

# Self and Other—An Analysis of Jesse in *Wonderland*

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**Abstract**—This article aims to analyse the protagonist Jesse’s characteristics from the perspective of struggle between Self and Other, and further to explore Oates’s great concern over the fate of human beings. In *Wonderland*, Oates voices Jesse’s suffering by the combination of individual experience and social events, and provides a solution to enjoy a better life—love.

**Index Terms**—*Wonderland*, self, other, subject and servant, love

## I. INTRODUCTION

Joyce Carol Oates (1938—), one of the prominent writer in contemporary world literature, is not only a novelist, poet, playwright, but also a critic, editor, and writer-in-residence at Princeton University. Oates impresses people with her productivity and versatility, and is known as “Lady Faulkner” for the variety of her literature fields, unusual depth and unique techniques. Oates once confessed that she has “a laughably Balzacian ambition to get the whole world into a book” (Clemons, 1969, p.5), and she has really created many novels with such kind of great ambition. *Wonderland* is such a good example.

Among Joyce Carol Oates’s works, *Wonderland* has a special position. It is one of the representative works at her early phase in the 1960s, also it marks the transitional period of Oates’s writing. Just like Oates says that “with *Wonderland* I came to the end of a phase of my life, though I didn’t know it”, “I want to move toward a more articulate moral position, not just dramatizing nightmarish problems but trying to show possible ways of transcending them” (Clemons, 1972, p.39). After *Wonderland*, Oates’s creative writing began to shift to modern or post-modern techniques, exploration of charaters’ inner world rather than mere description of social events.

*Wonderland* made its first appearance in 1971, two years later Oates revised the end of the story. This article discusses the second version in 1973. Although most critics have noticed Oates’s obsession with the dark side of human’s personality, but as to the question of what factors contribute to Jesse’s character, it still invites further explorations. The aim of this article is to illustrate how Jesse create self-construction and realize self-improvement, based on the relation between Self and Other. In particular, the emphasis will be on why this kind of relation is formed at certain period. This article has provided the phantasmagoria of personality, which is well worth contemporary people’s attention.

## II. SELF-CONSTRUCTION UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF OTHER

According to Lacan’s theory of Mirror Stage, Other is indispensable for the long and tiring process of self-construction. Self is not a natural being, rather it’s formed and derived from our interaction with other people. For a man, father as the Other plays a decisive role in one’s character. There are four men played the role of vital Other in Jesse’s different life stages, respectively they are grandfather Vogel, adoptive father Dr. Pedersen, father-in-law Cady, and famous doctor Perrault.

Childhood is the most important environment of human growth and directly decides the formation of Self. Just like Diane Tolomeo (1981) claims that “Characters are never given to us out of context, out of their families and the environment in which their growth occurred”(p.6). In *Wonderland*, the story begins with the death of whole family except Jesse, fourteen years old boy, who succeeded in eluding the gun-toting father. Since then Jesse as an orphan starts struggling to be a man of wholeness in the “wonderland” of America involved in the Great Depressions. Unfortunately, after the accident, Jesse can’t grow up like a normal boy any more, without family nor any relatives except grandfather Vogel. Then Vogel takes the role of vital Other, making great influences upon Jesse.

Due to the negative and pessimistic quality of Other, Self must get into some bad habits from Other grandfather Vogel. In addition young Jesse is so fragile and weak, who failed to judge right from wrong and make right choices. Thus during this period, Self has no power to fight with Other, then the fact is clear that Self is very likely to imitate Other in every way. Obviously in the company of grandfather, Jesse becomes indifferent, silent, low-spirited, rather than an active, optimistic and ambitious boy. Jeoffrey Steven Bull (1997) says in his dissertation that as a nihilist ego, Jesse “instead of seeking accommodation with his past and his present life, he looks for relief in the nihilism of the isolated sovereignty” (p.99). Jesse prefers to be alone, even “terrified of people, strangers, coming loose in front of him” (Oates,

1973, p.57). In short, just like his favorite horse, Jesse is a brainless slumber, nearly lost the ability of thinking. Until the broken sense of Self awake, he can't accept the fact that his grandfather denies the furnitures which is the symbol of his past, and even denies his personality. Then Jesse left grandfather to seek his life in another direction.

