence of Carroll on her *Wonderland*.[1]

The thematic parallel of the identity inquiry will be examined between the character of Alice set in Carroll's magical Wonderland and Oates' Jesse. The author sets Jesse in the authentic decades of the 1950s and 1960s engaging with the ideas of Nietzsche marked by the first publication on Nietzsche by the scholar Walter Arnold Kaufmann in the United States of America in 1950. Therefore, I will present my empirical claim that Oates was directly influenced by Nietzsche as supported by her references to Nietzsche in *Wonderland*. I will analyse Oates' employment of the terminology of a "higher man", "superior"[2] and the clearly depicted concept of a humanity that would "displace God" in *Wonderland*.[3] Through the chapter, I will explore Jesse's progression in terms of Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche,

[1] Joanne V. Creighton, "The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love", in *Joyce Carol Oates* (Woodbridge, CT: Twayne Publishers, 1979), p. 82.
[2] Joyce Carol Oates, *Wonderland* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), paperback edition originally published in 1972, p. 194
[3] Oates, *Wonderland*, pp. 101-102.

a model which lays emphasis on orderly inner control while establishing autonomy after the death of God.

Additionally, through my interpretative claim, I will also examine Oates' depiction of the questioning of identity through the lens of postmodern interpretations of Nietzsche that also impacted the cultural discourse in the United States of America after the late 1950s. Therefore, I juxtapose the term *Kaufmann's Nietzsche* with the term *postmodernism* and *postmodern Nietzsche*, where the latter represents Kaufmann's interlocutors, who argue that Nietzsche's opinions are based on the affirmation of chaos. To examine the contrasting views on the concept of order that are depicted by Oates, I will also shed more light on other characters in *Wonderland* who recall the disorder of Carroll's dream setting and personify the chaotic energy popularised in the postmodern reading of Nietzsche's ideas.

As in *Expensive People* (1968), a male protagonist is depicted in Oates' *Wonderland* who epitomises the Dionysian chaos advanced by the postmodern ideas. However, in the last part of the novel, the protagonist's daughter becomes the narrative focaliser and recalls Carroll's Alice while the male protagonist ultimately exercises control over his passion. By achieving his character's integrity, the protagonist balances the Dionysian and Apollonian elements in the text.

Set in the decades between the 1930s and 1970s, *Wonderland* challenges the intellectual and social forms of these historical periods. Read through the postmodern lens, the author combines the aestheticisation of violence with the story's background of the economic tension after the Depression in the 1930s, uncertainty, and the propagation of science after World War II, and the subsequent cultural development of social unrest in the 1960s.

Set in the same period as *Them* (1969), the plot of *Wonderland* is, according to Elaine Showalter, depicted from, "a more surreal and openly Gothic perspective".[4] Oates asserts that it could not be written in a different historical period.[5] The author argues that this was a time at which, "divisive hatreds between the generations, over the war in Vietnam, and what was called, perhaps optimistically, the 'counterculture,' raged daily".[6] Thus, Oates' *Wonderland* depicts the American landscape with alternative nightmare images. The inspiration the author acquired from Carroll's texts follows the tradition of her Quartet, and it is in this text that Oates' fragmentary narrative technique evokes the dream-like visions of the United States.

To explain the link between Carroll's texts and *Wonderland*, I base my argument primarily on the scholarship of Joanne V. Creighton and Ellen G. Friedman, who elaborate on the changing proportions of the protagonists and who link the intertextual imagery. From the philosophical point of view, I additionally explore the postmodern reading of Nietzsche in relation to Carroll's texts while applying the former's interpretation to Oates' chaotic characters. I also draw on the work of Irwin Halfond, who engages with the metamorphosis of Jesse from the spatial perspective, and whose historical-literary reading of *Wonderland* stems from his research interests in transatlantic world history. It is also the transatlantic influence of Nietzsche on the Anglo-American readership that impacted the course of history and intellectual thought worldwide.

Halfond's particular spatial analysis of Jesse's homes and progress towards a sense of identity represents a novel aspect of study, one that underpins my argument concerning Jesse's symbolic progress into Kaufmann's understanding of Nietzsche's higher man. I consider Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche as way of interpreting Jesse's development that

[4] Elaine Showalter, "Introduction: The Wonderland Quartet", in *Wonderland* by Joyce Carol Oates (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), originally published 1972, p. xxiii.
[5] Joyce Carol Oates, "Afterword: *Wonderland* Revisited", in *Wonderland* by Joyce Carol Oates (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), originally published 1972, p. 481.
[6] Oates, "Afterword: *Wonderland* Revisited", p. 481.

contrasts Oates' conflicting symbols of postmodern Nietzsche on her chaotic characters. Conversely, I offer Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche on the character who cultivates the organisation of chaos in *Wonderland*.

Friedman observes:

> Oates's *Wonderland* (1971), like Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is a book about proportions. In fact, Carroll's Alice books strongly influenced the theme, structure and imagery of Oates's *Wonderland*. [...] She [Oates] considers these two {Carroll's} very misanthropic works that ask the "valid and terrifying" questions, "Is life really a game?" and "Is everyone cheating but me?".[7]

In this text, Oates' childhood inspiration of Alice is aligned with the images of the psychedelic reading of Carroll's text in the United States during the 1960s. With the formation of the decade's countercultural movement that celebrated childhood experience, it is the culture of psychedelic drug use, thought to allow access to states of direct experience untroubled by systematised knowledge and dogma, which found some inspiration in Carroll's Alice.[8] Bernard M. Patten says about Carroll's texts:

> The story of Alice's adventures in Wonderland also raises venerable philosophical concerns about the relation of mind and body, free will, the uncertainty of knowledge, and the very nature of existence.[9]

Following the effects of the philosophical conflict after the death of God, *Wonderland*'s characters confront the "phantasmagoria of the personality" in the chaotic void.[10] In an attempt to discern new values, they navigate through alternative determinants, such as knowledge, medicine, art, and dissipation. Not only does Oates aestheticise violence, but she also depicts the demoralised psychedelic culture through the images of terror in her text. Therefore, the aesthetic map of Oates' imagery invites interpretation through the postmodern lens of Nietzsche. It is not only imagery but also the philosophical context that

[7] Ellen G. Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates* (New York, NY: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1980), p. 95.
[8] Sophia Satchell-Baeza, "Carroll in the Psychedelic World", London: The Lewis Carroll Society, 26 April 2019.
[9] Bernard M. Patten, *The Logic of Alice: Clear Thinking in Wonderland* (New York, NY: Prometheus Books, 2009), p. 10.
[10] Oates, *Wonderland*.

fosters the theme of identity and power of Carroll's texts that support Oates' literary ambition in *Wonderland*.

It is the changing currency of power and its forms that Jesse encounters and relates to his identity and existence in *Wonderland*. Oates' narrative introduces Jesse at the age of fourteen, a time when his family faces economic hardship after the Depression era. His father, Willard Harte, fails to support his family of five, only for his wife to become pregnant again. In despair, Willard shoots his family at home while Jesse is out working after school.

Afterwards, Willard drives Jesse home with the intention of killing him also, yet only succeeds in wounding him. With a bullet in his arm, Jesse escapes his father who then turns the gun on himself. Dying later in hospital, Willard leaves Jesse orphaned and in the care of the latter's maternal grandfather, Vogel. Afterwards, Jesse spends a few months in the care of his uncle and aunt in Yewville, before being given a place at the Niagara County Home for Boys.

It is Dr Karl Pedersen who learns about Jesse's misfortune in the news and decides to adopt him. Jesse Harte thus becomes Jesse Pedersen, and lives with Dr Pedersen and his wife, Mary, along with their two children, Hilda and Frederich. Pedersen has a well-established reputation as a physician, and his family holds a respectable position in their privileged neighbourhood. Jesse's gratitude at receiving a new family translates into a determined obedience to Pedersen's obsessions. The family is commanded by Pedersen to organise their daily activities, on which they report at regular communal family meals. Consequently, Jesse seeks education as a way to please Pedersen, and the following year is accepted at the University of Michigan. However, before his registration, he helps Mary to escape from her obsessive husband, resulting in the latter cutting him off.

Abandoned again, Jesse becomes Jesse Vogel. He pursues his medical studies and, despite financial hardship, graduates. He then advances his social status by marrying Helene

Cady, the daughter of Nobel Prize laureate Dr Benjamin Cady. Thus, the author alters the stereotypical narrative of the male saving the female by marriage, as both Jesse and Pedersen benefit from economically and socially advantageous marriages. Under the prominent Dr Roderick Perrault's leadership, a friend of Dr Cady, and with relentless determination and diligence, Jesse gains a distinguished reputation as a neurosurgeon. Both Dr Cady and Dr Perrault are leading professionals and become Jesse's surrogate fathers in his ambitious career. With Helene and his two daughters, Jeanne and Shelley, and with an unexpected and generous inheritance from Mary Pedersen's father, the Vogels move into a mansion, which represents Jesse's financial independence. After the death of Dr Perrault, Jesse becomes the director of his clinic.

In the last part of the book, the third person narration combines with Shelley's letters to her father. Like Mary's escape from Pedersen in the first part of the book, and Clara Walpole in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, so too does Shelley escape from Jesse's obsessive control. In this part of the text, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy triggers the background dynamics of the countercultural atmosphere of Shelley's adventures. Following the assassination, Jesse buys a gun to protect his family. Imitating his father, Jesse uses the gun to ward off Noel, who represents a countercultural guru and influences Shelley. However, Jesse ultimately suppresses his violent instincts and leaves Noel unharmed, while managing at the same time to save Shelley. The novel closes with Jesse walking the delirious Shelley home.

However, the original *Wonderland* hardcover publication contains a melodramatic ending absent from subsequent publications, one that sees Jesse helplessly drift away in a boat with his dying daughter on Lake Ontario. Oates observes, "In the months between finishing the manuscript, and seeing it published, I had continued to be haunted by it,

'dreaming' its truer trajectory".[11] Thus, Oates edited the text the following year, and it is the new ending of the consequent paperback edition and reprints that depicts the dynamics of the protagonist's control and its consequent effects. By reworking the text, the author establishes an aesthetic currency of internal control and fashions the interplay between the external and internal form of the protagonist's power. Recalling Carroll's obsessive re-writing habit, Oates recalls:

> I would systematically rewrite the entire manuscript, the first word to last. And this was the triumph of art, it seemed to me: the re-writing, the re-casting, the re-imagining of what had been a sustained ecstatic plunge.[12]

Thus, it is not only the ending of *Wonderland* that Oates edited. For Carroll, the fragmentary aspects of the storyline naturally occur in the dream-like fantasy context, but in Oates' realistic setting, the narrative dynamics are primarily marked by the imagery of Jesse's natural awakenings from several nights sleep. These awakenings are determined by particular historical periods of the United States, which represent major changes in Jesse's identity. Oates employs dramatic tropes to foster the shifts between Jesse's perceptions of the authentic setting of the three decades that influence his development in the text. With each awakening, the author generates new prospects for Jesse's pursuits. A new scenery, additional characters, or the change of Jesse's perspective enhance the dynamic atmosphere and convey fragmentary dream sequences. Additionally, the concept of dreaming in the form of daily hallucinations and episodes of insomnia permeate Oates' *Wonderland*.

The Aesthetic Map of Re-invention

[11] Oates, "Afterward: *Wonderland* Revisited", p. 479.
[12] Oates, "Afterward: *Wonderland* Revisited", p. 480.

Creighton argues that Oates' novel depicts a "dream-vision in which Jesse is plunged into the abyss of the 'phantasmagoria' of personality".[13] *Wonderland* is divided into three parts. The first sentence of the first book reads, "*Jesse wakes, startled*",[14] meaning the moment when Jesse rises from his night's sleep. The next time in the narrative that he wakes occurs in the hospital, during his recovery after the family massacre. Both of these instances of waking are situated in the first book, and both mark a significant part of Jesse's life.

The author implies the figurative meaning of Jesse's awakenings in the first section of the book: after Jesse's first awakening, Willard kills his family, thus evoking the 1930s nightmare vision with a pointless massacre and Jesse's desperate escape. His next awakening in the hospital is followed by his third relocation, to the Pedersens' house. The latter's destructive effect on his family represents the 1940s, when Jesse encounters the hallucinatory vision of external domination of madness in Pedersen's home. The author signposts significant periods of Jesse's life that are initiated by his awakening, and thus the storyline recalls Alice's fragmentary and threatening experiences.

Alice's dream becomes the plot of Carroll's entire novel, and her second dream stretches throughout the sequel until she, in both dreams, wakes into reality. However, Jesse arises twice in the first book. Unlike Carroll's narration of the dream plot that employs the image of awakening as a movement from fantasy into real life, Jesse's awakenings unfold fictional visions *in* the authentic setting. Recalling separate dreams, after each awakening Jesse's previous identity is replaced with a new one, rendered most overtly by his name changes. His original name, Jesse Harte, changes to Jesse Pedersen, and finally to Jesse Vogel. The latter family name is the German word for bird, and thus Oates emphasises Jesse's flight and freedom. Creighton says:

[13] Creighton, "The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love", p. 82.
[14] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 3.

