

Reinterpreting Gothic Mystery And American Dream In Joyce Carol Oates' *Because It Is Bitter And Because It Is My Heart*

Mrs. M.Vanitha¹, Dr. SP.Shanthi²

¹Research Scholar Department of English Annamalai University Annamalai Nagar Chidambaram Tamilnadu, India

²Assistant Professor Department of English Annamalai University Annamalai Nagar Chidambaram Tamilnadu, India

Abstract

This paper analyses how Joyce Carol Oates has used the Gothic to represent the contemporary American life meaningfully and effectively in her novel, *Because It Is Bitter and Because It Is My Heart*. The novel officially begins with the dead-body of Little Red Garlock, a sixteen-year-old boy, is found floating in the Cassadaga River near Hammond, New York. Though the story is told through flashbacks, the novel ultimately shows how Iris and Jinx, two of the persons connected to Little Red's death, yearn to be a part of a family or community. However, this sense of belonging is denied to them, making them feel unwelcome and unaccepted by society. The characters in the novel think that using violence will solve their issues. The Americans even go so far as to kill individuals for a common issue. Occasionally, Americans attempt to define the American dream in a new way. Because it differs from the traditional notion of accumulating riches, it has a new meaning. She has demonstrated how the Gothic is a contemporary method of dealing with reality by experimenting with several Gothic elements in several contexts, including mystery, retaliation, death, murder, family curse, haunted house, and ghost.

Keywords: Gothic, Dream, Society, Death, Mystery, Murder.

Introduction

Joyce Carol Oates is one of the most prolific and thought-provoking authors of American literature. Her ambition to address key Gothic elements such as mystery, retaliation, death, murder, family curse, haunted house, and ghost is evident in her literature. Through her art, she challenges American ideals and the necessity of forging one's own identity. Her immense concern with the phenomenon of modern America is directly related to her versatility as a fiction writer. She pays great attention to people, places, traditions, beliefs, and rituals in her novels. The poor's movement to the city and the impact of social upheavals like the Detroit riot and the Great Depression are two significant aspects of American society that are captured in her novels.

Oates creates a violent, nightmare-filled, destructive, mysterious, and terrifying fictional world. According to her, life is a fight, and the only way to survive the issues that the outside world - that is, other people - has created is by using violence. She responds that they are implying that her fiction contains too much realism when she is accused of having too much violence in it. She goes on to claim that her stories and novels are realistic interpretations of the modern world from what could be described as a tragic and humane point of view. Both conventional and contemporary Gothic fiction aspects can be found in her novels. Her Gothic fiction writing is enhanced by the blend of both.

The meaning of human life is a recurring theme throughout Oates's novels. Her writing demonstrates the understanding that life has purpose. The incapacity of her characters to discover the purpose of their lives is their ultimate failure. Through her writings, Oates attempts to make her readers aware of her notion that life, despite its chaos and tragedy, ultimately has purpose that can be both understood and embraced. Oates believes that the novel is the most human of all art genres and that truths can be seen there.

In *Because It Is Bitter and Because It Is My Heart*, the Courtney family serves as the most effective vehicle for revealing the American dream. In the novel, the death of Little Red Garlock, a renowned youngster in Hammond, serves as the Gothic subject. Only a tiny girl witnesses the murder. Since the murder occurs only for her benefit, she wishes to shield the killer. He is a boy of sixteen years old. His remains are eventually discovered in the Cassadaga River. After discovering the body, a fisherman informs Al Neeley, the owner of Neeley's Diner, who then calls the Hammond police.

Patrick Wesley is Little Red Garlock's true name. Vernon does not live with the family because his father is ill and his mother is ill at home. Only his brother Morton and his family members arrive at the location. The top newspaper's photographer arrives and takes pictures of everything. The police determine that numerous hits to the skull with a blunt object or a rock must be the most likely cause of death. Eddy Furlong, the police officer, asks about it. No one speaks out about this murder, except for a fourteen-year-old high school girl. She alone informs the police that the Garlock boy is having problems with some intoxicated out-of-town motorbike riders.

