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The Representation of Female Violence
In
Joyce Carol Oates's Later Fiction

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Abstract

The representation of female violence in Joyce Carol Oates's later fiction is an undertaking that involves three methods of reading *Because It Is Bitter, Because It Is My Heart*, *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang*, and *Man Crazy*. The first chapter is a Freudian interpretation of both the novels and the characters and how the female castration complex is the cause for female violence in all three works; the second chapter illustrates the effects of female violence from the perspective of race, gender, and body; and the third chapter discusses "real" and "fictionalized" violence as coping mechanisms for female oppression in the patriarchy. The goal of the thesis is to demonstrate the impact of male domination and female subordination of women in the patriarchy and how women learn to exist in a society founded on female oppression.

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Introduction

Joanne V. Creighton notes that Joyce Carol Oates "sees man and nature, consciousness and unconsciousness, the past and the present, the writer and his culture as all part of a single totality" (*Joyce Carol Oates*, 21). Oates's later fiction, novels such as *Because It Is Bitter, Because It Is My Heart*, *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang*, and *Man Crazy*, encompass her singular but complete human vision via an array of violent images that reflect the reality of violence in contemporary society; a reality that inhibits women from ever escaping the gendered ideology of a society that is founded on the patriarchal power of men; a reality that does not allow women to overcome the perpetuation of male domination and female subordination; a reality of patriarchy.

The representation of violence in Oates's later fiction, however, is not limited to male violence but rather illustrates Oates's "tragic vision" (Grant 117) of female violence that awakens her readers to the social destruction of society and the "tragic dimensions of [female] life" (Grant 117). Some feminist critics (perhaps even Oates herself) may argue that Oates's female protagonists are ironical constructions of women. Although this fact may indeed be true, one cannot ignore the critical methodology of reading Oatesian women via their existence as females in the patriarchy; an existence that may seem to evoke an anti-feminist quietism but rather provides Oates's readers with a realistic perception of feminine life both inside and outside the larger framework of feminism.

In Chapter One of my thesis, "Violently Oedipal Women," for example, I study the influence of Sigmund Freud in Joyce Carol Oates's work. I believe that Oates knows

Freud's theories well in spite of her own dismissal of Freud as a "tragically limited human being" (Oates in Johnson, 226). I also believe that Oates uses Freudian psychology to demonstrate the effects of patriarchy on women. For some critics, Oates uses Freud to illustrate the limitations of his masculinist or anti-feminist theories. I agree. However, for the purpose of my thesis, I focus on the implications of reading Oates's later fiction from my position as both a feminist *and* a woman living under patriarchal rule.[1] As a result, I provide not only a reading of Oates's work from a Freudian perspective but I also analyse the construction of Oates's characters in terms of the Freudian model of the pre-Oedipal history of women and the female Oedipal complex to determine how Oates's women accept their allotted status as female subordinates in patriarchy.

Chapter two of my thesis, "The Violence of Race, Gender, and Body," focuses on three types of female violence in Oates's later fiction in relation to existing power structures of domination and subordination within the patriarchy: racial violence in *Because It Is Bitter, Because It Is My Heart*, gendered violence in *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang*, and bodily violence in *Man Crazy*. In each novel, Oates defines the female protagonists' struggles with men in terms of each woman's inability to discover an identity and a subjectivity outside of the patriarchal ideal of female submissiveness; an ideal that is rejected by the protagonists but accepted by their mothers; and an ideal that is perpetuated by the mother-daughter relationships and displaced into female violence against race,

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[1] I think that there are general assumptions in the Academy that ***all*** women are feminists and that ***all*** women understand that they live in a patriarchy. I think that the reality of womanhood outside of the academic realm of Women's Studies and Literary Studies moves beyond the large umbrella of feminism and the many implications of such a

gender, and body.

The third chapter of my thesis, "Real and Fictionalized Violence," discusses how Oates combines "real" and "fictionalized" violence in her later fiction via the female protagonists' bid to find joy in their tragic existence as female subordinates to male domination. In this chapter, I define both "real" and "fictionalized" violence. "Real" violence, I argue, is reported within a story as a factual or realistic representation of turbulent, and often physically and emotionally destructive forces against both women and men. "Fictionalized" violence, however, is reported by a character or individual who participates in the story and not only speaks or writes as "I" about the violence she/he becomes a victim and perpetrator of, but fictionalizes the story of that violence when remembering and "re-writing" it. In essence, the third chapter of my thesis examines the process of surrendering the past to story, a process by which the female protagonists are able to find emotional comfort and solace as female subordinates in the patriarchy.

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word, implications like what is feminism? Who is a feminist? Who can be a feminist?

Chapter 1: Violently Oedipal Women

In *Invisible Writer: A Biography of Joyce Carol Oates*, Greg Johnson notes that one of Oates's literary influences is Sigmund Freud (120). Although Oates indicates that "it is dangerous to place too much emphasis upon [literary] influences" because most novelists and poets wish to "give life to the larger element of the human psyche by way of familiar images" (Oates in Milazzo 115), there is an underlying influence of Freudian psychology within Oates's later fiction that requires literary critics to question Oates's dismissal of Freud as a "tragically limited human being" (Oates in Johnson, 226).

In her collection of essays entitled *New Heaven, New Earth,* Oates reveals her own dissatisfaction with the Freudian psychological model for health -- "that emotions be purged, refined, made totally conscious and therefore discharged of their power" -- for, "so much of human behaviour is classified as 'neurotic' when in fact it is simply natural, given certain personalities and certain environments" (*New Heaven, New Earth*, 72-73). When asked by Robert Phillips if Freud is an influence on her writing, Oates ironically states: "I don't really know, consciously. For me, stories usually begin . . . out of some magical association between characters and their settings" (Milazzo 74). This "magical association" derives from what Oates claims to be her own notion of the unconscious; a state of mind where "the wellsprings of life," and the origins of creativity, reside (Oates in Milazzo, 115) and where an "undifferentiated primary paradise" (Oates in Wesley, 126) exists.

In his essay "Femininity," Freud not only discusses the Oedipal complex of women; he also attempts to make a link between adult women and their pre-Oedipal mother-daughter relationships. According to Freud, there is a "pre-Oedipus prehistory of girls" where "the seducer is regularly the mother" (*New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 154). Freud also argues that this pre-Oedipal relationship between a mother and her daughter is brought to an end by a succession of events that follows a female castration complex where a girl's growth is developed along three possible lines: "one leads to sexual inhibition or to neurosis, the second to change of character in the sense of a masculinity complex, the third, finally, to normal femininity" (*NILP* 160). Although Freud states that a fear "of castration has no place in women," this fear is "taken in their sex by a fear of loss of love . . . if [the girl] finds [her] mother absent (*NILP* 119). Moreover, "Many people are unable to surmount the fear of loss of love completely" and so, "they never become sufficiently independent of other people's love (Freud, *NILP* 121).

In reading Oates's later fiction from a Freudian perspective, one finds that the relationships between the protagonists and their mothers reveal a castration complex that explains the daughters' desire for violence before they enter the Oedipal complex; a desire that is created by the protagonists' anger and hatred toward their mothers who, in Freudian terms, lack the symbolic power of the penis. When the protagonists attempt to move from the psychological realm of their mothers to the phallic realm of their fathers, they become more aggressive in nature and begin to express their discomfort with continuously being the victims of male domination. Thus, the movement from the feminine realm to the masculine realm by the protagonists creates an awareness of female subordination. This subordination seems to force the daughters into angrily rejecting their mothers as love-objects and moves them toward their fathers for consolation; a move that, for Freud, is based on the daughters' unconscious struggle with penis-envy, a struggle that creates a desire in the daughters for the phallic power of their fathers' penis (*NILP* 159). When, however, the daughters realize that they are unable to obtain a penis from their fathers, when they realize that they are indeed castrated, Freud's theory suggests that the daughters' need for love by their absent mothers returns them to a "the feminine situation" where "the wish for a penis is replaced by one for a baby" (*NILP* 162). In effect, the female Oedipal complex upholds the patriarchal perception of woman as mother and determines that all girls eventually return to their mothers' matrilineal existence to redefine their subjectivity and identity as women within the patriarchy. In essence, Freud's theory suggests that womankind is in a cyclical pattern of subordination. Like their mothers, daughters learn to accept their allotted feminine role in life.

As some feminist critics argue, Oates uses the anti-feminist context of Freudian psychology to demonstrate the effects of patriarchy on women (Wesley 115).
And so, Oates's coyness about acknowledging Freud as a literary influence does not impede literary critics who interpret Oatesian texts from a Freudian perspective but rather incites them to locate the Freudian psychological model within her novels. Brenda Daly, for example, examines in her essay "The (M)other in Us" the depiction of the mother-daughter bond in three postmodern novels by Oates and argues that each

novel equally formulates a narrative based on the development of the female protagonists from girlhood to womanhood both inside and outside of the Freudian Oedipal Complex (136-138). She writes,

> As depicted in much of contemporary women's fiction, the daughter's desire to reclaim her matrilineal past marks her break with the misogyny of culture. For in order to ally herself with the mother, the daughter must transgress the patriarchal imperative, "Away from the mother," an injunction that, as Oates argues in an analysis of *King Lear*, is dangerous not only for daughters, but for society as a whole. "The patriarch's unspoken imperative, *Away from the unconscious, away from the mother*, is dangerous precisely because it is unspoken, unarticulated, kept below the threshold of consciousness itself" (*Contraries* 75) . . . Because daughters associate mothers with the vulnerabilities of the body, during adolescence they often disavow them, choosing to ally themselves with fathers who are associated with the supposedly superior aspects of "culture." Inevitably, however, these same daughters discover the need to reclaim their matrilineal inheritance. (126)

For Daly, this reclamation of a matrilineal inheritance requires feminist literary critics to move beyond an Oedipal psychology of Oates's work in order to follow a feminist model of female development in which "the daughter refuses to see (or desire) with the father's eyes. Rather than viewing her self through the eyes of an indeterminate male, the daughter must reintegrate aspects of the self that have been fragmented by the male gaze" (Daly 128). In other words, to reintegrate the self, "to see herself with her own eyes . . .the daughter must acknowledge her kinship with her mother" (Daly 128).

What critics like Daly have not noticed is the full impact of Freud's influence on Oates's fiction and how important Oates's knowledge of Freud is in allowing her to develop psychological narratives based on the issue of female violence. In fact, one may argue that Oates's works reveal a position between Freud's misogynist Oedipal narrative, on the one hand, and the work of Daly on the other, for she postulates the issue of female violence as an explicit act of sadomasochistic desire by the protagonists to remove themselves from the "natural order" of femininity;[2] an order that places womankind below the power and the autonomy of male supremacy and defines the female sex as *The Second Sex*,[3] "the [female] Other" in direct opposition to the the "first sex," the masculine "One" (de Beauvoir xvi).

From a Freudian perspective, sadomasochism, the derivation of pleasure from the infliction of physical or mental pain on others or on one's self, is a combination of two "perversions" known as sadism and masochism. Sadism, according to Freud, is the "desire to inflict pain upon the sexual object" and masochism is the ability to achieve satisfaction by "suffering physical or mental pain at the hands of the sexual object" (*NILP* 137). To argue that Oates's protagonists are both sadists *and* masochists, one simply has to analyse how each woman via her Oedipal crisis becomes a sexual object within the patriarchy and the manner in which these women's roles as both the

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[2] The natural order of femininity is the traditional order of the sex/gender system in patriarchy that places women in the traditional roles of wife and mother.

[3] Title of book by Simone de Beauvoir, translated and edited by H. M. Parshley, New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1968.

perpetrators and victims of violence follow from this process.

Oates's characterization of Iris Courtney as a violently Oedipal woman in *Because It Is Bitter, Because It Is My Heart,* for example, derives from Iris's struggles with subjectivity and identity both inside and outside of her relationship to her mother and father during her development from girlhood to womanhood. In fact, Oates provides her readers with an important hint about the protagonist's potential for psychological turmoil within the first few lines of the novel when the narrator states: "'Little Red' Garlock, sixteen years old, skull smashed soft as a rotted pumpkin and body dumped into the Cassadaga River near the foot of Pitt Street, must not have sunk as he'd been intended to sink, or floated as far" (3). Oates begins her novel with the death of a young man; and what her readers soon realize is that this death marks a symbolic moment in Iris Courtney's adolescence. Iris is haunted by her involvement with Garlock's murder throughout the entire narrative. She is haunted by her inability to stop Jinx Fairchild from killing his opponent; and she is haunted by an opponent whose obscene words and gestures threaten Iris to such an extent that her hatred for Red Garlock outweighs her desire to help another individual from harm. As a result, "Iris Courtney, watching Little Red Garlock die, stands transfixed. I've got to help she thinks. She watches. [She] Can't look away" (116). But why does Iris not seek help? Why does she *choose* to remain silent and watch Garlock die? Iris is uncomfortable with Garlock's's sexist and chauvinistic language and mannerisms that reduce the female body to the status of a sex object. In essence, Garlock demonstrates his sexual superiority over Iris by subjecting the female body to an objectifying male gaze, a subjection that Iris is taught to accept early on in her life by her initial love-object, her mother, Persia Courtney.

What is interesting is that Oates initially characterizes Persia in light of what seems to be a patriarchal standard for the ideal upper-class woman: Persia has a "beautiful face and naturally red-gold hair and a tireless ebullient manner"(17); she is charming to strangers; she is always concerned about making a strong impression on people ("Don't say 'damn'" [63]); and she is able to "light up her face at will -- shining eyes, seemingly radiant smile -- forehead smooth and unlined as if she were still nineteen years old, all adult strife, all marital heartbreak, yet to come, not even imagined" (63). Persia's ability to mask her inner thoughts and emotions "at will" is an important quality that Oates idealizes in her characterization of Iris's mother because Persia demonstrates the concept of female objectification at its best. When, for instance, the Courtneys attend Schoharie Downs to gamble on horse races, Oates connects Persia's status as an object with the artificiality of training horses to be Standardbreds:

> . . . Persia says, "But why are Standardbreds trained to run so"--- she searches for the word she wants --- "artificially? You force an animal to run against the grain of his nature, then he's penalized if---" Mr. Yard laughs in protest, saying, "But Persia, dear, that's the beauty of it, don't you see? It's like poetry, or music, or . . . whatever. The way the horse *runs*." Persia persists. "But it's so artificial. The pacers especially, swinging along like that. If I were four-legged, I'd go mad having to run that way." . . . The men are laughing at her, but their laughter has the ring of affection. She says, "An

> animal should be allowed its own nature!"
>
> Duke says, "All sports are artificial, Persia. Sports and games. That's how we tell them from life. They have beginnings and endings; they have rules . . . boundaries . . .absolute winners and absolute losers, most of the time" . . . "As far as that goes, sweetheart, who isn't an animal? On two legs or four? Aren't *you*? Inside your clothes? Inside your make-up? Inside *you*?" (79)

In reading the text from a feminist perspective, I feel that Oates seems to be criticizing the patriarchal standards of femininity with Persia's inability to understand why an animal (read woman) cannot be allowed its own nature. More importantly, I think Oates associates the notion of training horses to be Standardbreds with the idea that women can also be trained in the same manner. Although the conversation between Duke, Persia, and Mr. Ward is a discussion among three adults, Oates allows Iris to remain in the scene as a silent observer. As a result, Iris learns through observation that women are trained or "bred" by their patriarchal "owners" to be standard female objects. In the context of Iris's reaction to Red Garlock's sexual harassment, it is Garlock's objectification of Iris's body that exposes her lack of power and authority within the patriarchy. Thus, Iris must acknowledge that she is, like her mother, a subordinate to the ever-present patriarchal rule.

Oates even offers her readers the "true" meaning of Iris's name in order to emphasize the protagonist's position as an observer or eyewitness to female subordination and male domination within the patriarchy:

> "I thought I was named for a flower," Iris says, disappointed.

> "An iris *is* a flower, of course," Persia says, smiling, "but it's this other too. Our secret. 'The iris of the eye.'"
>
> "The eye?"
>
> "'The iris of the eye.' The eye. The eyeball, silly!" (39)

Unlike her mother's name that Persia associates with the southwest Asian country (39), Iris's name signifies two metaphors that can be found throughout the novel. The first metaphor is that of the iris as a flower. Oates seems to incorporate the flower metaphor into her narrative as a symbolic expression of femininity for both Persia and Iris. Like a flower in bloom, for example, Persia's physical beauty thrives in the outward display of its youthful and attractive splendour. But by projecting this idealistic feminine image of beauty, grace and charm onto her daughter while simultaneously suggesting that Iris's name has a secondary meaning, Persia creates an invisible barrier between herself and her daughter that establishes Iris as her mother's natural inferior, "It is as if Persia has stolen all light from her daughter: [Iris] an old-young child with sallow skin, dents beneath her eyes, tension in her jaw" (63). In effect, Iris must *learn* how to be like her mother. Like the iris of the eye, she watches Persia; she "Picks up on things . . . [and] doesn't have to be told" (106). As a result, Iris decides that she does not like her name for "Her favourite name at the time is Rose-of Sharon" (39), a name unambiguously affiliated with the floral metaphor of femininity.

It is Iris's disappointment in having to acknowledge that she does not belong in the feminine realm of her mother that spawns her adolescent potential for violence. In fact, it is the notion of having to be her mother's inferior that allows Iris to progress into the second phase of the female castration complex: the masculinity complex. According to Freud, the masculinity complex occurs when a girl "repudiates her love for her mother and at the same time not infrequently represses a good part of her sexual trends in general" (*NILP* 165). Furthermore, "with the discovery that her mother is castrated it becomes possible [for the girl] to drop [her mother] as an object, so that the motives for hostility, which have long been accumulating gain the upper hand" (165). For Iris, this "hostility" begins when she is in grade six and she is able to "pretend to be shy and well-behaved"(33). As her teacher, Mrs. Rudiger, mentally notes:

> It is a pose, a ruse, a game, an artful befuddlement. In spirit, Iris Courtney sides with the outlaws. Her polite classroom smile is wickedly elastic and capable of shifting -- with a quick sidelong glance at a classmate . . . into the subtlest of smirks. Her neat clothes, her decent shoes, her well-brushed fair brown hair, her posture, her outward deportment, the calm, composed, cool gaze of her pebble-coloured eyes, all mask a wayward and mutinous spirit that reveals itself in unguarded moments. (33)

Like her mother, Iris is capable of masking her emotions and thoughts. But as Mrs. Rudiger believes, a "wayward and mutinous spirit" continues to exist within the depths of Iris's unconscious. In spite of her mother's apparent disgust with racial slurs by her husband ("Oh what a thing to say! Oh -- what a thing to *say*!" [21]), Iris vocalizes her anger toward a group of young black girls from her class after they have beaten her for copying answers from one of their math tests: ". . . they shriek 'white bitch, white asshole bitch' and cuff and kick and then they're gone, running down the street laughing, and Iris picks herself up, biting her lip not to cry, not to give them that satisfaction. 'Dirty nigger bitches! *Dirty!*'" (36). The fact that Iris does not tell her mother about the entire incident signifies the beginning of Iris's progression into the masculinity complex. In bearing witness to her father's racist behaviour, Iris assumes that racism is a belief that belongs in the masculine realm. To enter upon the threshold of masculinity and to formulate a connection between herself and her father, Iris imitates Duke's behaviour. Oates even illustrates Iris's threshold existence by characterizing Iris in terms of her parents' influence on their daughter. On the one hand, Iris is like Persia, a woman who is able to uphold an ideal image of femininity within the patriarchy by remaining silent. On the other hand, however, Iris is also like her father. She is willing to attack others to express her sense of power and autonomy: "And next time she sees Lucille Weaver and her friends she surprises them with the ferocity of her attack, her sudden wild anger. You'd think the skinny white girl would be fearful but, no, she's mad as hell . . ." (36).

The marital problems between Persia and Duke, their infidelity, Duke's gambling, and Persia's incessant spending, culminate in an on-again, off-again relationship that places Iris in the middle of her parents' self-destructive behaviour; and it is throughout this ongoing period of self-destruction, of alcoholic binges, and of emotional and physical abuse, that Iris grapples with her own anger and confusion toward her mother:

> Now Persia is a waitress, now she gets decent tips; returning late

> from her job, seeing that Duke is still out, she sometimes turns around and hurries back out herself, high heels clattering an alarm on the stairs. Iris calls after her, "Mom? Mommy?" and Persia's voice lifts out of the dark, "I won't be long , hon!" Persia knows where to find her husband . . . some nights.
>
> . . . Some nights, though, she doesn't come home until two or three in the morning, escorted to her very door, without him.
>
> In bed but rarely asleep at such times, Iris waits to hear a stumbling on the stairs, voices. Who are the men who bring her mother home? she wonders. And does her father know? (41)

Iris's childhood is plagued by her existence behind the invisible walls of her family, walls that are unable to protect her eyes from seeing the slow decline of her mother's physical and emotional stability as Persia struggles to find materialistic happiness instead of spiritual happiness. Although Persia experiences some financial freedom with her "tips" as a waitress, her alcoholism not only begins to affect her marriage but also numbs Persia's sense of motherly responsibility for her daughter. Instead of providing her daughter with a stable home life based on love and nurturance, Persia gives voice to her own violent conclusion (during a drunken argument with her husband) that she would rather see Iris dead than bankrupt:

> "Rather see her dead. Like my father said: he'd rather be dead than bankrupt, unable to support --"

> "Your father! Don't make me laugh! That . . ."
>
> "You think so? You don't think so?"
>
> ". . . his ass from a hole in the ground."
>
> "I'd cut the child's throat and then I'd cut my own, to spare her! You don't believe me?"
>
> ". . . deliberate misunderstanding, distortion, everything reduced to the level of the cunt." (89)

I feel that Oates satirizes, in a subtle yet effective manner, the patriarchal ideal of femininity by giving Persia a forum to express herself through violent language but at the same time justifying these violent expressions by incorporating Duke's sexist commentary into the text. In doing so, Oates demonstrates how confined the female sex is within the patriarchy. Even when a woman threatens to become violent, an action that typically belongs in the masculine realm, she is reduced to the level of a sexual object, "the level of the cunt" (89). Thus, Duke Courtney's reaction to his wife's threat to kill Iris is an important element in understanding Iris's masculinity complex. Duke's refusal to accept Persia's emotional melodrama encourages his daughter to behave in the same manner as her father. To do so, however, Iris must reject her mother as a love-object, a rejection that, for Freud, is accompanied by hostility and hatred that destroys the daughter's attachment to her mother (*NILP* 160).

In fact, the destruction of Iris's relationship with her mother begins and ends with Persia's alcoholism. Persia's drinking "forces" Duke to divorce his wife and leave his child. This rejection of his wife, however, enables Iris to blame her mother for her father's absence ("*You* wanted the divorce . . . *you* must want this life that's ours" [205]). Furthermore, Duke pushes Iris into believing that the marital problems between him and his wife occur as a result of Persia's new love affair with a black man: "Maybe Daddy *is* right -- the things he says about you" (207). But it is Duke's desire to poison his daughter's thoughts about her mother ("Whose side are you on, Iris? Hers, or mine? . . . That whore's, or mine?" [152]) that has a serious impact on Iris's eventual progression into a masculinized state.[4]

Oates demonstrates Iris's anger and hatred toward her mother by characterizing the protagonist in terms of Iris's reluctance to outwardly display her feminine nature[5] like her mother. One may even posit that Iris's refusal to cry in front of her mother symbolically represents Iris's attempt to mask her femininity behind the closed space of her feminine existence:

> In the past year or so Persia has sometimes heard Iris crying in the bathroom or in her bed, a muffled coughing sound, and it worries her . . . that Iris won't cry in Persia's arms . . . refuses to cry with her. In fact, seeing Persia in tears, she's impatient, jeering, stamps out of the room, *Oh, Mother, will you for God's sake stop that!* (78)

But Oates also allows the protagonist to make an association between femininity and

---

[4] For the purpose of this essay, a "masculinized state" is a state of existence in which one's subjectivity and identity is characterized by what the patriarchy deems masculine qualities.

[5] By "feminine nature" I mean the manner in which Persia conforms to the ideological notion of femininity within the patriarchy.

sexuality via her construction of Persia Courtney's overactive sex life. As a result, Iris represses her sexual desires for fear of being, as her father suggests, "Bad as [her] mother" (72). When, for example, she overhears another drunken argument between her parents Iris prays "*Please God help me to be good*" (91). In her dreams, however,

> Iris dreams of bodies.
>
> Male bodies. Female bodies.
>
> Mmmmmmmmmmmm the things that happen between them, oh sweetie you don't want to know, that's not for little girls to know and *don't walk swinging your hips, hide your breasts if you can, there are words like "tits" "ass" "boobs" "cunt" "prick" you're not supposed to know, never call attention to yourself never lock eyes with any boy or man* but they seem to be everywhere suddenly, boys who stare crudely at her, boys who merely glance at her, boys who seem hardly to see her at all. (92)

In the context of Red Garlock's ability to reduce Iris "to the level of the cunt" (89), to reduce the female body to the status of a sexual object, Iris's dream figuratively shoves her into the feminine realm of her mother while her unconscious mind reveals her sexual desires beneath the confines of behaviour ostensibly not like her mother's.

What is interesting, however, is how Oates uses Garlock's character as a catalyst for Iris's hostility toward her mother. By allowing Iris to witness Garlock's death, to even wish death upon Garlock ("*Jinx, kill him. Jinx, don't let him live*" [116]), Oates offers her protagonist a symbolic outlet to unleash her hatred toward a man who treats women like sexual objects and a woman who is the epitome of a sexual object (her mother). Iris is transfixed while Jinx smashes a "wedge-shaped and heavy object" (116) onto Garlock's head because Garlock is forever silenced; and when his body is found at the beginning of the novel, he has become exactly what he never thought he was; he has become an object. Thus, Iris's attitude toward Garlock's death represents the masochistic death-wish she feels towards her socialization in terms of male domination and female subordination. In watching a man die, Iris not only gains a sense of emotional strength over her mother; she also matures into an autonomous and self-sufficient individual who is able to fill the void of her father's absence within the family unit both throughout his marriage to Persia and after their divorce.

One may also argue, however, that Little Red Garlock's death symbolically represents the death of Iris's father. With the absence of Duke from Iris's and Persia's life, Iris assumes a masculine role in her relationship to her mother and, in effect, becomes the dominant figure of the Courtney women's household. To maintain this sense of dominance, Iris must continue to express her emotions in a guarded and silent manner to move beyond the feminine stereotype idealized by her father that women are emotional and melodramatic creatures. As a result, Iris begins to write her thoughts in a journal:

> *She's an alcoholic.*
>
> As if testing out the words: *alcoholic, alcoholic*. Daring to commit them to the terrible authority of ink on paper, its impersonality. *I despise her: can't wait to escape her!* Gouging the paper with her pen's sharp point as she hears the anguished sounds of her mother emptying out her guts in the bath

> room beside Iris's room . . . spasms of helpless vomiting, sobs and vomiting, that go on and on and on. *I love her too OH JESUS WHAT CAN I DO.* (212)

On another occasion, Iris writes:

> *She has become utterly unpredictable . . . untrustworthy.*
>
> *She has no soul: all slipping sliding surfaces.*
>
> *She could stop drinking if she wanted to. She just doesn't want to.*
>
> *There is not the slightest connection between us.* (234)

The contrast between the two journal entries is an interesting example of how Oates uses Freudian thought in her narrative. As both entries illustrate, there is a progression from the pre-Oedipal connection of the daughter to her mother ("*I love her*") to a state of castration ("*There is not the slightest connection between us*") where the daughter rejects her mother as a love-object. But both passages reveal Iris's confusion as she tries to ignore her pre-Oedipal history with her mother. On one level, Iris hates her mother for her mother's alcoholism reduces Persia to a state of weakness, a weakness that allows her to be self-absorbed and dependent on men ("Does he pay you Momma? In cash, or just in drinks?" [250]), a weakness that destroys her entire life. On another level, however, it is Persia's weakness that enables Iris to continue to love her ill mother; and it is only after her mother is hospitalized that Iris is able to *see* her mother "through others' eyes" (257). In fact, I think Oates purposely manipulates the second meaning of Iris's name by placing an emphasis on Iris's role as an observer or witness to her mother's illness. The irony, of course, is that as an observer/witness, Iris is unable to *see* the very destruction of her mother's life until Persia's life is about to end:

> How had Persia become so emaciated? Nearly skeletal except for her grotesquely swollen belly, astonishing to observe. And astonishing too the breasts collapsed and flaccid as balloons emptied of air . . . Persia's lovely breasts!
>
> And her skin, coarse, a sickly orangish yellow, even the whites of her eyes jaundiced: the hue of urine.
>
> ********************
>
> Irish Courtney sees. Yet somehow cannot *see* . . . cannot *comprehend*. (257-258)

This lack of comprehension by Iris, this reluctance to see her mother beyond her anger and hatred as both a child of an alcoholic and as a child with unresolved Oedipal tensions, is what inevitably moves Iris into the final stage of castration: the progression into the natural order of femininity.

In the context of Oates's characterization of Iris's progression from childhood to womanhood, Iris enters the third phase of her development during her mother's final days of life at the hospital. Oates symbolizes Iris's entrance into the feminine realm by constructing a physical area beyond the power and authority of men. As the narrator states, "Persia is conscious enough to forbid all male visitors" (258) into her hospital room. It is in this room that the mother-daughter relationship between Persia and Iris blossoms into a solid feminine bond, a bond that is based on Persia's realization that she "failed to be a good mother" and a bond also based on Iris's ability to deny this truthful accusation with deep consolatory words, "Momma, you were a good mother, you always were a good mother," thinking *'Liar, liar, why do you lie*" (259-260).