> Stripped of their identities, Alice and Jesse are, [...] all alone in worlds of frightening metamorphosis and incipient extinction of being, worlds governed by quixotic principles and authorities.[15]

In *Wonderland,* it is the first paragraph in the second book where, as the narrator explains, "ordinary life resumes".[16] After Jesse's rejection by Pedersen, the second book opens with the former living an independent life, having relocated to the University of Michigan. He distances himself from the panic and memories of his past, which refer to the events of the first section of the book. The narrator goes on to describe the scenery of Jesse's new life: "Daylight resumed, after even the worst of his dim, baffling nightmares, and he [Jesse] *awoke to normal life*. He was in disguise as a normal young man".[17] The conflict between Jesse's internal chaos and external normal appearance is also referenced in the second part of the book.

The scene where Jesse awakes into normal life presupposes two previous awakenings into an alternative dream-like life in the first book. However, in the second book, Jesse's awakening alters in its mode. While in the first book it fosters the main plot with the main setting, in the second book his awakenings introduce minor plot episodes that centre around an attractive woman, Reva Denk, with the historical period remaining the same. The awakening introduces Reva, whose surname implies, according to its German meaning, her status as a dream-like temptation designed to encourage Jesse to abandon his married life. The idea of Reva is followed by Jesse's frequent and passionate hallucinations about her.

After his second awakening, Jesse's passion towards Reva progresses. He transforms his passive daydreaming into an active pursuit of her. His quest involves a new character, a private detective, whom Jesse hires to locate Reva. Jesse's third awakening happens in a car when he drives to meet Reva in Hilsinger, in Wisconsin. The fourth and final awakening to

[15] Creighton, "The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love", p. 82.
[16] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 179.
[17] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 180, emphasis added.

occur in the second book involves a change of scenery and fosters the development of the integrity of Jesse's character.

In the third book, Jesse wakes only once, and this time it is in a hotel the night after President Kennedy's assassination. As in the first book, Jesse's awakening marks a new historical period in the storyline, this time the 1960s that indicates substantial chronological leaps in the narrative. His daughter Shelley links this event to the initiation of chaos in her life, which consequently leads to her distress, dissipation, and escape. Additionally, the subject of dreaming is shifted from Jesse to Shelley, as it is now her fantasy that is of narrative importance, and which involves her attempts to escape her father's control. Recalling Carroll's texts, it is a young heroine, Shelley, that causes chaos in the last section of Oates' *Wonderland*. In her later interview, the author explains about the creative writing process:

> Thus the recurring "theme" or "plot" in a writer's work have the analogous function of the recurring dream: something demands to be raised to consciousness, to be comprehended by the ego, but for some reason the ego resists or refuses to understand. And so he is fated to dream or re-dream the same paradoxical problem, and can't be freed of it until he "solves" it.[18]

The most significant riddle Jesse needs to solve is the riddle of his existence and identity. Traumatised by the violence of his father, Jesse loses his closest relatives and thus his secure foundation. Being the only survivor of the massacre, and consequently frequently re-located, Jesse loses a robust sense of his identity. His vulnerable position highlights the cultural void in the philosophical conflict after the death of God, when the fundamental metaphysical value is determined by the figurative authority of the eternal father who is consequently dismissed. In an interview, Oates observes:

> I am always concerned with the larger social/political/moral implications of my characters' experiences. In other words, I could not take the time to write about a group of people who did not represent, in their various struggles, fantasies, unusual experiences, hopes etc., our society in miniature.[19]

[18] Dale Boesky, "Correspondence with Miss Joyce Carol Oates", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*, edited by Greg Johnson, (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), p. 51.
[19] Boesky, "Correspondence with Miss Joyce Carol Oates", p. 51.

Oates personifies the cultural phenomenon of Jesse's navigation through the postmodern void that yields his identity query. Battling with the metaphysical aspect, Jesse thinks that he:

> seemed to belong to another boy, another Jesse, and he didn't know how to get back to being that person, that self. Sometimes he felt a flurry of panic, to think that he was nothing at all, that he did not exist. What did that mean – *to exist*?

After the death of the President, Jesse queries his identity. He thinks, "*Jesse Vogel: who was that?*"[20] It is Dr Pedersen who first confronts Jesse with his "riddle of existence", which the latter then sets out to explore.[21] However, as a result of Pedersen's eventual rejection of Jesse, the latter's identity is further complicated, and his existence threatened. Pedersen says to Jesse:

> I pronounce you dead to me. You have no existence. You are nothing. You have betrayed the Pedersen family, which accepted and loved you as a son, and now you are eradicated by the family. Never try to contact us again. You are dead. You do not exist.[22]

Thus, Pedersen's rejection symbolises and recalls Willard's physical attempt to kill Jesse. In Carroll's Wonderland text, it is Alice's existence that is threatened by the Queen of Heart's frequent commands for beheading. Additionally, when Alice explains her astronomical knowledge, the Duchess says, "talking of axes, [...] chop off her head!"[23] Confusing her identity, the Pigeon pronounces Alice to be a serpent,[24] and Tweedledum persuades Alice to be invented as a part of a dream. Alice hopelessly defends herself, saying, "I *am* real!"[25] Combatting confusion and harassment from the Wonderland creatures, Alice eventually determines her identity. In the second Alice text, she strives to become a queen in the chess game. In both books she encounters new silly riddles, for instance from the Hatter and the Red Queen, which Alice dismisses with no answer.

---

[20] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 395, emphasis original.
[21] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 69.
[22] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 176.
[23] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 63.
[24] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 57.
[25] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 198.

In *Wonderland*, it is Jesse who encounters nonsense medical riddles that he is asked to solve, despite knowing they are a waste of time. He receives the following letter:

> Dear Dr. Vogel:
> My telephone number is below. Please call me any night after seven. I have long time of blindness and have to stay in bed. I am not a drinker. I have a good appetite and since a child I have always concentrated on good green vegetables and very little red meat. My spells of blindness will interfere with my job. I am awaiting your call.[26]

Nevertheless, apart from his determination to solve his identity riddle, he is concerned with his authentic medical cases in hospital that additionally substitute the nonsense concept of Alice's riddles. It is the element of logic that Oates, recalling Carroll's texts, depicts in her *Wonderland*. Like Alice, who becomes "curiouser and curiouser",[27] Jesse is "*curious* about Dr. Pedersen and his patients", because Pedersen introduces Jesse to knowledge and his skill at figuring out medical cases when others fail.[28]

However, unlike Alice, who gives up attempting to answer Wonderland riddles, Pedersen emphasises the determination of *organising* the chaos and suggests Jesse attend his clinical examinations. It is Pedersen who attempts to "diagnose both disorder and method of treatment", thus signifying his power and dominance.[29] At the dinner table, the doctor discusses a clinical patient he cured, saying, "what a puzzle to everyone! Well, it is finally solved".[30] Similarly, Jesse wants to "fix people up", and in the clinical emergency setting which cultivates chaos, his riddles are defined by the amount of blood he attempts to stop.[31]

Jesse overcomes the chaos created by life-threatening situations in the hospital, and his victory results in saved lives of his patients. The image of massive blood loss dramatises urgent and illogically appearing cases. Recalling nonsense and panic that is caused by the

[26] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 438.
[27] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 20.
[28] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 103, emphasis original.
[29] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 107.
[30] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 83.
[31] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 201.

"hysterical" nurse in the emergency room, Jesse finds glass splinters in a patient's groin due to his attempt of self-castration, and a juice glass in a woman's vagina.[32] Jesse thinks:

> *Nobody is going to die tonight if I can help it.* Mopping himself off, he looked around the messy room, its glinting metallic surfaces, its splattering of blood that were like exclamation marks, and everything seemed to him manageable now, in his power, a sacred area he had mastered. *Nobody is going to die ...*[33]

The blood imagery recalls the first section of the book, when Jesse finds his dead relatives. Thus, his determined motivation to save his patients is linked to his traumatic memory of his deceased family, who he was unable to help. Therefore, the textual playfulness in Alice texts conflicts with Oates' symbols of terror, blood images, and their morbid implications.

In search for his selfhood, Jesse realises that there are multiple options of identity. He thinks:

> Now he was never alone. Never by himself. He was not Jesse, but *Jesse Pedersen*. Even when he went to bed at night in his own room he was not really alone. Out there, on the bridge, he was not really alone. They [other Jesses] were present, watching him. Grave and patient and kindly.[34]

The preoccupation of Jesse's mind does not imply physical solitude. The personal pronoun "they" indicates his past identities, including Jesse Harte, who lived with his father, mother, and siblings, and the Jesse who stayed with his Grandfather on the farm after the shooting. His transformation into Jesse Pedersen is depicted by his constant need for order, influenced by Pedersen. The latter's obsession with external control requires that every member of the family generates a daily plan in the morning, the "Map of the Day".[35] Jesse explains, "at dinner this 'Map' would be measured against their actual achievements".[36]

Pedersen also controls the language to manifest the affirmative organisation of words. In reference to a microscope, the narrator explains that Jesse "*worked* – for the word

[32] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 296.
[33] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 297.
[34] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 76.
[35] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 76.
[36] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 76.

'played' was not used in the Pedersen home".[37] Following the brutality of Willard, it is Pedersen who teaches Jesse to grow into the concept of a higher man by rationally organising the chaos in himself. To manifest control, Pedersen corrects Jesse's abbreviated responses and demands that Jesse speaks in complete sentences.[38] Echoing Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God, Pedersen says:

> To displace God is not easy. To be higher, a higher man, that is not an easy fate. And I believe you will share this fate with me, Jesse. I am certain of it. Once you become the man you are, Jesse, you cannot ever rest, but must prove yourself continually. Again and again. It is the fate of the higher man.[39]

It is after the death of God that humans begin to attempt to substitute God's authority. It is Pedersen's notion of the higher man that recalls Nietzsche's language register, yet aspects of Nietzsche's ideas are considerably limited by Pedersen's view. According to Nietzsche, to become a higher person one passes through three transformations: the camel, the lion, and the child stages. The initial conversion into the camel stage requires "the strong reverent spirit".[40] There is an emphasis on obedience and learning, and it is a time to feed "on the acorns and grass of knowledge".[41] In Pedersen's home, Jesse is expected to devote himself to his progress in a sincere manner.

Echoing Pedersen's vision, Jesse says that he plans "to go as far as my abilities will take me".[42] To please Pedersen, Jesse strives to be "more obedient than [Hilda and Frederich], more docile, more eager to please" his adoptive parents.[43] Jesse prepares for the nightly quizzes at the dinner table in order to showcase his intellectual progress of the day. Consequently, Jesse discovers a talent for science and memorises whole passages of science textbooks to satisfy Pedersen.

---

[37] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 75.
[38] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 84.
[39] Oates, *Wonderland*, pp. 101-102.
[40] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated and edited by W. A. Kaufmann (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1954), p. 137.
[41] Nietzsche , p. 138.
[42] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 69.
[43] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 77.

However, the doctor emphasises his belief that knowledge representing the Apollonian element is the only means to accessing a higher state to exercise *external* control. Therefore, in this matter, his understanding of a higher man significantly differs from Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche, which emphasises the use of *internal* control to organise chaos. Kaufmann elaborates on the harmony between the logical and unconscious aspects, i.e. Apollonian and Dionysian element, of personality but does not mention knowledge as a key technique to accessing a higher state of mind.

Jesse lives in the Pedersen's mansion in the 1940s, and Pedersen's vision of Nietzsche's ideas recalls the misconceptions that prevailed in the same historical period that was followed by Kaufmann's sanitation of Nietzsche in 1950. Friedman describes Pedersen in the following manner:

> A grotesque embodiment of Nietzsche's Superman, Dr. Pedersen is a figure in whom Nazisism found its justification. He is one of a series of *uebermesch* figure in Oates's fiction, all of whom believe in the self as the final authority.[44]

Friedman's application of Nietzsche's scholarship is valid because she interprets Pedersen's self-delusion as a corrupt articulation of Nietzsche's vision. Pedersen does not have control over himself, but rather claims his superior external authority over his environment. He says to his daughter:

> You and Frederich are supernaturally gifted but you lack courage, you lack direction, you must become more obedient. […] You must allow me to interpret everything for you, as Jesse does.[45]

Thus, Pedersen demands his family's obedience in order to re-invent them. After the earlier violence of Willard, Jesse is thankful for some direction in his life, yet at this stage it is not Jesse's responsibility, nor autonomy, that he manifests in his development. Additionally, Pedersen demands complete obedience, thus he represents the highest authority figure in this

[44] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 101.
[45] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 120.

part of the text. He encourages Jesse to fashion, what he calls, a mentality of a higher man, yet Nietzsche was more concerned with mental transformations of the autonomous humane spirit.