In the boyhood, adoptive father Dr. Pedersen is a more influential figure. According to Fromm (1956), "fatherly love is conditional love. Its principle is I love you, because you do your duty, because you are like me"(p.43). Pedersen's love for Jesse just bases on his absolute obedience, otherwise the punishment withdrawal of fatherly love will be waiting for Jesse. Pedersen characterises with its belief of Super Man and dictatorship. What's worse, Jesse eagerly craves for family and love, exactly speaking it's instruction and protection that Jesse longs for most. According to Karen Horney (1945), Jesse belongs to the compliant type of people. "This type need to be liked, wanted, desired, loved; to feel accepted, welcomed, approved of, appreciated; to be needed, to be of importance to others, especially to one particular person; to be helped, protected, taken care of, guided" (Horney, 1945, p.51). Therefore Jesse tries every means to please Dr. Pedersen and does everything being ordered, even imitating his action and appearance. It's clear that in this period Jesse has no ability to disobey at all, because of the sharp contrast between weak Self and violent, powerful Other. What's more, Jesse is unaware of the fact that his seemingly happy and satisfactory life is in the sacrifice of selfhood. Jesse holds no will to rebel and pursue Self. As a result, there is no struggle between Self and Other at all, Jesse is willing to follow Pedersen's words, surrendering himself to the strong Other's magic power.

Above all, Jesse is under the control of Others completely, no subjectivity or personality. Due to the unmatched contrast of strength between Self and Other, the former has no other ways but being the tool of the latter, being used and dominated. The result is that Self shares more similarities with Other, such as selfish, autocratic, ignorance of the past and personality. Luckily there is still a poor sense of self, and his sympathy for Mrs. Pedersen saved himself, although failed to rescue his adoptive mother. Obviously it's the only way for Jesse to save himself, otherwise he can only be a shadow of Other Pedersen, the copy one, thoughtless. At last depending on the power of his own deep heart, the condition that Other's absolute rule over Self is over.

Youth Jesse, stronger and stronger, turns to the position of making an active choice of Others and making use of it. Of course, normal, reasonable relation between Self and Other should be equal and multiple. One can't be controlled by the only Other, either can't avoid the community, and what kind of relation will depends upon the forces between them. As time goes on, Jesse is no longer as weak as before, however he still fails to deal with the relation with Others in a right way. In a word, in youth Jesse has the ability to choose proper Other that he needs and actively tries his best to make achievement in order to get through the hard life.

On one hand, Jesse's sadness and confusion lies in the abnormal growth at his childhood caused by the dominant figures Willard Harte, Vogel and Pedersen. Due to their negative, absurd qualities, Jesse is molded into an abnormal person, a person doomed to lose himself and to be unhappy. On the other, it's worthy to notice that in the year 1945 Jesse changed his name to Jesse Vogel, which suggests he is planning to live a new life. Jesse naively believes that he would begin a normal and peaceful life: "he would begin an internship in Chicago in July; he would marry Anne-Marie; he would establish a certain life, professional and private. Wasn't this enough to pit against the universe?" (Oates, 1973, p.192). However Jesse's simple hope can't be realized due to the eventful society at that time.

In *Wonderland*, Oates merges personal fate with quite a disturbing society. This period, as Oates calls it "the finite passing of an infinite passion", is the time when "a life seems to come apart, to be violently slashed apart, then it comes together again and ordinary life resumes" (Oates, 1973, p.187). Wang Hairu (1996) has argued that after the Second World War, American entered into the Cold War stage, although there are fast development in economy and technology, people is still enveloped by the horrible and dangerous society. Thus Jesse's suffering is not because he personally failed to live through hard life, just as Oates (1973) says in *Wonderland*: "this confused sorrow that populated the universe that constructed the universe. It was not local. It was not even contained in the vast wastes of the war or in the jumble of history in this century. Time was mobbed with people. How could he establish himself, construct himself, in such a mob?" (p.195). In short, it's the fact that social turbulence results in individual confusion.

In terms of Jesse, the way he found to survive in such a society is science, represented by Dr. Cady. Dr. Cady is a believer and practitioner of mechanism; it is his way to survive in the turbulent society. He states that "human beings fear mechanisms because they do not understand that they are mechanisms themselves. Perfect machines" (Oates, 1973, p.191). The drive for the choice is that Jesse attempts to shy away from the humble past and precarious society. He is crazy about the thoughtless feeling while doing the job, which makes it possible to think nothing, being an empty container. He mistakes it as a valuable chance to forget the memory of his past and hard life. Realising that Cady is just the person, Jesse endeavours to approach him, especially by the marriage with Cady's daughter Hellen. It's noticeable that Jesse has gained great improvement, he is already capable to seek what he needs and wants, trying to satisfy himself. Therefore in youth Jesse's relationship with Other is different from that in the boyhood. During this period Self becomes the owner of himself rather than an attachment to Other, and Self makes Other serve for him.