Like her mother, Iris is unable to face the destructive power of truth. Although Persia demands that Iris promise not to make the same mistakes as her mother, Iris is unable to formulate a tabula rasa of the mind; she is unable to wipe the memories of her mother's former feminine self clean from her consciousness. As an observer rather than as a "see-er," Iris cannot ignore the social emphasis on the necessary femininity of women within the patriarchy. Therefore, when Iris describes her mother to Mrs. Gwendolyn Savage, her wealthy mentor's wife, the difference in Iris Courtney's description of Persia in comparison to the hate-filled journal entries is striking. As the narrator comments,

> the portrait that emerges of Persia Courtney is of a woman of unusual warmth, vitality, and strength of character who chose not to remarry after an early divorce and who was determined to support herself and her daughter without asking favours from relatives at a succession of low-paying jobs . . . a woman who displayed not only extraordinary courage in facing her final illness but who tried to the very end to shield her daughter from guessing the extent of her suffering. (308)

Iris omits the ugly effects of her mother's alcoholism in order to paint a beautiful image of Persia as patriarchy's ideal woman. In essence, her glorified description of Persia becomes an unattainable standard of femininity that Iris attempts to achieve because "Under Mrs. Savage's guidance she is becoming more self-effacing, more feminine" (311). In spite of the fact that Iris is "becoming more career-minded" under Dr. Savage's guidance, she is less apt to challenge Mrs. Savage's authority on the "cyclical tasks of domestic and social life" (311) than to argue against a dogmatic remark by Mrs. Savage's husband. Therefore, Iris's submissiveness to Mrs. Savage establishes the protagonist's position in the feminine realm, a realm that is haunted by her castrated fears of being separated from her mother (330).

With the Savages as new parental role models for Iris, Oates continues to characterize her protagonist in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis. As a more subdued and submissive woman, Iris is willing to become everything the Savages want her to be. In her journal, for instance, she writes: "*What am I but a sort of mirror or reflector for them, beaming back their happiness to them? Magnifying their happiness to them? And do I mind?*" Iris's thoughts do not reflect a momentary inner happiness that she currently experiences but rather reflect her childhood memories of her mother's materialistic happiness during the financial "good times" of Persia's marriage to Duke Courtney. But these "good times" were plagued by Persia's subordination to her husband's masculinist beliefs; and like her mother before her, Iris succumbs to a relationship based on her sexual inferiority. That is, when Iris begins her courtship with Alan Savage, Alan reduces Iris to the level of a sex object: "He says, How beautiful you are, Iris . . . but you must know it. He says, Your face is a Botticelli face . . . but you must know it. He says, I'm very attracted to you . . ." (332). To place herself upon an even higher pedestal of femininity, however, Iris reveals to Alan that she is, at the age of twenty-one, a virgin. In effect, Oates completes her characterization of Iris Courtney by defining her in terms of the ideal (Standardbred) woman; and as in her characterization of Persia, Oates uses her earlier comparison of horses and women in the novel to demonstrate Iris's subjection to objectification by the opposite sex. When Iris tells Alan about her relationship to her father, for example,

> She says, "I don't take after him in any way, people tell me. I take after my mother."
>
> She says, "One thing I do remember about him: he loved horses. Maybe he still does. He had a true love of horses."
>
> "Really!" says Alan Savage. "Saddle horses, or race horses?"
>
> "I guess I don't know. Just horses." (339)

More important, however, is the horse/woman dichotomy that Oates uses to describe Iris's sexual assault by a group of black teenage boys and young men after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. As Iris knowingly walks through a seedy area of Syracuse to return to the University campus, "someone calls, whistles, dances after her" (381). But as she continues to walk several blocks a car with a group of teenage boys and young men pulls up alongside the young woman:

> . . . there's a soft-sliding call, "Hey: you looking for a ride?"
>
> Iris stares at the pavement before her. Murmurs, "No . . . no, thanks."
>
> "Say what, honey? Huhhhhhhhh?" And louder: "You looking for a *ride*?" (382)

The sexual connotation of the word "ride" is obvious, although it is not as explicit as Little Red Garlock's innuendoes toward Iris early on in the novel. But the physical assault by the boys and men completely reduces Iris to the status of a sexual object.

Like the taming of horses to be Standardbred, Iris is tamed by male domination within the patriarchy. As though with an eye on Freud's text, Oates makes sure that Iris is shamed for her genital deficiency as a woman:

> Blackened eyes . . . a bloodied nose . . . a cracked rib . . . bruises and bumps and lacerations . . . clumps of hair torn from her head, and a chipped front tooth . . . kicks to her lower belly, and between the legs -- the assault was "sexual" obviously though not in the most technical sense "rape" since there had been no actual penetration of the vagina. In her early delirium the patient said she didn't think they'd meant to hurt her as much as they had; it was because she'd fought them, resisted. (392)

Iris's resistance to her assailants's sexual assault is her final attempt to avoid her destiny within the feminine realm. But due to her unsuccessful efforts, she is reduced to a state of weakness, a state that prepares her to be a "worthy" wife to Alan. Iris accepts her position in the natural order of femininity. She is willing to set aside her own career aspirations to take on the "responsibilities of a young curator's wife" (393); and, she is willing to accept her status as her husband's "Botticelli" (393) in order to create a sense of financial security for herself. When Alan comments on the lack of happiness brought about by materialistic values, the protagonist's response to Alan's spoken thoughts confirms her direct connection to the natural order of femininity and her inability to comprehend, to *see*, her mother's mistakes:

> "Freud believed that only the delayed gratification of an infantile wish can bring adult happiness; that's why money, material things, rarely bring hap-

> piness . . . they aren't infantile wishes."
>
> Iris Courtney laughs, murmuring, "What remains, then?" (395)

What remains is a young woman whose infantile wish for her mother's love shatters her initial desire to destroy the binary opposition of male domination and female subordination within the patriarchy. Persia belongs in the feminine realm. To be like her mother, Iris must accept a similar position of femininity. Perhaps this desire for destruction, this desire for violence, in Iris is why Oates juxtaposes the image of Red Garlock's dead body at the beginning of the novel with the image of Iris dressing her body for her wedding at the end of the novel. On the one hand, Garlock's death symbolizes the sadistic death of male domination and female subordination. Iris wants to inflict pain on Garlock whose overt display of sexism not only reduces Iris to an objectified state but also gives Iris the desire that Garlock be reduced to a feminized state in death. In death, Garlock becomes a feminized object without a life and without a voice; in death Garlock is reduced to a symbolically feminine non-existence:

> This thing floating in the water amid the river debris and froth with a look delicate as lace, and the goddamned gulls, the garbage birds, flapping and struggling above . . . the head, the human head, the upside-down face, a hand, outstretched fingers, arm caught in a snarl of rusted cables . . . (4)

On the other hand, Iris's decision to marry Alan Savage symbolizes a masochistic submission to the opposite sex. Iris becomes a symbolically dead object floating in the murky waters of matrimony: "icy-hearted, harder than nails, [Iris's] husband will one day say in hurt in outrage in simple bewilderment, Why did you marry me if, why do you insist you love me if?" (377). She does not agree to marry Alan Savage out of love but rather out of a need for financial comfort. Although Iris may be able to emotionally distance herself from her sadistic nature, Iris chooses to become a sexual object; she chooses to become a masochist: *she* subjects *herself* to male domination. Thus, Iris's marriage reconnects the protagonist to Garlock's death. Like Garlock, Iris succumbs to death, a figurative death in which her power and autonomy die within the patriarchal confines of her marriage to Alan Savage. In other words, Iris, like Garlock, dies knowing that she is not the dominant but rather the dominated. In effect, both Iris and Garlock are caught in a dramatic display of masculinity and femininity; their deaths occur as a result of their attempt to "look the part" (405) of the ideal male and the ideal female in the patriarchy, a part that does not alow them to cross the gender boundaries of male domination and female subordination without the fear of social repercussions from the patriarchal status quo.

"Looking the part" is not, however, an important narrative concern for Oates's female protagonist in *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang*. Although her characterization of Madeleine "Maddy" Wirtz follows a pattern similar to that of the Freudian model for female development in *Because It Is Bitter, Because It Is My Heart*, Oates establishes Maddy's psychological development from girlhood to womanhood via Maddy's memories of her own maturation as a young girl into her present-day existence as a fifty year old woman. Like Iris Courtney, the character of Maddy Wirtz is subjected to numerous forms of male domination and female subordination as she attempts to understand her own role as a woman in a patriarchal society. But this subjection to male dominance is, for Maddy "the adult," an on-going process that must be analysed in terms of the character's desire to defy FOXFIRE's motto, "FOXFIRE NEVER LOOKS BACK" (4), and to tell the story of the rise and fall of a girl gang (of which she was a member) during the 1950s, "a time of violence," states the narrator, "against girls and women" (100). In effect, one may argue that Maddy's story, her "confessions" of Foxfire, combines the facts of her position as FOXFIRE's official chronicler, the truths of FOXFIRE's "blood-sisterhood," the truths of FOXFIRE's numerous violent crimes against men, and the truths of FOXFIRE's final days (4) with her own contemporary experiences in order to gain a sense of control and power as a middle-aged woman within the patriarchy. As Oates even suggests, "Maddy is to be trusted utterly by the reader -- she tells the truth, and she is as unsparing of herself as of others. Here is the voice of adolescence -- distrustful of most adults, and of all institutions, for very good reasons" (*Where I've Been, and Where I'm Going* 374).

"The things that link us deepest," Maddy writes, "we can't feel. Except if they're taken from us" (*FCGG* 9). At first glance, Maddy's words seem to signify the emotional loss that she suffers as a result of the disintegration of her FOXFIRE family. But from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, Maddy's words may also reflect her unconscious struggle with her progression from one phase of her castration complex to the next. In fact, one may posit that it is this struggle with her identity and subjectivity as a young woman in a patriarchal society that enables Maddy to participate in violent acts. For this reason, I argue that Oates establishes Maddy's relationship to her mother as one that is based on a disconnection between both mother and daughter: "mostly there was just my mother and me and we hardly talked at all" (5). What is interesting is that this lack of a connection between Maddy and her mother is furthered by Maddy's friendship to Margaret "Legs" Sadovsky because Maddy's mother does not approve of Legs: "that girl's bad news, that girl's a bitch you can see it in her face, don't mess with *her*" (16). Although Maddy's mother seems to show some concern for her daughter, one may suggest that it is her mother's placement within the feminine realm, a realm based on female subordination, that encourages Maddy, like Iris Courtney, to reject her mother as a love object. When, for example, Maddy admires her newly inscribed FOXFIRE tattoo in the bathroom, she is shocked to see her mother walk into the room unannounced; she is shocked by the sight of her mother's face in the mirror, a face with a

> big purplish-orangish black eye as if a giant's fist had walloped her good on the right side of her face so the eye was swollen almost shut and her nose, her nose that was fine-boned and thin now had a pink-poached look to it and the right half of her mouth looked like a sponge soaked in blood. (58)

"oh Momma," Maddy remembers, "I squinted at you, I shrank seeing and not seeing just as you saw my FOXFIRE birthmark and didn't see shrinking away too fumbling with the doorknob murmuring something vague, apologetic, inaudible and slipping away. The two of us. By instinct" (58). This supposedly instinctual movement away from one another[6] creates, what I think is, a separation between mother and daughter that emulates the division of the mother-daughter bond within the female Oedipal complex. Maddy understands that, like her mother, she does not possess power and authority within the patriarchy. When Maddy's uncle Wimpy Wirtz, for instance, owner of "WIRTZ'S MEN'S CLOTHES: a man's place, a place for men" (65), manipulates his own niece and attempts to sexually assault Maddy, Maddy's position as a subordinate is obvious:

> "All right, then, you can have [the typewriter]. I was just kidding."
>
> "I can have it? I can?"
>
> "Not for eight dollars but for five. If --"
>
> "If what?"
>
> Wimpy didn't answer. Something seemed to crinkle, to constrict, painfully in his face.
>
> Maddy repeated doubtfully, "If -- if *what?*"
>
> ************************************
>
> "If you're a good girl."
>
> The words were unnaturally slow, spaced. All the while he was staring at her never once glancing down where, as if inadvertently, he brought her hand against the front of his trousers: against his bulging crotch. (68-69)

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[6] From the point of view of Daly, this movement away from each other is learned within the patriarchy (126).

It is the growing realization that the binary opposition between male domination and female subordination exists within her own life that allows Maddy to disassociate herself from the memories of her dead father; a father who is the blood brother of her uncle Wimpy; a father whom she'd "scarcely known . . . except as someone in uniform, breath smelling of whiskey, quarrels in the house" (65); a father whose physical death reduces Maddy's mother to a state of emotional crisis in which she suffers a nervous breakdown (120) and is unable to provide proper care to her teenage daughter. It is the knowledge that in death, Maddy's father still has, and will forever have, the ability to maintain his dominance and control over his wife ("her good looks gone and half her teeth rotted out of her head . . ." [208-209]) that encourages Maddy to reject her mother as a love object; a mother who does not possess the phallic power of the penis. By not having what she wants, by not having what her mother lacks, Maddy moves into the second phase of the castration complex; that is, Maddy rejects her mother as a love-object to experience the unfamiliar feeling of masculine power and autonomy within the patriarchy. In effect, Oates juxtaposes Maddy's refusal to be a "good girl" for her uncle with the intentions of being a "bad girl" for the betterment of FOXFIRE's sisterhood and to improve their freedom as independent women.

Oates allows Maddy to project her adult desire for violence via Maddy's descriptive narrative of her girlhood relationship to Legs Sadovsky and the FOXFIRE gang. This relationship is a key aspect of Maddy's masculinity complex because Legs and her FOXFIRE cohorts hate men. As Maddy writes, "Yes we committed what you would call *crimes*. And most of these went not only unpunished but unacknowledged -- our victims, all male, were too ashamed, or too cowardly, to come forward to complain" (4). But it is through her association with Legs that Maddy discovers an inner strength that enables her to gain autonomy and power as a female in a patriarchal society. In fact, Oates seems to develop a matriarchal society based on Legs's leadership as an oppositional force against the existing power structures of the patriarchy in order to grant women a forum or place to expound their needs for community among members of their own sex. When, for example, the founding members of FOXFIRE initiate one another into the gang, what begins as a "tattoo ritual" amongst the girls escalates into a blood-smearing naked frenzy that unites each individual to her FOXFIRE companions:

> Partly undressed, giddy and excited, they clutched at one another: the crosses around their necks collided, clattered. A single swooning fall gripped them. A ringing of distant church bells grew louder. There was a drunken joy to the flickering candle flames. So long restrained by the gravity of the strange ritual through which Legs had led them Goldie who was "Boom-Boom" now broke loose, hugging the others one by one to smear her blood against theirs her braying laughter rising and contagious so suddenly they were all laughing shrilly . . . (42)

So suddenly the girls entwine themselves in sexual foreplay: kissing and nibbling each other's breasts and necks as each girl engages herself in the symbolic birth of FOXFIRE. Oates, however, seems to play on the notion of Church rituals to mock the religious emphasis placed on masculinity and femininity, masculinity being the ideal representation of God as the ultimate patriarch and femininity representing the standard perception of women as the subordinate and submissive female followers of their Lord/lords. Oates, for instance, subverts the biblical story of the Fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden by combining the images of crosses colliding and clattering around the girls' necks and distant church bells ringing louder and louder with the single image of the entire group succumbing to a "swooning fall" (42). The group mentality among the girls, the idea of falling together, not only disrupts the archetypal/patriarchal image of Eve as the temptress of men but it also emphasizes Eve's role as the mother of all women. In essence, the initiation ritual for the FOXFIRE gang relies on the concept of being connected with one's sisters through pain and blood rather than with one's mother. Like Eve, condemned by God to a life of pain and suffering during childbirth (Genesis), the FOXFIRE initiates must perform a symbolic ritual of their foremother's fall from grace to become a sister within the matriarchal society of FOXFIRE's girl-gang. In effect, I think that Oates creates a connection between Eve and the FOXFIRE gang so that the ideological assumptions about femininity by women like Maddy's mother are destroyed and replaced by a desire for female violence against the patriarchy.

But this desire for violence by FOXFIRE is inspired by Legs Sadovsky's personal relationship with two men: Father Theriault, an old and alcoholic ex-priest, and her ostensible biological father, Ab Sadovsky. Unlike Maddy, Legs has two male role models as a replacement for her dead mother. Each man, however, represents one half of the division between the feminine and masculine realms within the patriarchy.

Oates, for example, associates Father Theriault's lack of power and authority in the Church and in society with women's oppression. In fact, it is Father Theriault's role as a Marxist that allows Legs to articulate hatred and anger toward men: "'First comes fear, then respect' as Father Theriault says. 'The oppressed of the Earth, rising, make their own law'" (83). Father Theriault's association with the lower class symbolically places him in the feminine realm where his own oppression and subordination as a drunken ex-priest allows him to freely express himself. In trying to maintain her position in the masculinity complex, however, Legs imitates Father Theriault's own desire for power and autonomy. But when she climbs the old water tower in front of a crowd of drunken "Others"(87), she rises above Father Theriault's feminized existence in the patriarchy:

> Now unbelievably she's sixty feet above the ground approaching the walkway from beneath and climbing more hesitantly now, or is it more thoughtfully as the weight of that very height lies heavily upon her narrow shoulders and the wonder is almost audible -- is she? isn't she? *is* she? Going to make it to the top of the water tower and win the seventy-five dollars? going to fall, and die? and where are the police? and where is her father? (86)

The reference to men as "Others" is also a wonderful example of a feminist appropriation of Marxist theory. Oates reveals interests by Legs that are similar to those of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in which de Beauvoir argues that women, as oppressed objects, become the Other to men: "The subject can be posed only in being opposed -- he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object" (xvii). Furthermore, "[Woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute -- she is the Other . . . [and] Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought" (xvi-xvii). What Oates does, however, is invert the de Beauvoirian concept of Otherness as Woman to Otherness as Man within the contextual framework of FOXFIRE's matriarchy as a result, impressing the crowd of mostly drunken Others (men) as Legs successfully climbs the phallic representation of masculine power and dominance (the tower) which is reduced, in her heart, to a minor matter. In climbing the tower, Legs defies the "patriarchal Law of the Fathers" (Farr 108). She defies the unspoken law of men to move beyond the feminine realm (to which Father Theriault belongs) and move into the masculine realm of her biological father. Legs chooses to define her own femininity and her own idea of womanhood rather than exist as an object within the patriarchy. Furthermore, it is this refusal of the standard process of male objectification of the female sex that also leads the entire FOXFIRE gang into a common belief system that the oppressed of the world must be set free from the ties that bind their bodies and their minds.

What is fascinating about Oates's notion of women's oppression in the novel is how she compares the oppression of women to the oppression of animals. When, for example, Maddy "the adolescent" chronicles the events at TYNE PETS & SUPPLIES (88-89), Oates creates a parallel between two images: the image of a half dozen sick-looking dogs crammed into undersized cages and the image of Maddy and Legs being caged in like animals:

> I believe I must have dreamt of the dogs in the cages because one night in the middle of the night I woke frightened and breathless, I was being suffocated I was being shut in tight inside something getting tighter like bars or that story of Edgar Allen Poe that'd made such a deep impression on me, "The Pit and the Pendulum"-- nowhere to go that isn't Death.
>
> Legs said she'd dreamt of the dogs too. Or something, in cages. Maybe *her*. (89-90)

In his essay "On Dreams," Freud argues that dreams are "a sort of *substitute* for the thought processes" (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud v. 1,* 88) in which the act of wish-fulfilment occurs (Ibid, 90). As Freud continues,

> Dreams fall into three classes according to their attitude to wish-fulfilment. The first class consists of those which represent an unrepressed wish undisguisedly; these are the dreams of an infantile type which become ever rarer in adults. Secondly, there are dreams which express a repressed wish disguisedly; these no doubt form the overwhelming majority of all our dreams, and require analysis before they can be understood. In the third place there are the dreams which represent a repressed wish, but do so with insufficient or no disguise. These last dreams are invariably accompanied by anxiety, which interrupts them. (Ibid, 115-116)

Oates uses the third class of dreams in Freudian thought to create an obvious connection between Maddy's and Legs's dreams and the animals in TYNE'S PET & SUPPLIES. That is, the oppressive cages which both Maddy and Legs unconsciously dream about parallel the miserable existence of the dogs in the pet store. Like their animal counterparts, Maddy and Legs are simultaneously trapped within a patriarchal cage of oppression that confines all girls and all women to a comatose and listless feminine way of life. The anxiety that interrupts their dream of caged confinement reflects the internalized patriarchal repression of desire to escape the patriarchal status quo. As Maddy reiterates Legs's anti-masculinist sentiments: "It's a state of undeclared war, them hating us, men hating us no matter our age or who the hell we are but nobody wants to admit it, not even *us*" (101).

Maddy's FOXFIRE confessions are a form of wish fulfilment. In writing, Maddy can break free from her cage of femininity via her ability to live vicariously through Legs's desire for female emancipation; and, it is this inner desire for freedom by Legs that empowers her to espouse a masculinized sense of violence against men that is based on her emotional and physical strength to overcome male domination. As an inmate at Red Bank, for example, Legs dreams of violent images:

> There's John Dillinger lying in the street riddled with bullets bleeding to death, shot in the back by cowards till he's transformed to meat, Legs stoops over him touching him her finger in his blood then both her hands, the palms of her hands, covered in blood.
>
> The danger was *she* might be next: shot down too in a hail of bullets, thrashing and dying on the pavement.

> Standing there erect, purposeful: waiting?

> Another dream and she's back at Perry in the parking lot running with her switchblade knife in her hand, blade gleaming bold in the sun and her FOX-FIRE sisters awaiting her and this time she plunges the blade into Vinnie Roper's throat, doesn't spare him 'cause nobody's sparing *her*. (147)

Legs's two dreams foreshadow the conclusion of Maddy's confessions. Each dream represents Legs's involvement in the wounding of Mr. Kellogg and the eventual destruction of the FOXFIRE HOMESTEAD and the FOXFIRE gang.

The irony, of course, is that Legs's need for freedom is hampered by her own father's vicious slander against his only daughter in Juvenile Court when Legs and some of the Foxfire gang members are charged with stealing a car after they are expelled from school for fighting a rival all boy gang: "They asked Ab Sadovsky was his daughter involved with drugs? -- was she a gang member? -- was she 'promiscuous'? -- and that traitor stood silent chin creased against his neck as he stared at his shoes like he couldn't bring himself to answer" (133). For Legs and for Maddy, Ab Sadovsky is a traitor. He manipulates Legs's life by using his male dominance and authority to imprison his own daughter. As Maddy angrily writes,

> Ab Sadovsky! -- with his reputation everywhere in Lowertown for his bad temper, crazy-quick temper, propensity for fighting, drinking drinking drinking and problems with women and employers . . . shows up in Juvenile court with Legs but hardly looking at her like he's wounded with shame and

> hurt, he's stone cold sober and clean-shaven and even wearing a suit and tie Legs said she hadn't seen on him since one of his drinking buddies died five years before and he'd gone to the funeral in that suit and disappeared for three days winding up finally in the county drunk tank so she had to go down and bail him out, and he's talking quiet-like to Oldacker "admitting" he can't handle his daughter any longer she's out of control like so many kids these days and maybe if he'd remarried after her mother had died things would be different . . . (132)

In analysing the text from a Freudian perspective, I think that Oates makes Ab Sadovsky's treacherous transformation from drunken and abusive father to ideal citizen a symbolic moment in which Legs is rejected by her father from the masculine realm and confronted by her mother's (Gloria Mason's) position in the feminine realm. Ab tries to convince his daughter that his mother was the ideal woman: "I'm serious," he states to Legs, "she was that good-looking and she knew how to carry herself like a woman should,"

> not . . . like *you* -- [you] could be a real knock out but *look* -- acting like a damn boy, dressing like a boy when you could, every chance, how d' you expect any guy to give a damn about you behaving so rough, it's a weird laugh how a daughter of Gloria Mason's acts like *you*, calling yourself 'Legs' acting like a fucking guy . . . (158)

Ab reveals his wife's status as a sexual object in the patriarchy. He initially tells Legs that her mother wanted to have an abortion when she discovered that she was pregnant but approached Ab for marriage when the illegal abortive procedure caused her severe amounts of pain and bleeding. With no other options but to have the child, Gloria professed her undying love for Ab who agreed to marry Legs's mother in spite of the fact that the baby may or may not have been his child: "I was keeping track better than your mother" who was an alcoholic and had "other guys hot for her" (159). Ab then tells his daughter that her mother died of kidney failure due to alcoholism ten years after Legs's birth.

The intrusion by Ab Sadovsky into the female correctional facility at Red Bank places Ab's masculine persona in direct relation to the masculine persona of his daughter but also forces his daughter to confront her mother's feminine persona to emphasize Legs's reluctance to be an active participant in female subordination. As in the case of Persia and Iris Courtney in *Because It Is Bitter, Because It Is My Heart*, Legs's mother's sexual submissiveness, apparent alcoholism, and complete dependence on men encourage her daughter to remain celibate and to rely on herself for survival. But, for Legs, female survival in the patriarchy depends on one's ability to oscillate between both gender realms.

This oscillation, in Freudian terms, represents a psychical bisexuality -- a mental inversion of masculine and feminine traits within male and female subjects (*NILP* 147). For Freud, psychological bisexuality is prevalent in women in the phallic phase of development where the little girl is recognized as a little man (*NILP* 151). In "the course of some women's lives there is a repeated alternation between periods in which masculinity or femininity gains the upper hand . . . [and] this [is an] expression of bisexuality in women's lives" (*NILP* 165). For example, while Legs is incarcerated at Red Bank, she must become the ideal female prisoner in order to return to the patriarchal society from whence she came. As a result, Legs transforms herself from the disobedient rough-and-tumble leader of FOXFIRE into a popular trusty with the prison's officials who helps teach her "near-illiterate sisters to read and write; [who] helps organize softball, volleyball, basketball games; [who] assists in the 'personal hygienics' and 'cosmetology' classes;" and who also sings in the Sunday choir,"her hoarse alto veering flat but loud, optimistic, determined" (174). But as the reader soon realizes, Legs is "*Never gonna take any shit from anybody again*" (174). Like her "father," Legs Sadovsky is capable of transforming herself into what "Others" think she is supposed to be; she is capable of manipulating people to be in control of her self. Even when she is abused by the female guards, abuse that she is unable to understand ("why's a girl gotta thumb you in the eye? -- somebody enough like you you could be twins, except for the face?" [192]), Legs's desire for freedom from the feminine realm of oppression and freedom from the emotional cage Ab Sadovsky tries to confine her to is achieved by continuing to maintain an active masculinity complex. Legs cuts her hair short; she works for Parks and Recreation with men because "with her father gone she damn well needed a job to support herself and live independently of all adult intervention" (196); she rents FOXFIRE HOMESTEAD where all of Foxfire's members may live; and, she buys a car.

The significance of Legs's apparent psychical bisexuality is that she upholds an active subjectivity and identity in both the masculine and feminine realms that Maddy is unable to achieve. On one level, Legs assumes an active and a masculine role in the patriarchy:

> Legs in a sleeveless chartreuse cotton jersey fitting tight enough so the vertebrae of her backbone and her hard little low-slung black pants and a belt of silver medallions someone at Red Bank (one of the guards?) Gave her as a going-home gift, there's something aggressive and sexual in just the way Legs stands, hip bone and pelvis tilted, stomach so flat as to be almost concave thus the mound between her legs subtly prominent, and her eyes so dilated as to be black with pupil -- *They're right, she's dangerous.* (190-191)

"They," as Maddy refers to them, are the adults, the courts, the entire patriarchal system that incarcerates Legs at Red Bank and decides to set her free; and it is this freedom that terrifies Maddy. As "Maddy thinks, [Legs] knows things I don't know, now. What kinds of things precisely, how cruel how brutal how intimate how carnal, Maddy doesn't want to speculate" (187). In essence, Maddy is no longer Legs Sadovsky's equal. She is unable to share in Legs's deep hatred for the patriarchy. As a result, the lack of equality between Maddy and Legs reduces Maddy to a more feminine realm.

But this movement into the natural order of femininity by Maddy is also a movement that is reflected in FOXFIRE's eventual demise. Legs attempts to use women's status as sexual objects in the patriarchy as a tool for their potential rise above the Law of the Fathers. In fact, Legs formulates a sadistic plan against men that involves the subjection of her girl gang members to "hooking" (230-231). But this subjection becomes both a sadistic and masochistic pleasure for the girls. Not only do the girls gain a sadistic sense of freedom by manipulating men and stealing men's money; they also enjoy the masochistic role of being female victims to male domination. As Violet Kahn tells her FOXFIRE sisters,

> ". . . What I did, I didn't do *anything*. I mean I was ready to, y'know like the last time, start undressing the son of a bitch or something y'know like just unbuttoning his shirt maybe, but it turned out I got lucky I didn't need to do even that, he got scared *I mean real scared* so fast . . . in the bathroom I messed up my hair and undid my jacket so it's falling off my shoulder just about, and I'm crying loud, I'm crying so I can't hardly stop which is what happens when I start . . . anyway Bradley says, 'Oh my God, Veronica, what's wrong?' and I'm half-screaming backing away from him saying please don't hurt me, oh please I'm only fifteen years old I don't want to be here . . . and Bradley's so scared I think he's gonna faint or have a heart attack or something 'cause everything changed so fast . . . so sure he buys me off . . . *two hundred and seventy-seven dollars*. And no income tax!" (235)

As the masculine leader of the girl gang, Legs assumes a 'pimp-like' persona and places her sisters in the feminine realm of the patriarchy, a realm of female objectification that was once occupied by her own mother; and when Maddy's turn for "hooking" arrives, when she finds herself walking beside Chick Mallick (her potential victim), the demarcation of male domination and female subordination between Legs and Maddy continues to divide the two characters. Maddy begins to think "of her mother who'd hugged her fiercely once, kissed and kissed and kissed as if to take her breath away, years ago, a mother and her very small daughter, and no words" (244); Maddy begins to think "of her father who might be there overhead in the moon, veiled by gossamer-thin clouds" (244). It is this memory of her parents, this memory of her mother's presence and her father's absence in her life, that enables Maddy to physically disengage herself from FOXFIRE's violent crimes against men and return to the natural order of femininity:

> *Since "Chick Mallick." Since that terrible night. I was afraid of you I guess. You saved my life but I was afraid of you having seen you hit him the way you did.*
>
> *And the others. My sisters. So wild, frenzied. Striking with fists, boots. Slamming him with lengths of iron pipe, anything they could snatch up from the ground.*
>
> *Like Uncle Wimpy, years ago. Except this time it's serious.*
>
> *A fierce gleeful FIRE rippling through you, my sisters, but not through me.* (253-254)

Maddy "the adolescent" does not seem to be a masochist. That is, she does not find satisfaction or excitement in being the masochist or sadist of violence. So why does Maddy "the adult," the author of the FOXFIRE's confessions, write a memoir about female violence? The act of writing from the perspective of an adult releases Maddy's suppressed desire for violence; a "suppression of women's aggressiveness which," for Freud, " is prescribed for [women] constitutionally and imposed on them socially [to] favour the development of powerful masochistic impulses, which succeed, as we know, in binding erotically the destructive trends which have been diverted inwards. Thus," as Freud argues, "masochism, as people say, is truly feminine" (*NILP* 149); and femininity, for Maddy, is a fact of life. If "you're a young girl or a woman you're *female* and that isn't going to change" (101). Maddy's girlhood decision to leave FOXFIRE results in her development into womanhood outside of FOXFIRE's matriarchy and inside the ever-present patriarchy. In essence, Maddy "the adult" is a masochist; to exist in the patriarchy as a woman, Maddy must unfortunately exist as a sexual object; she must suppress her desire for violence; and she must accept her identity and subjectivity within the feminine realm to find happiness outside of the FOXFIRE matriarchy.