Pedersen's abusive manipulation recalls Carroll's authoritative characters who confuse Alice. Patten says of these characters that they:

> exist for the "porpoise" of examining abuses of power, irrational thinking, and silly actions. Carroll is particularly concerned with silly actions and silly rules formulated by adults and those in control.[46]

Continuously threatened and ridiculed for her aspiring sense of order, Alice's changing physical proportions depict her identity crises, and correspond with her losing (shrinking) or gaining (growing) a sense of the self and her power. In the context of the thematic metamorphosis, it is Friedman who says that, "like Alice, Jesse Harte, the novel's protagonist, undergoes a series of metamorphic transitions in which he grows larger and larger".[47] Friedman further argues that changing proportions in *Wonderland* additionally evolve through three levels: physical (Jesse as an obese adolescent), mental (Jesse as a successful scientist), and psychical (Jesse as a possessive husband and father).[48] In this context, I additionally elaborate on the argument by Irwin Halfond, who interlinks Jesse's pursuit of his "true identity and place" in Oates' *Wonderland*.[49]

Transformation and Changing Proportions

I will set my argument in motion by starting with Jesse's first physical shrinking in the initial part of the book. After the fatal shooting, Jesse loses 15 pounds, and "his ribs showed. His wrists were bony. His upper arms were too thin for a boy".[50] Confused by the murder, he

[46] Patten, *The Logic of Alice: Clear Thinking in Wonderland*, p. 17.
[47] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 95.
[48] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 95.
[49] Irwin Halfond, "Wonderland", *Cyclopedia of Literary Places* (Pasaden, CA: Salem Press, 2016), p. 1128.
[50] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 65.

doubts his identity and questions his future existence. Jesse's consequent intellectual progress while living with the Pedersens is manifested by the image of physical enlargement. Entering the gluttonous Pedersen family as a thin boy, Jesse leaves as a fat teenager.[51] In Oates' *Wonderland*, Jesse feels inferior to Pedersen as a result of his initial slight frame that is consequently enlarged by his gluttony.

In her conversations with Dale Boesky, Oates explains that her "superior" characters must have "room to grow".[52] In her work, changing images of physical proportions, as well as mental progression, figuratively require spatial accommodations. To link these two aspects, an analysis of Jesse's first home is of use. He is born into the crowded Harte family house, and the new pregnancy of his mother distresses him. He is "stung" by his sister's happy response, thinking instead, "*His mother is going to have another baby. In this little house, all of them crowded together*".[53] After Willard slaughters the family, Jesse experiences the comfort of his own room for the first time in the Pedersens' mansion.[54] Therefore, this physical space symbolises the new conditions to which Jesse must physically adapt and also progress mentally and psychically. Jesse enlarges his body and also mentally progresses in his studies. However, during this process of self-development, he is exiled by Pedersen, which occurs at the end of the first book.

The second part of the book represent Chapters 4-7 in Carroll's first Alice novel. In the second part of Oates' book, after graduating from the University of Michigan, Jesse moves into a basement flat in a three-story building but eventually moves up to the top floor.[55] His initial basement dwelling symbolises a modest start after being proclaimed dead by Pedersen, but as the plot unfolds, Jesse develops into a "superior" personality, and his mental progress is manifested by his promising medical career, which is mirrored by his physical

[51] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 95.
[52] Greg Johnson, *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006* (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), p. 52.
[53] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 9, emphasis original.
[54] Halfond, p. 1128.
[55] Halfond, p. 1128.

rise up the building.[56] Thus, his mental and psychical progression is symbolically depicted by an internal aspect of Jesse in the context of his spatial progression.

Jesse's development in the second book corresponds to the lion stage of Nietzsche's ideas, which marks the second transformation. According to Nietzsche, "the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert".[57] After Pedersen's rejection, Jesse becomes more autonomous. Friedman says, "Thereafter, he [Jesse] nurtures his own autonomy rather than depending on the nurture of the world outside. As a result, his becomes a quest for self-creation".[58] Friedman further argues that Jesse replaces communal life with personal power, but it is external control that Jesse exercises at this point. Jesse's authority increases, as he has power both over his patients and his own family.

In this section, Jesse is described as "superior" by his friend, Dr Talbot Waller Monk, who is called Trick and has a "natural interest in superior personalities".[59] At one stage, Trick writes a note to Jesse's wife, Helene, saying that Jesse "is an exceptional young man, far superior to me".[60] However, Jesse is not yet able to detach from Dr Perrault, while being aware of his own reliance upon the doctor. Jesse observes that Dr Perrault "keeps me going at a pace I couldn't maintain by myself".[61] This reliance stems from Jesse's inability to direct his life to create new values.

According to Nietzsche, "to create new values – that even the lion cannot do".[62] It is only in the last part of the book that Jesse is able to establish new values and affirm his personal integrity. In Oates' text, Jesse's stage in the second book is transitory, which is signified by Jesse's lack of home-ownership. His move to the top floor represents his

[56] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 194.
[57] Nietzsche, p. 138.
[58] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 97.
[59] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 194.
[60] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 243.
[61] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 342.
[62] Nietzsche, p. 139.

empowerment, yet as a tenant he does not own either the floor or the building. Therefore, he has not obtained the ultimate affirmation of his autonomy.

However, in Carroll's text *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, it is in the second part of the book that Alice finds the mushroom that enables her to regulate her growing on the one side, and shrinking on the other side. It is only the confusing circular shape of the mushroom that challenges Alice's ability to control her size management.[63] Like Alice, Jesse achieves control that represents his powerful neurosurgeon position and the authoritative position of a father. Yet at this stage he struggles to cultivate healthy internal control.

By juggling between his dreaming about Reva and the reality of his family and professional responsibilities, Jesse ultimately manages to progress in the last part of the book. Creighton says:

> Finally, though, just as Alice flees from "the frightening anarchy of the world underneath the ground of common consciousness" and wakes up, Jesse rejects the alternate dream-vision of Reva, who represents the chaotic, uncontrolled world of the unconscious, and who might have opened him to the "elusive Jesse" within.[64]

However, his internal victory of consciousness for healthy family is proceeded by his passionate decision to get intimate with Reva. First, Jesse intends to clean himself in a bath; however, instead of shaving, he cuts himself with a blade on the different body parts which start bleeding:

> He held the razor in place against his left cheek, and felt up and down the length of his body a sharp thrill of lust, so keen that he nearly doubled over. [...] He stared at his own blood. Then, again, as if hypnotized, he drew the blade against the other side of his face. More blood.[65]

For his planned intercourse with Reva, Jesse wants to wash away, "the monstrous part of him he half-admired and half-loathed".[66] However, the consequent image of blood recalls the effects of Willard's chaotic murder, the tragedy Jesse contests ever since. In *Wonderland*, the

[63] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 55.
[64] Creighton, "The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love", p. 85.
[65] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 376.
[66] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 375.

images of blood symbolise uncontrolled Dionysian chaos. Being a doctor, Jesse is confronted with blood in the hospital. By stopping the bleeding, he saves the lives of his patients and manifests his external control over their lives. However, once his lust and passion for Reva are released through this act of self-mutilation, Jesse is unable to stop his own bleeding:

> He [Jesse] waited but the bleeding did not stop. He tried to blot it with the old paper towels, but it did not stop. The scratches stung. In the end, impatiently, he decided to put his clothes back on over the bleeding. He drove back to Chicago that way.[67]

To achieve a form of control, he rejects the chaotic concept of hallucinating about Reva, and drives home instead. Covering himself with clothes over his bloody body symbolises the act of his surrender to rational consciousness to control his passion. The scene occurs at the end of the second book of *Wonderland* marked by the last sentence. The next and final book of *Wonderland* is called 'Dreaming America' and is represented by a shift of perspective of Jesse while trying to save his daughter Shelley.

The individual and social advances of Jesse in the first two books correspond to Friedman's argument about Jesse's proportions, which he initially struggles to manage. She notes, "by expanding mentally – he becomes a brilliant neurosurgeon – and then by expanding psychically – he tries to possess his family".[68] In Oates' narrative, it is the transitory stage of Jesse that epitomises the post-war economic amelioration of the United States, while Shelley embodies the angry youth culture of the 1960s. After Perrault's retirement, Jesse finally runs his own clinic, and purchases a mansion with forty-eight windows in Winnetka, a town in Illinois.[69] Jesse's financial breakthrough symbolises his economic victory, something his own father was unable to achieve. However, Friedman asserts that at this point in his life, Jesse is psychically enlarged as "an *uebermensch*", one who acts "as a vampirish husband and father", and thus he resembles Pedersen.[70] The latter

[67] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 376.
[68] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 105.
[69] Halfond, "Wonderland", p. 1128.
[70] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 95.

represents a cruel oppressor, one who thirsts to exercise control over others, and despite Jesse's decision to rebel by helping Mary escape, he ultimately develops into Pedersen's image.

Recalling Pedersen, Jesse attempts to control how Shelley speaks, and demands that she organises her speech. Shelley remembers Jesse saying to her, "*Don't speak that way, Shelley. Speak only in complete sentences. Give us your complete thought*".[71] In her Afterword of *Wonderland*, Oates asserts that Jesse becomes obsessed with "demonic-paternal control", the very model of fatherhood that "he has been fleeing since boyhood".[72] It is at this stage in Jesse's life when Shelley flees home, and the third part of the book is predominantly narrated from her point of view.

In *Wonderland,* it is Shelley, whose character represents Alice's chaotic adventures, comments on her parents in the letters to Jesse and it is by the emotional attachment to Shelley that motivates Jesse to self-reflect. Recalling Carroll's wounded White Queen in *Through the Looking Glass,* in Oates' text, Helene feels emotionally destroyed by her marriage to Jesse, and is depicted as a passive character without a voice of her own. Therefore, Shelley dismisses Helene in her letters, and accuses Jesse of neglect. Shelley complains that Jesse either works at the clinic or, when present, is emotionally unavailable, thus recalling the character of Red King who is withdrawn from the fourth chapter in *Through the Looking Glass*.

Shelley recalls the times that, when crying, she demanded her father's attention, but he isolated himself from the family in his study.[73] Halfond elaborates on the development of Jesse's "self-directed life of his own", which is not achieved prior to the saving of Shelley.[74] Only after her escape, when Jesse searches for her in the third book of *Wonderland*, does he

[71] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 402, emphasis original.
[72] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 479.
[73] Oates, *Wonderland*, pp. 403-404.
[74] Halfond, "Wonderland", p. 1128.

finally choose his daughter over his work at the clinic. According to Nietzsche, to enter the third transformation, one must conquer "his last god", as to achieve the "ultimate victory" it is necessary "to fight with the great dragon".[75]

Following Jesse's economic victory and triumph over repeated fatherly rejection, his last struggle is against violence. Nietzsche describes the third level of the spirit as "a child", and it is through his child, Shelley, that Jesse enters a symbolic metamorphosis after evaluating his prior paternal influences. Nietzsche defines the stage as follows:

> The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning […] For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred 'Yes' is needed […] he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.[76]

Shelley's innocence parallels Jesse's own childhood innocence at the time of his family's massacre. Recalling the traumatic event from the position of being a father himself, however, Jesse decides to spare Noel's life. By making that decision, he refrains from following Willard's pattern and creates something new. The identity of Jesse Harte, which is lost in the violent act of his father, is articulated in the identity of Jesse Vogel. Friedman argues that it is at this stage that Jesse psychologically "shrinks from [the obsessive model of] *ubermensch* to an ordinary, self-questioning being".[77] In her analysis, Friedman appears to link the Nietzschean *Űbermensch* with the image of a cruel dominator when interpreting the manipulative Pedersen, while Kaufmann emphasises the Nietzschean idea of a creative life force. Following Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche, in the moment of overcoming his instincts, Jesse internalises the contests, and joins them with his conscience. Jesse accomplishes his eventual excellence that springs from the Apollonian control of the Dionysian element, thus following Kaufmann's understanding of Nietzsche.

Recalling Carroll's symbolism, Creighton says:

[75] Nietzsche, p. 138.
[76] Nietzsche, p. 139.
[77] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 96.

> As Alice dismisses the "insoluble problems of meaning in a meaningless world" with her waking-world resumption of insight, logic, and control: "You're nothing but a pack of cards!", so too Jesse awakens, dismissing Noel, Shelley's lover, and resuming control of his daughter and himself.[78]

However, it is in the process of waking into an authentic world that Alice's real-world vision interferes with the fantasy dream. Thus, Alice connects with the logic, order, and sense of herself from the real world that interrupts the dream. On the other hand, Jesse exists in an authentic setting in *Wonderland*. Therefore, he has no new realm into which he can wake, and he merely accesses his deeper consciousness while changing his perspective to overcome his violent temptation. Jesse's internal insight and consequent strength sparks optimistic hope for his daughter, and figuratively for the United States. The mental transformation of Jesse is externalised as the physical survival of Shelley and Noel. Additionally, Jesse's overcoming of obsessive domination symbolises the national potential to overcome the greed for power and destruction.

Oates' ternary narrative structure thematically mirrors a progressive tendency in the three titles, starting with "Variations on an American Hymn", then "The Finite Passing of an Infinite Passion", and finally "Dreaming America". The "variations" from the first part of the book are represented by the violence of Willard Harte in the 1930s and the scientific obsession and external dominion of Pedersen in the 1940s. Jesse's "infinite passion" refers to his feelings towards Reva, which are overcome at the end of the second part of the book that covers the 1950s and 1960s. In the last part of the book, Jesse's disillusioned daughter voices her concerns by rejecting her father's authority, and it is her dreaming about America that she hallucinates.

The Chaos of Wonderland

[78] Creighton, "The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love", p. 85.

Confused by the fatherly rejection of both Willard and Pedersen, Jesse constantly confronts the chaos of his environment while claiming his own control. Additionally, Shelley experiences the effects of chaos after the assassination of the president but she playfully pursues her psychedelic dreams. After each awakening, Jesse encounters the manifestations of chaos. It is the control of chaos that becomes Jesse's ambition, and the metaphor of *Wonderland*. Pedersen asks Jesse to recite the scientific definition of homeostasis that Jesse achieves.[79] However, the pursuit of Jesse is distracted by the element of chaos which is depicted by different characters and their nonsense actions throughout the text.