Iris Courtney is the girl that provides the police with information regarding Little Red Garlock. She does not wish to reveal the true murderer, though. Oates provides a brief overview of Iris's family. Iris Courtney's father is Duke Courtney. He has lost a lot of money in the race and is a gambler. He has taken out loans from several people, including Leslie Courtney, his brother. He believes he may be able to recover the money he lost. He comes home extremely late at night after consuming too many alcoholic beverages. Persia Courtney is his spouse. Even when Iris Courtney is around, they start fighting. He sometimes rushes out of the house and hits his wife. Then, like anything else, Persia Courtney chastises him. Persia Courtney maintains a covert romantic partner. Her lover completes tasks for her.

Finding Persia's lover, Virgil Starling, in Iris Courtney's home is extremely embarrassing. Persia, however, frequently departs with her lover and returns home late. That kind of living bothers Iris. The Courtneys relocate to a new flat in Hammond at 927 Jewett Street. Duke Courtney calls his daughter one day to enquire if Virgil, the mulatto, is with her mother. In addition, he poses the extremely sensitive subject of whether she is on his or her mother's side. Duke Courtney has a brother named Leslie Courtney. In Hammond, he is referred to as a Negro photographer. Duke Courtney is furious with his brother for tarnishing his brand by attracting a lot of black customers. However, Leslie Courtney believes that children of all colours can be beautiful. He has Persia and Iris's photos in his studio among a lot of Negro photos.

Vesta Garlock, the mother of Little Red Garlock, is in her thirties. She spots Persia Courtney standing next to a pharmacy one day. Vesta Garlock approaches Persia Courtney and requests assistance. She admits to her fear of black people. Her son then picks a fight with her for making this scene after Persia brings her safely to Garlock's residence. She fears that the black people will gaze at her because of her unsightly teeth. Persia believes that the idea that someone may gaze at her with desire is ridiculous. The place where Vesta Garlock lives is filthy.

When Iris Courtney was in sixth grade at Peter B. Porter Elementary School, she was terrorised by the Black females. Most of the students at that institution are white. There is no mixing of whites and blacks. Her maths teacher is Mrs. Rudiger. Sitting next to Iris Courtney is a Negro girl named Lucille Weaver. Iris writes the right response to the maths question, and Lucille duplicates it. Mrs. Rudiger requests that Lucille explain how she came up with the right response. She is aware that Lucille may have imitated Iris. Iris and Lucille end up misinterpreting one other as a result. Lucille and two of Iris's pals call her a "white bitch" and knock her into the gutter of filthy water as she is leaving for home. After picking herself up, Iris refers to them as "dirty nigger bitches" (88). A few days later, Iris uses her schoolbooks to attack Lucille and her pals. She notices that the black girl's nose is bleeding.

Persia wishes to give Leslie birthday presents in honour of his fortieth birthday. On August 20, 1955, Leslie turned forty years old. The sky is overcast that afternoon. Iris and Persia bring cake and birthday gifts to Leslie's workshop. They don't remember to bring an umbrella. As they gaze through Leslie's studio window, they notice their old photos on display among black people. According to Persia, the old photos ought to have been discarded. Leslie receives a classy pocketbook from Persia and a blue silk necktie from Iris as birthday presents. These two gifts were given to Persia by a friend who works as manager of a men's apparel store in Hammond. It is a tiny studio. He purchases a lot of new cameras because he likes them. However, he never discards the older ones.

Iris begins smoking, just like Duke Courtney and Persia, but never in front of grownups. Leslie is informed by Persia that she is leaving to call someone on the phone. Leslie is left alone with Iris. Leslie has been considering telling Iris about Duke's actions for a few months. Persia and Iris return to the studio and remain there for a while. Leslie snaps a picture of Iris and Persia. The power abruptly cuts off, and the rain begins. Persia tells Leslie that it appears they were close to Niagara Falls as they sip wine together. Iris recalls her mother and father having a tense relationship. Duke Courtney loves his daughter more than anybody else. He has frequently expressed to Iris how terrible it is to lose the people he loves in his life. He threatens to kill any man who attempts to stand in his way with his family. A dispute between Duke Courtney and Persia could be triggered by the smallest incident. Duke occasionally slams his fist against the wall and might even smack her open-handed. After Duke Courtney leaves the flat, Persia can accuse him of lying and being a bastard. Persia will be still, tears streaming down her face.