Ingrid Boone is another example of a female protagonist whose development from girlhood to womanhood is plagued by a sadomasochistic desire for violence. This desire, however, is significantly different from Oates's characterizations of the desires of Iris Courtney and Maddy Wirtz. The sadomasochism, the physical and emotional violence Ingrid Boone is subject to, is marked by Oates as more intense as a result of Ingrid's more intense psychological struggles with not being her father's one and only love-object:

> The way then Daddy looked at Momma who was leaning against the sink regarding him with her hurt, impassioned eyes -- Daddy with his angry-looking bruised eye and cut face, the smile draining from his lips -- not even

> needing to touch each other. *If a man would ever look at me like that.* (86)

The progression of Ingrid's development from the initial phase of the castration complex to the final phase, upon which she enters the natural order of femininity in the novel, occurs rather quickly. Oates seems to dwell on the secondary phase, the masculinity complex, as the most important period of violence in Ingrid's life. Although the novel begins with Ingrid as a young child of four (a time when Freud sees girls and boys entering the Oedipal phase of development), and although Oates informs her readers about the growing hostility between Ingrid and her mother (Chloe) early on in the plot ("Momma," [Ingrid] whispered. "Momma, I hate you" [22]), it is the absence of Lucas Boone, Ingrid's father, and the objectification of Chloe by her husband, that convinces Ingrid to reject her mother as a love-object and turn toward her father for consolation: "A tickle between my legs in that soft secret sliver of flesh between my legs I had no name for, sharp and sudden. Remembering that gun that fitted in my daddy's hand. That, other times, I forgot" (78).

In fact, I argue that Oates emphasizes Lucas Boone's absence in the narrative in the context of a binary opposition between the concepts of visibility and invisibility to establish a psychic motive for Ingrid's decline into psychological darkness. For example, in the first chapter of the novel entitled "Ghost Girls," four-year-old Ingrid encounters the ghosts of two little girls under the porch of a house as she hides from her mother's calls. What the reader discovers is that these two "ghost girls" were killed by their father (29) and when young Ingrid sees the "sisters crouched together in each other's arms," she whispers "I'm an alive girl . . . I'm an alive girl not like you"

(30). In terms of Freudian theory, the killing of the girls by their father symbolizes the girls' castration (punishment) by their father for incestuous desires. For Freud, "little girl[s] like to regard [themselves]as what [their] father[s] love above all else; but the time comes when [they] ha[ve] to endure a harsh punishment from [their fathers] and [the girls are] cast out of [their] fool's paradise" (*TSECPWSF v. 1* 395). But Ingrid's status as an "alive-girl" reveals that she has yet to be punished by her father for her incestuous desires. Thus, Oates also plays on the notion of childhood innocence as a method of rendering the invisible visible; and, it is through Ingrid's eyes that the truth of the two sisters' deaths is revealed. More importantly, however, it is Ingrid's ability to see what cannot be seen by others that allows her to formulate a strong connection with her absent father who defines himself as "the invisible man . . . just passing through" when he secretly meets with his daughter (65). This ghost-like quality in Lucas, this ability to be seen and to not be seen, becomes a standard model by which Ingrid begins to structure her own life. She desires to be loved by her father, a father whose absent presence dominates his daughter's life to such an extent that Ingrid is unable to overcome male domination but rather knowingly and masochistically succumbs to its most unthinkable sadistic forms to demonstrate her love for her father.

For Ingrid, this demonstration of daughterly love for her father becomes a process by which she must reject the visible realm of her mother, a realm where Ingrid's life is scrutinized by Chloe's watchful eye:

> [Joey] and his brother Floyd I knew from school and from the bus we all had to take into town and back. The boys' mouth grinning, the words that flew from

> those mouths were *fuck, fucker, shit, cocksucker, suck, it sucks, it all sucks,* and I would shape these words with my lips but never dared utter them aloud even to myself. Momma knew Joey's and Floyd's aunt but warned me to stay away from them, especially don't let them get you alone Momma said. No telling what kids like that might do.
>
> Promise? Momma said holding my shoulders, stooping to peer into my eyes like she was trying to look into the future and I said, Yes Momma I promise. (37)

But Ingrid's girlhood promise to her mother is based on a lie that Chloe is unable to "see." Like the invisible force of the wind that "can knock you on your ass quick enough" (50), Ingrid's unconscious desire to have her father as a love-object depends on her ability to become a love-object in the masculine realm where the eyes of boys and men are all that matter (105) and where Ingrid's desire to be loved by her father is reflected in her sexual exploits with the opposite sex:

> Kirk was gentle, saying *Ingrid? -- let's go in the backseat O.K.?* And I saw how big his penis was, big for *me*, I was proud how big it was for *me*, and I was sleepy and sort of sickish saying *Gee I don't know, maybe I should go back home?* and Kirk said *But honey I love you, I'm crazy about you* . . . (132)

In effect, Ingrid rejects her mother's warnings and thereby accepts her mother's position as a sexual object in the patriarchy so that she in turn becomes a sexual object in the eyes of her father ("I basked in Momma's touch, and in Daddy so close, seeing"

[90]). Ingrid becomes what her father symbolically represents to his daughter; she becomes an object of love.

But this subjection to the objectification of the female sex by the male sex is what establishes Oates's characterization of Ingrid as a fascinating example of Freud's theory of the female castration complex. In rejecting her mother as her love-object, Ingrid moves into the masculinity complex where Ingrid attempts to formulate a bond with her father. To do so, however, Ingrid must emulate her mother's role as a sex object for men. This unconscious rejection/acceptance of Chloe by Ingrid occurs as a result of Ingrid's desire for the phallic power of her father's penis but also because Ingrid is unable to understand the pseudo-feminist motive for Chloe's numerous relationships with men. Ingrid cannot grasp the notion that her mother subjects herself to male domination in order to supplement her working-class income and provide her and her daughter with a better way of life. As a result, Ingrid assumes that her mother simply needs to feel loved by men, a love that replaces the absent love of Chloe's husband, and a love that blinds Chloe to her responsibilities as a "good" role model for her daughter. In essence, Chloe, like the motherly characters of Persia Courtney and Mrs. Wirtz, ignores the visible signs of her daughter's withdrawal from the feminine realm. As Ingrid states, "Mother wasn't watching me at all, she had her own life I didn't give a shit for" (140).

Ingrid's hostility toward her mother, however, also stems from her father's condemnation of Chloe as a "bad influence" on his daughter: "He was looking at me, and he was smiling . . . seeing Momma cry this time I was crying, too . . . Daddy said, scolding, 'Look at her. You're a bad influence, Chloe'" (92). The irony, of course, is that it is Lucas Boone's ability to be invisible, it is his ability to remain as an absent presence in the lives of his wife and daughter, that not only encourages Chloe to dress provocatively and "find a man" to take care of her and Ingrid, but also influences Ingrid to hate her mother. Unlike her mother's, Ingrid's sexual relationships with men remain secretive and invisible from Chloe's eyes: "My boyfriends were kept secret from Mother out of spite not wanting her to know *Guys love me too -- not just you*" (138). Ingrid refuses to tell her mother about her boyfriends. She wants to belong to the invisible realm of her father. Thus, Ingrid relies on her secretive bond with her father (72) rather than with her mother ("Youd' think [our secret] would draw us closer, but no. That was the wedge splitting us apart" [115]) to disengage herself from her mother's lack of phallic power and search for consolation in the phallic realm of her father.

As in her characterizations of Persia Courtney and Mrs. Wirtz, Oates characterizes Chloe Boone as an alcoholic mother. For all three, alcoholism seems to be a coping mechanism within patriarchy; it is a way in which the female characters are able to continue their existence as the subordinates of men. When, for example, Lucas Boone sends his wife photographic images of a former lover's dead and mutilated body (106-107), Chloe turns to alcohol and men as her emotional support system. The irony, however, is that in repeatedly telling her daughter to ignore the photographs, "You never saw anything, Ingrid. You never saw anything. *You never saw anything*" (108), Chloe places an emphasis on the necessary invisibility in the masculine realm of her husband. Not only does the death of Maynard Zink (Chloe's lover) signify the death of this man's visibility in society; it also confirms the power that Lucas Boone has over his wife and daughter outside of the feminine realm. Although Lucas may be invisible to Chloe, he is, like the ghost girls, visible to his daughter's unconscious mind. As Ingrid states, "*you can't keep him out*" (125-126). Therefore, in spite of Ingrid's ability to not think of her father "who was no longer Daddy but had no name" (125), Lucas Boone's absent presence forever haunts Ingrid's life: "Crazy for men they say it's really your own daddy you seek. I hope this is so," Ingrid answers, "maybe someday I'll find him" (175).

I think Oates develops Ingrid's psychological search for her father in terms of the protagonist's willingness to define herself within the patriarchal language of her male admirers. For example, in a chapter entitled "Easy Lay," Ingrid is called "*Doll-girl*" by boys in her class, "popular juniors and seniors, and even athletes" (121). One may posit that Oates uses Ingrid's nickname as another example of the objectification of women by men in the patriarchy. The association of a woman with a doll suggests that the woman is simply a toy, an object that may be used for play. Thus, Ingrid is named "*Doll-girl*" because her popular status in school derives from her role as a "boy-toy": "*Doll-girl, do me, huh? You know how? Don't play dumb*" (128). But Ingrid's sexual exploits that inspire her male peers to name her in such a derogatory manner stem from her need to be loved by her father; to be lifted into her father's arms "So strong! -- so tall!"; to be like a "little girl again, lifted toward the ceiling, squealing as if [she is] being tickled" (92). Oates, therefore, reveals an invisible bond between Ingrid and her father through Ingrid's sexually expressive need for fatherly love:

> But the kissing was so sweet, even the openmouthed kissing so sweet some times, and a guy's strong hands cradling your head, stroking your hair, gazing at you close-up like a lover on TV or in the movies like you *exist*, you are *there*. But sometimes the hands were hurtful, and the guy too drunk and you're not smashed enough not to be scared, and running stumbling sobbing and puking beer across a snowy debris-littered field to the rear of a neighbour's house and so through to Mohawk Street and back home where Momma was not waiting anyway. (128)

The contrast in Ingrid's sexual experiences demonstrates how Oates uses the binary opposition of visibility and invisibility as symbolic signifiers of both the feminine and masculine realms within the patriarchy. On the one hand, Ingrid feels like she "*exists*" in the feminine realm of her mother, like she is "*there,*" like she is "an alive girl" (30), when her male sex partners are gentle, loving, and caring. On the other hand, however, Ingrid succumbs to a state of invisibility when she becomes a victim of sexual violence at the hands of her male oppressors; and it is this oppression by men that allows Ingrid to re-live the girlhood bond that she has with her father. Like her mother, Ingrid is trying to become Lucas Boone's love-object. When Ingrid reveals the tumultuous and violent relationships she has with the opposite sex, these relationships mirror the oscillating dichotomy of the love/hate binary opposition between her parents.

To be accepted in the masculine realm, Ingrid must completely disconnect herself from her mother and be elevated to a level of invisibility like her father, for to be invisible is to be an empowered subject in the patriarchy. Enter Enoch Skaggs - a leader of a satanic cult who identifies Ingrid as "*Dog-girl*" and establishes a new identity for Ingrid within the masculine realm of her father, an identity based on the notion of ownership. As Ingrid reveals, "Enoch Skaggs named me *Dog-girl*. For my doggy-brown, shiny-brown eyes so needful. So hopeful. For my shivering when touched. For the love welling in me so eager to be spilled" (208).[7] For Enoch, all of Ingrid's past must be erased. All of her ties and her memories must be forgotten (208) so that Ingrid may become one of Satan's Children. What is important to note is that these memories and ties, this past that must be erased, is the past between Ingrid and *both* of her parents: "My mother, I had lost contact with. I never thought of her. I didn't know where she was living. Had she gotten married again. Had she ever gotten divorced from my father. If my father was alive, or dead . . . I never thought of it" (207). Ingrid does not think of either of her parents. In her mind when she is "Dog-girl of Satan's Children all [her] strength [is] required for [her] to be in a single place at a single time"(207). In other words, Ingrid believes that her mind does not harbour any memories worth thinking about. She displaces the memories of her father onto Enoch Skaggs who symbolically represents Lucas Boone, the "narcissistic ideal of the man whom [Ingrid] had wished to become" (*NILP* 164). Thus, the substitution of Skaggs for Ingrid's father is a parody of the Freudian moment of successful

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[7] There is not much difference in the pronounciation between doll-girl and dog-girl. One may argue that this commonality between the two nicknames is Oates's way of suggesting

Oedipalization. As Freud argues, "If the girl has remained in her attachment to her father - that is, in the Oedipus complex - her choice is made according to the paternal type" (*NILP* 164). In fact, it is Ingrid's need for love by Lucas Boone that allows her to subject herself to Enoch's violent punishment for not kidnapping an innocent female victim from a mall parking lot (187). As Ingrid notes, "It's the men who treat you like shit you're crazy for. For only they can tell you your punishment is just" (224).

Ingrid's punishment by Enoch Skaggs becomes a medley of violent images in the novel that illustrates Ingrid's potential destination within the masculine realm, the ultimate state of invisibility, the state of death. In death, Ingrid's visible subjectivity and identity as a woman are destroyed. Not only is Ingrid raped by Enoch; she is forced to drink blood from the heart of a murdered cult member (223) who had also raped her ("*I wasn't sorry Gem was dead. When he fucked me, he hurt me. His crotch stank worse than his feet*" [224]); she is branded with a tattoo of a large X that signifies that she is now marked for death (227); she is ordered to live in the earthen cellar of the cult's house where she is continuously raped by other gang members (238); and finally, Ingrid begins to hallucinate; she envisions Gayellen Cruse, the woman she was suppose to have kidnapped for Enoch, crouched in the corner of the cellar:

> And there crouched in a corner of the cellar the girl from the shopping centre, the plumpish girl with her hair tied back in a ponytail *Gail Ellen* or was it *Gayellen* my friend in school one of my closes friends regarding me with aston-

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that treating women as dolls or dogs is a distinction without a difference.

> ished eyes. Eyes of horror, and of hurt. Knowing herself betrayed for this time I called to her, I spoke softly and cajolingly to her and did not drive her away to save herself but helped to overpower her, helped the guys to grab her with their quick hard hands, lifting, dragging into the rear of the van, a hand over her mouth to muffle the screams, helping to bind wrists and ankles with the wire, the terrible wire cutting into her babysoft skin I was crying *Damn dumb bitch! Cunt! This is what you deserve!* (237)

In an astute fashion, Oates allows Ingrid to express her underlying desire for violence inside the masculine realm of her father at the same time that she is subjected to male domination. Ingrid is like her mother; she is both a love-object and a sex-object. In effect, Ingrid symbolically represents the murderous father of the two ghost-girl sisters from her childhood; she is reduced to a darkened mental state, a spiritual nothingness, that allows her to wish violence upon members of her own sex. Ingrid and her father are now one and the same.

Like Iris Courtney and Maddy Wirtz, however, Ingrid Boone also returns to the natural order of femininity. This return occurs when Ingrid begins to see her mother's face while she is still imprisoned in Enoch Skaggs's earthen cellar (240). Ingrid's hallucinations of violence against Gayellen Cruse are replaced by her childhood memory of hiding from her mother under a porch. Ingrid is no longer Dog-girl but rather a child "hearing her [mother's] footsteps quick and light above [her] head . . . [listening to her mother's] bemused exasperation *Ingrid honey where are you? C'mon don't be a bad girl you know your momma loves you, and your daddy*" (240). It is this hallucination that convinces Ingrid to escape her prison (247); it is the childhood memory of her mother and the absence of her father that returns Ingrid to the realm of the living, to her mother's feminine realm where Chloe continues to exist as a subordinate to male domination. When, for instance, Ingrid visits her mother at the end of the novel, Ingrid is shocked to find at the rear of her mother's house a shrine dedicated to the memory of her father:

> I stood staring, in silence staring at the things displayed on windowsills, a bureau, a table . . . My mind was rushing, my thoughts flew too fast to be comprehended. There was a roaring in my ears . . . I stood in silence blinking and staring at these things, the evidence of Mother's love, Mother's madness, not knowing what to say. She told me I was the first person, I would be the only person ever to be allowed in here. She told me it not because I was her daughter but I was his daughter, and he'd loved me so. He'd loved her, and he'd loved me. So much. Not like any ordinary man. (270)

Chloe's shrine to her absent husband reveals an historical association with the past that Ingrid has been searching for throughout her entire psychological journey. It is this shrine to Lucas Boone that becomes a symbol of what the feminine realm represents. Each object that belongs to Chloe's husband and Ingrid's father reminds both women of his absent presence in both of their lives. Although Ingrid and her mother maintain their subordinate position as sexual objects in the patriarchy, Oates re-establishes their mother-daughter bond via the concrete evidence of Lucas Boone's existence, consisting of the objects from his past. I think it is this objectification of her father's life, this reduction of Lucas Boone's past to the status of insignificant "things," that allows Ingrid to accept her own existence as an object in her father's patriarchal world:

> I saw things, people and objects both with a strange clarity. Like light radiated outward from them. Their weight, substance. If I touched, texture. I saw that these objects inhabited space and wasn't that proof that I too inhabited space, I *existed*, I *exist*, and I *am*. Wasn't Ingrid Boone alive too, wasn't Ingrid Boone *here*? It did not seem to matter what was *inanimate, animate* -- there was consciousness in everything. (268)

In contrast to Ingrid's former belief that her existence depends on the love of her father (128), Ingrid now realizes that her existence is one based on her own ability to accept her status as an object in the patriarchy. As Ingrid states, "The way it has to be is to know you exist even when you're not in pain . . ." (271); to exist outside of the unconscious desires to live in the masculine realm of the father.

The development from girlhood to womanhood of Iris Courtney in *Because It Is Bitter, Because It Is My Heart*, Maddy Wirtz in *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl-Gang*, and Ingrid Boone in *Man Crazy* follows a similar pattern in terms of the mother-daughter relationships and how these relationships create a desire for violence in the protagonists. Each protagonist, for example, struggles with her subjectivity and identity as a female in the patriarchy; each protagonist wants to escape the feminine realm to which her mother belongs; each protagonist attempts to formulate a bond between herself and her absent father; and finally, each protagonist accepts her position within the natural order of femininity because her need for autonomy and power in the patriarchy is undermined by her own status as a subordinate to male domination. In effect, the castration complex leading into the Oedipal complex of the female protagonists in Joyce Carol Oates's later fiction establishes the basic foundations for the cause of female violence within the patriarchy.

Chapter 2: The Violence of Race, Gender and Body

In Mary Kathryn Grant's *The Tragic Vision of Joyce Carol Oates*, Grant suggests that "Oates's fiction is filled with violence because the society it describes is likewise filled with violence" (35). For Grant,

> Violence bring[s] man to the brink of self-discovery and often serves as an affirmation of his humanity. But ultimately, it has no lasting effect; violence cannot confer power, which is what those who turn to violence seek. It may for a time assuage one's feelings of impotence, but it does not permanently change his life. (35)

As Grant also asserts,

> In Oates's world, violence is performed by the character himself, motivated by his own sense of powerlessness. It does not radically change his life, although it may be a means of his temporarily transcending his petty existence. There is an unchangeability about the lives of Oates's characters. No form, no amount of violence brings about a new consciousness in her characters. (35)

This lack of change within the lives of the female protagonists, this inability to discover an identity and subjectivity outside of the patriarchal ideal of female submisseveness, is a condition that is rejected by the female protagonists in Oates's later fiction but accepted by their mothers. In fact, it is through the mother-daughter relationships that Oates illustrates the violent effects of male domination of women within the patriarchy; dominance that is perpetuated via mother-daughter relationships and displaced into female violence against race, gender, and body.

In *Because It Is Bitter, Because It Is My Heart*, the mother-daughter relationship between Persia Courtney and Iris Courtney establishes racial violence as a form of female violence within the narrative. Iris's development into womanhood is plagued by her inability to distance herself from childhood experiences related to her mother's white middle-class values, values that enable Persia to "pass" as an ideal model for white femininity in the patriarchy. When Iris is a young girl, for instance, she is told by her mother that staring at black people is rude:

> "*Don't* stare, I said," Persia whispers, giving [Iris] a poke.
>
> Iris starts to ask , "Why --" and Persia says, "Just *don't*."
>
> But the question Iris wants to ask is too abstruse for the few words in her vocabulary. Why are they the way they are? Different from us? The same, but different?
>
> Iris wonders why, if the Negro children stare frankly at her, at her pale drained-looking skin, her pale greenish-gray eyes, her hair that isn't brown or blond or any precise colour at all, she can't stare right back?
>
> Persia says, "They don't know any better, some of them. *But we do*." (23)

The racist overtones of Persia's statement are obvious. Oates, however, contrasts Persia's moral lesson on racial difference with Persia's own sense of inferiority within the dominant white patriarchy when she overhears her husband's "gentleman friend"comment on a black individual's attempt to "pass for *white*" (21).

The "scandalized laughter in response" by Duke and his friends only allows Persia to scold "prettily" ("Oh, what a thing to say! Oh -- what a thing to *say*" [21]). Persia's status as a woman dissuades her from formally criticizing the racist beliefs of her male superiors. Her sexual inferiority forces her to accept the racial divide between whites and blacks without being able to challenge the differences created by the dominant white group. As a result, Persia can only reprimand her daughter - and mildly, at that - for staring at black adults and black children. I think Persia, on some unconscious level, identifies her otherness, her submissiveness to white male supremacy, as a common denominator between female subordination and racism. If Persia chooses to challenge her husband's and her husband's friends' racism and elitism, she is reduced to an even lower level of sexual inferiority.

It is through this association of Persia's otherness with the otherness of non-whites, this conceptualization of a mutual oppression between white women and non-white men and women, that Iris begins to understand her own inferior position within the patriarchy; that is, in spite of her father's racism, Iris Courtney learns at a very young age that "black blood" is indeed the same colour as white blood. After cheating on a math quiz by copying an answer from the test paper of Lucille Weaver, a black girl in Iris's class, Iris is physically assaulted by Lucille's friends on the way home from school:

> Lucille and two of her friends shove Iris Courtney off a curb, knock her into a gutter of filthy rushing water, her saddle shoes soaked, knee scraped raw and bleeding, the palms of both hands; they shriek "white bitch, white asshole

> bitch" and cuff and kick and then thery're gone, running down the street laughing, and Iris picks herself up, biting her lip not to cry, not to give them the satisfaction. "Dirty nigger bitches! *Dirty*!"
>
> But the next time Iris sees Lucille Weaver and her friends, Iris rushes straight at Lucille and strikes her with her schoolbooks, and the girls scream, and scuffle, and punch, and kick, and another timer Iris is knocked to the ground hard on her bottom stunned and breathless and her nose bleeding, but she sees that the black girl's nose too is rimmed in blood.
>
> And bright red blood it is, sweet to behold. Just like her own. (36)

Iris's realization that both "black blood" and "white blood" are one and the same is significant in terms of the thematic concern for racial violence in the novel. Oates seems to place an emphasis on the notion of metaphorically mixing bloodlines in order to demonstrate the effects of white male domination on both white women and non-white men and women in the text. In effect, Oates's narrative becomes a "mulatto" narrative; a narrative that mixes the stories of white and black characters as they attempt to overcome white male supremacy. As a result, Iris refuses to accept her mother's role as female subordinate. She challenges racial differences in the patriarchy by attempting to associate herself with black individuals in early adolescence. In the Rialto theatre, for example, Iris sullenly watches Jinx Fairchild and Bobo Ritchie as they are thrown out of the movie house for disruptive behaviour:

> "Out you go, boys. Out! . . . Out you go!" the manager says, loud and nervous.

> "OK, man, cool it," says one of the boys, "Yeah, man, we be *goin'* says the other, tall outlaw figures blocking the Technicolor screen, the Fairchild boy zipping up his sheepskin jacket like it's a razor he's wielding, the Ritchie boy, mean as the ace of spades in profile, tugging his wool knit cap low on his forehead like Joe Louis in an old photograph. Jive-talking and loud-laughing, the boys amble up the aisle, followed by the blustery white manager and the young white usher with his flashlight, and when they're gone there's a collective wave of relief in the audience. (84)

Iris is angered by the abruptness of the white manager and his white employee. Although the manager can blame Iris and her friends for being loud and obnoxious as well, he opts to pinpoint the blame on the two black youths; two young men with whom Iris associates violence, crime, and intrigue. Word associations such as "outlaw figures," "razor . . . wielding," "mean as the ace of spades," that the narrator uses to describe each boy suggest an inherent "evilness" within Jinx and Bobo that Iris is attracted to. The narrator continues:

> But Iris Courtney whispers to her friends, "Come on! Let's go!" She's fierce, she's angry, snatching up her coat as the other girls stare at her astonished. "Come *on*," she says, and Nancy Dorsey hesitates, saying, "I don't know . . ." and Jeannette hesitates, "Oh, Iris . . . we'd better not."
>
> Iris is on her feet pushing out into the aisle, as determined as her friends have ever seen her. "The hell with you, then," she says, running blind up the

> aisle . . . into the bright-lit foyer smelling of stale popcorn and sugary soft drinks . . . out into the street . . . (84)

Iris's actions illustrate the protagonist's attempt to formulate a bond with Jinx even before he and she murder Red Garlock. This bond is based on Iris's desire to invert the racial structure of society by attempting to figuratively "pass" as black as a result of her outward display of disgust and anger toward her white friends and the white manager of the Rialto theatre. "The resolve with which Iris Courtney runs out the Rialto," however, is an unrecognized resolution on behalf of the protagonist because "the black boys are gone" (84). To further develop Iris's desire for violence, Oates inverts the patriarchal notion of racial violence as white against black to black against white so that the death of Red Garlock symbolically represents the death of male domination and racism; and it is this inversion of racial violence and the mixing of racial narratives that allows Iris to challenge the binaries which structure racism and sexism in society.

Little Red Garlock's death is also an important element in the perpetuation of racial violence in the novel. His murder represents the symbolic destruction of white male supremacy. Although Garlock belongs to the lower-class or "White Trash" level of society, his masculinity and his colour provide him with a sense of power that enables him to harass women and non-white individuals (like Iris Courtney and Jinx Fairchild, respectively) without the fear of repercussion. In fact, it is this lack of fear by Garlock that encourages him to glory "in the pain and humiliation and confusion of others he understands are superior to him" for "He sees in their faces how they hate him and how they're scared of him, knowing they are never *never* going to escape him" (114). Garlock obtains a sense of power from his position as a white man. He upholds cultural, racial, and gendered social barriers that are established and controlled by white men of power within the "global patriarchy" (Weedon 21).[8] Although some critics with other ideological imperatives may argue that Oates is criticizing capitalism and classism as the foundation for male domination and female/other subordination, I argue that racism and sexism are primary means of eliminating female autnomy in the novel. Racism and sexism place Garlock above women like Iris Courtney and black men like Jinx Fairchild for the dominant race and gender in the novel is white man.

To become dominant, Iris and Jinx must rise through the social ranks of society. But Jinx ruins his own life; he ruins his chances for financial success and glory when he intentionally breaks his ankle during a basketball game. Jinx's guilt drives him into a severe mental state in which the punishment for Garlock's death is, in effect, his own life; a punishment that Iris believes they do not deserve: "We didn't do anything wrong. We don't deserve to be punished" (240-241). But Garlock's death overwhelms Jinx with guilt; and unlike Iris's, Jinx's guilt destroys his motivation to succeed. As a result, Jinx chooses to accept a lower station in life as a black man. He, for example, quits high school and becomes a general laborer; a position that, for Iris, is a diminished state of the actual young man Jinx Fairchild once was (221). It is this lack of success by Jinx that empowers Iris to literally fight for her freedom from male

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[8] According to Chris Weedon, a "global patriarchy" is a "system of domination which pervades all aspects of culture and social life and which is to be found in all cultures and at

aggressors; to, as Charlotte Bunch generally states about white women,"control people and situations for [her own] benefit" (98). In fact, Iris attempts to vindicate Jinx from his involvement with Garlock's death when St. Germain, a fellow tenant of Iris's boarding house at Syracuse University, sexually harasses her:

> Iris tries to force her way past St. Germain but he crowds her back, pushes her against the stove . . . this old-fashioned gas stove, eight burners, enormous . . . wriggling his hips defiantly, not smiling now; and Iris, who has been under the confused impression that maybe Hodler hurried to get the house manager . . . begins to realize that there won't be any help - she's alone with this embittered, disturbed black man - and tries to think what to do. What to do! Yet it's without thinking that she ducks past St. Germain to get to one of the kitchen drawers, he seizes her arm and tries to spin her as if they're dancing a rough giddy dance, and Iris wrenches away, yanks open a drawer, takes out a knife, a paring knife, too small so she discards it and fumbles for another, a carving knife . . . now crouching, she lifts the knife toward the astonished St. Germain, saying, "You touch me another time and I'll kill you," pointing the blade at his throat, speaking calmly and even dispassionately, until, with a shuddery little laugh, both hands uplifted in a parody of surrender, St.