It indicates that the relation between Self and Other is in dynamic, which is changeable with the development of Self and Other. When Self is above Other, the latter will be controlled to a certain extent, so is the verse. Take the fourth vital Other Dr. Perrault for example, he is also the Other chosen by Jesse. As both marriage life and career become worse and worse, Jesse lives in great embarrassment. Then Jesse is attracted by Perrault, a famous surgeon doctor, under his instruction, Jesse feels relaxed and his body can work itself regularly out of his control. Again Jesse becomes fantasy

with this feeling, and regards it as the ideal way to relieve himself. Unfortunately Jesse lost the ability to absorb the good and disdain the bad, the fact is that he takes absolute acceptance of other. As a result, Jesse being another Perrault, has so much in common with him, and it is reasonable to say that Jesse is the copy one. Jesse felt that he is weighed down with age when together with Perrault. It proves that Jesse is unaware about how to deal with Other in a suitable way. In fact he is still controlled by Other, although Jesse makes a choice of him actively.

Just like Ordon O. Taylor (1974) suggests in the essay that “for everyone in *Wonderland* the present is a pressure gauge of an accumulating past; for each of them ‘the past is always there, in your head’”(p.24). That means the past and reality can’t be avoided, or be separated from people’s life, they will exist forever. Thus the things that Jesse needs most are encouragement, bravery, honesty and real friends, rather than Willard Harte’s violence, Vogel’s solipsist, Cady’s mechanism, nor Perrault’s denial of personality. Unluckily Jesse doesn’t realize it, he continually struggles sadly in almost half of his life.

To conclude, building selfhood can’t separate from Other, and their relation is always in dynamic, either the self being dominated by the other or the reverse. In fact the ideal relation is that both sides keep balance of each other, being equal. After the struggle between Self and Other, Self acquired the sense of selfhood with the help of Other, and Other continues to play different kinds of roles after the basic formation of Self.

### III. SELF-IMAGE AS MIRROR OF OTHER

Lacan gets important implication from Hegel’s dialectics about subject and servant, from which he concludes that Other as the equal opposite part, takes the role of mirror to reflect the image of Self, which provides another aspect for Self to examine oneself. In *Wonderland*, Jesse assumes the center of consciousness in most part of the novel, however Jesse is not always aware of his behavior and thoughts, who always feels confusing, hurried and nervous. So the speech he made is not persuasive, not reliable if used to make speculations about his personality. Thus Oates provides many Others in the novel, it’s helpful to get a clear understanding of Jesse. In detail, they are his friend Trick, lovers Anne Mary and Reva Denk. On the basis of different relation between them and Jesse, it demonstrates various facets of Jesse.

Trick Monk is an admiring assistant of Dr. Cady at first, then a poet, finally a counterculture poet-guru to the young. In nature he turns out to be every bit as horrible as Pedersen. He would like to be a great gynecologist, to “take loving, gentle smears” to examine in the solitude of a laboratory (Oates, 1973, p.228). Just as Pedersen dreams of invading the minds of others, Trick wants to impregnate women with speeches. In addition, the poems written by him not only demonstrate his own mind, but also expose Jesse’s confusing inner world. In Gavin Cologne-Brooks’s(2005) words, “Trick is both otherworldly and a kind of mirror image of the main protagonist” (p.51).

Oates arranges Trick to mirror Jesse’s personality and life journey, for they live in the similar personal life and share the same social life, which shows Oates’s concern over human destiny. Trick, being an assistant of Dr. Cady as well as Jesse, is explicitly conscious of Jesse’s confusion: no faith in life, in the past and defiance of Others. However after recognition of such confusion that exists in every one’s life, Trick makes a decision to give up the job in school and attempts to save himself from poor mental world and cruel reality by writing poems. From this, it’s noticeable that Trick knows himself very well, he is sure about what he is doing, and what he is seeking. While Jesse is a total different character, who refuses to face himself, and denies both the past and the reality, preferring to be brainless rather than a man with deep thought. Another sharp contrast lies in the attitudes toward themselves. Trick thinks that “I’m only guessing at life, the only person I can write about is myself” (Oates, 1973, p.256); while Jesse views himself as a superman, who wants to change and save the whole world. Finally they both failed to realize themselves. In fact they are two failures in life just by different ways to solve the conflicts between world and individual. Thus their unfortunate sufferings from life is indeed a vivid reflection of people’s life in the America.