The affirmation of chaos by these characters represents the new postmodern Nietzsche in contrast with the character of Jesse, who epitomises Kaufmann's Nietzsche in *Wonderland*. Creighton says about the analogies between Carroll's text and Oates' *Wonderland*:

> Mad, morphine-hooked Dr. Pedersen finds his counterparts in the Mad Hatter and the hookah-smoking Caterpillar of Carroll's Wonderland, both who imperiously demand that Alice "explain" herself as Pedersen does Jesse. Pedersen's monstrous egg-like appearance and know-it-all attitude also recall Humpty-Dumpty. Mrs. Pedersen, in turn, is the passionate Red Queen who brings "chaos" into the Pedersen household (according to her daughter Hilda) and who drags Jesse back and forth to Buffalo, as the Red Queen drags Alice through the air, in her frenzied attempt to escape from her husband.[80]

However, the first chaotic character in Oates' *Wonderland* is Willard, who expresses the absence of order and domination over the economic situation by the disordered violence and consequent bloody outrage. Chaotic elements disturb Jesse throughout the text, and his autonomous progress occurs in confrontation with these challenges. In Pedersen's house, the image of chaos is triggered by Mary and Hilda. Recalling Carroll's images, Mary has her rose garden and is in charge of cooking. Hilda says to her mother, "you bring chaos in here.

[79] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 99.
[80] Creighton, "The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love", p. 82.

More than anyone else. [...] Chaos will absorb me".[81] Preceding her escape, Mary collapses in the bathroom in which she has locked herself, and it is Jesse who frees her. Additionally, it is Jesse who orchestrates her escape from Pedersen, assisting her to order chaos.[82]

The established analogies between the characters from both books may be supported by the character of Hilda, whose exceptional mathematical abilities are determined by the chaos. It is the mathematical career of Carroll at Oxford University that translates in his texts as mathematical riddles and gains considerable scholarly attention. Recalling the concept of mathematical puzzles in Carroll's text, Hilda is a mathematical genius in Oates' narrative. Hilda, along with Frederich who is a musical genius, represent the nineteenth century concept of intellectualism. In her study of Nietzsche, Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen says, "Enlightenment ideals [...] created new literary roles that aimed to serve humanity rather than God".[83] Ratner-Rosenhagen further explains that the created romantic cult of genius is linked with the eighteen-century Enlightenment ideal and that it is Nietzsche who popularised their "independence from institutions".[84]

In *Wonderland,* Hilda and her brother, both of whom achieve extraordinary results, are isolated at home and discontinue their education. Recalling Alice's logical riddles, Hilda figures out mathematical questions by imagining a high tower of numbers. As with Alice, Hilda is not able to order the logical process. When being publicly examined, Hilda responds chaotically by running, screaming, and consuming chocolate bars in excessive amounts. In this passage, the third person narrator shifts into the first person, and it is Hilda whose internal thoughts are depicted:

> *The examiner asks another question and this time I can't stay still. I run to the end of the table and back again, giving the answers as I run. [...] – why am I fighting to get up again, pushing myself away from the table? I bump against someone's chair – the doctor next to me – and start to run to the end of the table, again, panting. I bend*

[81] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 138.
[82] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 166.
[83] Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 168.
[84] Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas,* p. 168.

> *down to pull up my socks. Father calls out, "Hilda. Hilda, you are disturbing the examination" [...] I run back to Father and I know that everyone is staring at me. [...] Someone is screaming. It is a girl's voice. She is screaming into the white shocked face of Dr. Pedersen. "The tower will give me answer! It will figure it out if I wait! Don't touch me, don't come near me – nobody can come near me –" And still the tower floods upward, a galaxy of numbers.*[85]

Thus, Jesse is confronted by different chaotic episodes in the Pedersen family home. As he did with her mother, it is Jesse who calms Hilda at the examination, thus mastering the chaos. In the second part of the book, it is the character of Trick who tempts Jesse to embrace chaos and also violence. Trick says to Jesse, "in your life I am not a very crucial event. Obviously! In spite of my bulk, I am about the size of the jack of hearts seen sideways – or am I the joker maybe?"[86] The author's image of playing cards recalls Carroll's card game images. In *Wonderland*, Trick's playful association underpins the figurative element of alternative chaos to Jesse's sense of order. The image of disturbing nonsense of Trick corresponds to his consummation of the cooked female vagina that he steals from the hospital, provoking Jesse to kill him in a physical fight, and his attempt to ruin the ambitious relationship between Helene and Jesse before their marriage.

Later in the text, Trick becomes an avantgarde poet in New York City, and indulges in the psychedelic life of the 1960s. Recalling the confusion of Alice in Wonderland, Trick says to Jesse while reciting his poem:

> You're confusing me, I can't remember the rest of it – Jesse, you're confusing me – *At the rim of the mouth – at the rim – You become this pulp/you surrender your name* – I can't remember the right order. You've confused me.[87]

It is Trick's "Wonderland" poem that prefaces Oates' *Wonderland*, and which depicts the "human eye with which the self strives to orient itself".[88] Trick ponders the art of identity creation while also contemplating human biology. In his poem, Trick navigates from

[85] Oates, *Wonderland*, pp. 128,129, 130, emphasis original.
[86] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 247.
[87] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 252.
[88] Creighton, "The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love", p. 85.

inorganic development to the organic creation of *wonder*. It is Trick who meets Shelley in the psychedelic subculture of New York City, and it is she who represents the last chaotic figure in Oates' *Wonderland*.

Oates explicitly references Carroll's texts in one of Shelley's letters to Jesse. Recalling her childhood, Shelley writes to Jesse:

> When I was nine years old Grandfather Cady gave me a large illustrated copy of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice's Adventures Through the Looking-Glass*. I sat with it up on the table before me, a big heavy book reading the paragraphs one by one and trying not to fall into them and loose myself, trying not to feel terror, *it's only a book*; staring at the drawings of this girl with the long, long neck and the straggly hair and the wild, enlarged eyes, the girl reduced to the size of a mouse, sailing through the air dragged by the red queen's hand, sitting at the end of a banquet table while legs of mutton waddled down towards her to eat her.[89]

She stimulates the dream vision of Carroll's storyline with her hallucination of Jesse on the pretext scene that depicts chaotic running of Alice with the Red Queen. After pondering the Alice book in her letter, she daydreams:

> I would close my eyes in a panic and feel you [Jesse] dragging me through the air, feel my head coming loose with the exertions of the wind and all the noise of Winnetka that was not said out loud, screaming at the back of your head, the side of your face, that *noble face*.[90]

In Carroll's original scene, the Red Queen announces that Alice can easily become a queen from a white pawn. Then the Queen grabs Alice and they run hand in hand, however the scenery surprisingly remains the same. The passage reads:

> And they run on for a time in silence, with the wind whistling in Alice's ears, and almost blowing her hair off her head, she fancied. "Now! Now!" cried the Queen. "Faster! Faster!"[91]

The image of chaotic movement symbolises Shelley's sense of insecurity. By substituting Jesse for the Queen, who represents the highest authority in Carroll's text, Shelley recognises her father's authoritative dominance and holds him responsible for the chaos in her life.

---

[89] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 399.
[90] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 399.
[91] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 174.

Further in the text, she pinpoints the date of her chaotic perception as 22 November 1963, the day President Kennedy was assassinated. Relating to the loss of the external authority, Oates' text symbolically depicts the day of the assassination of national authority. That day, she describes people who appear wearing chaotic masks:

> Unused to this condition, this noise. The women's clothes seem put on crooked. *Is he dead? Is he dead?* A young man with an overcoat flapping around him rushes through the crowd, knocking people aside.[92]

Consequently, the uncontrolled screams of Shelley recall Hilda's chaotic behaviour at her examination. Jesse, despite being her father, is unable to console Shelley. He is unable to protect her from the rising chaos in the wake of the Kennedy assassination, or in the chaos of permissive postmodernism. Shelley pulls away from his embrace, which foreshadows her later escape from home. Unprotected by Jesse after he emotionally fails her, Shelley navigates through the chaos by relating to Noel.

According to Creighton, Oates "suggests that President Kennedy's assassination in 1963 signalled the break-up of settled, ordered, directed society and initiated the malaise which afflicted the youth of the Sixties".[93] Further, Creighton elaborates on Oates' image, saying:

> Oates is suggesting that the society suffers from the same violent loss of a "father" in President Kennedy that Jesse did in the loss of his parent and, consequently, suffers compositely from the same disorientation.[94]

Creighton's interpretation links the fatherly figures of Willard Harte and John F. Kennedy. Thus, she argues that Oates stretches the fatherly loss from the individual to the national level.

[92] Oates, *Wonderland*, pp. 387-388.
[93] Creighton, "The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love", p. 85.
[94] Creighton, "The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love", p. 86.

Stripped of the security that having a father can provide, Shelley's cultivation of the self recalls disordered postmodern culture after the death of God. Encountering the psychedelic movement of the 1960s, Shelley lets Noel paint her naked body in order to walk to the beach, thus causing a public disturbance. The image of Shelley naked additionally recalls Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama's Carroll-inspired postmodern visualisation "Alice in Wonderland Happening" (1968) (Figure 1), which depicts naked models with polka-dots painted over their bodies.

Figure 1. Yayoi Kusama, "Alice in Wonderland Happening", presented on 11 August 1968 in New York on and around the "Alice in Wonderland" sculpture by José de Creefts (1959), erected in Central Park. Photo by Bob Sabih.

Kusama considers herself to be "mad as a hatter", as well as a "modern Alice in Wonderland".[95] Evoking the psychedelic reading of Alice's texts in the 1960s, Kusama

[95] Yayoi Kusama, "Alice in Wonderland Happening", in *Alice in Wonderland: Through the Visual Arts*, edited by Gavin Delahunty and Christopher Benjamin Schulz (Millbank, London: Tate Publishing, 2011), pp. 132-133.

challenges the intention of Carroll and writes that "Alice was the Grandmother of the Hippies. When she was low, Alice was the first to take pills to make her high".[96] As the psychedelic countercultural visualisation of Carroll's heroine, Shelley indulges in promiscuity, claiming sexual freedom, and she hallucinates multiple psychedelic encounters in her letters to Jesse.

Recalling the chaotic sense from the scene of Carroll's Red Queen, who drags Alice faster and faster, Shelley feels lost in the confusion of the hotel crowd:

> The screams rise in a pyramid but still they are silent, caught inside the faces. A current is dragging us all. There is a wind inside this building that lifts us, pushes us hard, cuts off our screams, suffocates us, we stampede back and forth, trapped, and yet we are all free here, nobody knows us, we are all children running loose without adults to hold us back, we see people who look familiar to us like people in a dream, but they turn out to be strangers.[97]

The passage conveys Alice's surreal descent down the rabbit hole, a transition scene that shifts from reality to a dream.[98] Alice does not know what comes next, and her loss of control and uncertainty in the process of falling is recalled by the confusion of Shelley in the hotel. The aspect of descending direction indicates the loss of ethical foundation that represents the postmodern sentiment of decentralisation and plurality.

Just as the unattended Alice enters Wonderland and embarks on her adventures, Oates links the disordered scene in the hotel with the concept of orphaned children who feel abandoned by their absent parents. The relation between Shelley and Jesse symbolically highlights that the United States is a nation stripped of national authority through the death of the president, and on a deeper level it symbolises the vanished global authority of God. The day after Shelley enters the hotel, it is Jesse who relates the President's death to a more complex tragic loss. Jesse confronts the panic and frustration, "mourning the President, and

[96] Kusama, "Alice in Wonderland Happening", in *Alice in Wonderland: Through the Visual Arts*, pp. 132-133.
[97] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 388.
[98] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, pp. 11-13.

yet mourning something else – but he did not know what".[99] Jesse's grief represents the human mourning for lost security, in its literal and also figurative sense.

The third part of Oates' book is called "Dreaming America", and the title refers to Shelley's dream that she invents in the psychedelic setting. After she ends up at the Clinton Street Jail in Toledo, Jesse picks her up and is disturbed by her crime disordered consciousness. Consequently, she escapes Jesse's authoritative power and Noel advises her to annihilate Jesse symbolically in her dream. Noel says that she "must dream back right over him [Jesse] […] Dream his face and his voice. Erase as you dream".[100] Creighton says:

> As Alice thinks that the Red King might be, after all, a part of *her* dream, so too is Jesse a part of Shelley's who feels that she must "dream back" the nightmare of Jesse walking around in her head; for in this frenzied desire to save Shelley, Jesse has created a nightmarish Wonderland for her where he is likened to the Red Queen pulling her through the air.[101]

Thus, in the last part of Oates' *Wonderland*, the author employs the technique of the dream image and creative letter writing to console Shelley's consciousness, thus recalling the technique of Alice's dream setting in Carroll's novels. However, by invoking the images of the psychedelic 1960s, Carroll's dream-like fantasy changes into a nightmarish hallucination in the United States.