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all moments of history" (20-21).

> Germain backs off. (276)

As Grant argues, there is no amount of violence that brings about a new consciousness in Oates's characters (35). Iris's physical aggression toward St. Germain demonstrates how her own personality has changed. She is able to defend herself against a male aggressor. This aggressor, however, is black; and to reveal her lack of fear, her strength, and her sense of power to St. Germain suggests that, as a white woman, Iris maintains more power in the patriarchy than any other non-white individual because she is white. Note, however, the similarities between Iris's behavior toward St. Germain and Sissy Fairchild's behavior toward Jinx when Jinx violently attacks his wife:

> "Whore! Bitch! Dirty Cunt!" into [Sissy's] face, his fingers digging into her shoulders meaning to hurt, and Sissy is squealing in pain like a little girl and slapping at him and her wig's askew and the sight of it pisses Jinx off more so he's pounding her against the wall, his lips laid back from his teeth and his eyes bulging so everything in the dim-lit room is shaking and vibrating and the baby has begun to cry in his crib and that makes Jinx angrier and Sissy knees him in the groin just hard enough to throw him into a greater fury so he hits her in the mouth with his elbow and she's spitting blood and laughing, "You prick! You! Who in hell're *you*!" Managing to get loose and seizing a brass lamp one of her relatives gave them for a wedding present and if Jinx hadn't seen the bitch lifting it to bring down on his skull he'd be knocked cold but he's got her, he's got her, he's got the bitch, walking her backward into the bedroom crying

> "Whore! Cunt! Dirty cunt!" into her face as she's crying, "Fucker! Shithead! Why don't you *die*!" . . . (365-366)

Like Iris, Sissy reveals her lack of fear, her strength, and her sense of power to a male aggressor. Unlike Iris, Sissy's racial commonality with Jinx does not threaten her husband. Her blackness and her status as a woman reduce her to a state of submissiveness that, as a white woman, Iris never has to endure. Moreover, Jinx cannot be violent against a white woman. He associates whiteness with white male domination and his own socially inferior position as a black man. When Jinx's fury against Sissy heightens, for example, he is not angry with his wife but rather furious with his allotted status as a black man in a white patriarchy. The rape of Sissy, in effect, is a symbolic action of violence in which white culture, like black culture, becomes a victim. But when Jinx removes Sissy's underwear and forces himself upon her, the sexual assault evolves into an image of the married couple passionately making love:

> Jinx you crazy asshole you know I love you, huh, hon? You know you ma man -- her eyes purplish-bruised but soft and damp and acquiescent -- You know I'm not serious, don't you, any crazy old thing I say? And Jinx Fairchild laughs saying, Nobody's serious, girl, naw, nobody. (366)

Oates seems to be criticizing the feminist notion of a common oppression among all women (hooks 43) by demonstrating the effects of the racial divide among white women and black men and women in the novel. Iris unconsciously uses her whiteness, her white privilege in the patriarchy, as a weapon against St. Germain's sexism. In doing so, Iris establishes a racial barrier between herself and Jinx. Unlike Sissy, Iris is unable to bond with Jinx "on the basis of shared victimization" (hooks 47). In essence, her violent behaviour toward St. Germain launches her into a reintegration process whereby she begins to espouse her mother's former subordination to the patriarchal ideal of white femininity by asserting her dominance and control over a black man; a black person; a black other.

Oates also develops what Joanne V. Creighton defines as a "blood bondage" (100) between Iris and Jinx that simulates their mothers' relationships with racially opposite men. To successfully blend the stories of both her white and black characters, Oates creates a mirror image of the mother-daughter relationship between Persia and Iris Courtney within her characterization of the mother-son relationship between Minnie and Jinx Fairchild. Persia, for instance, has an affair with Virgil Starling, a "mulatto" jazz clarinetist. Like her daughter, Persia becomes involved with a man whose lack of white skin forces him to accept a subordinate position in the patriarchy, a position that Persia finds comfort in as a result of her own subordination to white men. But when Persia and Virgil are harassed by two white police officers, it is Virgil's subjection to the officers' racism that threatens the apparent equality between the bi-racial couple. Persia's whiteness signifies purity and cleanliness, qualities that non-white individuals like Virgil, in the eyes of white supremacists, clearly do not have:

> Mock-serious white faces, jeering eyes, those loud voices like barking laughter and who dares to resist? Not Virgil Starling, who removes his suede coat and allows the troopers to turn the pockets inside out, tear the bright silk lining . . .

> who tugs off his high-heeled calf-skin boots and stands in his stocking feet in the snow while the troopers examine, or pretend to examine, the boots . . . who unlocks the glove compartment, unlocks the trunk, pries off with a tire iron all four of his fancy chrome hubcaps under the white cops' supervision. *Nosir. Yessir.* By this time Persia Courtney too is standing on the shoulder of the Thruway, hunched and shivering in her steely-coloured coat . . . she *is* a good-looking woman -- good-looking white woman -- fucking a nigger. (164)

Virgil's degradation by the police officers damages the relationship between him and Persia. As Persia expresses to Iris in a drunken rage of fear and despair, "So awful . . . seeing a man crawl . . . Seeing a man crawl and he can't not know you've seen . . . and the two of you aren't ever going to *not know* . . . what it is you've seen" (165). Persia, like Iris, is a witness to racial violence; she stands helpless and afraid as she watches the one she loves suffer at the mercy of dominant white men; and like her daughter, Persia knows that it is "the whiteness of her skin [that] has something to do with" (156) her guilt over not being able to "readily forget" (163) her own status as a white woman in the patriarchy. One may even posit that Persia's inability to forget the hatred and the ignorance of the white race reminds Iris of the racial divide between herself and Jinx. In an attempt to "readily forget" her own whiteness, Iris tries to deepen her bond with Jinx. As Iris tells Jinx, "No one is so close to me as you, no one is so close to us as we are to each other" (181). But this closeness between Iris and Jinx is founded on an inverted notion of racial violence where the death of a white man represents the death of male domination and racism. Persia's experience with Virgil and the two white police officers not only reminds Iris that white men continue to maintain their power and authority in society, but also confirms her notion that mixing bloodlines, mixing of "white" blood and "black" blood, does not create equality between people; the mixing of bloodlines continues to allow groups to divide themselves into opposing factions whereby so-called racial integration consists of non-white individuals "passing" as white folk.

I believe that Oates creates a parallel between her characterizations of Persia Courtney and Minnie Fairchild throughout the novel to illustrate the ways in which they teach their children the importance of being able to "pass" for white within the patriarchy. For example, both Persia and Minnie emphasise a need for their children to be clean because cleanliness signifies purity and purity represents a higher form of living. As Persia tells Iris, "There's nothing so nice, baby, as being *clean*, is there. *Clean* outside and in . . . *Always*" (27). Similarly, when Minnie discovers that her children have been swimming in Peach Tree Creek, she is furious and disgusted; she sends them home to be scrubbed clean from the "inside [of] their ears . . . [to their] fingernails and toenails" (125), and makes "the two of them gargle with evil-smelling mouthwash she br[ings] home from the white doctor's" (126).

Persia's and Minnie's desire for clean children, however, is juxtaposed with Vesta Garlock's lack of concern for her own house and family. Oates, for instance, characterizes Vesta's son, Little Red Garlock, as an individual who was born dirty: "Not just dirty-minded and dirty-mouthed -- he didn't grow into that until aged eight or so -- but truly dirty: a patina like the grime of years covered him even as a newborn infant rosy-slick and shining out of his momma's womb" (96). And as the narrator continues,

> Little Red was forever filthy. Soiled himself and anyone reckless enough to hold him. Soiled every item of his clothing, soiled the bed sheets and blankets, soiled the carpets and floors and walls of the Garlock house, even soiled things the family swore he hadn't been anywhere near . . . And Mrs Garlock tried not to despair of his dirt and his dirty ways, his habit of peeing where he stood or doing worse, and sometimes playing with it, smearing it on the walls: baby shit caked in the poor woman's hair and wedged permanently under her fingernails, streaks of it on everything she cherished, her hand-embroidered sheets, pillowcases, doilies brought north from home. (96-97)

Unlike Persia and Minnie, Vesta is unable to keep her son clean; and this lack of cleanliness spreads into her house where Persia is witness to the "*squalid*" (19) conditions of this hillbilly-woman's home:

> The front room has been made into a bedroom of sorts. There's a sofa with bedclothes on it, a mattress on the floor, a filthy pillow . . . no pillowcase. Towels, dirty undergarments, children's clothes, debris seems to have drifted . . . no, Persia squints and discovers an actual baby in there. Napping in all the mess . . . (18)

Vesta's reluctance to clean both her house and her children reduces her family to a lower- class status, a "White trash" level of existence, in which the Garlock way of life signifies a laziness or lack of concern for the standard acceptance of the American dream;[9] a standard that requires individuals to want to be (or at least appear to be) financially successful and happy. Red Garlock's desire to humiliate and terrorize Iris Courtney and Jinx Fairchild derives from his own understanding that both Iris and Jinx are taught by their mothers to be afraid of becoming like Garlock: "*Garlock!*" Minnie fumes, "Everybody knows what *Garlock* means in this town! Just trash! Dirt! Lowest of the low! It's enough to make you sick to your stomach . . . Those hillbilly trash beatin' and killin' their own wives and children . . . worst kind of white folks exceptin' actual Nazis" (136). In essence, Iris and Jinx are taught by their mothers to be afraid of becoming a wasted life in the chasms of American white culture. The irony, of course, is that it is these teachings by Persia and Minnie that emotionally and/or physically destroy Iris and Jinx for both children learn racial violence in an attempt to resist white male domination and eventually succumb to it. Thus, both children murder Little Red Garlock. Garlock represents not only the lowest of the low in terms of his social class, but also a dominant white/masculine power that Iris and Jinx are "never *never* going to escape" (114). In effect, the death of Red Garlock establishes the beginning of Oates's "mulatto narrative" where the lives of both white and black people intertwine and where the lives of Iris Courtney and Jinx Fairchild are forever linked through racial violence.

Like Persia, Minnie Fairchild also maintains a relationship with a racially opposite

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[9] The American dream signifies an individual's pursuit of happiness via financial security and wealth.

man: Dr. O'Shaughnessey. And when Minnie works for Dr. O'Shaughnessey, "a general practitioner of some reputation" (132), she assumes a predominantly "white personality;" that is, Minnie seems to be almost racist against lower-class black people because *she* is able to afford a decent lifestyle. As Minnie states:

> You have to know where you've come from to know how far you've come . . .
> . . . You don't get a house like this by sitting on your rear.
> . . . You don't *keep* a house like this by sitting on your rear.
> And . . . Coloureds crybabyin' about they skin don't get no sympathy from me . . . (132)

Although Minnie's responsibilities to Dr. O'Shaughnessy initially begin with housework and cooking, "she was," as the narrator continues,

> assigned more and more household responsibilities and even, in time, replaced Dr. O'Shaughnessy's office nurse . . . though Minnie is untrained as a nurse, or even as a nurse's aide. ("Nothing to it," Minnie boasts to her friends. "The main thing is the uniform: you *look* the part, folks think that's what you *are*!"). (132-133)

Looking the part, being able to "pass" as white, is another significant theme of racial violence in Oates's novel. Both Iris and Jinx learn from their mothers that "a uniform has the effect of making individuals look alike" (70); and to look alike is to conform to the ideological standards of white male supremacy, standards that provide white men with the power to control and dominate white women, non-white women, and non-white men. Iris, for instance, notices at Schoharie Downs that "There are several black waiters and [that] it's easy to confuse them in their uniforms" (70); and Jinx, as another example, thinks during a basketball game in high school that

> There are nine white cheerleaders on the varsity squad, all so pretty, and one high yalla . . . first time in school history that a nonwhite girl has been so honoured. Of course she's the cutest thing you ever saw: dentist's daughter, nice clothes, snubbed nose, and smooth glossy brown-black hair bobbing in a ponytail just like the white girls'. (169)

The mixing of bloodlines is not, however, an accepted act in a society that is based on racial divisions. As I think Oates suggests throughout her narrative, there is an emphasis on the purity of one's bloodline that cannot be crossed: "Blood. Bloodlines. Pedigree. 'Purity'" (26). To reject this linear boundary between races is to literally and metaphorically infect the racial bloodstream of a certain group. But Oates counterbalances this racist and elitist misconception by developing the aforementioned blood bondage between Iris and Jinx and by juxtaposing what seems to be racist commentary by both Minnie Fairchild and her son with their own acts of "blood mixing." For example, Minnie refers to the United States army as a "white cracker" group (142); she labels the non-white cheerleader as an "empty-head[ed] high yalla" (175); she reiterates her hatred for white trash hillbillies who fall down drunk on the street, and beat their wives and children "as bad as any niggers, any of the worst cutthroat niggers" who move into "good decent neighborhood[s]" where "coloured folks [own] their own homes" (182-183); and she even insults the work of Martin Luther King: "That Reverend King," Minnie complained, "seems to me he's doing more harm than good, preaching 'non-violence' and 'passive resistance' and 'hate will be returned with love' -- making it hot for the rest of us, is all" (179-180).

In contrast to Minnie's racial slurs and elitist beliefs, however, there is a narratorial suggestion that Minnie may have had a sexual affair with her white employer:

> . . . for years, malicious speculation the neighbourhood regarding the relationship between Minnie and her white employer, even scurrilous talk of Ceci [Jinx's sister] being O'Shaughnessy's child and not Woodrow Fairchild Senior's -- the girl has a smooth, light, buttery-coloured skin. (135)

It is this speculation about Minnie's involvement with a white man that offers Jinx a new perspective on the racial divide among white people and black people. At first glance, Jinx, like his mother, seems to abhor the idea of blood mixing among the races: "If there's white blood in ***him***, he thinks, it's a long way back and many times diluted" (135). But the dilution of white blood in black blood is an interesting image that Oates uses in the novel. Oates seems to be playing with the structural concept of the colour spectrum and how a continuum of colour occurs as a result of white light being dispersed through, for example, a prism. In effect, Jinx tries to ignore the fact that white is the basis of all colour by assuming that his "potential" whiteness is simply absorbed by colour, an absorption that allows him to maintain his blackness; an absorption that allows him to maintain his black identity and black subjectivity within the white patriarchy. Thus, Jinx learns from his mother's relationship to Dr. O'Shaughnessy that the racial division between blacks and whites is an existing barrier that can never be overcome. As Minnie discovers when she is forced to work at the

Hotel Franklin after Dr. O'Shaughnessy's death, all the white people *see* is her skin, "her brown-black skin" (179). Minnie discovers that what *she* has chosen to ignore for many years is a reality that she must face: Minnie is unable to "pass" as a white woman and this inability allows her to now acknowledge Reverend King as a saint. Reverend King "*is* accomplishing something for the coloured people if not maybe for Minnie Fairchild" (355) herself. And like his mother, Jinx

> understands that whites study him as if he were not even a specimen of sorts but an entire category. They study him, amazed at his athletic gifts, admiring of his personal style, deceiving themselves they are learning something about this category when in fact they aren't even learning anything about Jinx Fairchild the specimen. (183)

Jinx realizes that his blood bondage to Iris Courtney is a unique relationship with a white individual. Unlike Minnie Fairchild's relationship with Dr. O'Shaughnessy, Iris is the "only white [person] who *sees* him, [and who] knows ***him***" (183).

But this acknowledgement of one another's identity and subjectivity in the white patriarchy is not enough to challenge the social expectations placed on white women and black men. Both Iris and Jinx are the offspring of women who are trapped in a realm of otherness that is defined by white men. Like their mothers, Iris and Jinx are trapped in a realm of otherness, a realm in which Iris marries a prominent white academic and is reduced to the ideal feminine role of 'wife'; and a realm in which Jinx is a black man, "a man defined by his skin and by his facial features and by his voice and by that look in his eyes" (358). But unlike Iris's girlhood belief that if she was coloured, she'd know who she was (93), Jinx's identity and subjectivity (like his mother's identity and subjectivity) is based on what white people see. His blackness is diluted into white society. Like the photographic image of the black soldiers from 1864 (188), Jinx chooses to wear the "Man's uniform" (189); he chooses to join the United States Army because the army "makes you think *somebody* wants you at least, and like Bobo Ritchie said, It's *something*, aint it? Not just fucking *nothing*" where "white men surrounding Jinx resent him for his very presence on the [work] floor as if he's not only presenting himself as an equal of theirs but is in fact an equal of theirs" (358-359).

This resentment by white men towards Jinx is also reflected in Oates's final image of racial violence in the novel when Iris is sexually assaulted by a group of black teenage boys and young men after the shooting death of President John F. Kennedy (382). I believe Oates uses Kennedy's death as a catalyst for Iris's complete submission to the patriarchal ideal of white femininity. The gruesome death of the white President represents the death of another dominant white man in the novel, Red Garlock. Although Kennedy's social status as President far exceeds Garlock's socially inferior "White Trash" level of existence, the President's death reminds Iris that she can never escape white patriarchal rule no matter how often she tries to forget her involvement with Garlock's death. To take responsibility for her involvement with Garlock's murder, Iris willingly enters a black neighbourhood after Kennedy's murder and becomes a perpetrator and victim of racial violence in order to reaffirm her status as a white woman in the patriarchy before she marries Alan Savage. While Iris sits in a restaurant and listens to the social commentary by black customers on Kennedy's death, she thinks, "Why do you care that a white man has died? Why do you put your faith in any of us? What she almost wants to do isn't cry but cradle her head in her arms on the counter, shut her eyes, vanish" (380).

This desire to vanish is fulfilled, however, after Iris's assault. That is, the racial divide between black people and white people is heightened and strengthened by the white supremacist elitism of Iris's surrogate mother and future mother-in-law, Mrs. Gwendolyn Savage:

> Eventually Mrs. Savage would say, You must pray for them, dear, you mustn't harbor bitterness.
>
> Oh, yes. Oh, no.
>
> It's the only way. The Christian way. The way of health, forgiveness.
>
> Iris could tell Syracuse police only that her assailants were young black men. She wasn't sure if there had been four or five, hadn't seen their faces clearly, hadn't heard any of them call any other by name, could not identify the car, even its colour. Nor was she certain of the location in which she'd been picked up except to know it was somewhere west of the river.
>
> Someone has predicted bad dreams for months, years.
>
> A lifetime of flinching when she sees black skin. (392-393)

Coached by Mrs. Savage, Iris is able to render herself invisible by becoming a stereotypical white woman. Although she learns from Persia Courtney's experiences that white female subordination to white male domination is the key to future financial security, Iris also shares a mother-daughter bond with Mrs. Savage that is based on a shared victimization as a result of their continued domination by men; a victimization that silences white women in the masculine discourses of the patriarchy. As Mrs. Savage thinks: "*Iris, how is it we lack speech; who has deprived us of speech?*" (315). The irony, however, is that Mrs. Savage relates women's oppression to male domination and is able to share a bond with Iris as a result of Iris's whiteness without acknowledging the very oppression she perpetuates against her black female cook, Mercedes. Mrs. Savage goes as far as removing Iris from the world of her black employee when Iris decides, for some unknown reason, to help Mercedes clear the dinner table. Iris thinks,

> Why am I doing this?
>
> She sets the wine bottles down on one of the counters where there's space. How disappointing the Savages' kitchen is: old-fashioned fixtures . . . an immensely ugly stove . . . a single overhead light emitting a pitiless glare . . . dishes, pots, pans heaped on all sides . . . twin sinks filled with sudsy water and stacked with china. The air is heavy with the smells of turkey grease, gravy, and percolating coffee.
>
> Mercedes is staring at Iris Courtney, this pushy white girl who is in *her* kitchen, uninvited . . . and Mercedes isn't smiling. The surprised, gruff-growling sound she makes only vaguely sounds like "Thank you."
>
> But almost at once Mrs. Savage has pushed through the swinging door, diamond earrings glittering in alarm, and Mrs. Savage *is* smiling . . . smiling

> rather hard at Iris Courtney. "No need for you to help clear the table, dear," she says, reaching for Iris's arm. "You're our guest, you know!" (293)

Oates establishes a visible boundary that segregates Mercedes from Mrs. Savage's lavish world. On the one hand, Oates associates Mercedes with darkness and disorder for she situates Mercedes in the Savages' dark, cramped, and filthy kitchen. The image of the kitchen, therefore, symbolically represents Mercedes's marginalization in darkness as a result of her blackness. Mrs. Savage, on the other hand, moves freely in the lighted world of her dining room and house; unlike Mercedes, she exists beyond the doors of the kitchen as a result of the whiteness of her skin. Thus Iris's attempt to connect with Mercedes, to "pass" as black, is thwarted by Mrs. Savage because Mrs. Savage is reluctant to allow a white guest into the darkened realm of her black employee's existence.

One may even argue that Persia Courtney's initial life lessons to her daughter are reiterated through Oates's characterization of Mrs. Savage. Iris learns from Mrs. Savage's behaviour toward Mercedes that white women who uphold the patriarchal ideal of femininity do not co-exist with black others. As bell hooks observes of even well-intentioned white feminists,

> Often, white women bond on the basis of shared racial identity without conscious awareness of the significance of their actions. This unconscious maintenance and perpetuation of white supremacy is dangerous because none of us can struggle to change racist attitudes if we do not recognize that they exist. For example, a group of white feminist activists who do not know one another

> may be present at a meeting to discuss feminist theory. They may feel they are bonded on the basis of shared womanhood, but the atmosphere will noticeably change when a woman of color enters the room. The white women will become tense, no longer relaxed, no longer celebratory. Unconsciously, they felt close to one another because they shared racial identity. The whiteness that bonds them together is a racial identity that is directly related to the experience of non-white people as 'other' and as a 'threat.' (54-55)

If this is so, or has recently been so, it is not surprising that Mrs. Savage seems to be threatened by the idea that Iris is willing to reduce herself to the status of a black woman, like Mercedes. By removing Iris from the kitchen, Mrs. Savage maintains her future daughter-in-law's integrity as a white woman with social breeding. Therefore, Iris learns from Mrs. Savage the importance of being able to "pass" as white in the patriarchy. In whiteness, financial privilege is obtained and secured.

But after Iris receives the photograph of Jinx in his army dress uniform, she is stunned by the knowledge of his death and the shock of his final words to the only white individual who ever understood him: *"Honey — Think I'll 'pass'?"* (402). To vindicate Jinx's death, I think, Iris accepts her position as a white woman in the patriarchy. In the final image of the novel, she stands in her "bride's costume in the mirror, silken luminous white, dazzling white" (405) and "look[s] the part" (405) of a white woman; to maintain her bond with Jinx, Iris consciously decides to "pass" as white. Her childhood desire to challenge the binary dichotomy between white and black in the patriarchy is lost within her supposed adult sensibility to maintain her blood bondage with Jinx Fairchild. But like Persia and Minnie, Iris and Jinx succumb to the powerful and dominant forces of white male supremacy in spite of their ability to silence white male authority through racial violence; as a result, both Iris Courtney and Jinx Fairchild become the silenced. Jinx loses his life and Iris loses her voice to the dominant language of white male supremacy in order to integrate herself into the patriarchy as a model of femininity like her foremothers, Persia Courtney and Mrs. Savage. To challenge racism and sexism in the patriarchy is, for Iris, a solicitation of death. In the death of others (like Persia and Jinx), patriarchal rule thrives. To survive, Iris must "pass" as white: to look the part of an ideal white woman. Iris Courtney's consciousness does change as a result of racial violence. The circumstances of her position as a female subordinate do not; and Iris's relationship to both Persia Courtney and Mrs. Savage is evidence of the violent effects of male domination of women within the patriarchy. Neither woman has the power to eradicate women's oppression. As white women, they follow a general pattern of race relations that hooks believes to be a safe way to "avoid confrontation . . .[and] never experience any revolutionary change, any transformation, individually or collectively" (64).

In *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang*, the representation of violence focuses more on the issue of gendered violence and the ideological standards of female subordination and male domination via the mother-daughter relationships in the novel. The perpetuation of violence in society is not a simple binary dichotomy between male domination and female subordination. As bell hooks suggests in an oblique reference to feminism, "So far the feminist movement has primarily focused on male violence and as a consequence lends credibility to sexist stereotypes that suggest men are violent, women are not; men are abusers, women are victims" (118). For hooks, it is this type of thinking that

> allows [academics] to ignore the extent to which women (with men) in this society accept and perpetuate the idea that it is acceptable for a dominant party or group to maintain power over the dominated by using coercive force. It allows [academics] to overlook or ignore the extent to which women exert coercive authority over others or act violently. The fact that women may not commit violent acts as often as men does not negate the reality of female violence. (118)

This "reality of female violence" is the central issue in *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang*, for the novel revolves around the construction of a matriarchy, a society based on the rule of women within the social boundaries of the ever-present patriarchy; a girl gang whose desire for violence establishes men as their targeted victims (Oates 4); and a gang that needs a mother-supplement or matriarch. I think Oates characterizes FOXFIRE as young and motherless women in the novel to create a matriarchy where all women are daughters on one level or another. However, it is the weak bond between biological mothers and daughters in the novel that perpetuates female violence; violence that occurs as a result of the mothers' subordination to male domination and their inability to provide their daughters with a sense of female strength and independence.

And so, I believe that Oates juxtaposes the standard binary opposition between male domination and female subordination with the "reality" (hooks 118) of female domination and male subordination. At first glance, for example, Oates characterizes male characters in terms of their abilities to physically and emotionally oppress women. In fact, it is this oppression of women via male violence that enables the protagonist and narrator, Maddy Wirtz, to want to be an active member of FOXFIRE. Like other female victims of male violence, Maddy's involvement with violence begins with her mother's submission to male domination. As Maddy writes,

> The bathroom door's lock was broken, broken for years but who'd expect Momma to shove it open half-naked herself. . . I saw in the mirror incredulous Momma's big purplish-orangish black eye as if a giant's fist had walloped her good on the right side of her face so the eye was swollen almost shut and her nose, her nose that was fine-boned and thin now had a pink-poached look to it and the right half of her mouth looked like a sponge soaked in blood . . . (58)

As in Persia and Iris Courtney's relationship, the effect of male domination on Maddy's mother inspires her young daughter to seek refuge in violence against men; and it is this search for power and autonomy in the patriarchy that enables Maddy to shrink from "seeing and not seeing" (58) her mother's apparent status as a submissive female. As a result, Maddy and her mother slip away from one another "By instinct" (58); that is, Maddy moves away from her mother's identity and subjectivity as a subordinate woman to discover a new identity and subjectivity free from male violence against women.

This instinctual movement away from the mother may be interpreted as both a stage of oedipalization and an example of patriarchal socialization. As Nancy Chodorow, a feminist object relations theorist, generalizes about the the role that women play as mothers, the universal act of mothering is "the basis for the reproduction of women's location and responsibility in the domestic sphere" (208):

> This mothering, and its generalizations to women's structural location in the domestic sphere, links the contemporary social organization of gender and social organization of production and contributes to the reproduction of each. That women mother is a fundamental organizational feature of the sex-gender system. It is basic to the sexual division of labour and generates a psychology and ideology of male dominance as well as an ideology about women's capacities and nature. (208)

To apply Chodorow's theoretical conceptualizations of motherhood to Oates's novel may be advantageous for one may read Maddy's instinctual movement away from her mother as an instinctual desire to escape the ideological consequences of patriarchy that place women in the universal role of motherhood and thereby generate a social system of domination and subordination. This weak bond between Maddy and her mother, however, is replaced by the FOXFIRE matriarchy.

But in spite of her newly found existence in a matriarchal society, Maddy cannot escape patriarchy for the foundation of the girl gang is based upon a patirarchal model that perpetuates the traditional sex/gender system. To develop her own interests, Maddy has to move away from her mother, the FOXFIRE matriarchy, and the patriarchy. In order to continue her movement away from her mother, for instance, Maddy delves into a world of female emancipation from male domination. To do so, she rejects a masculinist and stereotypical belief that some women simply allow themselves to be the victims of male violence. When, for example, Maddy (the narrator) reflects upon Rita O'Hagan's sexual victimization by men, Maddy's resentment toward Rita parallels Mrs. O'Hagan's refusal to help her own daughter after Rita has been gang-raped by the Viscounts, a local boy gang:

> . . . somewhere beyond the railroad tracks beyond a hilly trash-littered wasteland of billboards on giant stilts . . . Rita O'Hagan, twelve years old, was the object of certain acts performed upon her, or to her, or with her, for most of a long August afternoon; and when, dishevelled and weeping, and leaking menstrual blood, Rita was released to make her way home, alone, her mother screamed at her and slapped her and did not then, or subsequently, inquire of her what had happened that afternoon -- whether anything happened at all. (Mrs. O'Hagan's primary concern was that her husband know nothing since Mr. O'Hagan, a machine-shop worker, was inclined to melancholic binges of drinking and sporadic acts of violence, most of them domestic, when things troubled him.) Nor did Rita ever tell Maddy Wirtz what had happened that afternoon though Maddy was prepared to say, in disdain and contempt and even loathing of her friend, these things don't just happen to you, you let them happen. (25-26)

Both Maddy's and Mrs. O'Hagan's reaction to Rita's sexual assault and rape is astonishing. Both women are reluctant to help Rita. But it is Mrs. O'Hagan's fear of her husband's violent wrath that is the most shocking. Her subordination to her husband overpowers her ability to protect Rita from harm. As Mr. O'Hagan's subordinate, Mrs. O'Hagan fears that she will have to face the violent reprimand of her husband whose physical and emotional strength exemplifies male domination at its worst. Thus, the mother-daughter bond between Rita and Mrs. O'Hagan teaches Rita to accept a subordinate position in the patriarchy, a position that leads to Rita's constant subjection to violent assaults by men, women, brothers, and even her own mother.