Through Trick, it’s easy to explore the deep feelings of Jesse. As a friend, Jesse is willing to confide to Trick. Since Jesse has no friends at all before, his real idea is known by nobody. To make up this, Oates alters the relation between Jesse and Trick, let readers acquire of Jesse’s images not only through his colleague but also from the view of a friend, to whom Jesse will speak out his thoughts. Jesse confides that he wants to forget himself; he want to fix people up; he want to save everyone; he wants to perform miracles, and want miracle ordinary; he wants to do this impersonally because “where there’s personality everything is confused—” (Oates, 1973, p.209). Also Oates expressed one kind of different ideas through the mouth of Trick, Trick judges that “You want to raise up the halt and the crippled, you want to raise the dead—a small ambition!” (Oates, 1973, p.234) Such judgement shows the absurdity of Jesse’s idea. To make it worse, self-arrogant Jesse doesn’t understand, nor believe what Trick says, or maybe Jesse just attempts to be ignorant of his words since Jesse has no other better ways to face the social turmoil.

The best exploration of Jesse’s hypocrisy and inner fear lies in the brutal fight with Trick. Finally Jesse can’t bear his honesty and bluntness anymore, because Trick exposes the cruel reality and empty soul of human beings, especially Jesse’s. First Jesse is annoyed by Trick’s letter to Hellen, in which Trick makes a declaration of his ‘love’ toward Hellen and opinion about Jesse as well. Especially Jesse is annoyed by the words ‘a dangerous man’, with ‘a strange look’. What’s worse, in the letter Trick delivers to Jesse, Trick doesn’t hesitate to speak out the truth of Jesse frankly. “Your soul is as tough as the muscles of your body but my soul is flabby and drained and mealy from disuse....you can’t imagine how ugly a face looks in that mirror, especially my face. I am always staring at myself. I am always pulling my cheeks to show my eyes edged with red and crazy. I look like an ape. I joke with myself in the mirror. You are a man

who does not even bother looking at himself in the mirror, because you know just what he looks like. Always” (Oates, 1973, p.250). Obviously, Trick has made a vivid and full self-analysis, he views himself soulless, being drained out. In fact it's Jesse's image as well, who even dares not to look himself in the mirror. Actually Jesse is a real man without soul, failing to know himself.

In *Wonderland*, there are some poems written by Trick, which play irreplaceable roles upon the description of Jesse's characteristics. Just as Oates (1973) says in the novel, “a poet can express himself obliquely, in poems, he can say things that his friend won't allow him to say in the daylight!” (p.258). Take one of Trick's poems named “Song of Myself” for example, in which Trick compares oneself with a ‘jelly’, a ‘vile jelly’, that means a vicious jelly, a man without soul. It's equal to say that Trick, Jesse and all the people are soulless, being drained out, and exhausting. In fact the poem alone hits the nail on the head about the life of Jesse's, Trick's and many others'.

Above all, Jesse's image becomes richer and truer in the mirror of Trick. In fact they represent two different views about life, different ways to solve the conflicts between world and individuality. Thus their unfortunate suffering in life is indeed a vivid reflection of the whole Americans from 1930s to 1970s.

If Jesse's view about life being shown by Trick, then in the eyes of Anne and Reva, Jesse's idea about marriage and woman is described vividly. The two women are lovers of Jesse, respectively before and after marriage. Of course, Jesse holds only sexual desire toward them, attempting to find a peculiar protection against the outside world and his heart. Following is a detailed study about it in order to figure out what kind of personality Jesse possesses.

As to the relation with Anne, it can be interpreted that Jesse attempts to achieve transcendence through the sexual relation with her. Jesse feels certain that he is not abnormal, not alone. In *Dreaming America: Obsession and Transcendence in the Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates*, G. F. Waller (1979) compares Oates with the English novelist D. H. Lawrence and Oates, he said that, “the most obvious connection between Lawrence and Oates is their fascination with sexuality. Like Lawrence, Oates is fascinated with the power and the dynamic of sex. She focuses repeatedly on the numinous aura of sexuality, on how sexuality contributes to, or so often mocks, our attempts to order our lives...” (p.4) In light of this statement, it's easy to conclude that Jesse is seeking safety and protection through the body of Anne.