Jesse's ambitious intention for his family turns destructive in effect, and like Dr Pedersen, instead of creating a dreamy wonderland he initiates a nightmare. Pedersen demands that Jesse progresses by "becoming what he was meant to be".[102] The words that Pedersen speaks to him make no sense to Jesse, but rather it is the opportunity for a certain identity that Jesse pursues. Therefore, Jesse follows Pedersen's lead, feeling his "urgency as his own: to become Jesse Pedersen, to catch up with Jesse Pedersen".[103] From an initial

[99] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 397.
[100] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 381.
[101] Creighton, "The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love", p. 84.
[102] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 63.
[103] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 76.

position of a victim, Jesse proceeds into "the fate of the higher man".[104] Nietzsche's ideas are once again contextualised in a form of parody, although Oates also offers an additional adaptation of the Kaufmann's interpretation of Nietzsche, and juxtaposes this with his postmodern naturalisation.

Conclusion

Creighton asserts that Jesse "has no choice but to try to construct an identity within his horrific milieu".[105] In this pursuit, Jesse discovers his academic capacity and accepts responsibility for his life. In the process of re-invention, he exhausts his present chances and orients himself towards future accomplishments. A constant desire for control characterises this text, yet Jesse's attitude to power significantly alters towards the end of the text. Jesse's development is characterised by the influence of his surrogate fathers. It is the concept of chaos and the violent articulation of disorder that he is exposed to by Willard, while Pedersen symbolises his opposition in his obsession for control.

In *Wonderland*, the protagonist progresses from a victim of the Great Depression into a respected upper-class neurosurgeon in the 1950s and 1960s. The imagery of Jesse's paternal influences, all of whom represent the changing national ethos of the United States, suggests that the fatherland constitutes the textual dynamics of *Wonderland* in the following manner: Willard characterises the desperation and economic struggle that occurred in the aftermath of the 1930s, and in his absence, a series of other father figures appear, shifting from the adoptive father, Dr Pedersen, to Dr Cady, and ultimately Dr Roderick Perrault. Marylin C. Wesley comments on the reading of Friedman:

[104] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 102.
[105] Creighton, "The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love", p. 110.

> If Pedersen personifies the jingoistic expansionism of American attitudes during World War II, Jesse's next ideological fathers, as Friedman suggests, represent scientific attitudes dominating the 1950s and 1960s.[106]

Influenced by his surrogate fathers, Jesse eventually develops his own voice. Through the act of saving his daughter Shelley, Jesse redeems himself from the heavy burden of his father's violence, and the fear of turning into Willard finally vanishes. By not committing violence himself, Jesse confronts his deepest self, conquers his "darkness", and accomplishes his personal equilibrium.[107] Friedman further argues that equilibrium, or "homeostasis", is the controlling metaphor of this narrative.[108] According to her, a balance of proportions concerns both Carroll's and Oates' texts, and not only an individual symmetry, but additionally the desired harmony between a self and the environment that Jesse achieves at the end of *Wonderland*.[109]

Oates reflects on Nietzsche's ideas in a distinctive manner in each text of her Quartet. In *Wonderland*, she blends the Nietzschean imperative to become what one is, with the parody of human superiority and cruelty. Conversely, the playful concept of the postmodern interpretation of Nietzsche is depicted as a chaotic disorder, externalised by violent and psychedelic images that foster the elements of terror of *Wonderland*. Through her adaptation of Carroll's elements of logic, Oates recalls a dream-like fantasy world that initiates wonders juxtaposed with horrors. Acting on chaos and illogic in the authentic setting causes tragic consequences, which could have been avoided by organising the chaos and gaining internal control. I read Oates' texts as artistic visualisations of the human potential to conquer the heaviness of life.

Oates engages her characters with the exploration of the metaphysics of human identity, by depicting the unconscious patterns of a traumatised mind. Combating family

[106] Marylin, C. Wesley, *Refusal and Transgression in Joyce Carol Oates' Fiction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), p. 82.
[107] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 393.
[108] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 103.
[109] Friedman, *Joyce Carol Oates*, p. 103.

trauma, the author dynamically portrays Jesse's individual progress. Moreover, in the setting of neurosurgery, the author ponders the plausible binary concept of a soul and body what Carroll was also interested in, and the interplay between the consciousness and unconsciousness. Alluding to the Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche, the development of the character of Jesse is ultimately manifested through the harmony of the Dionysian and Apollonian element. By sublimating his passion and violent urges through a rational concept, Jesse releases the integrity of his character.

Conclusion

This study has examined Joyce Carol Oates' Wonderland Quartet, in which the author aestheticises the cultural implications of the philosophical conflict after the death of God upon American society after 1950. Read through the postmodern lens, Oates' protagonists correspond to the postmodern sentiment that appropriated some ideas of Nietzsche and that contrasts with the previous Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche, which was popularised by the influential scholarship of Walter Arnold Kaufmann. The differences between these two readings of Friedrich Nietzsche have emerged in terms of the unity, authority, and attending to chaos during the decades that follow the philosophic rationale of the death of God.

Fundamentally, it is within her fiction that Oates establishes the aesthetic currency of the concept of autonomous thinking. She hones in on literary forms to depict vibrant human experiences, in which her protagonists choose between nihilist articulations and the Nietzschean idea of a creative re-invention. Oates' characters in the Wonderland Quartet span three decades, starting with the Great Depression of the 1930s. Along with the effects of World War II, the marginalised characters are trapped in various cultural forms and, therefore, welcome the opportunity to liberate themselves. The characters' resentment and materialistic obsessions lead to violence and destruction, while the notion of power develops from a cruel external alternative through the fictional power games to an inner virtue within Oates' stronger protagonists. Therefore, Oates's protagonists and their various ends differ according to their life struggles, thus evoking the postmodern sentiment of total permissiveness. The normative standard is omitted, and this particular textualisation renders the experimental image of the uncanny in Oates' texts.

Recalling Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), Oates employs the term "Wonderland" for the title of the last text and the quartet as a whole, thus indicating a thematic unity of the collection. The surreal imagery of the disorder in Carroll's Wonderland, in which sense engages with nonsense in the context of symbolic games, is celebrated in Oates' Quartet. She experiments with the blurred fusion of fiction and reality in depicting the re-invention of personality in the authentic chaotic void after the proclamation of the death of God. Oates frequently points to the inspiration she gained from Carroll's texts, which are linked to surreal and postmodern sentiments by many critics.[1]

Her fascination with Nietzsche's ideas is predominantly manifested in her critical essays, although hermeneutically coded in her fiction. In the Quartet, the explicit evidence of Nietzsche's terminology is considerably dispersed. In *Expensive People*, the author satirically references nihilism[2] and eternal return[3], whereas in *Them* the protagonist refers to himself as a "madman".[4] In *Wonderland,* Dr Karl Pedersen directs Jesse towards becoming a "higher man", to displace God,[5] and the character of Trick describes Jesse as "superior" twice in the text.[6] Direct references to Nietzsche are, however, absent in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, and the text is read instead through the postmodern lens. A significant portion of the postmodern appropriation of Nietzschean sentiment corresponds to the transformative depiction of the characters who, elevated from the societal margins, imagine new identities conditioned by fictional visions that permeate the authentic setting; this reflects the creative process of art that is thoroughly read in the Quartet.

[1] Jennifer Brown, "Surrealists in Wonderland: Aspects of the Appropriation of Lewis Carroll", in *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, March-June 2000, ISSN 1913-9659, pp. 128-143.
[2] Joyce Carol Oates, *Expensive People* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), originally published in 1968, p. 98.
[3] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 6.
[4] Joyce Carol Oates, *Them* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2000), originally published in 1969, p. 284, emphasis original.
[5] Joyce Carol Oates, *Wonderland* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), paperback edition originally published in 1972, pp. 101-102.
[6] Oates, *Wonderland*, p. 194.

The postmodern perspective on the world, which views it as an art form, is formed by Alexander Nehamas' *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985).[7] In the postmodern articulation of Nietzsche's thoughts, human singularities and relationships correspond to fictional constructions that require textual interpretation.

The elevation of a dream image overlaps with and transposes the authentic setting. In her Quartet, Oates revisits Carroll's imagery, in stimulating the fusion between fantasy and reality in the corresponding art form. In *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, Clara Walpole indicates the healing aspect of visual art in her life, although its textual correlation is limited. However, in *Expensive People*, Richard Everett liberates himself by writing a memoir, in which he replaces the authorship of his mother after killing her. In his fictional dominant position as creator, the murder becomes a hallucination. In *Them*, Maureen Wendall uses a creative writing course to set her life back on track, and it is through letter writing that Jules documents his own adventures. Recalling the aspect of the replacement of the author in *Expensive People*, Jules becomes the creator of his fictional life, while Oates enters *Them* as a character. In *Wonderland*, it is the creative letter writing of Shelley Vogel that triggers the process of re-evaluation in the life of her father, Jesse Vogel.

Set within the societal margins, the protagonists pursue an unconventional liberation fashioned by their progression from a moral to an aesthetic existence. The hallucinations of the protagonists confront the harsh reality of their location and cultural atmosphere of rigid stereotypes. Oates celebrates the individual singularities of her morally ambiguous protagonists and their creative energy to re-invent their lives and move forward, recalling the adventurous character of Carroll's Alice. Oates reflects on the American countercultural audience of the Alice texts to establish the psychedelic images in her narratives, and the

[7] Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

element of terror. The dramatic effects created by the historical settings of the 1950s and late 1960s are represented by the excessive violence and power games between the protagonists.

In depicting the invented images of her characters, the author employs the postmodern literary techniques of frequent plot fragmentation, intertextuality, decanonisation, carnivalisation, and moral indeterminism. The polyphonic voices of the protagonists challenge the impenetrable meaning of the metaphysics by pursuing their symbolic fictions. Oates' characters transgress the traditional conception of external authority and move into their dominant position of the creator of their lives. By playing the fictional games they invent, they accelerate their chance to win and define themselves by the immanent antagonism. By identifying with the fantasy, they are, nevertheless, confronted by the reality of differing views from the environment. Following the publication of the Quartet, Alfred Kazin argues about Oates:

> Joyce Carol Oates is like no one else writing fiction in America today. She works entirely from the inside out; and her regular subject is so much insideness, the "wonderland" that is the tidal sea of thoughts, fancies, memories, obsessions within us, that she is able to make her book fascinating without ever making it real.[8]

In *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, protagonist Clara Walpole invents a power game in which she fictionalises herself and competes with her male opponents. In *Expensive People*, Richard Everett acts out the fictional notes of the mother he murders, and by compiling a memoir himself, the murder returns into the fantasy realm. In *Them*, Jules Wendall is influenced by movie icons and so believes himself to be a romantic hero, one who is indestructible, and takes part in violent and criminal adventures. Lastly, in *Wonderland* protagonist Jesse Vogel navigates through an array of influential Nietzschean figures, including Pedersen, Cady and Perrault.

[8] Alfred Kazin, "Books: Oates: *Wonderland*" , *Vogue,* Vol. 159, No. 1 (1 January 1972), p. 16.

Oates employs the literary tradition of naturalism in her description of the novels' settings, yet experiments with the pursuits of daydream vision and dream states as sources of inspiration for her protagonists. In her texts, the protagonists attempt to use hallucinatory revelation as conduits of a creative process to cultivate their singular identities. In line with post-war experimental writings, Oates depicts an imaginative effect of dreams, along with the sexual desire of her protagonists, to blur boundaries between rationality and irrationality, reality and imagination. The concept sits well with the postmodern readings that return to imaginative visions of unconscious material. Influenced by Carroll's dream setting, Oates depicts the philosophical interplay while establishing the elements of terror in her Quartet.

Oates enacts the interrelation between fiction and reality, order and disorder in the artistic form of the fictional invention. Her deliberate historical setting of the atmosphere after the death of God yields the ideal setting of chaotic pursuits and the concept of disorder for her characters. The American culture loses the external authority of God, but also the traditional moral context that navigates human values. Stripped of security and moral authority, the concept of permissive pursuits and symbolic games is applied in societal experiments of the era, and moral decentralisation and plurality of opinions trigger the antagonist character of the postmodern thoughts.

In Oates' texts, the representation of what is consequently gauged as postmodern thought suggests the internalisation of the playful concept of fictional games, but it also envisages self-destruction and external violence, while entwining both affirmations. The aestheticisation of violence is marked by ethic ambiguities that also serve to reveal moral judgements prevalent at the time and the sometimes dark reality of individual validation of power gain.

Oates' aesthetics of a mode of survival are eclectically influenced by literary and philosophical intellectualism, and dramatise the postmodern sentiment as a feature of the

American culture after the death of God. The underlying concept of morality that characterises the setting of Oates' Quartet is confronted by her protagonists, who epitomise the new generation of American nation which elevates from the margins of society in the 1950s and 1960s.