Mrs. O'Hagan is a perpetuator of violence for two reasons. First, as a female subordinate to male domination, Mrs. O'Hagan needs to release her own desire for violence against men; to do so, however, Rita's mother must conceal her anger toward the opposite sex for fear of punishment by her husband. As a result, Mrs. O'Hagan slaps her daughter without even demonstrating a sense of motherly concern for Rita's dishevelled state. Mrs. O'Hagan wants to maintain some notion of power and control in her life. Second, the emotional effects of Mrs. O'Hagan's subordination to both her husband and her sons seems to convince Rita's mother that she must physically punish her daughter to instill a fear of violence and a fear of punishment in Rita so that Rita becomes a subordinate to men. And so, when Rita is confronted by Mr. Buttinger's disciplinary sessions, he "never hurt [Rita] exactly. Nor threatened her" (29), but she nonetheless suffered an assault, which she hid out of fear of her mother's assault:

> So she never ran away, wouldn't have had the courage to run away just walked

> home after the "disciplinary" session numbed and sobbing quietly to herself hoping that her mother wouldn't look at her and immediately see something in her face she didn't know was there and like that time in August slap her, hard. (29)

Rita is more afraid of her mother's violence than of male violence in general. On an unconscious level, Rita fears a possible disconnection from her mother. To move away from her mother, like Maddy, Rita has to become violent against men. This violence, however, maintains a rather weak bond between Rita and her mother that is founded on their roles as perpetrators of violence. Therefore, Rita's desire for violence is intensified by her relationship to Mrs. O'Hagan. Rita's involvement with FOXFIRE becomes a stepping-stone toward female emancipation from her mother's and her own subordination to male domination. The irony, of course, is that unlike Maddy "the adult," a childless divorcée, Rita assumes the role of wife and mother at the end of the novel. This role for Rita illustrates Chodorow's theory of the sex/gender system in the patriarchy and how, for Chodorow, women are trapped by the traditional ideology of motherhood. But as an adolescent, Rita's role as a daughter of FOXFIRE is a violent one. When Maddy writes about FOXFIRE's attack against Wimpy Wirtz for trying to sexually assault his niece, Maddy notes Rita's lack of physical restraint against Wimpy:

> . . . the wildest of all is Fireball whose curly red hair's alive with static electricity though her face is clammy-pale, she's that intense as she tugs Wimpy's trousers off, manages to get the man's boxer shorts down past his

> thrashing naked thighs, knees, ankles, feet, and off, in single minded fury kicking him as he kicks, or tries to kick, to protect himself . . . (77)

As a FOXFIRE member, Rita finds strength in her womanhood and in her sisterhood with other women. She is not to blame for her victimization. As Maddy remembers, "Legs said, 'When that sonuvabitch picks on Rita you better tell yourself he's picking on you 'cause the fucker sure *would* if he *could*.' And right away [Maddy] could see the logic of that, so clear and so final it about took [her] breath away" (46). Oates reverses the conceptualization of female victimization as an effect of male domination by developing female violence as a direct link to finding a different plain of existence where women are equal among each other. But Oates also seems to suggest through her characterization of the protagonist and the FOXFIRE gang that this egalitarian plain is fragile. Female violence against men progresses into female violence against women, a progression whereby the matriarchal society of the girl gang disintegrates into the oppressive behaviour of the patriarchy.

Oates, for example, establishes two forms of violence against men as the basis for Maddy's eventual acknowledgement of her own subjection to patriarchal rule: linguistic violence and physical violence. In "The Language of Tragedy and Violence," Grant notes that according to Oates, "Language is not only that power which elevates man above other living things, but it is also his only weapon against annihilation and destruction" (73). For Oates, "Man re-creates the world through language" because "It is all he has to pit against death and silence" (Grant 73). "Silence," as Oates maintains "is the opposite of language" and "silence for human beings is death" (Grant

73). Therefore, in writing the 'confessions' of FOXFIRE, Maddy is able to maintain an active voice in the patriarchy; she is able to re-write her experiences and thereby continue to express her desire for violence. In fact, words and symbols become dominant modes of expression for FOXFIRE before the girl gang resorts to physical violence as a means to maintain power and autonomy. For instance, when Legs learns about Rita's "disciplinary sessions" with Mr. Buttinger, she concocts a plan of revenge against the teacher that involves the vandalization of his car with painted words: "I AM NIGGER LIPS BUTTINGER IM A DIRTY OLD MAN MMMMMM GIRLS!!! I TEACH MATH & TICKLE TITS IM BUTTINGER I EAT PUSSY and most curious most proud most provocative of debate in the days following FOXFIRE REVENGE! FOXFIRE REVENGE!" (48). The signature of the unknown authors known as FOXFIRE validates the female existence of the girl gang members in the patriarchy and gives each girl a sense of power and autonomy. Brenda Daly argues that "the girls in FOXFIRE must first admit what adults, especially males in positions of authority, refuse to acknowledge: [that] institutionally sanctioned violence toward women, violence perpetuated by the silences in public discourses" (206), is one way that "violence is engendered in representation" (Daly, 206).[10] Thus, FOXFIRE's use of derogatory language such as "NIGGER," "TITS," and "PUSSY" places the girls in the masculine realm of language that allows them to express themselves in a dominant manner and relate to the masculine realm of violence.

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[10] Daly also notes that Teresa deLauretis defines public discourses as "male-dominated discourses, -- the way language names certain behaviours and events as violent, but not

Similarly, when Maddy tries to purchase her uncle's Underwood typewriter, "the gang saves her from his attempt at sexual blackmail" (Daly 213). Daly suggests that it is Maddy's desire to possess "the word" (213), to possess a language, that moves Maddy and her female friends out of silence and into a world of words and life. Moreover, it is male intervention in the girl gang's desire for linguistic emancipation that inspires the girls to move toward a more physical mode of expression:

> They pummel him. They tear at him -- clothes, and flesh. They kick him. There is a point early on when Maddy Wirtz herself breathless and frenzied pulls feebly at the others' hands suddenly worried Wimpy Wirtz might have a heart attack or a stroke but her FOXFIRE sisters rightly ignore her, little high pitched cries and yelps, skeins of wild giggling, and Boom-Boom's hyena laugh, Boom-Boom that husky gal straddling Wimpy who's now trouserless bouncing up and down on his cushiony belly slapping and punching and squeezing cruelly, "Giddyup fatso! Giddyup you prick!" and Legs in a transport of bliss her eyes afire has hold of Wimpy's hair so she can bang his head *thump! thump! thump!* Rhythmically against the floorboards . . . and Lana the quietest of all nonetheless breaks several manicured fingernails clawing at Wimpy's shirt, then at his bare oily-gleaming chest, she's smiling,

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others" (206).

> she's truly happy both eyes in perfect alignment but the wildest of all is Fireball [Rita] whose curly red hair's alive with static electricity though her face is clammy-pale, she's that intense as she tugs Wimpy's trousers off, manages to get the man's boxer shorts down past his thrashing naked thighs, knees, ankles, feet, and off, in single minded fury kicking him as he kicks, or tries to kick, to protect himself *but there is no protection against FOXFIRE.* (77)

Tattoos and graffiti espousing the symbol of flames also signify a more physical mode of expression for the gang members love to see "people in gaping ignorance" looking at FOXFIRE symbolism and seeing, "though not knowing what it [is] they [are] *seeing*": "What is that? -- it looks like fire, like a torch" . . . "Is it supposed to mean something? What's it supposed to *mean*?" (80-81). The *meaning* of fire, the burning rage of FOXFIRE, is an interesting symbol in the novel in that Oates re-introduces the concept of "*seeing*" and "*not-seeing,*" a concept developed in *Because It Is Bitter, Because It Is My Heart.* Like the black skin of Minnie and Jinx Fairchild, FOXFIRE's words and signs do not reveal their underlying signification but rather suggest a variety of meanings that do not resemble what Maddy (the narrator) suggests is the truth:

> . . . a girl named Linda Fearing who was a senior and a popular girl, a cheerleader, said "*I* think it's some sort of religious sign to give us warning, 'the coming of the End' like the world's in danger of going up in fire, y'know?" . . . and Lana said in a strange high-pitched voice I'd never heard from her before, "Yes. That *is* what it is: 'the coming of the End.' It *is.* I

> just *know*." (81)

Although Lana's words hint at the end of patriarchal rule, Oates incorporates a fascinating image of words and signs into the text that suggests that FOXFIRE's strength and power will cease to exist outside of the pages of Maddy's memoir. When FOXFIRE protests the inhumane living conditions of animals in TYNE PETS & SUPPLIES, for instance, Oates connects the oppression of women with oppression of animals via the gang's decision to wear animal masks as they picket the pet store with "white sheets of cardboard with neat red letters":

> TYNE PETS IS CRUEL TO ANIMALS and IF YOU LOVE ANIMALS DON'T SHOP HERE and SHAME SHAME SHAME and two signs with "HAVE MERCY ON ME" and "HELP ME PLEASE" above drawings of dogs squeezed in such small cages their noses and tails are poking through the bars. And we put on Hallowe'en masks Legs has a crafty fox mask, Goldie has a snarling wolf mask, Lana has a snooty cat mask, Rita has a panda mask, and Maddy, naturally, has a puckish monkey mask. (91-92)

The symbolic gesture of wearing masks and using words to destroy the oppression of animals formulates an association between two factions of society that are subjects of male domination: women and animals. One may posit that Oates uses this association between women and animals (or women and nature) to reiterate the ever-present binary opposition between the sexes. As Maddy reveals, both women and animals are incarcerated in cages of oppression:

> I believe I must have dreamt of the dogs in the cages because one night in the

> middle of the night I woke frightened and breathless, I was being suffocated I was being shut in tight inside something getting tighter like bars . . . Legs said she'd dreamt of the dogs too. Or something, in cages. Maybe *her*. (89-90)

But Legs's incarceration within her dream not only foreshadows her own imprisonment into Red Bank Correctional Facility for Girls; it also foreshadows the failure of the gang's quest to end female oppression within the patriarchy. In fact, Toby's death, the death of FOXFIRE's beloved Husky from TYNE'S PET & SUPPLIES, represents the impending end of FOXFIRE and the death of female power and autonomy. Toby's death never becomes a source for FOXFIRE REVENGE (274), a source that originates in a desire to protect all women from male domination. As a result, the matriarchal society of FOXFIRE begins to slowly unravel.

Oates's incorporation of Legs's experiences in the Red Bank correctional facility is a logical starting point for a discussion on female violence against women and the unravelling of the FOXFIRE matriarchy. Legs's imprisonment is an overt display of female oppression by women that parallels the oppression of animals in TYNE's pet shop. When, for example, Legs is in solitary confinement, she watches (from her window) eleven hawks circle in the sky,

> borne solely by wind, their wide wings, wide feathered-muscled wings, graceful wings lifting them to the top of the spiral then there's a moment's pause . . . a heartbeat . . . then they spiral downward again, slowly circling . . . dipping, descending . . . riding the air currents beyond the twelve-foot cinder block wall that bounded the property of the RED BANK CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

> FOR GIRLS topped with concertina wire like a wicked necklace you wouldn't want around your neck
>
> *I am one of you.*
>
> Banging her forehead against the sweaty wall, her forehead that's already bruised, sore, and her eye inflamed from the guard's thumb, and she can't remember how many days she's in for this time; or if they'd even told her.
>
> *I am one of you oh God oh sweet Jesus-God let me out.* (128)

Although she believes that the courts have no jurisdiction over her (131), Legs is doubly-victimized by the patriarchy. First, she is trapped in a cage of oppression that is created by men to reform female delinquents. To add insult to injury, Legs is subjected to male domination within the confines of a feminized space[11] where female violence is no longer used to overcome male domination but is rather used to subject women to the dominant forces of the patriarchy with the hope of melding delinquent girls into ideal young women.

Legs, for example, is first reduced to the status of an object in a reception/observation room where her "waking trance" is "interrupted by sudden spasmodic episodes of anger, frustration, [and] violence":

> Finding herself forcibly stripped, it's a "narco search" and she's sobbing humiliated never never is she going to survive such insult, fingers in greasy

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[11] A feminized space is a space where women are taught to be more feminine through, for example, cooking lessons and cosmetology classes.

> rubber gloves poking into her body; into the most secret most hidden-away parts of her body and they inquired too about her tattoo, so crudely done it's a homemade tattoo, honey, isn't it? -- your boyfriend done it to you, huh? -- damn lucky you didn't get an infection. And they felt through her hair, her straggly snarly hair, used a small flashlight to examine her scalp, her ears, even her nostrils, even her mouth, Legs Sadovsky who's just a body to them now, a name and a number too exhausted to protest. (145-146)

Once Legs is objectified by the female officers, she is subjected to the first of "many baths and showers with female officers looking close" and forcing her to scrub the tub "naked, panting and sobbing so exhausted, so ashamed" (146). "And then," as Maddy (the narrator) continues, they spray "her with disinfectant like you'd spray an animal . . . stinging liquid under her arms, under her breasts, into her pubic area to kill lice" (146). In essence, Legs is ushered through a quasi-purification process whereby the result is a clean and respectable -"looking" young woman who is willing to succumb to patriarchal authority. In fact, Oates reveals this aspect of patriarchy's ideological project by having the gang members comment on the muted personality revealed via Legs's censored letters:

> When I showed Legs's letters to my friends or read them aloud, that strange flat dead voice on the page ("Things are all right here. Im making some friends here. We take classes in things like writing & hair styling & 'cosmetology' its called. I feel O.K. They feed us O.K. & work us pretty hard so were hungry")
>
> Goldie came near to snatching the letters from me to tear up, she was

that upset, angry and laughing, "Shit! Listen to that! That ain't *Legs!* . . . (164)

The obvious censorship of Legs's letters, the "dead voice on the page," demonstrates the effects of patriarchal ideology on women. Like Mrs. Savage's loss of speech in *Because It Is Bitter, Because it Is My Heart*, Leg's own "voice" in writing is silenced by patriarchal ideologies of femininity and transformed into a regulated (read pleasant) feminine tone. Thus, Legs's existence at Red Bank revolves around her ability to maintain her sanity, to avoid the "craziness that comes and goes" (152) as she moves toward a more feminine existence idealized by the prison's strict regulations for, and high expectations of, its female inmates. Legs must subvert her own desire for violence as she pretends to evolve into a more feminine woman within the ideological plane of the female correctional institute. Legs, like Iris Courtney and Jinx Fairchild, must "look the part" or "pass" as a model of femininity: "*Make them sorry make them regret all they ever did to you and your sisters but never let them know it's* you *the strength that is in* you *the strength that is* you" (171). She learns how "power need never relinquish any degree of power; how those in control of our fates must be allowed to believe that . . . genuine integrity has guided their behaviour" (172). In effect, Legs's expression of rueful resigned calm" (173) when the guards release her from forty-eight hours of isolation reveals that she has had a "Turn of Heart" (173). But this decision to, as Legs states, "stop fucking around" (173) does not signify Legs's complete submission to patriarchal rule. Although she seems to be an "inmate who is intractable and beyond repentance and rehabilitation," she becomes "after a sequence of rapidly escalating confrontations and punishments tractable; reasonable;

obedient; good" (173-174). Thus, Legs becomes a popular trusty in order to free herself from the captive cell of the patriarchal prison.

In following the "lessons on femininity" learned at Red Bank, Legs re-enters society with the knowledge that FOXFIRE is her only way of escaping male domination in all of its visible and invisible forms: *"No one and nothing will touch me, ever again. If anybody is to kill it will be me . . . Nobody's ever gonna put their foot on the back of my neck again. Never gonna take shit from anybody again*" (174). For Legs, the violence she succumbs to at the hands of her own sex is unfathomable: "Now a man as the Enemy, O.K. I can accept that . . . but one of our own *kind*, the female sex, that's -- unexpected" (192). To rectify her shock and disgust with female violence against women, Legs attempts to create a true sisterhood of a single family of women (182), a sisterhood of the FOXFIRE gang. But as the gang's leader, Legs also assumes the most powerful role within her family: the role of the matriarch.

In the context of the production of female violence as an effect of the strained mother-daughter relationships in the novel, the patriarchal association of power with masculinity is displaced into a matriarchal system of female autonomy. Legs, for example, uses her sense of power and masculinity to rent a "FOXFIRE HOMESTEAD" where she and her "sisters" can live outside of the oppressive barriers of male domination. But this freedom from oppression comes with a price for the girl gang. Each FOXFIRE member becomes Legs's subordinate rather than her equal. As Maddy suggests, "She knows things I don't know, now" (187). Legs's knowledge of male domination, however, leads her down a destructive path where her desire for female emancipation is clouded by her own thirst for power. In fact, Legs attempts to murder dwarf-woman (Yetta) and dwarf-woman's brother and male friends when she discovers Yetta's deformed body "completely exposed and completely open," ready for men to enter whenever they choose (200). Legs is enraged by this blatant image of male domination and female subordination, but when she approaches Yetta's brother and argues that there are laws that prohibit abuse and forced prostitution on women (200), she is told that dwarf-woman is happy: "my sister's happy *here*" (201). I think Oates incorporates the sadistic image of Yetta into the narrative to re-define the complex issue of gendered violence. And it is this redefinition of violence that allows Oates to argue (via her characterization of Father Theriault) that "the tragedy" of human existence "is that men and women not only use one another as things but use themselves, present themselves, sell themselves . . . as things" (203). But it is also the acceptance of this gendered objectification by both men and women in the patriarchy that allows men and women to continue to be violent. Therefore, Legs's decision to burn Yetta's house is a dramatic display of one woman's violent realization of what the patriarchy actually is: a darkened chasm of conscious and unconscious violence between the sexes.

Legs becomes FOXFIRE's false matriarch, a female ruler entrenched in patriarchal ideology. It is only her power and autonomy outside of the FOXFIRE realm that enable her to move between the gendered identities and subjectivities of a surrogate mother and surrogate father to the girl gang members: "Dressed in men's clothes, her hair combed back and up from her forehead in a pompadour, mock-sideburns, no makeup of course and her voice gravelly-low, Legs *is* a guy, in a manner of speaking" (225). This blurring of her own identity and subjectivity within the patriarchy also subverts the FOXFIRE decree that all of the gang's victims are male (4) for Legs has the power to oscillate between a masculine and feminine persona. As a result, Legs maintains a position of dominance within her own self-created matriarchy by equating herself with the "negative manifestation" (Kaufman 62) of power and masculinity. That is, Legs uses gender to attain power as both a matriarch and a patriarch; she, for example, is able to force her "sisters" into a treacherous scheme of "hooking" (232) or prostitution to finance her homestead project and establish FOXFIRE as an independent and powerful female establishment within the patriarchy. Moreover, she is able to convince her FOXFIRE "sisters" that kidnapping a wealthy capitalist (Mr. Kellogg) is a concrete plan to ensure the betterment of FOXFIRE's way of life:

> Legs informing us, one night at supper, that Whitney Kellogg is our man, she's figured it all out.
>
> Says one of us, not sure she'd heard correctly, "-- 'Our man'?"
>
> Says Legs, "The *X* in our plot."
>
> Says another of us, puzzled, "-- 'Plot'?"
>
> Says Legs, "FOXFIRE's 'final solution.' So, y'know, we can buy this house, and nobody can make us leave. We can live here *forever*. (259)

Legs's "final solution' for FOXFIRE is a parody of the Nazi's coded reference to the extermination of Jews during World War II. To obtain complete dominance and power over men, Legs resorts to a more fatal form of violence that depends on her use of fire arms as a way to protect her matriarchy and to exterminate patriarchal rule. Oates relies on the symbolic representation of guns as phallic power to emphasize Legs's desire for autonomy and authority in the patriarchy. For Legs, the acquisition of this symbol of masculinity guarantees her a masculine subjectivity and identity that gives Legs an equal status with men in the patriarchy. Thus, Legs is able to kidnap Mr. Kellogg because "She was such a cool blond bitch" (229). What Legs does not understand, however, is that this newly-acquired masculine power is a force that she is unable to control for she continues to exist as a female in a patriarchal society. One may even posit that Legs's reluctance to harm Mr. Kellogg is a result of her own internalization of gender relations, relations that as Michael Kaufman postulates, "wittingly or unwittingly preserve patriarchal systems" (64); systems that Legs understands when she contemplates Mr. Kellogg "in that detachment beyond horror or even alarm" and "sees how the Enemy is after all only a man" (311):

> Legs, her eyes widened glistening like candlelight the knowledge of *the end of FOXFIRE* slow-coursing through her. Squatting by the unconscious man, afraid to touch him but needing to touch him, "Hey mister, hey you're not gonna die are you, hey --" her fingers coming away sticky with blood.
>
> It wasn't a shot to the heart, a flesh wound maybe? -- in the upper right corner of the man's fatty chest. Dark blood seeping through his shirt and through the clumsily wadded strips of torn sheet Legs has tried to tie around the wound, beneath WKJ's' arm and over the shoulder, a stench of bowels and animal panic lifting from him. (310)

Through Legs's perception of Mr. Kellogg in an animal-like state that simulates the condition of the animals in the oppressive cages from TYNE'S PETS & SUPPLIES and Legs's own incarceration at Red Bank, Oates softens her characterization of Legs Sadovsky and establishes female violence as anything but a "final solution" to the binary opposition of male domination and female subordination in the patriarchy. As bell hooks's theorizes about universal gender relations, gendered violence only perpetuates the existing gendered division of the sexes; and as I think Oates illustrates via the absence of solid mother-daughter relationships in the novel, the ideal matriarch of the FOXFIRE girl gang is a mother figure whose own female identity and subjectivity exists beyond the powers of patriarchal rule. In essence, Legs's attempt at being a matriarch is unsuccessful because she is unable to escape patriarchy. Therefore, Legs's desire for violence against men continues to perpetuate gender divisions between the sexes and these divisions categorize men and women witin a constant flux of binary oppositions between the dominant and the subordinate.

Oates continues to incorporate the binary opposition between male domination and female subordination into her later fiction via her thematic concern for body violence in her novel *Man Crazy*. Like that between Persia and Iris Courtney and Mrs. Wirtz and Maddy, the mother-daughter relationship between Chloe and Ingrid Boone reveals a pattern of male domination and female subordination that begins with Chloe's submissiveness to men and Ingrid's desire to be loved by her father. But how does this binary opposition create female violence? How does Chloe's relationship to Ingrid enable Ingrid to be a victim of and perpetrator of violence?

According to Joanne V. Creighton, Oatesian women

> are victims of an inadequate model of female selfhood. Those very qualities which are considered to be prototypically feminine -- passivity, fragility, beauty, sensitivity, and dependence -- make many women vulnerable to the harshness of modern life, insufficient to cope with life's unpredictability. ("Unliberated Women in Joyce Carol Oates's Fiction," [56])

Oates explores the roots of "female non-liberation" (ibid, 56) by examining femininity in terms of women's subordination in the patriarchy. However, in the context of female violence in Oates's later fiction,[12] female "non-liberation" is a social issue that seems to be an ideology unconsciously assumed by the protagonist's mother, violently rejected by the daughter, and ultimately accepted by both women. Oates's characterization of Chloe Boone, for example, may be interpreted via Chloe's ability to use her body and her physical beauty as a financial tool to support her and her daughter during Chloe's lifelong connection to Lucas Boone.[13] Chloe's physical appearance, her "silky white blond hair, her brown eyes set deep, her mouth that seemed always pouting, even when she smiled" (18), is a source of attraction to members of the opposite sex; an appearance that "a man would die for" (48). In fact,

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[12] Creighton's essay was written in the 1970s. The fiction by Oates that I study was written from the early 1990s onward.

[13] This connection between Chloe and Lucas Boone begins with their marriage, continues throughout their separation, and is reiterated in the narrative with the image of Chloe's shrine to her former husband at the end of the novel.

it is Chloe's physical appearance that brings Maynard Zink to his own untimely and gruesome death, for he sees Chloe as a sex object:

> "Excuse me, ma'am: do you know the way to the nearest church?"
>
> This brings Momma to almost a halt. She isn't prepared for this question.
>
> "A *church?*"
>
> "That's right, ma'am, can you help me?"
>
> . . . Saying flat and cool, "Mister, any way would take you to a church, wouldn't it? - - you keep going long enough."
>
> . . . "Look, I need to get to a church *fast*. To fall on my knees."
>
> Momma says, "Oh yes? Just why? Why's it so crucial?"
>
> "Because I want to give thanks to God," [Maynard Zink] says, like he's on TV or radio, making a statement, "--I'm looking at a woman so beautiful my heart is singing." (45-46)

By looking at Chloe's beauty, Maynard trespasses on Lucas Boone's "territory". Although Lucas and Maynard are men, it is Maynard's disrespect toward another man's property that prompts Boone to reduce Maynard to the status of a subordinate: "Out! Out of here before you get hurt, 'Zink'! Think I don't know *you*, I know *you*, 'Zink'! Bastard! Cocksucker! Taking advantage of another man's wife because she needs money, 'Zink'! Think I don't know *you*?" (79). Chloe allows herself to be a female sex object who subjects herself to male domination in order to gain financial freedom from Lucas Boone; and it is this subjection to men, this willingness to be a man's property rather than his equal, that provides Chloe with a sense of power. She is able to survive as a single mother in the patriarchy. Therefore, when Chloe receives three photographs of Maynard Zink's corpse (106), she is reminded of her position in society as a feminized object; an object that Lucas Boone dominates in Chloe's home (which Zink owns) and in Maynard Zink's office, where Zink is murdered. The grotesque images of Zink's corpse lying in a position of eternal submission to his male oppressor, "the fleshy face . . . turned away from the camera as if in shame of what has happened to him, what he's become" (106), reminds Chloe that she is like Zink - that she is ashamed of what has happened to her and what she has become as a result of her feminized position as a sexual object in the patriarchy.

Chloe's impulsive reaction to burn the images of Maynard's dead body is also an important element in Oates's characterization of the protagonist's mother:

> Momma whispered to herself now breathing hard, quick short hard breaths, and after awhile she got to her feet, went to the sink and tore up the Polaroids quickly into small pieces and burned them with her lighter . . . Then coming stumbling to where I was sitting, had been sitting unmoving for almost two hours, stooping over me clumsy and sobbing and her hot damp breath in my neck, hugging me, gripping me tight, "You never saw anything, Ingrid. You never saw anything. *You never saw anything.*" (107-108)

Although the title of the chapter from which this passage derives is called "*Separated,*" the circumstance of Chloe's lack of a separation from her husband is evident in her attempt to erase the horrific images of her former lover's dead body from her mind and from her daughter's mind. Chloe must erase the vivid realization that she does not, as a sexual object, have control over her own body. In telling Ingrid that she "never saw anything" (108), Chloe not only tries to protect her daughter from Lucas Boone's homicidal temper; she also attempts to shield Ingrid from her inevitable fate as an object in the patriarchy; a fate that may occur in life (as it does for Chloe) or a fate that may occur in death (as it does for Zink). Chloe feels that Ingrid will become a sexual object in the patriarchy and will be forever reminded of her status as a subordinate to male domination for Maynard Zink's death is not the first death to occur on behalf of Chloe Boone ("'Oh God, Luke. It hurt me, seeing that. It's a terrible thing to see someone you love get hurt. I was so scared you'd' she paused, and glanced at me, her gaze going wild -- 'do what you did that other time'" [90]). But Ingrid learns from her mother's submission to male authority that female power and autonomy depend on a woman's ability to become an object, to become a subordinate to male power. In essence, Ingrid attempts to gain power and autonomy through a violent process of self-objectification in which she becomes a victim of violence, a victim of self-inflicted body violence and a perpetrator of gendered body violence.

The victimization of the female body, as the symbolic meaning of Maynard Zink's death suggests, is an ongoing suppression of female power and authority in the patriarchy. In fact, how a woman *perceives* her body is an important aspect of her own subjectivity and identity as a subordinate in society. According to Oates's biographer, Ingrid Boone is an excellent example of an Oatesian heroine who suffers "sexual molestation, incest, or rape" and whose sense of self is permanently altered

(173). Oates illustrates this alteration of the bodily self and the suppression of female power in the novel via various images of male domination and female subordination, images that Ingrid first bears witness to as a young girl. When, for example, Ingrid sees the ghosts of two girls murdered by their father, she discovers that men in the "alive" world are violent and that women accept this violence as a pre-condition for love:

> Maude said, "Meltzer's little girls Cheryl and Doreen -- *I* knew them! Meltzer and Lena his wife weren't living together, Lena was living with this other guy, in Watertown, and one night Meltzer went with a gun to get the girls from Lena's mother where they were staying, and brought them out to the camp here, can --" and Brownlee cut her off saying, "Maude, shut the fuck up, you'll scare the kid," and Maude said, "*You* shut the fuck up, God damn you -- you were a buddy of Meltzer's weren't you -- thank God the prick put a bullet through his own brains too --" (29)

The transition from Maude's violent story of male violence to her own use of verbal violence brings about Brownlee's violent reaction against his partner (the slap he delivers to silence Maude). Both Maude's and Brownlee's behaviour exemplify gendered body violence and the power structures that allow male domination and female subordination to exist within the patriarchy. The irony, of course, is that Maude is in the middle of insulting Meltzer, Brownlee's friend, and so Brownlee must demonstrate his authority over Maude's outspokenness by physically silencing her with a slap. In fact, one may argue that Brownlee's violent action is very similar to Lucas

Boone's violent attack against Maynard Zink at Chloe's home (80). Each dominant male physically asserts himself to express his agitation with a weaker individual's belief that he/she has the right to criticize or cross the boundary between masculinity and femininity, strength and weakness, man and woman.