His attempt to be unaware of Anne's ignorance and other limitations, is the right evidence of Jesse's hypocrisy. When Jesse learns that Trick used to have a relation with Anne, Jesse becomes very angry. He gets to know what Anne marries is not him, but his identity as a doctor in the near future—“all these nurses, these clever little girls, hopes to marry doctors” (Oates, 1973, p.219). Ironically, even though Jesse has realized the fact that she doesn't love him, he refuses to acknowledge it and deceive himself that he is going to marry her soon, “it would work out”. It exposes another facet of Jesse, hypocritical, timid, who dares not to accept the cruel fact.

If Jesse is still clear enough about his deed in Anne's company, at the time with Reva, Jesse's confusion becomes worse. After the marriage with Hellen, life is not as easy as what Jesse imagines before. For one thing, Jesse is greatly in debt to Hellen's father. For another, Jesse is unsatisfied with Hellen, who is reluctant to have babies and possesses some ideas that Jesse can't understand. Thus it's not exaggerated to regard Jesse as a loser being caught in life. Therefore it's emergent to find out a way to survive: the appearance of Reva is the solution that Jesse seeks.

Involved in deep corner, Jesse is not aware of his behavior and speech, most of the time he is in self-contradictory. Thus in this part most of conversations are instructed by Reva, Jesse just tries to answer and solve her puzzles. After twice meeting with Reva, Jesse falls in love with her crazily. While expressing his desire and demand for her, Jesse emphasizes that “he is permanently married”. Such a paradox not only shocks Reva, but also readers can't help wondering the reasons behind it. Through Reva, the puzzle is solved. The fact is that Jesse himself is not clear-minded, how illogical what he is means how contradictory his inner world is. It's not love at all; it's only temporary self-loss. Jesse is a man of family-center, however it's too hard to hold a family in such a chaotic society, even he has a transient idea to give up the family, like his own father Willard Harte, who slaughters the whole family just because he can't support it.

To sum up, from Trick, Anne Mary and Reva Denk, it's not difficult to discern Jesse's deep heart. He is a hypocrite, a coward, a loser, living quite a miserable life due to certain social and personal reasons. He leads a negative life by escape and self-deception. In addition, Jesse is nearly denied by all the people around him. It's safe to say that Jesse doesn't gain recognition from them and doesn't ruminate too much in the face of their disapproval. At last it's the accident of his lovely daughter Shelley's departure from home awakes Jesse to the reality.

#### IV. A JOURNEY OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT

According to what has been discussed above, self-construction is roughly realized under the influence of Other, meanwhile analysis has been made about the views of Self in different Others' eyes. It's obvious that almost all their opinions about Jesse is negative, in other words, actually Jesse failed to gain recognition from Others.

The theory of Hegel's master and servant exerts great influence upon Lacan's idea of self-construction. Hegel believes that the master is not inborn but recognized by the servant, and according to Andy Blunden (2007) “the master's self-certainty rests on the activity of a dependent, dominated being. By conquest, the master has made himself dependent on a dependent being. Mutual dependence is the truth of this relation” (p.192). It means only the recognition of master by the servants can lead to the humble position of servants in society. Thus Lacan concludes that the relation between Self and Other is also of mutual dependence. Self has to get recognition from Other in order to achieve

wholeness.

Through Shelley's letters to Jesse, a conclusion can be drawn that there is quite a complex father-daughter relation, love and hatred together, which is resulted from Jesse's disability of normal love. Shelley is his favorite daughter, also the girl being severely examined and hurt one. Jesse's love for daughter is suffocating and compelling, no freedom at all. According to Fromm (1956), the love between father and daughter, should be communicative, on the basis of equality and freedom. Father should instruct children by the way of reasoning and hoping, patience and tolerance, not threat or autocratic. Father should allow the separation from his authority and be the owner of herself (p.36). Thus the strained relations between father and daughter, is caused by the self-isolated father Jesse.