Oates' depiction of the notion of power is not linear, but rather distinctively calibrated in each text of the Quartet. In the novels, Oates engages with a notion of power that is initially depicted as violent domination and also manipulation of the opposite sex in the invented symbolic games. However, in the last text of her Quartet, the concept of power considerably alters to correspond to Kaufmann's understanding of Nietzsche's ideas. Kaufmann says, "tyranny over others is not part of Nietzsche's vision",[9] and his delineation of Nietzsche's conception of power is to be read psychologically, as the internal contest for the power over the self.[10]

The underlying level of cruelty that some of Oates' characters demonstrate in the pursuit of their goals invites comment from the author. Oates says that the absence of liberation results in resentment that is consequently destructive.[11] Her survival images of relentless conflict are in accord with the distinctive aesthetics that the postmodern permissiveness would deem acceptable. In the process of re-invention, Oates' marginalised characters are deprived of power and drawn to obsessions with its notion. Questions surrounding the exchanges of power between the self and other, and how this is conceptualised beyond domination, permeate the Quartet. Its first three narratives extend the desperate climate of resentment and the characters' inability to grow in *Upon the Sweeping Flood and Other Stories* (1966), which Greg Johnson outlines as the "chaotic landscape,

[9] Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist* (4th Ed.), (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 316.
[10] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, p. 204.
[11] Dale Boesky, "Correspondence with Miss Joyce Carol Oates", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*, edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), p. 52.

tentatively poised at the edge of the Nietzschean abyss".[12] In this aspect, Oates' four narratives culminate in the last book of the Quartet, in which the essence of power is re-articulated by the protagonist, Jesse Vogel, who internalises the contest and gains the ability to transform his personality. Thus, Jesse corresponds to Kaufmann's understanding of Nietzsche's notion of power, and his control is eventually based on his inner strength. Depicting resentment and the greed for power in the first three novels of the Quartet, Oates conveys the critique of decentralised values.[13]

In *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, Clara Walpole's pursuit of social advancement develops into the manipulation of Nietzsche's ideas of materialistic advance.[14] She fictionalises herself in an invented power game between her and male partners, who represent her salvation. Recalling the card images of Carroll's text, Clara re-evaluates the given card value that she assigns to her opponents. The morally decentralised character of Clara corresponds to the concept of plurality and permissiveness of the postmodern sentiment, which shapes the American society after the death of God. On the other hand, the underlying moral rigidity of the culture in the 1950s is embodied by Swan, and it is due to him that Clara's vivid fictions are ultimately reduced to watching violent television programmes. Thus, the fiction of Clara that challenges the authentic setting ultimately returns to the fantasy realm.

In *Expensive People*, the author presents a nihilist parody along with violent and self-destructive motifs, and comments on generational differences. It is the young generation of the countercultural movements that represent idealistic dreams in the psychedelic context, which engages with disorder.[15] In this context, protagonist Richard Everett, who is not able to overcome resentment, fatally shoots his mother. It is the concept of the eternal return that

[12] Greg Johnson, "Out of Eden: Oates's *Upon the Sweeping Flood*", in *The Midwest Quarterly*, 35 (Summer), p. 436.
[13] Stig Bjoerkman, "Conversations with Joyce Carol Oates", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*, edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), p. 184.
[14] Joyce Carol Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), originally published in 1967.
[15] Bjoerkman, "Conversations with Joyce Carol Oates", p. 184.

is satirically depicted in *Expensive People*, where dead neighbours reappear and new locations enigmatically look the same. Oates employs the postmodern techniques of fragmentation and intertextuality to critique moral hypocrisy that promotes idealised suburbia and privileges the middle class.

Within his memoir, Richard becomes an unreliable first-person narrator by confessing his childhood murder. Richard thus considerably differs from Carroll's Alice by violently externalising his repressed aggression. The semantic suppression of violence in Carroll's text contrasts with the excessive violent imagery in Oates' novel. Nevertheless, recalling the innocence of the childhood that is celebrated in Carroll's Wonderland, Richard goes unpunished. By his fictional creation, the murder of Nada vanishes from the realm of reality into the realm of fantasy and hallucination, and the physical evidence of Richard's murder disappears. Oates' depiction of blurred lines between fiction and reality defines all four texts of her Quartet and is considerably calibrated in each text.

The chaos, disorder, and nonsense situations in *Expensive People* recall the adventurous encounters of Alice in Carroll's texts. In Oates' novel, it is children who become alcoholic and care for their mothers, while mothers become neurotic. The atmosphere of pretence, confusion, and the absence of punishment in suburbia evoke the loss of foundation after the death of God in American society.

It is Nada's fictional notes on "comic nihilism" that Richard discovers, and which inspire his real-life murder of Nada.[16] Richard autonomously alters his fictional role to kill his mother. By writing a memoir about the murder, his position as a "minor character", assigned by Nada, is replaced by the dominant position of the author. The same textual connection between the death of God and the death of the author, however considerably modified, is touched upon in *Them*, where the author becomes a character. Although not

[16] Oates, *Expensive People*, p. 98.

killed, Oates is replaced by the protagonist Jules Wendall, who becomes the author of his invented fictional life that fashions his real life.

In *Expensive People*, the author caricatures the antifoundational permissive sentiment of postmodern ideas. In this context, it is essential to reiterate that, on the other hand, it is Kaufmann's Nietzsche who strives for internal control through the *Űbermensch*, and does not presume movements of the decades that exercise external forces against others. By dramatising an array of social experiments, Oates underlines the inability of her weak characters to grow. Following the publication of *Wonderland*, in her essay called *New Heaven and Earth* (1972), Oates outlines her views on the fundamental purpose of literature, which she argues is to interpret old values and to create new concepts.[17] Oates argues:

> I still feel my own place is to dramatize the nightmares of my time, and (hopefully) to show how some individuals find a way out, awaken, come alive, move into the future.[18]

In her essay, Oates argues that the American culture of the 1960s which was defined by violence, apparently mistakes "a crisis of transition for a violent end".[19] Reflecting on the emerging cultural form, Oates' alternating images of power depict violence in *Them*, which ends with the 1967 Detroit riot. In this narrative, the individual resentment is additionally expanded on at the regional level. Witnessing the riot, the author recollects her authentic experience in the Afterword to *Wonderland*, "what was called, perhaps optimistically, the 'counterculture,' raged daily".[20] In a book review of Oates' later novel, *Do with Me What You Will* (1973), Calvin Bedient argues that it is not an external influence that is softened in Oates' fiction, but rather the strength and inward shift of control in her characters. Bedient states:

[17] Oates, "New Heaven and Earth", *Arts in Society*, Vol. 10 (4 November 1972), pp. 51-54, p. 54.
[18] Oates, "New Heaven and Earth", p. 51.
[19] Oates, "New Heaven and Earth", p. 52.
[20] Joyce Carol Oates, "Afterword: *Wonderland* Revisited", in *Wonderland* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), originally published in 1971, p. 481.

> What was hell has become a heroic arena, where we 'fight one another, compete from birth till death.' No longer nihilistic, nightmarish cat's paw – teasing, destructive – it is now freely Nietzschean.[21]

Bedient refers to Kaufmann's model of Nietzsche in cultivating a more assertive personality. In Oates's texts, only the characters who are caught in their weakness exert violent power in order to advance. Alternatively, the protagonists who overcome the nihilism of resentment benefit from nonaggressive internal control. In her written interview, Oates says about *Wonderland*, "It's the first novel I have written that doesn't end in violence".[22] In the text, Oates shifts the power dynamic from external to internal, as Jesse is her first character to control the chaos inside him. Bellamy argues that the author "re-create[s] a man's soul" in *Wonderland* and a progression occurs from the obsessions surrounding the acquisition of power to a buoyant climax of personal inner control.[23]

The visual progression of the places where Jesse lives symbolises his mental progress. He can develop only in a spacious area such as the Pedersens' home, which represents the decade of American expansionism. In his own room, Jesse can enlarge both his body and mind, whereas in the three-story building in Chicago, he moves up vertically in parallel with the scientific advances of the decade, which he epitomises. Therefore, Oates depicts the shift in the structural displacement of growing; the horizontal aspect of broadening and enlargement is symbolised by gluttony within Jesse's first private room, but this is replaced by vertical progression as Jesse moves up his building and obtains mental dominance over his family and patients.[24] Finally, Jesse owns a mansion in which he affirms his self-selective singularity. In Oates' narrative, the strength of the character is celebrated. Jesse in

[21] Calvin Bedient, "The Story of Sleeping Beauty and a Love that is Like Hatred", in *The New York Times* (October 14, 1973), pp. 396-561.
[22] Joe David Bellamy, "The Dark Lady of American Letters", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006,* edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), p. 18.
[23] Bellamy, "The Dark Lady of American Letters", p. 17.
[24] Irwin Halfond, "Wonderland", in *Cyclopedia of Literary Places* (Pasaden, CA: Salem Press, 2016), pp. 1128-1129.

Wonderland unlocks creative assertiveness, and the text launches heroic characterisation in Oates' fictitious world.

By using the lens of Kaufmann's understanding of Nietzsche, Oates' characters may be divided into weak and strong individuals. The weak are not able to integrate all aspects of their personalities, or simply do not find room to grow. If they lack space to progress, the author says in an interview that "they become violent or self-destructive or apathetic, and sink back to an earlier level of existence".[25] Trapped in the cycle of resentment, their survival is affirmed only through violent ends. The characters who epitomise the dismay of their decades are Clara in *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, Richard in *Expensive People*, and Jules Wendall in *Them*.

This thesis comprises a considered review of contemporary secondary readings on Friedrich Nietzsche, which share a good deal of coherence. The complexity of Nietzschean thoughts, nevertheless, suggests that discipline was not an easy task and therefore, the scope of this research was limited to Kaufmann's and postmodern interpretations of Nietzsche. The emergence of many more intellectual and cultural experiments that appropriate Nietzschean sentiment invite, therefore, further research.

The examination of two selected interpretations contributes to our understanding of the historical shaping of society in the United States after Nietzsche's proclamation that God is dead. Although distinctive features emerge, there is a need to explore variations more explicitly through comparative analyses of global literature, not only texts produced in the United States. Such a comparative study of texts that fictionalise postmodern cultural forms could be fruitful for studies of the representation of contemporary human self-improvement and its narrative implications. Texts from more disparate regions would help make a significant contribution to the field of philosophy, literature, and cultural studies.

[25] Dale Boesky, "Correspondence with Miss Joyce Carol Oates", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations, 1970-2006*, edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), p. 52.

Considerable critical analysis of Tim Burton's visual adaptation of Carroll's texts, *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) and *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (2016), might benefit from the methodology of comparable philosophic rationale after the proclamation of the death of God. Additional topics that arose during my analysis, but which were beyond the scope of this thesis, include Oates' recurring images of eating and cannibalism in the context of symbolic power games, relations between adults and children, the aspect of modern female Gothicism, cultural development of the United States of America, and the Cartesian dialectics in the context of bodies and the brain in fashioning personal development. These are all lines of enquiry that are worth exploring in future research.

Appendices

Joyce Carol Oates: An Interview and Correspondence with the Author

A crucial question for this thesis has been: *Why Oates now?* The cultural critique of Oates' earlier narratives sheds light on the history that shapes current trends in the literary tradition of self-improvement. The fertile soil of Nietzschean ideas formed liberating patterns that were addressed by cultural forms emerging in the United States in and around the 1960s, and in this context, it is essential to reflect on Oates' Wonderland Quartet where the author engages with the aftermath of World War II and chronicles the strong wave of emergent critical and theoretical thinking.

Oates' literary contribution meets with ongoing and well-deserved national and worldwide recognition. Her oeuvre is translated into multiple languages, and she has held an array of literary, and other awards. Over and above my reading of her fiction, during the course of my research, I had the opportunity to access the many interviews Oates has given and to follow the critical reception of the author over time. In the process of developing my thesis statement, in its initial phase, I was able to identify how the influence of Nietzsche on Oates' work intersected with the literary inspiration of Lewis Carroll, among others.

Consequently, having established the intellectual link between Oates and Walter Arnold Kaufmann as reflected in her *Wonderland* I also scrutinised the non-linear progression of her other characters from her first three novels of the Quartet. While the empirical claim about the influence of Nietzsche on Oates remained unreconciled, the

occasion of a personal interview with the author became a further catalyst for my critical inquiry. Having confirmed my understanding of the theme of identity improvement in her texts relates to Nietzsche's ideas, while emphasising her earlier inspiration of Carroll's Alice texts for her Quartet, the author's reflection supported my fundamental research findings. On this basis, I continued to examine both concepts while maintaining a written correspondence with the author, for which I am enormously grateful. Shortly after my conversation with Oates, I was alerted to the way Gilles Deleuze articulated postmodern theory in part in relation to the Wonderland texts by Carroll, which in turn led me to examine postmodern philosophy that references some ideas of Nietzsche in more depths. By co-ordinating my research findings with the evidence gained from the interview with the author herself, I was able to form my interpretative claim while sustaining my empirical claim as defined in the thesis.

DH: The Wonderland Quartet encompasses four texts in which the cultural background covers the period from the 1950s up to the early 1970s. Does the public environment of the present decade affect your writing differently from the setting of the previous decades? Or do you see any parallel between the climate of the Vietnam War and the racial tensions applicable to your more recent fictional environment?

JCO: Well, that's a good question when one is writing fiction set in earlier decades from the perspective of the present. For instance, writing a novel from the 19th-century setting, it is written from the perspective of the present. And so, when writing the Wonderland Quartet, it was a little bit of history, I did some research, but I was looking at it from a different decade, from a different perspective. I've always been concerned with dramatizing the stories of marginal people: women, children, adolescent girls, and people who are at the margins of power. And so, when writing about these people in

earlier decades, I am giving them a dramatic focus, which at that time, the literature wouldn't provide.