Peach Tree Creek is a filthy stream that carries sewage, trash, used condoms, and various waste products from manufacturers. It empties into the river Cassadaga. It is not expected that white girls will be swimming there. Iris Courtney and Nancy Dorsey, two White girls, go swimming with some Black girls one afternoon. They are teased by Sugar Baby Fairchild and Jinx Fairchild, two Negro brothers. Iris is instructed by Nancy to disregard the Fairchilds. Compared to Sugar Baby, Jinx is darker. Iris has observed him playing basketball at school and in the local park. The real names of Sugar Baby and Jinx are Woodrow William Fairchild and Verlyn Rayburn Fairchild, respectively. At school, Sugar Baby excels as a basketball player. Another day, Iris

and her two white pals go to the play. Jinx Fairchild and his companion accompany her to the play. When the Black boys start making noise in the cinema, the manager arrives. Those two youngsters are sent out of the theatre by him.

Little Red Garlock acts in a very barbaric and primitive manner. He used to stand spread-legged and purposeful while urinating in the alley. Iris was unable to ignore this horrible scene on numerous occasions. He is the target of numerous complaints. Vernon, his father, is likewise well-known in the community for abusing his wife and kids. The father and son are the subject of numerous complaints at the police station overall. The mother of an impacted girl once complained to the sergeant about Little Red Garlock's misbehaviour, but nothing was done about it. Oates paints a vivid picture of Vernon and his son's inappropriate actions. Witnesses have reported that Vernon, even in inclement weather, chased the youngster half-naked and whipped him with his belt. The boy whimpered like an animal while Vernon roared and was intoxicated. It could have been Little Red, or it could have been another boy; the Garlock household has a variable number of children, all of whom require occasional whipping. The seventh precinct is generally bored with these calls; they have more serious crimes to deal with, like murders, armed robberies, and nigger punks. Vernon Garlock has been jailed multiple times, with his longest stint being thirty days for assault and drunken and disorderly behaviour.

Little Red has also been taken into the station, slapped around by police, and scared into obedience. The desk sergeant advised Nancy Dorsey's mother to either leave the area or keep her daughter at home when she called the station to complain that the Garlock youngster was "touching," "doing thing to," and "threatening" (96) her daughter, who was eleven years old at the time. Little Red Garlock is said to be born filthy. Even while milk drips from his mouth, he is biting, kicking, and wailing for more milk instead of just sucking his mother's breast. Even at the age of five, his mother tries to address his immoral behaviour. As he has done with all his children, his father attempts to punish the youngster. Even whipping has to lose its appeal to him.

The siblings of Little Red Garlock learn to avoid close contact. His mother makes numerous attempts to correct him. Little Red Garlock's mother tries one last time to correct him when he is six years old. She fills a tub with a five-gallon bucket of boiling water. Little Red Garlock flees and hides for three days when she tries to push him into the sea. He uses trash to feed himself. His mother goes crazy when he returns. Iris went out one day to buy a carton of cigarettes. She spots Jinx Fairchild and Bobo Ritchie standing close to the store. Bobo keeps to himself. Bobo is asked for a matchbox by Iris. It is almost eleven o'clock. It is very dark as she makes her way home. Little Red Garlock emerges from the undergrowth. He scares her by approaching too closely. Oates explains how Iris is scared when Little Red Garlock appears:

Little Red has emerged out of the bushes, loose-limbed, grinning.

'Hiya, liiiiii-riis! Where ya going!'

He's advancing toward Iris as Iris retreats, stepping backward - she doesn't want to turn and run - clowning around as if this is a game and Iris really want to play it; she's just pretending to be frightened and angry.

Iris says, 'I see you too. I know who you are.'