Oates also uses images in the narrative that signify male violence against the female body. In a short chapter entitled "Marsena Sportsman's Club," Ingrid recounts a childhood memory about a local sports club where young boys are hired to find and kill shot pigeons: "Why do they want to shoot pigeons? I asked Momma and Momma said, They're men. It's what men do when they can't shoot one another" (36). In terms of the Lucas Boone/Maynard Zink scenario, Chloe's assumption that male violence against men is displaced onto birds is juxtaposed with the notion of male violence against women. Boone shoots Zink to death; and so, Boone's act of violence does not need to be displaced onto birds/women for Boone's domination of Zink reduces Chloe's lover to an objectified feminized state in death. In effect, Maynard Zink's death symbolizes violence against women; a violence that requires male violence against men when men trespass one another's boundaries. Although Boone does not physically hurt Chloe, the Polaroid images of Zink's corpse threaten Chloe's physical existence nonetheless: "And her mouth dropped open, and the blood drained from her face. She uttered a wail like somebody had struck her in the belly" (106). Similarly, Ingrid's question seems to be an interrogation of her own identity and subjectivity in the patriarchy as a female subordinate; that is, Ingrid associates herself with birds as a result of her father's nickname for his daughter ("Birdie" [11]). The question as to why men kill birds suggests that Ingrid's relationship to her father is one based on his domination and her subordination, a binary opposition that becomes an important symbol in Ingrid's personal journey through drug addiction, sexual abuse, and almost death. One may even posit that Ingrid's recollection of her acid trips, when she remembers her secret hiding place as she spies on the boys running and crashing through the underbrush in pursuit of pigeons, is a memory that reveals Ingrid's desire for death[14]:

> Not once did one of them see me. I can dream of it to this day and in my acid trips I'd be returned there, that tree, crouching behind that tree, but I'd be flying too, flapping my wings rising into the air in just that instant before the *crack!* of the gun but the buckshot would miss me, or pass through me. Rising to God, feeling God's breath. That sharp smell of gunpowder. (36)

From a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, I think Ingrid's dream of flying symbolizes her sexual desire (Freud 124) for her father because Oates connects Ingrid's hallucinatory smell of gun powder with the sexual image of Lucas Boone's gun and the tickle of the gun between Ingrid's legs: "A tickle between my legs in that soft secret sliver of flesh between my legs I had no name for, sharp and sudden. Remembering that gun that fitted in my daddy's hand" (78). But Ingrid's dream also reveals her progression toward a downward spiral of violence. For Ingrid, death

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[14] Creighton argues in "Unliberated Women in Joyce Carol Oates's fiction" that the "characteristic Oatesian woman . . . consciously or unconsciously seeks her own

seems to be a higher state of existence where her connection to her father reaches its ultimate plateau. Ingrid perceives her death as a sadistic mercy killing (like the fate of the shot pigeons) performed by her father. As a result, Ingrid is able to tell her father that she is willing to die for him (65). She is prepared to be like her mother; she is prepared to have a man crazy enough for her that he is willing to kill *her*.

Although Ingrid's "man craziness" imitates her mother's ongoing "relationships" with men and reproduces the constant victimization of the female body by male domination, Ingrid also learns how to commit self-inflicted body violence via her mother's alcoholism. In fact, Chloe's alcoholism develops into a more serious problem after she sees the Polaroid images of Maynard Zink's body, "After the Polaroids, Momma began drinking more heavily" (117). Chloe's drinking is an attempt by Ingrid's mother to ignore (or forget) her status as a sexual object in the patriarchy. But Chloe is oblivious to the effects of her drinking on her daughter. That is, through her relationship to her mother, Ingrid learns to abuse her own body in three different ways: scratching, drug abuse, and sexual promiscuity. Oates allows Ingrid to gain a sense of orgasmic satisfaction from each form of body violence. When, for instance, Ingrid tells her readers that she tries to stick a fork in her arm during her detention at Chau Co Women's Det. CT., she states that she wants to see if she is "real": "I was not

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death" (156).

on methadone, I was not a junkie. But you feel the need, the need builds up, every forty-eight hours or so. It's a fact. It's human anatomy. Neurology. We all want to explode. If you can't come one way, you come some other way" (4). But Ingrid also informs her readers about her skin scratching and skin picking:

> All I know is there's this tightness in my skin like it's a drum's skin stretched to bursting, and a pounding heat in it like fever. You people staring at me in pity, disgust, superiority whispering *Dog-girl!*
>
> Always had this bad habit since I was a little girl, Momma despaired of me. Maybe because Momma used to be so beautiful, I needed to hurt one of us? Picking at my face till it bleeds. These rashes that flare up out of nowhere, pimples hard as grit, insect bites -- my sharp fingernails find their own way, greedy for what they find. Asleep, or awake. Dig till a little blood starts!
>
> Then I feel better. Almost better. (4)

Ingrid is violent toward herself. She needs to equate her own existence in the patriarchy with her mother's existence as a subordinate to men. To compensate for her mother's beauty that allows Chloe to be a sexual object, Ingrid inflicts pain upon her own body to become her mother's equal -- to be an object. In effect, Ingrid's scratching is a violent act of confirmation that reveals her ability to control her own body outside of her mother's watchful presence:

> Tried to forbid me but even in her watchful presence I could rake my nails lovingly in secret across my serrated skin, draw pinpoints of blood and take a spiteful pleasure in it. I never thought of scarring, of permanent injury

> . . . I thought only of SCRATCHING. (139)

One may even suggest that it is Chloe's lack of control over Ingrid's body that empowers Ingrid to believe that she is what her mother seems to be -- to be an autonomous and powerful woman in the patriarchy. As Ingrid reveals, she becomes a sexual object:

> A few of the guys gave me money, older guys not in school I'd meet downtown and I'd buy clothes, funky hip-hugger belts, once a Timex watch with a good-looking leather band. Mother saw, and asked where'd that come from and I said what? Where did what come from? And slammed out of the apartment. Went to make a telephone call, I didn't have to take any shit from *her*. (138)

I believe that Oates uses Chloe as Ingrid's role model to emphasize the cause for Ingrid's desire to be a sexual object; to be a subordinate to male domination while maintaining a sense of power and autonomy by using her body as a financial tool. As Chloe tells Ingrid, "it didn't matter if the man you're with is nobody you much care for, other men will be looking you over, too. It's the other men, the men you haven't yet met, one of them who'll maybe change your life, you're fixing yourself up for" (141). And when Chloe decides to cover Ingrid's sickly complexion to make her gorgeous (143) for her daughter's poetry reading, Ingrid admits to wanting to be gorgeous, "The truth was, I wanted to be *gorgeous* too" (146). But Ingrid's sudden desire for physical beauty is overcome by her uncontrollable urges to scratch her bite-infested skin. Although Chloe attempts to control Ingrid by masking her scarred and bleeding face with make-up, it is Ingrid's fear of not being admired by her peers the way that her mother is admired by men that unconsciously forces her to scratch her face:

> It washed over me in sickening horror that Momma, I mean Mother would be here, she and her man friend Mr. Dilts who was another woman's husband "separated" like Momma was "separated," and my classmates would see her, and him. And I wanted them to know that Momma was my mother so much younger and better-looking than their mothers but I didn't want them to think that Mr. Dilts was my father, the idea filled me with revulsion. I scratched at my forehead . . . (153)

To psychologically imitate a sexual union with her father, Ingrid scratches her forehead as a symbol of her own sexual objectification in the patriarchy. In other words, to be loved by her father (rather than by other men), Ingrid must become a sexual object like her mother without emphasizing her potential for physical beauty. Oates even compares Ingrid's self-inflicted violence with the protagonist's sexual experiences with men:

> Very cautiously like a blind person I touched the string of pimples at my hairline just lightly drawing my nails back and forth over them. Oh God this made them itch all the more. Terrible, terrible itching! It was like a guy touching the tip of his cock against me just the tip of the little ridge of flesh between my legs so stiff and aching and his breath so hot and quickened and the moaning in his throat he didn't hear *Oh! Jesus* and I would bite my lip hard enough to draw blood not wanting to come, not wanting it to happen, not like

> that, so exposed. (150)

The apparent enjoyment Ingrid feels during both acts is obvious. Both experiences provide Ingrid with a climactic outlet for the release of tension and stress. For Ingrid, however, this physical release is infused with pain and so physical pain and sexual satisfaction become one and the same.

Adding Ingrid's desire to be a sexual object to this recipe of physical wish-fulfilment, Oates creates the basis for Ingrid's sexual promiscuity and willingness to be a sexual subordinate. When Ingrid is in secondary school, for example, she finds herself in a position of sexual subordination that she cannot escape:

> *Ingrid? -- let's go in the backseat O.K.?* and I saw how big his penis was, big for *me*, I was proud how big it was for *me*, and I was sleepy and sort of sickish saying *Gee I don't know, maybe I should go back home?* and Kirk said *But honey I love you, I'm crazy about you* and I said in this slow dazed voice *Gee I don't know, I guess not* but he wasn't listening, pushing against me, and running his hands over me, and we never needed to go into the backseat. (132)

Ingrid allows Kirk to sexually satisfy himself. She is unable to look beyond Kirk's empty compliments; she feeds on his sexual attraction to her; she associates beauty and sex with her mother's attractiveness and her mother's sexual relationships with men. In effect, Ingrid becomes Kirk's sexual subordinate not just because Kirk chooses Ingrid as his sexual object, but also because Ingrid desires to be his sexual subordinate. As Ingrid reiterates, "Sometimes when you let them do what they want to do and don't try to stop them the evil energy runs through them like an electric shock" (164). When, for example, Ingrid defies Enoch Skaggs by warning an innocent woman of the potential that she will be harmed as a victim of Skaggs's mastery and dominion ("I'm not your friend, I'm an emissary of Satan! Get out of here, run like hell! Go on!" [187]), Ingrid knowingly subjects herself to Enoch Skaggs's violent wrath. As a punishment, she is not only raped by her master, she is also made to bleed: "He'd made me bleed, he said a woman who can't bleed between the legs is a whore" (214). And so for Ingrid, physical violence is a so-called natural occurrence (she discovers that "a woman is born to bleed" [166]) as a result of her complex socialization within the dysfunctional structures of her patriarchal family.

"Evil energy" is, however, also an important aspect of Ingrid's role as a perpetrator of body violence. It is through her mother's ability to ignore Maynard Zink's death that Ingrid learns how to perpetuate violence against others. In fact, it is in the knowledge that her father has killed for her mother that Ingrid finds the strength to bear witness to the death of Gem. Ingrid's involvement with death brings her closer to her father. Death, for Ingrid, is a symbol of invisibility; and invisibility is a quality that Lucas Boone maintains throughout Ingrid's life. To be invisible, to die, is to establish a connection between Ingrid and her father. Therefore, Ingrid refuses to help Gem with his fatal predicament ("You could save me if you wanted to, Ingrid! -- you could run away from her to somebody's house -- call the police -- Ingrid? -- you hear what I'm saying?"). She is (unconsciously) more concerned about her role as a sexual object in the patriarchy and how this role may somehow connect her to her father.

That is, Ingrid is more concerned about imitating her mother's status as a sexual object in order to be loved by her father as a female subordinate. For this reason, I think Oates re-introduces animal imagery into the narrative to denote Ingrid's unconscious desire for her father through death. As a prisoner in the earthen cellar, Ingrid is reduced to an animal-like state where she must eat garbage and drink water "trickling down the stone walls":

> Lying on the topmost steps my nose and mouth pressed to the crack of the door to breathe, slipped into my twilight state not-there and finally not-hungry a day and a night and a day and a night -- you lose track, you float where Time is one single stream like Death, there's dignity in such knowledge. Momma said *A woman has to have her pride, without pride we're all animals*. But I was an animal, that was how I survived. (218)

Like Ingrid's drug-induced hallucination of being a shot-pigeon (36), Ingrid's animal-like existence in the earthen cellar is an existence that she desires. It is an existence that reveals the level of submissiveness that she is willing to subject herself to in order to demonstrate her love for both Enoch Skaggs and her father. Although Enoch does remove Ingrid from her cage after he feels that her punishment is just (219), Ingrid, like Gem, becomes a sacrifice to Satan. She is "tossed into the darkness with the garbage left to decompose [and] rot into the soil" (235) like a decomposing corpse. Unlike Gem, however, Ingrid does not die. Her final punishment by Enoch Skaggs is to be death but what Enoch does not count on is Ingrid's own desire for violence within the patriarchy. During her "final hours" of life in the cellar, Ingrid envisions herself as a perpetrator of violence:

> And there crouched in a corner of the cellar the girl from the shopping centre, the plumpish girl with her hair tied back in a ponytail *Gail Ellen* or was it *Gayellen* my friend in school one of my closest friends regarding me with astonished eyes. Eyes of horror, and of hurt. Knowing herself betrayed for this time I called to her, I spoke softly and cajolingly to her and did not drive her away to save herself but helped to overpower her, helped the guys to grab her with their quick hard hands, lifting, dragging into the rear of the van, a hand over her mouth to muffle the screams, helping to bind wrists and ankles with the wire, the terrible wire cutting into her babysoft skin I was crying *Damn dumb bitch! This is what you deserve!* (237)

One may argue that it is this ghostly image of Gail Ellen as Ingrid's victim that reminds Ingrid of her own physicality within the patriarchy. Ingrid's hallucination parallels Oates's earlier image of the ghost girls hiding underneath the porch. During Ingrid's childhood, Ingrid is confronted with the fatal effects of male violence against the female body. As she matures, however, this understanding of male violence develops into a more sophisticated comprehension of the association between power and masculinity. In order to imagine herself as a perpetrator of violence, Ingrid must re-identify herself with a male subjectivity, a subjectivity that enables her to commit a violent act against another female.

But it is this hallucinatory act of violence that provides Ingrid with a sense of inner strength and desire to continue living within the patriarchy. Like her mother, Ingrid discovers a sense of power in her subordinate position as a woman and it is this power that helps her to escape death:

> Starved to eighty-six pounds when they weighed me. Skin tight as a drum, and jaundiced. Covered in insect bites, bruises and scabs and the festering X tattoo on my stomach. Lost so much weight in those days and nights of captivity (I would estimate after about two weeks) I was able to push myself through the slot of a window where you'd think a full-grown cat could not have pushed itself. (244)

Oates reconnects Ingrid to her mother through Ingrid's exhausting escape. In fact, Chloe becomes a source of strength for Ingrid:

> . . . I was too weak to continue even to lift my head I slept hoping to summon my strength I saw Momma in the road I had not known was so close, only a few yards away, Momma pacing smoking her cigarette seeming unaware of my presence *Ingrid? Where are you?* Momma's plaintive voice borne by the wind *Ingrid? Ingrid* the sound fading and I could not lift my head, I tried but could not, until at last the sky began to define itself out of the darkness like coalescing pieces of ice in freezing water and the sun appeared at the tree line a faint drained red under reefs of red-stained cloud and I heard the voice now distant, now closer *Ingrid are you lost? Ingrid where are you? Ingrid!* impatient and worried and I tried to reply but had not enough strength, my throat tight as if the flesh had grown over rendering me mute. *Momma don't leave me! Momma wait I begged in silence but she was gone* . . . (244)

By redefining Chloe's and Ingrid's relationship in terms of their mutual subordination to male domination, Oates allows Ingrid to try and redefine her own subjectivity and identity outside of her relationship to her father. But Ingrid cannot escape the effects of male domination and female subordination. She learns to live her life by accepting her role in the mother-daughter bond she shares with Chloe: "*That river! It's Mother's blood she can't escape*" (262). Ingrid is forever haunted by her past. She follows a progressive pattern of body violence that does not allow her to escape the binary opposition between male domination and female subordination. Like Chloe, Ingrid finds emotional solace in loving one man, Lucas Boone; and like Chloe, Ingrid's desire for Lucas Boone is alive but invisible from the outside.

A constant characteristic of Oates's female protagonists as they attempt to violently erase the binary opposition of male domination and female subordination in society is their submission to masculine ideologies of femininity that offer men power and autonomy and reduce women to sexual objects. But it is through the mother-daughter relationships that Oates illustrates the violent effects of male domination of women within the patriarchy; dominance that is perpetuated via mother-daughter relationships and displaced into female violence against race, gender, and body. Although each protagonist succumbs to a fated female destiny of perpetual subordination, I feel that Oates incorporates the issue of female violence into her later fiction to demonstrate the effects of women's oppression in terms of racial violence in *Because It Is Sweet, Because It Is My Heart*, gendered violence in *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang*, and body violence in *Man Crazy*. But as the reader soon discovers, to challenge the patriarchal status quo through violence does not create female emancipation for women but rather forces women to conform to a standard of masculine behaviour, behaviour that does not eradicate the problem of binary oppositions in society; oppositions that, as Oates's novels suggest, continue to empower one group above another: white over black, man over woman, mind over body.

Chapter 3: Real and Fictionalized Violence

The term "psychological realism" is used by many of Oates's critics to define the author's style of Gothic writing that includes such elements as "extreme personal isolation, violent physical and psychological conflict, settings and symbolic action used to convey painfully heightened psychological states, and a prose style of passionate, often melodramatic intensity" (Johnson in *Understanding Joyce Carol Oates*, 17). As Oates explains,

> . . . the writing of prose would not interest me if it didn't move, or give the impression of moving, along a "realistic" continuum. How to create fictitious worlds of words that nonetheless give the impression of being "real": not merely style, or gesture: not mere postmodernist display. (*Excerpts from a Journal: July 1989*)

Oates relies on her own experiences as a survivor of violence (Johnson 30-31) to establish this realistic continuum in her work. But I also think she uses the reality of violence in her novels as a means to embrace the tragic existence of womankind and their constant struggle for survival in the patriarchy. And so, I argue in this chapter that Oates recreates the early turbulent world of childhood in her later fiction to allow her protagonists (and herself) to surrender the past to story:

> now perhaps we are ready to surrender the past to story, even to anecdote; past griefs to present laughter. And the truth came to me how if you survive, all things in time become narrative, that artful selection of words, words that do your bidding, not *This happened to me* but *I did this.* If you survive.

(Oates, *Excerpts from a Journal: July 1989*, 134)

By surrendering the past to story, Oates's female protagonists are able to find emotional comfort and solace as female subordinates to male domination. That is, Oates reveals a "tragic joy"[15] in which, like Oates, the protagonists proclaim not "This happened to me," but rather "I did this." She reveals a "Yes-saying" to female joy "without reservation, even to suffering, even to guilt, even to everything that is

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[15] "Tragic joy" is best exemplified in Albert Camus's existential interpretation of the Myth of Sisyphus, a myth that outlines the condemnation of Sisyphus by the gods to "ceaselessly" roll a stone to the top of a mountain in Hades and have this same stone fall back to the bottom of the mountain as a result of its own weight (Camus 312). For Camus, Sisyphus's punishment by the gods is a) a tragic act performed in sorrow where man goes back down the mountain "with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end," and b) an act performed in silent joy where Sisyphus's "fate belongs to him," where "the absurd man says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing" ("The Myth of Sisyphus" in Kaufman, 314-315).

questionable and strange in existence" (Nietzsche *Intellectual Origins of the Contemporary World* 272-273), as the female protagonists waive their desire for violence to continue existing within a violent society that is dominated by men.

For Oates, "Art is built around violence, around death" (*Edge of Impossibility* 6). In fact, Oates's later fiction is built around a disjunction between "real" violence and "fictionalized" violence. "Real"violence, for example, is reported within the story as a factual or realistic representation of turbulent, and often physically and emotionally destructive forces against both women and men. The gruesome description of a character's death by a narrator, for instance, may be classified as a form of "real" violence in literature. In contrast, I regard "fictionalized" violence as the report by a character or individual who participates in the story and not only speaks or writes as "I" about the violence she/he becomes a victim and perpetrator of, but also fictionalizes the story of that violence when remembering it and "re-writing" it. Oates combines "real" and "fictionalized" violence in her later fiction via the female protagonists' bid to find joy in their tragic existence as female subordinates to male domination. In *Because It Is Bitter, Because It Is My Heart*, for instance, it is Iris Courtney's relationship with violence, death, and a fear of the future that enables her to surrender her violent past to story, a story that is a darkened tale of the protagonist's ability to find joy in tragedy and to fictionalize the reality of her own violent life. One may even argue that Iris is not afraid of the past but rather subverts the truth of her past to protect her future, a future that she is unable to control:

> Jinx? . . . I'm so afraid.

> Afraid of what?
>
> Of things.
>
> You mean . . . what happened by the river?
>
> No. Not the past. What's coming. (242)

To control her future, Iris surrenders her past to story. She fabricates fiction from fact or lies from truth, to create a new identity and new subjectivity in her relationships with the Savages. During a dinner discussion at the Savages, for example, Iris retells Garlock's death and dramatically changes the death from the horror-filled vision the reader is already familiar with to a more subdued version in which a red-headed boy falls over the side of a boat and accidentally drowns (325).

But in order for Iris to destroy her past, she must, like her mother and like Jinx Fairchild, destroy her former self. Although Iris does not physically die in the novel, she becomes the ideal feminine woman and therefore renders herself silent. She becomes a mirror image of Mrs. Gwendolyn Savage. The tragedy of Iris's final lot in life as the soon-to-be bride of Alan Savage is that she is reduced to the status of a sexual object, a Botticelli, a work of art. The sense of joy she finds in this new life where, as Mrs. Savage thinks, "[women] lack speech" (315), is a sentiment Iris readily accepts as her own. She deprives herself of speech; she chooses to reconstruct her identity and subjectivity; she chooses to live in the present, to forget the past, and to fear the future.

One important image Oates incorporates into the novel that links Iris's past to her present (the present signified by her status as an angelic bride in the final chapter of the novel) is the photographic images and the minute instances of time they each represent. The 'Persia-and-Iris portraits,' for example, provide Iris with a working history of her own life that follows her growth from infancy to adolescence. This progression, however, is questioned by nine-year-old Iris after her mother comments on the age of the portraits:

> "Why doesn't [Leslie] take the old [portraits] out?" Persia says annoyed. "They're so *old.*"
>
> Iris wipes roughly at her eyes. "If that's actually me -- that baby -- I wish I could remember. Momma, I don't remember any of it!"
>
> Persia says, "I remember."
>
> Mother and daughter stand staring through grimy glass seeing mother-and-daughter gazing placidly out, each pair of photographed likenesses inhabiting their inviolate time beyond the breath of perishable things.
>
> Again Persia says, sighing, "I remember." (54)

Persia is filled with a deep-rooted sense of melancholy when she sees Leslie's mother-and-daughter portraits and this melancholic reaction suggests that Persia does not want to be continuously reminded of her past, of her youth, and of her former beauty. In fact, Persia's confirmation of her past ("I remember") is an affirmation for Iris that life inevitably ends. In the midst of baby pictures and family portraits of unknown individuals stands a photographic history of the Courtneys:

> Iris's father as a dashing young man in his twenties, in a straw hat, a cigarette in a holder jutting FDR-style from his mouth; Duke and Persia as "The

> Incomparable Courtneys," in elegant formal attire, poised in what appears to be a foxtrot position, arms upraised, legs gracefully stretched, each pair of eyes gaily locking with the camera lens; Persia, very young, a beautiful dreamy full-faced girl, with her infant daughter wrapped in a lacy shawl . . . and with her year-old daughter . . . and with her two-year-old daughter . . so, it might seem, to infinity . . . Iris never wants to seek out these photographs but always does. As soon as she walks into the shop.
>
> Feeling that stab of visceral horror: *You are going to die, here's proof.* (58)

To imagine a nine-year-old child even *thinking* of death is rather upsetting. Childhood is supposed to be a time of innocence and happiness. But Oates subverts the correlation of youth with innocence and happiness by making Iris aware of the past and the future; for Iris, the progression of time leads to death, and death turns people into abstractions (156).

In fact, the death of Persia Courtney allows Iris to fabricate new stories of her past. When, for example, Iris discusses her mother and father with Mrs. Gwendolyn Savage, Iris seems to rely on lies to create a picture-perfect image of her parents' life together:

> the portrait that emerges of Persia Courtney is of a woman of unusual warmth, vitality, and strength of character who chose not to remarry after an early divorce and who was determined to support herself and her daughter without asking favours of relatives at a succession of low-paying jobs (sales clerk, typist, librarian's assistant), a woman who displayed not only extraordinary cou-

> rage in facing her final illness but who tried to the very end to shield her daughter from guessing the extent of her suffering. (308)

And as the narrator continues,

> Iris has suggested that her father is a politician of some kind . . . in one of the western states. She remembers him as a very busy man, a brisk, steely-eyed man; she hasn't seen him since she was five years old but bears him no ill will since her mother bore him no ill will: just said, simply, that the marriage had not worked out and never dwelled upon it. (309)

What the reader, of course, knows is that Iris's description of both Persia and Duke Courtney is a complete fabrication that in no way resembles the truth of her parents' lives, a truth that reveals the Courtney's struggle with a relationship lost in the mindless torments of alcoholism and gambling. Moreover, Iris even incorporates her own position as a librarian's assistant in her mother's list of "low-paying jobs." She is ashamed of her working-class past; she is ashamed of who her parents are in relation to the upper-class status of the Savages.

The irony, however, is obvious. Like her mother, Iris pretends to be someone she is not in order to obtain a sense of validation from strangers who do not realize that Iris is not the person she claims to be. When, for example, Alan Savage discovers the photograph of the Christmas tree "comprised of hundreds of children's faces with the caption 'CHRISTMAS 1946': 'And the Light Shineth in Darkness, and the Darkness Comprehended It Not'" (344), he ignores the possibility that Iris's own image may indeed be interspersed throughout the black and white faces of other children and placed at "the very peak of the tree" (344). In effect, Alan is the "Darkness" that does not comprehend the very "Light" that stands before him. Like his parents, he only sees what Iris wants him to see. In essence, Iris's lies about her family are based on what she wants to remember about her past -- a past that does not involve an ugly memory of her mother as a wasted and nervy body coiled up on a hospital bed (263); a past that does not reveal her father's lack of steady employment or lack of responsibility to his family but rather a past that creates a softer version of Iris's childhood experiences in which Iris envisions the real Persia as "the healthy Persia: the woman so frequently and so lovingly photographed with her daughter, throughout their lives" (261); a past that does not include her father.

Oates's association of Persia's illness with photographs from Persia's past is fascinating. It is through these former images of Iris's mother that Iris maintains a bond with someone who knows "her intimately enough to love her" (287). With Persia's death, however, Iris's intimate bond with her mother is not only shattered but also forgotten. As the narrator reveals, Iris shares a bond with Jinx Fairchild; a bond that enables Jinx to know Iris intimately enough to not love her (287); a bond that involves the death of Little Red Garlock. Garlock's death is a crucial aspect of both Iris's and Jinx's past that neither adolescent is able to repress because the violent end of Garlock's life haunts their very existence. In fact, Oates seems to establish Iris and Jinx as one another's doppelganger or alter ego. The manner in which both adolescents deal with their guilt is strikingly different, and yet these differences link the two characters until the very end of the novel. Iris, for example, is able to function on a daily basis without the appearance of a guilty conscience. However, the nights become a troublesome medley of gory images for Iris as she remembers "Jinx scrambling across Little Red Garlock's legs,"

> picking up a rock, bringing it down on the other's head again, again, again, . . . cursing, sobbing, screaming out words that weren't words, only sounds.
>
> Then Little Red Garlock stopped struggling, stopped *his* noise . . . then he was dead, so quick.
>
> His legs twitching and that's all. And then that stopped too. So quick.
>
> And Jinx got to his feet, and Iris came closer, and they'd stood over the body staring . . . thinking, Was it a trick of his, lying there like a slaughtered hog? In the weeds, in the sandy gravel? Hoping they'd bend over him, touch him? Then he'd have an advantage?
>
> Surely Jinx Fairchild knew this was Death, the seeping blood, the wide-open sightless eyes, but he was whispering for Little Red to get up, damn you, get up, peckerhead motherfucker get *up*, clearly knowing he'd smashed in the boy's skull as with the edge of a shovel you'd smash ice that's in your way, but still he was dazed, pleading, wiping blood from his own dripping face, whispering, Hey man get *up*. (154)

But Iris's guilt derives from "not running for help and protecting [Jinx] from his own instinct for self-survival" (155). Therefore, it is not Garlock's death that Iris confronts on a nightly basis but rather her guilt in not having helped a young black man whose own struggle with and anger toward racial oppression and Otherness forces him to murder a white man: "Glancing down at the whiteness of her skin she feels a sensation of vertigo, a physical sickness, as if this whiteness were the outward symptom of her spirit's etiolation, a profound and unspeakable not-thereness" (155). It is no wonder then that Iris does not think of death but rather "occupies her mind with other things" (153). Garlock's death is less important to Iris then the possible downfall of Jinx Fairchild for Jinx has more potential for success in life as an all-star basketball player and secondary school scholar than Garlock would ever have in his entire life as a high-school drop-out. Thus, Iris lies to the police about Garlock's death not only to protect herself from any incriminating evidence, but also to protect Jinx from being blamed for the violent and fatal crime against a white man. As the narrator contends, however, Iris's fears about being arrested are subverted by her realization of and appreciation for "the extraordinary power of duplicity" (156). Iris becomes two separate people in one as she carries on with her daily existence after Garlock's murder. Although she is the "link between Jinx Fairchild and the dead boy" (157), as a murderer and a victim, Iris knows that she and Jinx will never be caught for their crime. She knows that the police will never suspect a white girl. And so for Iris, lies become truths and her happiness and Jinx's happiness depends on their ability to move forward and to forget the past.