DH: I would like to ask about the concept of personal re-invention in your fiction which seems to have analytically Nietzschean dimension. It seems to be important in a few of your books, such as the novels in The Wonderland Quartet, Blonde *(1999)*[1]*,* The Gravedigger's Daughter *(2007)*[2]*, and perhaps some others as well. Why is it that you depict this concept? What aesthetic function does it have in your narratives?*

JCO: That is something in parallel with Nietzsche, the idea of making oneself a higher person. I think it is within the range of everybody, to enhance and rebuild the personality. At the same time, I have this sense of tragedy that many people cannot self-improve, for instance for economic reasons, or another reason. In the novel *Blonde*, Norma Jeane Baker is always inventing and re-inventing herself.

In real life, Norma Jeanne was taking classes. She took dancing classes and acting classes, which was in her thirties. She was a person who was always trying to re-invent herself and improve herself. At the same time, there is a strong gravitational pull back to the past. In her case, she never had a father. She was always searching for these older men, some of whose she married. She was searching for that elusive lost father, and also searching for the mother. In the past, she had been wounded, but she was trying to make herself a different person so that she can be free of the past. I feel that for some reasons, Norma Jeanne did not succeed, and she died at 36. I knew people who had known her, in New York. They had said she was an excellent actress. She could be very plain, she would wear her hair back and no make-up, casually wear jeans and a sweater. She would ride a subway and people did not recognize her. Her two

[1] Joyce Carol Oates, *Blonde* (London: Harper Perennial, 2000), originally published in 1999.
[2] Joyce Carol Oates, *The Gravedigger's Daughter* (London: Harper Collins, 2007).

personalities, one public and private, inspired me to depict two fictive characterizations of the same person, and often I write about the conflict between the two. One was Marilyn Monroe which was an attempt to create some successful artificial person pleasing many people, and the other was Norma Jeanne who was herself. A person who yearns for love, and for a baby.

I am writing a novel now, where I want to show a girl who breaks free of the past. But as I keep writing that, I feel how she is pulled back. To be honest about it, the pullback is powerful; I am not sure that she can be free. It is like a bird whose wings have oil on and in spite of that; the bird is trying to fly.

DH: To me, in The Gravedigger's Daughter*, the protagonist, Rebecca, seems to overcome her "fate."*

JCO: That's right. And then Rebecca's son is a musician, it's the next step. She's never gotten to be a musician. By her son, I'd allowed her to triumph over the past, but at the same time; she ventures in the future. Being in the present tense means that she'd lost her past. Like my grandmother, my Jewish grandmother, she had never had a history. She hadn't talked about it; she hadn't known anyone from her past. She lived in the present. And I think that must not be the best life, to live only in the present.

DH: Have you already decided upon the title of your new book?

JCO: 'My Life As a Rat.' In this case, the plot questions siblings' relationship. Brothers committed a hate crime, and their sister tells at school that they did it. That causes a tragedy in her life; her family expels her. I am trying to dramatize the conflict between family loyalty and a higher ethic.

DH: I would like to return to your fictitious re-inventing of personality. As you observed, the characters of Marilyn Monroe and Norma Jeane Baker are two images of the same person or two personalities. In connection with William Butler Yeats and the concept of wearing masks that he took from Nietzsche, do you relate Yeats' aesthetics to your writing?

JCO: That is interesting. It has been a while since I have read Yeats, but I have done some writing on him. The idea of masks was very popular in the late 19th century. Oscar Wilde said if you give a man a mask, he will tell the truth. While in his own person, he may be afraid to tell it. That are all interesting themes.

DH: In our previous correspondence, you said that " philosophy is a method— a way of seeing & thinking— rather than a body of beliefs. This is very Nietzschean, & so even if one disagrees with Nietzsche, one can be under his influence".[3] *How does this relate to your fiction? What effect does it have on the conception of your characters?*

JCO: Yes. Some of the things impressed me about Nietzsche when I was eighteen or nineteen when I first read Nietzsche. The first is the form. The aphorisms, he spoke as flat as if with a hammer, breaking down this big edifice of 19th century Christianity. And he presented his philosophy, his epigrams, and poetry in short theme so that his form was very appealing.

*DH: You said in an earlier email that, "*The influence of Nietzsche blends with the influence of Henry David Thoreau in my life. Though the two are different in many respects, each is a vivid, intransigent individualist with a penchant for scathing aphorisms & skepticism".[4] *Can you explain that?*

[3] Joyce Carol Oates, "Re: The Influence of Nietzsche on JCO" (email to the author, 2 November 2017).
[4] Oates, "Re: The Influence of Nietzsche on JCO" (email to the author, 7 November 2017).

JCO: The extreme skepticism of Nietzsche coincided with my inheritance from my father who was very skeptical about politics, and religion, and many things. My father did not believe easily things that he was told. And so from my father, and from Nietzsche, also Henry David Thoreau, I've always learned to question. But many other people in America do not seem to question anything. They just believe things that aren't true. I find that very deluding. So that is the inheritance from Nietzsche.

Then the idea of progress, of being able to evolve the person and the personality which is Nietzschean. I definitely, absolutely, I know that it is the truth. I do not think that we are fated, not really. I think that sometimes people look to the past as an excuse for not doing better. But I know people who had tragedy in the family, drama, who went on and became stronger. One is a famous person. He has become famous, has become very successful by being strong whereas he could have been destroyed. As something happened in his family when he was only about 15 years old, and I know other people like that. So, to me, there is a conflict between the idea of a tragedy where we are in the grip of the past, and maybe genetic inheritance and then the excitement and the energy of moving towards the future, of what we make of ourselves. And I feel that, in America, there has always been this tradition of re-making the self, when moving on to the west, you know, the mountains and some new territory. So, I am still writing about these subjects.

DH: In "The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates 1973-1982", you mentioned that your students were studying Nietzsche on your course, amongst others.[5] *Which of Nietzsche's canon did you find useful in your classes?*

[5] Joyce Carol Oates, *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates: 1973-1982*, edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2007).

JCO: When I taught at the University of Windsor, I taught *Thus Spake Zarathustra;* a most riveting text!

DH: Throughout the novels, and especially at their conclusions, I admire the way you let the characters think for themselves. They use Nietzsche's ideas for their own purposes, so they are not entirely bound by any ideology or any –ism, which I read as a unique literary technique of combining different voices in your texts. Can you comment on that?

JCO: One thing that Nietzsche disliked was hypocrisy. Nietzsche disliked compromise, and he had a strong feeling of moral strength, but I think hypocrisy was what he saw in his society around him. And he was very harsh. But another thing about Nietzsche, he does have a sense of humor. One thing I do not like was his attitude to women, which is very misogynic. I do not know how serious this was because he was in love with Lou-Andreas Salomé. She was a superior woman. But yet, he would say negative things about women. Women at that time were not educated mostly, and so every woman that he had met might not have been his equal. But she was his equal.

DH: Do you believe in the saving grace of fiction or art? In other words, do you think that your texts have a didactic function, one in which you articulate the tragedies that people usually do not discuss, and perhaps do not even dare to think about? By this, I mean personal or family tragedies in your fiction, but also cultural themes of the United States. I admire the courage and truthfulness behind voicing these matters.

JCO: Well, as I said before, I like to tell the story of people which are on margins of power. There was this image of Marilyn Monroe in the novel *Blonde.* She is like a wildflower; she is like a weed flower. There is all the broken concrete, and the flower comes up and blossoms, even though there is always a disadvantage. I like to write about

these experiences; to come up from difficult backgrounds, they could sink down, they could be destroyed, but they make their way up. There are so many stories like that in America, of people who have made their way up, who were strong. Marilyn is the beggar maid in a fairy tale. It is didactic because there is something that a reader could identify with. I have met men who had told me that when they read *Blonde,* they would identify with Marilyn Monroe because she was always trying to improve herself, trying to survive.

DH: Do you think that readers should daydream and re-invent, basically taking life as fiction?

JCO: **I think that serious literature makes people feel, and maybe sometimes surprises, and shocks them. And so, if you have read a particular novel, it may shake you, and wake you up, and you decide to do something a little different with your life. I think that is very true. It could also be poetry, could be a play, any work of art. Universally, art is noble.**

DH: My next question is about a novel you have stated, was a very early influence of yours, Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland *(1865).*[6] *There are a lot of wordplays, logic versus illogic patterns, changing proportions, and the theme of the identity of Alice and your character Jesse in* Wonderland (1971) *– Ellen Friedman wrote about some of these analytical allusions between the two texts.*[7] *Parallel to Nietzsche's ideas, Alice was also quite skeptical and rebellious. Additionally, she embodies creative life force and copes with various images of herself that eventually progress in her identity.*

[6] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001).
[7] Joyce Carol Oates, *Wonderland*, (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), originally published in 1971.

JCO: Yes, I have lots of allusions to Alice in Wonderland through my writing because I memorized the book when I was about nine years old. Most passages I know very well. It is the fundamental text of my whole life. Nietzsche comes much later when I was older, so that is more intellectual. Alice in Wonderland is always this nightmare comic characters doing absurd things, and it is a vision that is comic. But Alice still gets out of her predicaments. She is in some terrible situations where she is very tall, and her neck is tall, or little, or she's been threatened by the red queen. However, she still moves on to her next adventure, and chapter. I interpret that as being analogous to human life. Likewise, we run through life episodes and are not trapped. There is a new chapter, you walk away, reject the past, move to the next room.

In *Through the Looking Glass* she is moving to squares of the chessboard, and she finally gets all the way through and becomes the queen.[8] What I am looking at is life as a kind of game, a contest of power. Alice is eventually in control, and no higher authority is exercised over her. She is her own master. From a girl, she grows into adulthood and affirms her identity. However, her childhood innocence and playfulness is the ideal setting for her progress.

DH: Ms. Oates, could you comment on the symbolism in your works, and especially on the images of fire and the phoenix imagery in Blonde*, specifically in relation to Marylin's hallucination. I read that as her transformation into a new being, but fire imagery is also found in* Them (1967)[9]*, and* Foxfire *(1993)*[10].

JCO: Yes, I think the fire force transforms. It is somehow different in each novel. The fire of *Them* is the fire of revolution. The marginal classes, mostly all black people, try

[8] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001).
[9] Joyce Carol Oates, *Them*, (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), originally published in 1967.
[10] Joyce Carol Oates, *Foxfire* (New York, NY: Dutton, 1993).

setting flames and burning down the existing order, and it is threatening. In actual life, they did initiate some change, but more recently in our America, a lot of the progress seems gone. We live in a very repressive and conservative era now. I am hoping that some of the revolutionary spirits will come back.

DH: I would like to ask about your former colleague, Walter Arnold Kaufmann. Did you meet him?

JCO: Yes, I was a friend of his. It was sad that he died so young. My husband and I went out to dinners; I attended his lectures. For one semester I went to his class which was two times a week and then we would have lunch, and I read his poetry. He had a big book of photographs, mostly from India. I inherited that book.

DH: Do you remember what lecture of his you attended?

JCO: It was all Nietzsche. I've been very impressed. I have read his book *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, and his other books too.[11] He was a vivacious person. I have a story with him in it, did you know that?

DH: Princeton Idyll?[12]

JCO: Yes, that was a humorous portrait of himself. But he was a philosopher - dramatic and poetic, like Nietzsche. He asked the right questions.

DH: Well, his scholarly contribution was enormous, especially in the 1950s.

[11] Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, originally published in 1956 (New York, NY: New American Library, 1975).
[12] Joyce Carol Oates, "Princeton Idyll", in *Dear Husband (*New York, NY: Ecco Press, 2009).

JCO: Enormous, it had many translations. I was hugely honored to know him. It was very sad that he died so suddenly.

DH: Absolutely. Thank you for sharing your time with me today, Ms. Oates.