Iris says, trembling with hatred, 'I'm going to tell my father ...He'll call the police on you.'

Little Red laughs, jogging amiably forward. He's crooning obscene words in a singsong. Iris doesn't want to hear and making ugly twisting gestures at his crotch she doesn't want to see. In this awkward but seemingly coordinated fashion, the one in retreat, the other coming forward, Iris Courtney and Little Red Garlock emerge from the alley onto East Avenue at approximately 11 p.m. of April 2, 1956. Evidently no one sees them. Or will remember seeing them, afterward. (108)

She tells Jinx about Little Red Garlock as she dashes back to the Chenoy's store. When she attempts to call her parents, the phone just rings and no one answers. Jinx offers to contact law enforcement. Iris is informed by Jinx that police are not necessary. He offers to get her inside the house safely. Little Red Garlock blocks their path while he is taking her. When Jinx Fairchild asks Little Red Garlock why he is scared Iris, the latter attacks him. They are engaged in combat with one another. They are hurt in that duel.

A piece of concrete is picked up by Little Red Garlock, who then throws it at Jinx Fairchild. With a large, wedge-shaped object in his hand, Jinx Fairchild strikes Little Red Garlock's skull while he is hurt. Little Red Garlock is killed because of this severe attack. The newspaper covers Little Red Garlock's death in detail. Little Red Garlock's death has a profound impact on his mother. She just disappears for a few days and then returns home. To meet the suspects in Little Red Garlock's murder, the police bring the Garlocks to the station. However, they were unable to make accusations. Therefore, in this instance, the police were unable to make any arrests. Jinx worries about what is ahead. He fears that he could be arrested by the authorities at any moment.

Jinx recalls his early years as he gazes upon Peach Tree Creek. He is instantly reminded of his murder and the fact that Garlock's body was dumped into the creek. His mother, Minnie, works in the office of renowned Hammond physician Dr. O'Shaughnessy, where she earns a stable and respectable salary. Minnie is given more significance following the passing of his wife. Some even believe that the doctor is the father of Jinx's sister Ceci. Jinx was unable to unwind and be carefree. He is troubled every time he considers his murder. His goal is to inform his mother everything about Little Red Garlock's murder. Meanwhile, two motorbike riders are detained by the police as Garlock's killers. However, because his father is a devout follower of God, Jinx fears him. It would be easy for his father to diagnose him and explain his condition. His mother enquires as to whether he has a fever. Jinx finally confesses his father's murder to him. His father breaks down when he hears Jinx's confession. Iris also wants to inform her mother about Garlock's murder. She fears that she might be arrested by the police when they visit her college one day. She runs into Jinx one day, and they both look at one another. She grabs his hand and gives it a kiss. She informs him that Little Red Garlock's murder is solely her fault. Later, Jinx had unsettling dreams. In his dream, Little Red Garlock, the deceased youngster, is pushing him into the river.

Because It Is Bitter and Because It Is My Heart does a good job of describing Vernon Garlock's and his family's fame. Both Vernon Garlock and his son Little Red Garlock are the subject of several complaints. Little Red Garlock appears to have behaved worse since he was a little youngster. He forbids girls from walking freely on the street when he is an adult boy. People do not feel sorry for him when he is found murdered because of this. There is little affection even among family members. Jinx happens to kill Little Red Garlock, who is regarded as a beast. As a result, Jinx is destined to kill Little Red Garlock, and he deeply regrets doing it. According to Iris Courtney's family, her parents are unfit to be her parents. Her mother is interested in an extramarital affair, but her father gambles. We are grateful to her uncle, Leslie Courtney, who does not distinguish between whites and blacks.

Oates has been successful in portraying the pursuit of an American identity in her novels. She has shown how the American dream, which once spoke of equality and human freedom, has been corrupted and has resulted in a life of violence and meaninglessness through the storyline, the setting, and the characterisation in *Because It Is Bitter and Because It Is My Heart*. She has examined the essence of American individuality and appears to have made a comment about the incapacity to develop an identity by using the Gothic structure.

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