The beloved Other can help to affirm the wholeness and intrinsic value of human beings. As Fromm (1956) says, "love, the answer to the problem of the human existence" (p.7). Ironically in *Wonderland*, due to father's dangerous love, Shelley is forced to leave home; owing to the love for daughter, Jesse starts to look for daughter at any price. When Jesse is trapped by the miserable life, the departure of Shelley fulfills his desire to be acknowledged and recognized. Jesse's courage and confidence is greatly dependent upon the news of beloved daughter Shelley. During the several months of Shelley's departure, Jesse feels almost exhausted and even too tired to work with patients, which used to be his favorite way of escaping from daily life. However when Jesse begins his journey of seeking Shelley, he feels energetic, even youthful. "He felt that nothing could stop him. He would drive to Toronto and find his daughter and bring her back home. She wants me to find her, he told his wife" (Oates, 1973, p.463).

Finally awake from the departure of Shelley, Jesse starts the journey of searching for Shelley at any price out of love. Deeply involved in the social reality, Jesse witnesses several social events at that time, such as antiwar demonstration, the hippies and drug-takers. In detail, Jesse has learned to think, to admit others' existence, and he has developed an ability of analysis of social phenomena. For example, Jesse once hated the crowds very much, however to find Shelley, Jesse is forced to be in the crowds. Jesse stares into it, trying to find a center as before. Since as a scientist Jesse believes that there is a center in the world and he is the center, but he realizes that actually it's unable to find any center, any single place to look. Based on this, Jesse draws the conclusion that, "Maybe the young people themselves felt it, these baffling sexless creatures with their long trousered legs and frizzy hair and laconic, pleasant faces passing him effortlessly, as if in a dream, having no center to them, no core, no place to get to. Jesse felt that if he put his hand out to touch one of these people he would touch nothing, his hand would grope hopelessly in the air" (Oates, 1973, p.465). It indicates Jesse has learned to observe and analyse social events gradually.

On the journey of searching for Shelley, Jesse also begins to examine his self-centered strategy. This is illustrated at the end of the novel, when he is blamed to be a devil both by Noel and Shelley, Jesse wonders "am I"? Such an open ending serves as an answer to his former question "Jesse Vogel: who was that?" (Oates, 1973, p.397). Different from the original edition of *Wonderland* (1971), Oates arranges such kind of way to end the story—Jesse killed Noel, and take the dying Shelley on the boat. Just as Samuel Chase Coale (1987) interprets that, "Violence alone seems capable of breaking through the boundaries of the Western ego" (p.120). However Oates makes some revisions in 1973, in which the story ended with Jesse's awaken, "am I a devil" out of the great force of his love toward Shelley. That's to say Oates employs a rhetorical question to suggest the beginning of Jesse's self-retrospect, which is the better way Oates has found for her character to get through the living predicament. It is love rather than violence, a fatherly love for his daughter.

## V. CONCLUSION

In *Wonderland*, Oates mainly focuses on the life journey of Jesse, also many Others are arranged to provide another facets of Jesse's life. These others can be divided into three classes according to their different relations with Jesse. First class are his father figures who play crucial roles upon Jesse's self-construction. Second class is about Jesse's friend, including a male friend and two important female friends. Through their views, Jesse's personality becomes more authentic and more vivid. Third class refers to Jesse's family, who finally drives Jesse to reconsider himself, his past and his present life.

This article has done a detailed study of Jesse's life from the perspective of struggle between Self and Other. According to Lacan's theory, Self and Other are of mutual dependence, which can't exist without each other. In this paper, first there is a careful discussion about self-formation under Other's influence, then the examination of self-image in the mirror of Other. Meanwhile on the basis of Hegel's emphasis upon "recognition", it's learned Self has to get recognition from Others, otherwise Self is not complete or not meaningful. Finally Jesse begins his journey of seeking self since he fails to get recognition from the irreplaceable Other—family.

In short, Oates has made a vivid description about Jesse's life journey through many others' fate, which shows that actually Jesse's tragedy in life is shared by the whole American at that age. Due to some social factors and individual experience, Jesse possesses a shattered-personality and leads a tragical life. Finally Oates guides Jesse to find a way to survive the society and achieve self-wholeness by love. It's a kind of love in Erich Fromm's words, compounded of care, responsibility, respect, knowledge, in which giving is the expression of strength and source of mature joy. Therefore it's reasonable to reach the conclusion that, Oates holds intense interests about human existence and tries to explore solutions to deal with problems.

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