14 November 2017, Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House
New York University

Bibliography

Åström, Berit, "The Symbolic Annihilation of Mothers in Popular Culture: *Single Father* and the Death of the Mother", *Feminist Media Studies*, Volume 15, Issue 4 (2015), 593 - 607

Barthelme, Donald, "On Angels", in *Sixty Stories* (New York, NY: Dutton, 1982)

Bedient, Calvin, "Sleeping Beauty and the Love Like Hatred", *The New York Times* (14 October 1973), 17 - 18

Beer, Gillian, *Alice in Space*: *The Sideways Victorian World of Lewis Carroll* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016)

Bell, Michael, "The Superman and the All-Too-Human", in *A Concise Companion to Modernism,* edited by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003)

Bellamy, Joe David, "The Dark Lady of American Letters", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006,* edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), pp. 15 - 25

Bender, Eileen T., *Joyce Carol Oates, Artist in Residence* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987)

Bertens, Hans, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003)

Bjoerkman, Stig, "Conversations with Joyce Carol Oates" in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970 - 2006,* edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), pp. 178 - 197

Bloom, Harold, ed., *Joyce Carol Oates,* (New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishing, 1987)

Boesky, Dale, "Correspondence with Miss Joyce Carol Oates", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006,* edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), pp. 49 - 63

Carlevale, John, “The Dionysina Revival in American Fiction of the Sixties”, *International Journal of the Classical Tradion*, (Winter 2006), 364 - 391

Carroll, Lewis, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001)

---, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, edited by Martin Gardner (London: Penguin Books, 2001)

Clemons, Walter, “Joyce Carol Oates: Love and Violence”, in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*, edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), pp. 26 - 35

Conti, Christopher, “Nihilism Negated Narratively: The Agency of Art in *The Sot-Weed Factor*”, *Papers on Language and Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (2011), 141 - 161

Corngold, Stanley, *Walter Kaufmann: Philosopher, Humanist, Heretic (*Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019)

Creighton, Joanne V., *Joyce Carol Oates: The Novels of the Middle Years* (New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1979)

---, “The Phantasmagoria of Personality: The Liberation through Love”, in *Joyce Carol Oates*, edited by Joanne V. Creighton (New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1979), pp. 74 - 93

Daly, Brenda, “The Art of Democracy: Photography in the Novels of Joyce Carol Oates/Rosamond Smith”, *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 38 (2006), 457 - 477

DeKoven, Marianne, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of Postmodern* (London: Duke University Press, 2004)

Deleuze, Gilles, *Logic of Sense* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018)

Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan *Bass* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1978)

Dusinberre, Juliet, *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 1987)

Fossum, Robert H., "Only Control: The Novels of Joyce Carol Oates", *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Summer 1975), 285 - 297

Friedman, Ellen G., *Joyce Carol Oates* (New York, NY: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1980)

Gardner, Martin, ed., *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, (London: Penguin Books, 2001)

Gemes, Ken, "Postmodernism's Use and Abuse of Nietzsche", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (March 2001), 337 - 360

---, 'Nihilism and The Death of God', Birkbeck, University of London: Academic Podcasts, 2013, <https://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2013/05/ken-gemes-nietzsche-on-nihilism-and-the-death-of-god/> [accessed 13 April 2019]

Giles, James R., "Suffering, Transcendence, and Artistic 'Form': Joyce Carol Oates's *them*", *Arizona Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Autumn 1976), 213 - 226

Graff, Gerald, *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979)

Grant, Mary K., *The Tragic Vision in Joyce Carol Oates* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978)

Gregson, Ian, ed., *Character and Satire in Postwar Fiction* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2006)

Halfond, Irwin, "Wonderland", in *Cyclopedia of Literary Places* (Pasaden, CA: Salem Press, 2016), pp. 1128 - 1129

Halliwell, Martin, *American Culture of the 1950s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007)

Haar, Michael, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language", in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, edited by David B. Allison, Vol. 1 (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 5 – 37

Harris, Matthew Edward, "The Reception of Nietzsche's Announcement of the 'Death of God' in Twentieth-century Theorising Concerning the Divine", *The Heythrop Journal*, (2018), 148 - 162

Hayes, Patrick, *Philip Roth: Fiction and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

Jaspers, Karl, "On my Philosophy", in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, edited by Walter A. Kaufmann, translated by Felix Kaufmann (New York, NY: New American Library, 1975)

Johnson, Greg, *Invisible Writer: A Biography of Joyce Carol Oates* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 1998)

---, ed., *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970 - 2006* (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006)

---, "Transformation of Self: An Interview with Joyce Carol Oates" in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*, edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), pp. 36 - 48

---, "Out of Eden: Oates's *Upon the Sweeping Flood*", *The Midwest Quarterly*, Vol. 35 (Summer 1994), 435 - 449

Kaufmann, Walter Arnold, *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1954)

---, "Jasper's Relation to Nietzsche", in *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, First Edition (New York, NY: Tudor Publishing Company, 1957)

---, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Fourth Edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974)

---, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1975)

---, *Existentialism, Religion, and Death: Thirteen Essays* (New York, NY: The New American Library, 1976)

---, '*Walter A. Kaufmann's Correspondence with Joyce Carol Oates'* (Princeton, NJ, 1980), Walter A. Kaufmann Collection, available via Joyce Carol Oates Papers at Syracuse University Library

Kazin, Alfred, "Oates", in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006,* edited by Greg Johnson (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), pp. 5 - 14

---, "Books: Oates: *Wonderland*", *Vogue*, Vol. 159, No. 1 (1 January 1972), 16

Kolb, David, *Postmodern Sophistications* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990)

Kusama, Yayoi, "Alice in Wonderland Happening", in *Alice in Wonderland: Through the Visual Arts*, edited by Gavin Delahunty and Christopher Benjamin Schulz (Millbank, London: Tate Publishing, 2011), pp. 132 – 133

Large, Duncan, "Nietzsche and/in/on Translation", *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Spring 2012), 57 - 67

Lomax, J. Harvey, "Löwith's Nietzsche", in *Interpreting Nietzsche: Reception and Influence*, edited by Ashely Woodward (London: Bloomsburry Publishing, 2011), pp. 26 - 36

Markoff, John, *What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry* (New York, NY: Viking, 2005)

Martin, Alice Conkright, 'Toward a Higher Consciousness: A Study of the Novels of Joyce Carol Oates' (DeKalb, IL: Northern University Illinois, 1974)

May, Simon, *Nietzsche's Ethics and His War on 'Morality'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

Mayock, Rick, “Perspectivism and Tragedy: A Nietzschean Interpretation of Alice’s Adventure”, in *Alice in Wonderland and Philosophy: Curiouser and Curiouser*, edited by Richard Brian Davis (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), pp. 153 - 166

Mazzocco, Robert, “Swingtime”, 9 June 1996, *The New York Review of Books*, [accessed 12-05-2020]

Mencken, Henry Louis, *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche,* First Edition (Boston, MA: Luce and Company, 1908)

McElroy, John Harmon, *Divided We Stand: The Rejection of American Culture since the 1960s* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006)

Monteith, Sharon, *American Culture in the 1960s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008)

Nehamas, Alexander, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985)

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche,* translated and edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1982)

---, *On the Genealogy of Morals* in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo,* translated by W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York, NY: Vintage, 1969)

---, *The Gay Science* (1882), translated and edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1974)

---, *Twilight of the Idols* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated and edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1954)

---, *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter A. Kaufmann and J.R. Hollingdale, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1967)

---, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Planet PDF) <http://www.planetpublish.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Beyond_Good_and_Evil_NT.pdf> [accessed 25 March 2015]

---, *Untimely Meditations*, edited by Daniel Breazeale, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

---, *Ecce Homo*, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici, Dover Edition (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 2004)

Nehamas, Alexander, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985)

Noland, Richard W., "John Barth and the Novel of Comic Nihilism", *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1966), 239 - 257

Oates, Joyce Carol, *The Edge of Impossibility: Tragic Forms in Literature* (New York, NY: The Vanguard Press, 1972)

---, "RE: The Influence of Nietzsche on JCO", Correspondence with the author, October-November 2017

---, "Re: The Muchness of the Wonderland Quartet", Correspondence with the author, 24 April 2019

---, *The Lost Landscape* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2015)

---, *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates 1973-1982*, edited by Greg Johnson, First Edition (New York, NY: Harpers Collins Publishers, 2007)

---, "Princeton Idyll", in *Dear Husband* (New York, NY: Ecco Press, 2009)

---, *The Barrens* (New York, NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2002)

---, *Do with Me What You Will* (New York, NY: The Vanguard Press, 1973)

---, *Marya: A Life* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1986)

---, "The Mystery of the Ring", 29 May 2008, *The New York Review of Books*, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/05/29/the-mystery-of-the-ring/ [accessed 12 July 2018]

---, *With Shuddering Fall* (New York, NY: The Vanguard Press, 1964)

---, “New Heaven and Earth”, *Arts in Society*, Vol. 10 (4 November 1972), 51 - 54

---, *You must Remember this* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 1987)

---, and Lee, Hermione, *Writers Talk Series*, dir. by ICA (The Roland Collection, 1989) [Video]

---, *Foxfire* (New York, NY: Dutton, 1993)

---, “Wonderlands”, *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 55/56, No. 4/1 (Winter 2001/Spring 2002), 150 - 169

---, *Vengeance: A Love Story*, dir. by Johnny Martin (FilmRise, 2017) [Motion Picture]

---, *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006)

---, *Expensive People* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006)

---, *Them* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006)

---, *Wonderland* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006)

---, and Vadnal, Julie, “Joyce Carol Oates on the Enduring Influence of *Alice in Wonderland”*, 4 February 2010, *Elle*,<https://www.elle.com/culture/movies-tv/news/a3498/joyce-carol-oates-on-the-enduring-influence-of-alice-in-wonderland-4680/ > [accessed 19 April 2019]

---, and Acherstuhk, Alan, “Joyce Carol Oates: Failure is Just Preparation”, 22 January 2019, *Guernica*, <https://www.guernicamag.com/joyce-carol-oates-failure-is-just-preparation/> [accessed 10 May 2019]

O’Hara, Daniel T., ed., “Preface”, in *Why Nietzsche Now?* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. vii - xii

Patten, Bernard M., *The Logic of Alice: Clear Thinking in Wonderland* (New York, NY: Prometheus Books, 2009)

Pawlett, William, *Georges Bataille: The Sacred and Society* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016)

Pederson, Joshua, "'You are Crucified Too': Joyce Carol Oates, Atonement, and Human Behaviour", in *The Forsaken Son: Child Murderer and Atonement in Modern American Fiction,* edited by J. Pederson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016), pp. 87-102

Penner, James, "Gendering Susan Sontag's Criticism in the 1960s: The New York Intellectuals, the Counter Culture, and the Kulturkampf Over "The New Sensibility"", *Women's Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 8 (2008), 921 - 941

Phillips, Robert, "Joyce Carol Oates: The Art of Fiction LXXII", in *Conversations with Joyce Carol Oates*, edited by Peggy W. Pernshaw and Lee, Milazzo (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1978), pp. 62 - 83

Pinsker, Sanford, "Suburban Molesters: Joyce Carol Oates' *Expensive People*", *Midwest Quarterly*, Vol. 19 (Autumn 1977), 89 – 103

Privitello, Lucio Angelo, "Josiah Royce on Nietzsche's Couch", *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society,* Vol. 52, No. 2 (2016), 179 – 200

Rathbone, David, "Kaufmann's Nietzsche", in *Interpreting Nietzsche: Reception and Influence,* edited by Ashely Woodward (London: Bloomsburry Publishing, 2011), pp. 49 - 60

Ratner-Rosenhagen, Jennifer, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2012)

---, "'Dionysian Enlightment': Walter Kaufmann's Nietzsche in Historical Perspective", *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2006), 239 – 269

---, "My Own Private Nietzsche: An American Story", *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter 2012), 22 - 29

Roth, Philip, *American Pastoral (*New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, 1997)

---, “Imagining Jews”, 3 October 1974, *The New York Review of Books*, [accessed 13-05-2020]

Ryan, Sean, “Heidegger’s Nietzsche”, in *Interpreting Nietzsche: Reception and Influence*, edited by Ashely Woodward (London: Bloomsburry Publishing, 2011), pp. 14 - 25

Sartre, Jean-Paul, “Existentialism is a Humanism”, in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, edited by Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York, NY: New American Library, 1975)

Satchell-Baeza, Sophia, “Carroll in the Psychedelic World”, London: The Lewis Carroll Society, 26 April 2019

Showalter, Elaine, “Introduction: The Wonderland Quartet”, in *Wonderland* by Joyce Carol Oates (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006)

---, “Introduction: The Wonderland Quartet”, in *A Garden of Earthly Delights* by Joyce Carol Oates (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006)

---, “Introduction: The Wonderland Quartet”, in *Them* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006)

Solomon, Robert C., “Nietzsche’s Virtues: A Personal Inquiry”, in *German Philosophy since Kan*t, edited by Anthony O’Hear (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 81 - 108

---, *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great “Immoralist” Has to Teach us* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Smith, Rosamond, *Soul/Mate* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1989)

Stafford Brown, Jennifer, “Surrealists in Wonderland: Aspects of the Appropriation of Lewis Carroll”, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature,* (March - June 2000), 128 - 143

Stein, Julia, “Joyce Carol Oates’s *Blonde*: Modernism and the Working-Class Heroine”, in *A Class of Its Own: Re-Envisioning American Labor Fiction,* edited by Laura Hapke and

Lisa A. Kirby (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 170 - 188

Taylor, Gordon O., "Review: *Joyce Carol Oates* by Ellen G. Friedman and *The Tragic Vision of Joyce Carol Oates* by Kathryn Grant, *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Dec.,1981), 442 - 444

Turner, Frank M., *European Intellectual History from Rosseau to Nietzsche*, edited by Richard A. Lofthouse (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014)

Updike, John, "What You Deserve is What You Get", *The New Yorker,* 1987 Issue (28 December 1987), 153

Waller, G. F., *Dreaming America: Obsession and Transcendence in the Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979)

Waugh, Patricia, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984)

Waxman, Robert, "Apollo and Dionysus: Donald Barthelme's Dance of Life", *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Spring 1996), 229 - 43

Weller, Shane, *Modernism and Nihilism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Wesley, Marylin C., *Refusal and Transgression in Joyce Carol Oates' Fiction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993)

West, Cornel, "Nietzsche's Prefiguration of Postmodern American Philosophy", in *Why Nietzsche Now?* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 241 - 269

Williams, Linda L., *Nietzsche's Mirror: the World as Will to Power* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001)

Zhuo, Yue, "Bataille's Nietzsche", in *Interpreting Nietzsche: Reception and Influence,* edited by Ashely Woodward (London: Bloomsburry Publishing, 2011), pp. 37 - 48