Jinx, however, is unlike Iris; he is unable to accept the notion that he has killed a man with his own hands:

> Everywhere he goes, through every hour and day, he's carrying these hands of

> his . . . there's a shyness in the glance he gives them, like he's in the presence of something with its own thoughts and its own unknowable consciousness of *him*.
>
> Jinx Fairchild's hands. That have administered Death.
>
> Long skinny fingers he'd thought he knew and owned. Like his penis that isn't always his exactly . . . charged with blood, flexing like a fist . . . and that blood not his.
>
> I have dealt Death. With these hands.
>
> ******************************
>
> . . . Administering Death in one! Two! Three! Four! *Five*! frenzied hammer blows. (127-128)

What Iris lacks in remorse toward Little Red Garlock Jinx makes up for with a guilt-ridden conscience. Jinx cannot pretend to be two people at the same time; he cannot easily forget the past nor turn the past into a fictitious narrative to ease his conscience:

> [Jinx] [r]emembers the start of it in Cheney's and the end of it -- burning his sweatshirt in the woods and sobbing and talking to himself -- but the middle part is blurred, hazy. As if he'd only been told it, secondhand. As if the killing of the white boy, Garlock, with that white girl a witness, isn't anything more than a story Jinx Fairchild has heard, in fragments.
>
> One of those neighbourhood stories told and retold so many times, when they return to their source they're unrecognizable . . . lumpy disfigured and covered in dirt like a snowball you keep rolling in the yard till it's the size

> of a bushel basket and too heavy to budge. Not a snowball any longer, and not recognizable. (160)

Note the counter-balance of information between Jinx's and Iris's experiences with the events of Garlock's death. On the one hand, the reader learns the gruesome details of the murder via Iris's vivid memories, memories that Iris reduces to fiction after she lies to the police officer about the entire crime. Jinx's memories of Garlock's death, on the other hand, are fragmented and unrecognizable. It is these fragments of memory, these fragments of truth, that shock Jinx's system into a state of disbelief. Jinx is the author of this vicious plot of mayhem and death; that is, Jinx is the author of "real" violence in the narrative. In effect, Jinx is Iris's binary opposite: he is male, she is female; he is black, she is white; he is poor, she is wealthy; he represents truth; she represents lies; he is the author of real violence; and she is the author of fictionalized violence. The irony, however, is that it is Jinx's spoken testimonials to Iris about Garlock's murder that suggest his lack of concern for his decision to kill his enemy: "*I* did the right thing, *I* didn't have any choice . . . Once it got started, only way it was going to end was that peckerhead bastard dead, or me" (186). Jinx lies to Iris about his own pain and guilt. He cannot reveal his weaknesses to a member of the opposite sex. As a result, Jinx becomes an author of fictionalized violence and his lies and Iris's lies begin to intertwine with the truths of their thoughts to create new identities and subjectivities. Iris maintains her duplicate personality and moves to Syracuse to start a new life for herself while Jinx breaks his ankle, ruins his chance at a basketball scholarship and career, marries a lower-class black woman, and joins the ranks of working-class black men.

But the truth/lie binary opposition also seems to correlate with the image of photographs in the novel and the notion of turning the past into story. And what are stories but a conglomeration of truth and lies, reality and fiction, intermingled and juxtaposed to, as Oates argues, anticipate "the future as if from a vantage point exterior to time; or, and this futilely, rethinking the past as if rehearsing it, wanting this second time to get everything right -- the right syllable in the right place, the perfect punctuation" (*Excerpts*, 125). Jinx assumes that Iris confesses her own dismay at having had a role in Garlock's death: "If only . . . I had it to do over again. It was my decision, it was my--" Jinx says, "Yah, honey, but you did, didn't you. As my daddy says of certain things, 'It is writ.' 'It is writ, Amen'" (186). For Jinx, what is written becomes the unchangeable past; but for Iris, the past is open to change if one surrenders history to fiction. Iris feels no regret or guilt about Garlock's death. Iris's guilt derives from not having protected Jinx from himself. So when Iris gives Jinx a "sepia-tinted photograph" of the Civil War with an image of black Union foot soldiers (188), she tries to reconnect Jinx with a moment in his ancestral history when black men and white men worked together as a unit of soldiers to fight in the war (189); a proud history that came before Jinx's violent past. This photographic image of a union between blacks and whites represents Iris's bond with Jinx, a bond that signifies her connection with someone other than her mother who knows her intimately. But Jinx is reluctant to accept this photograph as a token of his connection to Iris. He knows that Iris belongs to the realm of the "Man," the white race that exploits, uses up, sucks dry, and discards the black race (190). "Jinx keeps the photograph, however" (189); he treasures it; and when Iris is given a chance to explain her sense of guilt for allowing Jinx to murder Little Red Garlock, her frustration with Jinx is obvious when Jinx purposely breaks his ankle and allows himself to succumb to the past:

> "Look: *why* did you do it? That 'accident'? I knew you did it intentionally, I knew right away." She pauses. Jinx makes no reply as she knew he wouldn't, behaves as if he's hardly listening. She says, "He deserved to die. That's the one clear thing. If he was alive and it was that night again . . . the same thing would happen. I know there's a way of seeing him, of the person he was, or the thing, the . . . the circumstances, there's a way of understanding so you couldn't hate him or want him dead, you'd be a part of him like God is a part of him seeing things from his perspective, but I don't care, I *don't* care. I don't want that perspective or that sympathy, I don't want him in the world.
>
> *************************
>
> Iris says, "You know what I'm talking about. We know each other. That basketball game . . . you did it deliberately . . . ruined everything for yourself. And *why?* . . . it was a mistake, we didn't do anything wrong. We don't deserve to be punished." (240-241)

Iris's survival in the future also depends on her willingness to live in the present (404), to learn to forget the past, and to reconfigure her life in terms of her daily existence outside of her memory's "transcendental function" that seems to only "attach itself to bodies" (403). This attachment to bodies includes an attachment to writing that allows Iris to express her immediate emotions in her journal. As Oates suggests via the narrator's dialogue, "When we are hurt, when we are frightened, befuddled . . . we take up our pens. And in secret" (234). Iris begins to write in her secret journal when she realizes the extent of her mother's struggles with alcoholism:

> *She's an alcoholic.*
>
> As if testing out the words: *alcoholic, alcoholic.* Daring to commit them to the terrible authority of ink on paper, its impersonality, *I despise her: can't wait to escape her!* Gouging the paper with her pen's sharp point as she hears the anguished sounds of her mother emptying out her guts in the bathroom beside Iris's room . . . (212)

And as Persia's illness worsens, Iris writes:

> *She has become utterly unpredictable . . . untrustworthy.*
>
> *She has no soul: all slipping surfaces.*
>
> *She could stop drinking if she wanted to. She just doesn't want to.*
>
> *There is not the slightest connection between us.* (234)

What is ironic is that as the female protagonist, Iris has also become "utterly unpredictable" and "untrustworthy." Iris leads a life of duplicity in which her identity and subjectivity oscillate between the "Iris Courtney from Hammond" and "the Iris Courtney from Syracuse." A journal entry, for example, by Iris after Alan Savage leaves her boarding room reads: "*How happy. HOW HAPPY I AM. You didn't think, did you, that I COULD BE SO HAPPY*" (347). In spite of her earlier assumption that she has no connection with her mother, Iris's latest entry demonstrates the anger and hostility that she has toward Persia Courtney. In fact, the tone of the written message and the use of capitalization to emphasize the tone, undermines Iris's attempt to convince herself that she is, indeed, happy. Like her mother, Iris blurs the boundaries between truth and lies (226) for she is unable to distinguish one from the other. Furthermore, in writing her thoughts and emotions on paper, Iris continues to uphold the bond between her and her mother even after Persia's death.

According to Myra Jehlen, "all women must destroy in order to create" (583). As Jehlen argues, "No woman can assume herself because she has yet to create herself, and this the sentimentalist, acceding to their society's definition [of women] did not do" (593). For Jehlen, a woman's right to her own story depends on her "ability to act in the public domain" (596). In the context of Oates's novel, Iris's story depends on her ability to forget the past tense and live in the present tense (*BBMH* 404). As Jehlen's generalization suggests, Iris must destroy her journal to create an existence that is based on current moments of time rather than on the past; and as Alan Savage addresses Iris, "The Surrealists believed that personal history is irrelevant, your family background, childhood, all that's merely personal; they believed [as does Iris] you must erase the past and begin at zero" (327). What is fascinating is that Iris does not begin at zero when she attempts to reconstruct her identity and subjectivity in Syracuse. She still maintains a tradition of writing letters to Jinx Fairchild: "--but this Jinx Fairchild wouldn't write to Iris Courtney, not even consider it. He never will write, he'll provide a photo instead" (361); and it is the photographic image of Jinx in his military uniform that convinces Iris to forget the past and throw her journal away (404). For Iris, Jinx's image signifies freedom in death. Like the freed slaves of Lincoln's Union soldiers in the 1864 photograph, Jinx re-establishes his bond with Iris by freeing himself from the guilt and shame that surrounds his earthly existence (as a result of Garlock's death) to join black soldiers and white soldiers and fight for the freedom of humankind. In effect, Jinx's photograph convinces Iris to continue to lie about her identity and subjectivity. As Iris's uncle Leslie always taught his niece, "photography always lies" and there is no "*visual truth, only inventions. No 'eye of the camera,' only human eyes*" (236). And what human eyes "see" is lost in the imaginative folds of the mind and what the mind chooses to remember or invent. Thus, real violence as a visual truth in the novel is undermined by fictionalized violence and the narratorial inventions from the protagonist's mind.

In *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang*, real and fictionalized violence represent the binary relationship between Maddy Wirtz's life as an adolescent gang member and Maddy Wirtz's life as an adult. Maddy attempts to write the memoirs of her experiences as a youth from her perspective as an adult. Unlike Iris Courtney, Maddy chooses to remember her past; a past that is a "permanent record" (3) of time gone by when she, as a member of FOXFIRE, attempted to restructure the male domination/female subordination paradigm in the patriarchy as a new paradigm of female domination/male subordination in a matriarchy. Maddy's narrative appears to be a feminist demand for female power and autonomy. She writes an autobiographical story dedicated to the memory of the FOXFIRE girl gang. But rather than simply placing an emphasis on female autonomy and power within the patriarchy, Oates is interested in allowing the character of Maddy to "experience herself, from within," outside of the requirement to be a "representative" (Oates, *(Woman) Writer*, 23). As Oates observes in her essay "Does the Writer Exist?": "It might be argued that most human beings, writers or not, are in disguise as their outward selves; and their truest and most valuable selves are interior" [*(Woman) Writer* 52]. For Maddy, an important route to this interior is via writing - a writing about violence. Thus, Maddy's narrative is a fictionalized construction of Maddy's desire for violence outside of her own mid-life experiences as a woman in a patriarchal society.

Maddy's violence is, at times, more fictionalized than real. When, for example, Maddy introduces herself in the novel as the official chronicler for the FOXFIRE gang she writes that she was

> the sole person trusted to cast what [the girls] did into words, into a permanent record for the gang. Typed on a typewriter. Kept in neat dated entries, in a loose-leaf binder. A secret document . . . which Truth would reside forever. *Thus distortions and misunderstandings and outright lies could be refuted.* (3)

But Maddy also creates lies and distortions in her narrative; that is, Maddy must incorporate fact and fiction into her autobiography to invent *her* history:

> What is memory but the repository of things doomed to be forgotten, so you must have history. You must labour to invent History. Being faithful to all

> that happens to you of significance, recording days, dates, events, names, sights not relying merely upon memory which fades like a Polaroid print where you see the memory fading before your eyes like time itself retreating. (44)

As for Iris Courtney, the invention of Maddy's history depends on her ability to surrender her past to story. For Maddy, story depends on memory and history; and memory and history are two separate entities. One cannot invent one's memory but one can expand on specific images and experiences in the memory to create a history. This expansion of images and experiences is what Maddy's confessionary tale is about. Maddy must continuously refer to her original notebook in order to create a new and more fascinating memoir about female violence: "It was a time of violence against girls and women but we didn't have the language to talk about it then" (100). The "flights of fancy" of girls and women are silenced by the patriarchal status quo for wild ideas from the female sex signify high emotions that need to be subdued, relaxed, and feminized. But in the postmodern era of the late twentieth century, Maddy develops a fictionalized writing that allows her to reconstruct the violence of her youth. She discovers that "the core of adult knowledge" revolves around "mere words, mysterious tangles of sound" that "have an uncanny power" (102).

For Maddy, however, the chronology of time becomes a factor in how she is going to structure her memoir: "leafing through Maddy Wirtz's notebook, wondering how to proceed -- so many entries! So many dates!" (9). Although Maddy's narrative seems to follow a certain order of events, there are gaps in her writing that seem to contradict Oates's claim that Maddy is a reliable narrator (*Where 've I been and Where*

I'm Going 374). As Maddy writes,

> For every fact transcribed in these CONFESSIONS there are a dozen facts, a hundred facts, my God maybe a thousand left out.
>
> For writing a memoir is like pulling your own guts out inch by slow inch. I didn't know this when I started but I know it now.
>
> Can you tell the truth if it isnt the *entire* truth? -- and what *is* truth? Some things, I can't fit into these CONFESSIONS. Nor can I calculate how truly I should explain any incident. Because one thing rises out of some thing that came before it, or many things that came before it, so it's like a big spiderweb in Time going back forever and ever, no true beginning nor any promise of an end the way in those years it was believed the Universe was, a steady mostly unchanging pool of galaxies and gases and emptiness going on and on like a dream to no purpose in all directions and forward and back too in Time. The kind of Time that, if you tried to show your place in it, not even the snap of your fingers could count for it. Not even the idea of snapping your fingers. (99)

Time becomes a "*paradox of chronology*" in the novel for Maddy knows that "no thing can have happened without another thing preceding it and another preceding *that* to the very beginning of Time!" (196). Maddy also notes that there is a problem of "transcribing a document like this notebook" because a "memoir or a confession [does not give you] the power to invent episodes, people, places, 'plot' etc. but [rather forces you to] set everything down as it occurred" (195). But like Iris Courtney, Maddy contaminates her past with lies to surrender her past to (her)story. When, for example, Maddy reveals the "DWARF-WOMAN" incident to her reader, an incident that she was never a witness to, she goes on to describe the events "thus remembering, and taking happiness in the memory of the ramshackle old farmhouse FOXFIRE wanted so badly to own . . ." (196). Life-writing, for Maddy, cannot be a self-conscious act of simply writing historical facts about her past. Maddy's writing is a reflection of her experiences from both her past and present status as a subordinate in the patriarchy. Although her narration seems to be unreliable, it also depends on the inclusion of her adolescent experiences from the original notebook that were unscathed by adult 'sensibilities'.

Maddy's role as the narrator also oscillates between a first-person narrator who describes her own experiences with FOXFIRE and a third-person narrator who knows what all of the characters are thinking and doing throughout the novel. The chapter entitled "Tattoo," for instance, opens with a split in the narration, a split that demonstrates Maddy's inexperience as a writer due to her inability to maintain one formal method of narration:

> Says Legs, Whatever passes between the five of us tonight must forever remain unspoken to the world. Under penalty of death.
>
> Says Goldie, Yes. Right.
>
> Says Lana, Yes.
>
> Says Rita, Oh *yes!*
>
> And Maddy, after a pause, swallowing, *Yes.*

> I was thirteen years old *Oh yes I would have sworn anything I would have stuck the ice pick deep into my flesh to bless such a Sacrament had my hand not faltered* on New Year's Day 1953 the day of the birth of FOXFIRE. (33)

Maddy's inexperience as a writer is an important element in Oates's novel. Through her characterization of Maddy, Oates subverts the traditional genre of autobiographical writing for women[16] to create a novel that is, in itself, autobiographical fiction: a genre of novel that lets Oates create an author/character for a text in which this fictional author's/character's reality becomes fiction. Thus, the connection between "Maddy" and "I" in the novel reveals two distinct subjectivities and identities for the female protagonist that not only enable Maddy to write from two perspectives but also give Maddy a sense of duplicity as she traverses the liminal space between the present and the past. In Brenda Daly's essay "How Does 'I' Speak for 'We'?: *Violence* and *Representation* in Foxfire, Confessions of a Girl Gang," Daly writes: "as narrator, Maddy has a different problem: how can she tell the gang's story -- that is how can 'I' speak for 'We' -- without doing violence to, without denying the voices of, the women she once loved?" (205). For Daly, "Maddy's voice occupies an 'intermediate' zone between personal and communal narration . . . [in which Maddy reconstructs] the life of another woman but is in some sense the protagonist herself;"

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[16] Female autobiographers are often motivated to write about their awareness of the ways in which their identities have been constructed because women have a tendency to identify themselves in terms of the more narrow and more constricting social boundaries established by the patriarchy (Heilbrun 22).

and in which "Maddy's narrative authority comes from her membership in a community that, contradictorily, has authorized her to write the gang's history, but not to tell it" (206). In Daly's view, "Maddy's style of communal narration, her attempt to create an 'I' that can speak nonviolently for a 'we,' is born out of her recognition that violence, whether linguistic or physical, arises from a desire for stability, certainty, and control" (207). Although Daly notes that "Maddy is striving to avoid representational violence by acknowledging that, even as she attempts to tell the 'Truth,' [Maddy] doubts that it is possible to do so" (207), the images of violence in Oates's novel represent fact and fiction simultaneously. It is through a violent fictional past that Maddy gains a voice in the present. As Mary Kathryn Grant suggests, "Language is not only that power which elevates man above other living things, but it is also his only weapon against annihilation and destruction" (111).[17] For Grant, "Language grants some measure of control over one's fate; the ability to define and to record is the first step toward achieving that control" (111). This desire for control by Maddy is reflected in the questioning of her own existence within the novel:

> Who is, or was, Maddy Wirtz? -- why should we trust *her*?
>
> The closer she comes to adulthood, bearing witness with an adult's increased sense of ambiguity, and irony, and self-doubt, the less clear are her memories. (The messier the entries in the notebook.) Say there's a mirror you have trusted to give you a solid umblemished surface reflecting the world then suddenly it breaks and shatters revealing a thousand new surfaces, miniature

---

[17] Grant uses the reference of "man" as a universal term for "human".

> angles of seeing that must have been there all along hidden in the mirror's bland face *but you hadn't known.*
>
> Who *is*, who *was*.
>
> Whoever's reading this, if anyone *is* reading it: does it matter that our old selves are lost to us as surely as the past is lost, or is it enough to know yes we lived then, and we're living now, and the connection must be there? – like a river hundreds of miles long exists both at its source and at its mouth, simultaneously? (179)

I think Oates suggests that Maddy's historical past is a precursor for Maddy's present existence. The past signifies the beginning of a story that cannot exist without some formal connection between 'who is' and 'who was'. Explaining this connection between Maddy's "selves," however, Oates describes her novel as one that "reproduces the chronology of a story in a diary-like way" that is not "autobiographical, or "confessional" -- except in emotional terms" (*Where I've Been, And Where I'm Going*, 375-376). Although the novel allows Oates to confront memories of her childhood during the 1950s (Ibid, 376), the basis of Maddy's story develops within a diary-like context that moves back and forth in time because time is irrelevant in terms of a diary's contents; time does not progress in a linear fashion in diary writings but rather oscillates from one period or moment of the diarist's life to another. In essence, Maddy is able to transcend different moments of time. The contents of her original notebook are itemized reflections of her past, reflections that are written in the form of itemized lists within Maddy's narrative (in the chapters "FOXFIRE Adventures, Missions, Triumphs" and "Diversionary Tactics," Maddy itemizes different events in FOXFIRE's history to illustrate the gang's growing notoriety). Oates combines Maddy's first-person narration with Maddy's third-person narration to unify Maddy's written past with her present act of writing. For example, Maddy uses the language of adulthood, the language of power, to outline her adolescent experiences:

> But the girl, Ab Sadovsky's daughter, the one they call Legs, keeps climbing. No awareness that her rivals have dropped away or possibly no interest in them just climbing a little slower now as if the first feverish adrenaline rush has subsided and she's getting smarter with each foot of elevation climbing the vertical surface up into the sky forty, fifty feet above the ground as some in the gaping crowd that's primarily men fall worriedly quiet and others continue to cheer to shout to whistle in a raucous chorus and there's a small group of her friends screaming *Legs! C'mon Legs! Almost there Legs!* . . .
> We on the ground clutched at one another faint and delirious moaning *Oh! oh oh!* -- Lana and Goldie and weak-kneed Maddy, just the three of us that night, Rita'd had to stay home . . . (86-87)

The looseness in Maddy's writing, the movement from third-person narrator to first-person narrator, suggests that Maddy is an inexperienced writer; a writer who does not lead her material but rather is led by it (197); a writer whose writing is based on the past.

Although Maddy Wirtz's confessions reveal the written words from her original notebook, some of Maddy's entries are paraphrased and invented to authenticate her document and lend credibility to Maddy as the author of both the original notebook and the new notebook. In fact, Maddy often uses third-person narration to create her own characterization of Legs Sadovsky. When Legs is in the Red Bank Correctional facility, for example, she writes a letter to Maddy that she cannot send:

> Maddy I cant send this letter 'cause theyd censor it but I miss you so, all my FORXFIRE sisters I miss so I love you I would die for you you know that dont you. Thanks for your letters & forgive me please I dont answer except those asshole little things its 'cause they read what we write, I cant stand that. (152)

Maddy "the adult" writes her past by placing an emphasis on Legs's lack of power and lack of a voice as a prisoner. Furthermore, I believe that Oates incorporates Legs's unsent letter into the novel to suggest that, like Maddy, Legs is able to express herself though language. In writing, Legs finds comfort and solace as a Red Bank inmate. In fact, she repeats the phrase "I'm alive" within the context of her letter to find strength, "I'm getting stronger," she says, "I can feel it" (153). The censorship of Legs's letter signifies a silencing of women's voices for the prison is regulated via patriarchal notions of femininity. In effect, Legs's writing succumbs to a level of male domination that only Maddy "the adult" can overcome by rendering the past to story. What is ironic, however, is that after Legs has an apparent "Turn of heart" (173) and becomes a popular trusty, she begins to teach her "near-illiterate" inmates the basics of reading and writing. In essence, Legs only gains power in language if she chooses to succumb to the patriarchal status quo.

Legs's letter to Maddy also reveals another significant issue in Oates's novel: the issue of death:

> So you think my God theres so many not alive, it makes you weak thinking it. How the earth is filling up with the dead & theyre lost in one another, just earth. Remember that thing we saw at the museum THE TREE OF LIFE so many animal species extinct it was sort of scarey 'cause you wonder whats the purpose but the fact is no matter the beginning of Time etc. how far back it was, the only beings *alive* are *alive right now*. (152)

As Legs's letter demonstrates, "Allusions to the past" (38) annoy Legs. She, like Iris Courtney, lives in the present tense where the past tense does not exist; where "the only beings *alive* are *alive right now*" (152). For Maddy, however, death represents both a beginning and an end. It is the death of FOXFIRE that inspires Maddy to write the confessions about her former girl gang: "Never never tell, Maddy-Monkey, they warned me, it's Death if you tell any of Them but now after so many years I am going to tell, for who's to stop me?" (3). Maddy does not understand that in writing FOXFIRE's confessions, she inevitably writes FOXFIRE's death. Maddy's memoir moves beyond historical fact and moves into a narrative realm of real and fictionalized violence; a realm where FOXFIRE's death is "Unrecorded in Maddy Wirtz's [original] notebook" (289) but rather intimated in the conclusion of Maddy Wirtz's new FOXFIRE narrative after the FOXFIRE gang kidnaps Mr. Kellogg. Maddy, saddened by the gang's invovlement with a capital crime, writes "Oh Legs! If you'd known" (299). As the author of her own history, Maddy has the power to use language as a method of female emancipation. But instead, as Daly contends, Maddy chooses to write a story in which the FOXFIRE gang disintegrates into the patriarchy. After Mr. Kellogg is shot, for instance, the death of the girl gang occurs:

> "Legs? Is he dead?"
>
> The man in the cellar isn't dead but he's moaning, his breath comes in shudders. The force of the bullet sent him sprawling as if a violent gust of wind had blown him over and Legs contemplating him in that detachment beyond horror or even alarm sees how the Enemy is after all only a man . . . on his back, bleeding.
>
> Legs says bitterly, "Hey, you're not gonna die. We'll get help for you, just hang on."
>
> Upstairs she rushes about clutching the girls, hugging them to her, letting them hug her. "It's O.K. Nobody's dead. We had an accident -- change of plans. We fucked up so get out, O.K.? All of you who can, *go*."
>
> Meaning: those of you with homes, go ***home***.
>
> Meaning: those who weren't part of the kidnapping, hadn't been present when the gun went off, those who hadn't *seen* anything close up, thus were not to ***blame***, you're safe and I'm gonna protect you if I can.
>
> Meaning: FOXFIRE is ended. (311-312)

In writing the dramatic end of FOXFIRE's existence, Maddy is able to control her own destiny and begin to create a subjectivity and identity separate from her former subjectivity and identity as a gang member. In fact, Maddy removes herself from the

FOXFIRE sisterhood. She is afraid of death and she refuses to write ransom notes; and so it is with a heavy heart that Maddy confesses:

> Now as we approach the end of the FOXFIRE CONFESSIONS I find it so hard to continue.
>
> Not just because it is THE END.
>
> Not just because I will lose Legs Sadovsky forever.
>
> Not just because FOXFIRE was my heart, and I have had to surrender my heart.
>
> But because in violation of her sacred oath to FOXFIRE consecrated with her own blood Maddy Wirtz failed to behave with the utmost fidelity and loyalty when such were required of her. Because when her purported "verbal skills" were needed, in the composition of the ransom notes, and in the general orchestration of the kidnapping in, in May 1956, Maddy Wirtz refused to cooperate.
>
> Unless "refuse" isn't the right word? -- maybe just a sort of cringing-shrinking away? (251)

Maddy's fear of death is a fear of non-existence in the patriarchy. To ensure her own position in society, Maddy "the chronicler" must remove herself from the FOXFIRE sisterhood to develop her own identity and subjectivity. And as Maddy interjects, "I want to state this clearly now, so none of you need feel any pity for me, if you are so inclined. *I did escape*" (209). But the kind of world Maddy escapes into is a society based on male domination and female subordination; a society that "cringes and shrinks away" from women who refuse to have their voices silenced. And so, it is to Maddy's credit that she, as an adult, tries to reclaim her history; she tries to reclaim the power and autonomy she felt as a FOXFIRE gang member through her writing. In writing FOXFIRE's confessions, however, Maddy destroys the gang's written legacy ("I've been destroying it page by page, entry by entry. Crumpling pages in my fists. In order that they might burn more readily"[319]) and thereby destroys FOXFIRE's history. Unlike Maddy's adolescent writing in the original notebook, the newly written FOXFIRE confessions are based on an adult's perspective of her childhood; a perspective that the FOXFIRE gang continuously tries to escape. When Maddy innocently remarks, for example, that she would change places with a stranger, that she would gladly change places with the next person she sees (21), Legs becomes violent against Maddy. As Maddy writes: "'Traitor!- you love *them* so much, go suck up to *them*, get out of my sight and away from *me*!' and I didn't see her arm swinging, her fist cracking me in the face, my nose began to bleed, icy-eyed and furious Legs would not relent even when I burst into tears . . ." (22). Legs's anger derives from her desire to remove herself from the world of adults and men. So when Maddy chooses to rewrite FOXFIRE's past, she destroys the gang's history. As she moves into adulthood, the gang remains stagnant and unable to survive the progression of Time. In effect, the destruction of the original confessions of FOXFIRE allows for the construction of Maddy's new FOXFIRE narrative which becomes an expressive outlet for the protagonist's adult sense of "*being*":

> Maddy Wirtz was a smart girl for Fairfax Avenue but she'd been mis-

> taken believing the stars were permanent, telling herself the stars are *there* in the sky no matter how things change on earth -- soon coming to learn of course the stars aren't permanent nor are they even *there*, that's the most ironic fact of all. The heavenly light you admire is fossil-light, it's the unfathomably distant past you gaze into, stars long extinct.
>
> Even our own sun, our domestic star, is eight minutes into the past. *Look-back time* it's called, such tricks of light and Time, such paradoxes, best not to think of it. I mean -- not to think of it with any emotion, not a shred. (327)

Maddy creates a new subjectivity and a new identity for herself when she rewrites her past. As a result, the confessions become Maddy's method of renewing her self by digging out the old memories to replace these memories with the new (222).

The purpose for Maddy's confessions also moves beyond Legs's original idea of writing in a notebook to ensure that FOXFIRE does not "slip away" or die (166); the purpose of Maddy's confessions is to piece together the remnants of *her* past to re-invent her own adult existence via her adolescent experiences. Thus, the FOXFIRE confessions become Maddy's confessions. Maddy's writing is a quest to discover the truth about her self by inventing her past. In fact, one may posit that Oates parodies the Catholic conception of confessing one's sins to purify the soul in order to justify Maddy's desire to turn her past into story: "*Knowing now I would never be alone again never lonely again as in those years God allowed me to be thus as if He did not exist forcing onto me the bitter knowlege that He did not exist in truth or if He did*

His existence touched in no way upon my own" (45). The parody, of course, lies in Oates's title for the novel, *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang*. The suggestion that Maddy's memoir is a confessional tale parodies the act of confession in the Roman Catholic faith; an act that is a conscience cleansing act based on the purging of sins and the absolution of the human spirit. In Maddy's narrative, however, Oates includes fact, fiction, truths, and lies to subvert "religious, civic, and legal ceremonies that traditionally confer power on men" (Daly 209). Thus, to subvert male power, to provide Maddy with a sense of detachment from the patriarchy, Oates incorporates religious doubt into her characterization of Maddy via Maddy's characterization of Legs:

> Legs said she sure didn't believe in God and all that crap, or the "immortality of the soul," it didn't figure Legs said that we were all that important, and I said trying to hide how shaky I felt, "--So you don't believe we have souls I guess?" and Legs laughed and said, "Yeah probably we do but why's that mean we're gonna last forever? Like a flame is real enough, isn't it, while it's burning? -- even if there's a time it goes out?" (328)

Legs's uncertainties of faith establish the foundation for Oates's "playfully serious parody" of religious ritual and thought. When, for instance, Maddy records the FOXFIRE pledge, she demonstrates Legs's use of ritualistic prayer to welcome each member into her sisterhood:

> *Do you solemnly swear to consecrate yourself to your sisters in*

> *FOXFIRE . . . to consecrate yourself to the vision of FOXFIRE . . . to think always of your sisters as you would they would think of you . . . in the Revolution of the Proletariat that is imminent in the Apocalypse that is imminent in the Valley of the Shadow of Death and under torture physical or spiritual . . . never to betray your FOXFIRE sisters in thought word or deed never to reveal FOXFIRE secrets never to deny FOXFIRE in this world or the next above all to pledge yourself to FOXFIRE offering up all fidelity and courage and heart and soul and all future happiness to FOXFIRE . . . under penalty of death . . . so help you God . . . forever and ever until the end of time . . .* (39-40)

The use of a prayer-like pledge is significant in terms of the overall ritual each potential member of the gang is subject to because the pledge, the whiskey, and the blood sacrament of the FOXFIRE tattoo imitate the Catholic Church's sacrament of the Eucharist and the idea of consuming the blood and body of Christ to celebrate a spiritual communion with God. For Legs, however, the communion being celebrated is the spiritual bond that she is trying to create among her FOXFIRE sisters: "From somewhere came a glow like a candled egg enveloping them as if the veins of one coursed into the veins of the others as if the spontaneous startled tug of a smile tugged at the others' lips as well" (39).

But this spiritual sharing among the FOXFIRE sisters is undermined by Legs when she challenges her sisters to pledge themselves to the FOXFIRE gang forever. This challenge seems to be an attempt by Legs to fortify the life of FOXFIRE by constructing a matriarchal system based on the same principles of the patriarchal

Roman Catholic system; a system in which the absolution of sin allows individuals to achieve a higher form of spiritual purity in the eyes of the ultimate patriarch, God. And so Maddy "the adult" leaves her readers with a stronger sense of her own existence in the present tense. She surrenders her past to story in order to "not think of it with any emotion" (327), to simply acknowledge the past as history; to live in the now; and to discover a new identity and new subjectivity for herself through her writing (an identity and subjectivity that can only be achieved when Maddy gains the adult power of knowledge and language) in which Maddy accepts the notion that the "older you get the more times" you rehearse "dying. So you aren't so scared, that way. Not Death itself but the approach to Death, your thoughts, *you*, in Death's presence" (143).

Like Iris Courtney and Maddy Wirtz, Ingrid Boone in *Man Crazy* surrenders her past to story: "This story I want to tell began in Upstate New York, in the Chautauqua Mountains, in August 1972" (9). It is a story of Ingrid's life as she progresses from girlhood to womanhood; but it is also a story of real and fictionalized violence in which Ingrid's vivid memories of the past enable her to create a subjectivity and an identity in the present. In fact, Oates uses Ingrid's memories as a catalyst for Ingrid's recovery from traumatic childhood and adolescent experiences. In the Prologue, for example, the reader is introduced to the narrator of the novel, Ingrid Boone, an inmate at a women's detention centre who is on a restrictive suicide watch:

> O.K.: maybe I did try to poke myself with a fork smuggled back to my

> cell after supper one night. My head was hurting and word was, I could almost hear the whispering, my life was over anyway . . . Just to get a vein going, that was the only purpose. To see *am I real? Any of this?* (3-4)

Although Ingrid notes that she "was not a junkie" (4), Ingrid is unable to differentiate reality from fiction unless she is sober. It is this sobriety that allows her to acknowledge reality before she falls into a drug-induced haze of unreality. As she states later on in the novel, "Every drug you take, every sweet-swooning moment [is] the way into oblivion" (115). Ingrid's addiction to drugs not only becomes a psychological struggle to define herself as either a real person or as a figment of her imagination but also allows Ingrid to shamefully admit to wanting to die: "O.K. I did want to die, that was my secret" (5). Death, for Ingrid, represents freedom because in life, Ingrid is tortured by her past: "Inside my hot eyelids comes a quick dream of seeing myself through a stanger's eyes. Wondering what judgement to pass on this person who's *me*" (5).

Ingrid's experiences with violence are revealed to the reader in a novel about real and fictionalized violence; a novel that seems to be both a realistic representation of violence that happens to the protagonist and a fictional representation of violence that the protagonist creates. For example, Ingrid's story is a narrative that is based on both fact and fiction. Her life is a life that she does not know but rather has learned. As she states, "children know nothing factual about their parents or about their own lives . . . By the time [they do] learn, [they]'re no longer" children (71). In telling her story from the perspective of an adult, Ingrid is able to combine childhood fiction with adult sensibility to invent her own euphoric sense of reality where she may always live in a past that she creates without the factual intervention of adults: "*If I could open a vein. Not to inject any shit, I will never weaken like that again, but just to feel the kick of it, the old memory. So this numbness lifts. So I could get back there easier*" (69).

To "get back" to the past is an important process for Ingrid for the past consists of childhood memories of Ingrid's father, memories that the reader soon learns are based on childhood lies:

> Daddy had never taken me up in the Vultee trainer with the sliding-canopy open cockpit like he'd promised. But by the age of ten I'd gotten to the point where I could remember that flight as well or better than the flights in the smaller planes he'd actually taken me on . . . If Momma overheard me bragging to neighbor kids she'd call to me to come inside and scold, Daddy never took you up in that plane, that was me, and we didn't buzz Niagara Falls . . . Don't make up stories, sweetie. (58-59)

Even as an adult, however, Ingrid chooses to reflect on invented memories. Her imagination relieves her from any fear of life that she may have:

> And thinking of it now it's easy as shutting my eyes I remember Daddy lifting me in his strong arms up onto the Vultee's wing so I can climb into the cockpit, I remember Daddy strapping me in, his big smile as he puts on his dark-tinted goggles and adjusts the strap under his chin, then climbing back into the cockpit close behind me and continuing to talk to me happy and excited as a boy raising his voice to be heard over the terrible roar of the propellers, laugh-

> ing telling me not to be afraid honey, this is the safest plane of all 'cause it's an Air Force trainer. You trust your daddy don't you? (59)

The false sense of security Ingrid finds in the fictional memories of her childhood establishes Ingrid's motive for surrendering her past to story. Ingrid tries to reconstruct her life based on her relationship to her mother and the absent presence of her father. One may even argue that it is Lucas Boone's inability to move forward in his own life that teaches his daughter the importance of remembering the past:

> Snapshots Daddy carried in that wallet, years old and beginning to tear. Laying them out carefully like playing cards, like a game of solitaire, on the picnic table behind the Tastee-Freez . . . There was a snapshot of Momma so young and beautiful in cutoff jeans and a red halter top holding a baby up beside her face . . . And Momma and Daddy so young in some time I didn't know long ago, arms linked tight around each other's waist, good-looking and arrogant preening themselves for the camera . . . Daddy tapped that snapshot with his finger, the nail of which was blackened from some injury. "Here's the start of it," he said, smiling hard. "That can't be erased." (66-67)

I think Oates uses the image of photographic imagery to emphasize the importance of time passing in spite of Lucas Boone's reluctance to differentiate the past from the present. For Lucas Boone, the past is the present because time is defined in two ways: "The time on the ground, and the time in the air" (111). The problem is that time in the air moves more quickly than time on the ground: "When you're in the air and the clock really speeds up everything goes white, roaring, collapsed, blind" (111). Unlike

Iris Courtney's reaction to the mother-daughter photographs (*"You are going to die, here's proof"* [58]), Lucas Boone's response to the weathered snapshots of him and Chloe lacks any formal acknowledgement of the progression of time. For Boone, the photographic images mark the beginning of their bond together and symbolize the present relationship that cannot be erased. Thus, the topical boundary between the past and the present is blurred. Lucas Boone's current existence depends on images of the past; images that do not account for the life of his daughter. As a result, Ingrid chooses to live in a psychological state of non-existence; a state in which she is unable to understand that she had yet to be born when the last photograph of her parents was taken.

But Lucas's reference to the past also limits his love for his daughter. Although Lucas Boone may indeed love Ingrid, his dedication to his wife far outweighs his fatherly concern for his daughter. On one occasion after school, for instance, Ingrid meets with her father and becomes an invisible party to a discussion Lucas has with himself about his inability to be a good man:

> Daddy said, like he was arguing with somebody not visible, "I want to be a decent person. I've got a chance now, I've got money saved and I can begin again. It's just that I can't see any good reason not to be a bastard. I was trained young, and the training took. Blowing off guys' heads -- it settles any doubts you have about them, or them about you. And like I say, it's my nature." (75)

Lucas's discussion with himself is, in fact, a preparatory speech for his eventual confrontation with Chloe; and it is during this confrontation after he assaults Maynard Zink that Ingrid's invisibility in her father's life becomes more apparent in the narrative:

> Daddy spoke carefully as if it pained him to speak. He looked at me without seeing me, his words were all for her.
>
> Saying, "I killed people in Nam, men, women, kids, Christ knows – water buffalo! But I never saw their faces. None of it was real to me. The more it happened, strafing, dropping napalm on 'em, poor fuckers, the more it wasn't real. And I wasn't real . . . (88)
>
> *********************
>
> "You saw me just now with that asshole boyfriend --"
>
> "He wasn't any 'boyfriend' --"
>
> "-- of yours. I could have hurt him bad, but I didn't. I went against my own nature, and I did it for you." (90)

Lucas tries to demonstrate to Chloe that he is not the mass murdering, cold-blooded killer he once was but rather a man of conscience whose ability to restrain his anger illustrates his newly found concern for human life. The irony, of course, is that Lucas murders Maynard Zink in response to Chloe's refusal to move to Florida and to assume a new identity and new subjectivity in the patriarchy ("Momma laughed. "Under what name, Luke? Or names? What would be our new names?" [91]). Lucas Boone is unable to escape a world of unreality. His world is a world that he is able to control and to dominate; a world where he does not have to be afraid of life or death:

> a world of sudden arrivals and more sudden departures. A world of guns that might be fired, or might not. A world of sheriff's deputies surrounding the house while you slept, yelling *Open up! Open up!* Breaking down doors in the night. (98)

Lucas Boone is unable to escape a world that Ingrid Boone never knew as a child but longed for as an adult.

I believe that Oates uses the character of Lucas Boone as a parental role model for her female protagonist. Ingrid wants to be loved by her father; she wants to exist in both her father's present and past. But in order to achieve this existence, Ingrid must surrender her past to story. For Ingrid, however, this surrendering of the past occurs within her own mind, within her own imagination. As a result, Oates's novel can be read in terms of momentary glimpses of time inside the protagonist's mind as she struggles to overcome the loss of her father's physical presence in her life during her progression from girlhood to womanhood. As Oates suggests, *Man Crazy* is a "novel built of images and episodes" where Ingrid is fascinated with the mysterious lives of her parents as a result of her own inability "to control and comprehend the adult world that surrounds her" (*Where I've Been, And Where I'm Going* 375). To gain control, Ingrid chooses to follow her father's path of self-destruction and to succumb to an existence that allows her to "lose track [of her self], [to] float where Time is one single stream like Death" (218); and where memories become "Separate channels of Time braided together and rushing past" (50). As Ingrid reiterates, "Not all things that happen to us are known by us. Where I was, wasn't a priority. Say you're a drunk eighteen-year-old girl going to be fucked by a biker-stranger you'd never seen before that night, the actual place like the actual time is not relevant" (211). Time's irrelevancy in Ingrid's life is significant to Ingrid's method of storytelling for fact and fiction combine as a result of Ingrid's drug-induced flashbacks. When Ingrid recounts a local myth from her childhood, for example, one can see the "braiding" of memories within her consciousness:

> Mohawk Street was paved for several blocks then turned abruptly to gravel and dirt, gravel and mud in wet weather. About a mile away, back an other gravel road, there was a limestone quarry; an abandoned quarry where, kids in the neighbourhood told me, a man's body was trapped in water thirty feet deep. Inside the cab of a truck he'd been driving. There had been an accident and the truck backed through a fence and sank into the water and they'd sent divers down but couldn't locate him . . .
>
> If it was dusk, or a darkish day, we scared one another seeing the drowned man's ghost.
>
> My first acid trip, years later, it was that *drowned man* I saw, out of so many things I might have!
>
> There's a stark cold odor of stone I can smell right now. And that odor of deep, lightless water. (103-104)

The past represents a braiding of fictional images that signifies reality. Ingrid, for example, learns about the death of a man whose corpse has yet to be found by local authorities. The death, although a true story, is fictionalized by the children in the form of a ghost story which is, in turn, absorbed into Ingrid's consciousness as an image of a drowned man and expelled from her consciousness as a mixture of peripheral senses that allows Ingrid to remember the odor of the stone and water; an odor that Oates also connects with Ingrid's death-like experiences in Enoch Skaggs's earthen cellar: "I would have starved except for garbage, would have died of thirst except for water trickling down the stone walls so cold and fresh to my tongue" (218).

One may even argue that it is Ingrid's braiding of memories that enables Oates to create a protagonist with a passionate desire to be a subordinate to men. Ingrid lacks an identity and subjectivity in her father's life. Female subordination reduces her to a psychological state of nothingness; a mental state where "*Death is always with [her because] Death is [her] ally*" (196); a state of unreality where death and darkness is a precursor to life and light. Thus, Ingrid's love for Enoch Skaggs parallels the love for her father. Like Lucas Boone, Enoch Skaggs has the power to erase Ingrid's past and render Ingrid to a state of non-identity and non-subjectivity ("*Who am I, am I Ingrid?*" [183]); the state of death that is symbolically represented by the X tattoo on Ingrid's stomach:

> Was it punishment, or love. Dosed with 'ludes and strapped down on the wooden table. Enoch Skaggs wielded his glittering knife careful as a scalpel. *There is no pain.*
>
> Might have eviscerated Dog-girl the way you'd gut a chicken, with a turn of the wrist, a flashing blade. That was in his power.

> Blood streamed in quick trickles out the shallow wound, soaking into towels. Screaming inside the gag. Those eyes on me, Enoch Skaggs wielding his knife, I will never forget. (227)

What Ingrid does forget, however, is time; and when she escapes the earthen cellar, when she escapes death, time becomes an important element in her story to the local authorities. Knowing dates, hours, and minutes is evidence of truth within Ingrid's real and fictionalized experiences. But Ingrid cannot remember:

> They demand for you to be specific about dates for if you testify one thing at one time then forget or remember differently at another they believe you are lying, they will call you *perjurer*. Or *mentally incompetent -- substance abuser*. So I was not able to provide specific dates because even if I seem to remember in my dreams it is only what I believe I remember and not any true fact. (209)

Ingrid seems to link truth, time, and death with her escape from the cellar in order to reconstruct a new identity and a new subjectivity for herself within the patriarchy. As Ingrid states,

> When I was Dog-girl of Satan's Children I knew a truth vanished from my life now. Now I know truths, new truths are uttered to me every day like the names, numerals in a telephone directory, so many. But then I knew a single truth and that truth was my life. (224)

Like her father's, Ingrid's life (outside of her drug-induced fantasy world) involves numerous identities and subjectivities that she must accept to be accepted by society;

identities and subjectivities like woman, daughter, lover, wife, and so on that become affiliated with Ingrid's name. But as one of Satan's Children, Ingrid knows her status; she knows that she is Dog-girl; she knows that she is a subordinate and cannot, therefore, live her life. She is marked for death. In effect, Ingrid must not only escape the earthen cellar; she must also escape the only truth that she knows: her life.

To escape one's life, to change one's destiny, involves an inner strength that enables an individual to start all over again; to forget the past and to live in the present. The image Oates creates as Ingrid describes her escape from the earthen cellar is striking. Ingrid's womanly body is stripped of its physical strength and is reduced to a waif-like eighty-six pounds so that she is able to push herself "through the slot of a window where you'd think a full-grown cat could not have pushed itself" (244). This "slot of a window" seems to represent a vaginal opening from an earthen-womb from which Ingrid forces herself to emerge to be reborn within the patriarchy. In fact, Ingrid's escape reflects a primordial memory of a newborn's journey through the darkness of its mother's birthing canal and into the first moments of its life:

> And crouched over half-naked my filthy hair in my face like an animal making my way through the orchard of misshapen trees their leaves coldly fluttering crackling like paper in the windless dark and through to an open field doubled over in pain crawling on my hands and knees how many minutes, how many hours through a maze of wild rose and brambles like jeering laughter and in a ditch of spiky brackish weeds I was too weak to continue even to lift my head I slept hoping to summon my strength I saw Momma in the road I had not

> known was so close, only a few yards away . . . there were headlights in my eyes out of nowhere I crawled into the road and now a car shuddering to a stop skidding in the gravel and there was a car door opened and a man's voice *My God what is it?* And a woman's voice in a cry of horror *It's a child, it looks like a child.* (244-245)

Ingrid's rebirth into society is plagued by realistic images of the outside world; images that reconnect her to her mother and her past:

> . . . I saw Momma in the road I had not known was so close, only a few yards away, Momma pacing smoking her cigarette seeming unaware of my presence *Ingrid? Where are you?* Momma's plaintive voice borne by the wind *Ingrid? Ingrid* the sound fading and I could not lift my head . . . and I heard the voice now distant, now closer *Ingrid are you lost? Ingrid where are you? Ingrid!* Impatient and worried and I tried to reply but had not enough strength, my throat tight as if the flesh had grown over rendering me mute. *Momma don't leave me! Momma wait* I begged in silence but she was gone . . . (244)

Oates re-uses the image of Ingrid hiding from her mother in the "Ghost Girls" chapter to re-establish the bond between Ingrid and Chloe after Ingrid's emotional and physical experiences with violence. In essence, Ingrid chooses life over death. Like a newborn infant searching for its mother's warmth and protection, Ingrid searches for her mother, her life-giver, in the darkened wilderness. When Ingrid is rescued, however, she continues to surrender her past to story to hide the fact that she had almost chosen death over life:

> My voice was hoarse and cracked like a voice long unused. Pride and shame equal in measure.
>
> *And what is your name?* They asked, they asked repeatedly, *who are you, where is your family, your home?* And I looked away, I shut my eyes. Could not utter that name. Could not involve my mother nor any Boone relatives however distant and unknown to me, could not bear the shame of it. *I'm not from this part of the country* I said *I'm from Florida, lived in different places in southern Florida and only came north last year. Crystal Lake* the name came to me as out of a dream but vaguely recalled, *My last home was Crystal Lake.* (245)

Ingrid recalls the name Crystal Lake, Florida, from a matchbook that her father dropped on the kitchen floor during his last visit when she was a child ("Daddy reached for the matchbook and knocked it to the floor and I stooped to get it for him. *Marita's, Crystal Lake, Florida*" [91]). In doing so, Ingrid creates a new identity and subjectivity for herself by turning a childhood memory of an unknown place into a fictional reality; a reality that is the truth as Ingrid believes it, "But a truth shredded and mangled like skeins of cloud blown across the moon. For what [Ingrid] can remember is but a fraction of what was, as all that *is* is but a fraction what *was*" (246). In effect, Ingrid's present tense is so imbued with images and memories of her past that in order to make herself well, she makes the choice to live in the present by never giving herself to any drugs again and by never giving herself "unquestioning to any man again" (268). As Ingrid states, "*You have to live: no choice*" (268). And it is in being a witness to life as life occurs that Ingrid sees things with "a strange clarity" in which her own existence is confirmed: "I *existed*, I *exist* and *I am*" (268).

Ingrid embraces life by saying "Yes!" to all of its tragic losses. As she notes, "I did not know if I was *sane*, or what *sane* was. But I behaved as others did, and that seemed to be all that was required" (269). To behave as others do, to maintain an illusion of sanity, Ingrid reveals her innermost thoughts and desires to her therapist because, as a doctor, her therapist does not judge (5). Thus, Ingrid is able to gain a sense of power and strength in the patriarchy by using her own words to describe the events of her life without the fear of telling too much about herself; a fear that, as Chloe warns Ingrid after reading her daughter's award-winning poetry, should scare her more than anything in life (143); a fear that forces Ingrid to feel ashamed "that poems of [hers] had been printed in the school paper exposing INGRID BOONE to public wonderment and derision" (142). Ingrid therefore replaces her poem with

> a poem that might be mistaken for a poem of mine except it would be a real poem, a worthy poem, by a real poet. I did not think this constituted theft, nor even *plagiarism* -- I knew what *plagiarism* was. I was not thinking of that, at all. But only of finding something worthy to read to an audience, not insulting an audience with a poem by INGRID BOONE. Not just students would be at the assembly but all the teachers, my tenth-grade teachers and teachers I would have in the future, and Mr. Cantry the principal, and parents, the parents of my classmates, and Mother and Mr. Dilts -- I could not read my poem to them, the poem I'd won a prize for was the most pathetic shit. There were words like

> *sorrow* and *yarrow* in it that rhymed by accident, there were words *perish of being* that made no sense. The subject was a pilot, a man in a small plane flying so high above the earth at night he'd lost his way, he was out of radio contact and his instruments were spinning because of electricity in the clouds and his gas tank was almost empty, all this crap was invented . . . (146-147)

The irony is obvious. The "crap" that Ingrid thinks she invents is based on her own experiences of feeling real emotions, emotions that allow her to feel lost, alone, and on the edge of death; feelings that reconnect her to her father, the "pilot" of her poem. To avoid revealing her thoughts and emotions to an audience, Ingrid copies poems from poets like William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Thomas Hardy and A. E. Housman and convinces herself that these newly written poems in her notebook, in her handwriting, are her inventions (149). And when Ingrid chooses to read a poem entitled "Grief" to her audience instead of reading one of her own poems, the poem she chooses has a melancholic tone that leaves Ingrid's listening audience stunned because as the supposed author, Ingrid seems to be reading a poem about her own "hopeless grief":

> "'I tell you, hopeless grief is passionless; / That only men incredulous of despair, / Half-taught in anguish, through the midnight air / Beat upward to God's throne in loud access / Of shrieking and reproach. Full desertness, / In souls as countries, lieth silent-bare / Under the blanching, vertical eye-glare / Of the absolute heavens. Deep-hearted man, express / Grief for thy dead in silence like death -- / Most like a monumental statue set / In everlasting watch

> and moveless woe / Till itself crumble to the dust beneath. / Touch it; the marble eyelids are not wet: / If it could weep, it could arise and go.'" (156)

Ingrid's choice to read a poem about grief draws a more drastic reaction by her audience. Although the audience is aware that Ingrid's poem is not her own, Ingrid inadvertently reveals more about her self to her audience than she may have revealed if she had simply read her original poem. As a result, Ingrid does not gain a sense of "being" as an adolescent in the patriarchy. She does not use her own words to express herself but rather the words of others. To exist in the patriarchy, for Ingrid, is to acquire a sense of autonomy and power - two elements of female emancipation that she is only able to obtain as an adult when she is given the opportunity to tell her life story without the fear of being judged or rejected; a fear that her mother still maintains about herself; a fear that Ingrid transcends when a new voice narrates, from a third-person perspective, the second to last chapter of the novel, "The Shrine."

"The Shrine" is an interesting chapter in the novel because it is the only chapter that is not written from Ingrid's point-of-view. For example, the narrator itemizes objects of Chloe Boone's past with her husband, Lucas Boone. These objects, however, do not necessarily belong to Lucas but remind Chloe of good and bad memories with her husband; objects such as "several towels soaked and stiffened with blood" (251); a grimy and blood-spotted t-shirt; a tie; a man's watch; a man's hat; a map of Florida; glossy pictures; an empty pack of Camels cigarettes; a playing card - the Joker; and a vase (251-258). To tell the reader about these objects in Chloe Boone's life is significant to Ingrid's own story for the objects are given a history or past through Chloe's imagination. In effect, the ostensibly omniscient narrator (Ingrid) offers the reader the truth about Chloe but also demonstrates that she does not yet have the ability to control anyone else's story or past but her own. The objects prove that the past cannot be erased or forgotten, "For all *here* is measured against *there*. Forever" (269). Oates even connects Ingrid's past to her present by re-incorporating the photographic images of Ingrid's parents into the text:

> And there were the Kodak snapshots. Precious, irreplaceable. You can't ever guess in the hilarity of the moment, somebody taking your picture, you're clowning for the camera arms around each other's waist holding beer cans, or kissing -- can't ever guess what these snapshots will mean one day. The two of them just kids! -- it makes her dizzy to see. How pretty she'd been, how sassy and arrogant and *him* -- so good-looking, that crest of hair, that grin, just the way he stood -- takes her breath away. She'd dropped out of high school to marry him. In this picture, she'd been already pregnant. But not showing. A secret. (251-252)

To understand that she existed in her parents' lives even before she entered the world is an important aspect of Ingrid's ability to conform to society's notion of sanity (or reality). Ingrid knows that there is "consciousness in everything" (268); that everything has a past and a present. What Ingrid is unable to overcome, however, is the notion that her reality is not her mother's reality; and when she is confronted by the objects in her mother's shrine in the final chapter of the novel, Ingrid is unable to give meaning to the objects because she cannot enter into her mother's reality without fictionalizing Chloe's life. As a result, Ingrid is rendered into a state of silence:

> I stood in silence blinking and staring at these things, the evidence of Mother's love, Mother's madness, not knowing what to say. She told me I was the first person, I would be the only person ever to be allowed in here. She told me it not because I was her daughter but I was his daughter, and he'd loved me so. He'd loved her, and he'd loved me. So much. Not like any ordinary man. So much. (270)

Ingrid stands in silence, I suggest, because she realizes that her ability to fictionalize her past derives from her mother's apparent desire to recreate her own past from objects of both the past and the present. Like her mother, Ingrid learns to conceal her thoughts and emotions in order to maintain a sense of power and autonomy within the patriarchy. But Ingrid tells a story about real and fictionalized violence to find an identity and subjectivity that allows her to not be afraid of dying, to not be afraid of not existing. To find this identity and subjectivity, however, Ingrid must surrender her past to story with the knowledge that the past represents the death of Dog-girl, Doll-girl, Birdie, and any other of Ingrid's former identities and subjectvities. The present represents Ingrid's new life as a daughter, a student, an employee, and as a bride-to-be:

> I said, "I'm thinking of getting married. In the spring."
> Mother said evenly, "Who is he?"
> Suddenly I was shy, telling her of you.
> What I knew of you.

> That you'd been my therapist at the clinic; that you were fourteen years older than me, and divorced. That you seemed to love me very much. That you weren't my doctor any longer; we hadn't been seeing each other in that way until after the therapy was finished. That you said you'd loved me for a long time. (276)

In being able to fictionalize her past, Ingrid is able to exist in the present with the scars of her memories etched "like a secret writing" on her body (282) and like a quiet voice in her mind where her thoughts, emotions, and dreams can continue to flourish without the fear of feeling ashamed.

For Mary Kathryn Grant,

> Oates's fiction leads to a sense of confusion . . . to reflect the confusion inherent in human life and to push on toward a new consciousness. Only when one begins to ask how life can be lived or to wonder if a careless move can unhinge the universe can [s]he begin to see how [s]he can take hold of [her] life and avoid the careless move. (94)

Iris Courtney, Maddy Wirtz, and Ingrid Boone surrender their past to story to find emotional comfort as female subordinates to male domination in the patriarchy. They do not live their lives as feminists but rather as oppressed women. Joyce Carol Oates utilizes real and fictionalized violence to illustrate how these women define their identities and subjectivities by using their past experiences to redefine their experiences in the present. In essence, the protagonists of Oates's later fiction survive violence and embrace the tragic existence of womankind to be able to exist and live in the 'now' of female oppression.

Conclusion

As Joyce Carol Oates writes: "The writer/poet: excited by/thrown into a state of dread by the anticipation of: that eerie moment when consciousness is altered by an apprehension of structure. The final image for instance. The final words . . ." (*Excerpts from a Journal: July 1989*, 128). For Oates, this final image, these final words, "recede before [her] like mirages on a hot asphalt road" (ibid, 128). But for myself, the Oatesian literary critic, the methodical structure of thesis research and thesis writing has led me to a final destination, an oasis if you will of conclusionary thoughts.

Through violence, Oates's female protagonists find a sense of emotional strength and courage to continue to live inside a violent world of binary oppositions where the masculine always dominates the feminine. Therefore, the "tragic vision" (Grant 115) of womanhood in Oates's later fiction is in accord with the feminist assumption that women are the constant subordinates of men. Yet rather than creating an enduringly successful feminist persona within her writing via her characterizations of the female protagonists in *Because It Is Bitter, Because It Is My Heart*, *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang*, and *Man Crazy*, Oates instead epitomizes the actualization of the concept of "hierarchical rule and coercive authority" (hooks 120) where women are always caught in the social and the political web of a binary opposition between male and female. It is the female protagonists' altruate inability to separate themselves from gendered ideology in the patriarchy that enables one to read Oates's later fiction in the manner that I have put forth in my work In Chapter One, the castration complex of the female protagonists establishes the *cause* of female violence in society In Chapter Two, the representation of female violence illustrates the *effects* of male domination and female subordination via the perpetuation of racial violence, gender violence, and body violence. And finally, in Chapter Three, the differentiation between "real" and "fictionalized" violence in Oates's novels illustrates how Oates's female protagonists become the ultimate survivors of a violent society by turning their past into story to redefine their experiences, their identities, and their subjectivities, in the present system of female oppression. I think that Oates's project is thus to bear witness by writing to an identity afflicted by her own "womanly" existence within patriarchy and inflected by her own conceptualization of feminism: *"Your writing departs from traditional feminist subjects*, the (woman) writer is asked repeatedly, *why is this?* And the answer is, *Since I am a feminist, whatever I write about is in fact a 'traditional feminist subject'"* (*Excerpts from a Journal* 132).

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