Joyce Carol Oates and the female body

The female body in Joyce Carol Oates’ *The Wheel of Love*, *Heat and Other stories* and *Give Me Your Heart*
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One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman - Simone de Beauvoir

If one is a woman, one is doomed to victimization – Pamela Smiley
Introduction

Joyce Carol Oates was born in 1938 in Lockport, New York and is well known for her extensive literary oeuvre. Since 1959 Oates has published many essays, plays, poems, novels and short stories. Her first short story was published in 1959, though she had written short stories before, for the student publication of the Junior-Senior High School in Williamsville, New York, and for the college literary magazine of Syracuse University (Mayer xvi). Since then Oates has published numerous short stories; the largest part of her literary legacy consists of literary works of this genre. Greg Johnson estimated in 1994 that Oates had written more than five hundred short stories since the late 1950s (Mayer xii).

In the short stories written by Joyce Carol Oates the protagonists of the story are often female characters. The plot lines are frequently violent and happy endings are not very common in these short stories. One aspect that resurfaces in many of Oates’s short stories is the female characters’ struggle with their own bodies. The female characters cannot truly appreciate their own bodies nor even have a positive connection with them. Often this struggle ends in a negative manner or it is suggested that the end will not be a happy one. The stories do not present a denouement or a solution for this conflict; most of the female characters are not happier with their own bodies at the end of the stories than they were in the beginning. Moreover, the way the male characters view the female body is important in this struggle too. The female body often entices sexual reactions of the male characters; it influences their behavior and their minds in such a manner that they even become violent. In this violent, sexual behavior they want to take control over the women’s bodies and often they succeed.

It is exactly this aspect – how the male and female characters consider the female body – that is worth more analysis. To come to this analysis, this thesis looks at three short story collections by Joyce Carol Oates to investigate how the female and male characters have developed their views on and relationships with the female body. *The Wheel of Love* (1965) is analyzed as an example of her early works. *Heat and other Stories* (1991) is used to give insight in how the theme surfaces in this period. Lastly, this thesis analyzes *Give Me Your Heart* (2010), which is one of her more recent short story collections and can be used to show how the more current characters regard the female body.
To examine this development, only a few stories in the three volumes are used to analyze certain typical aspects of the male and female characters’ consideration of the female body, but some – if not all – aspects could be applied to the other stories as well. Moreover, the development of the consideration of the female body will be put aside next to the development of feminism. In this manner, a possible connection between the two will be explored.

To consider this view on the female body in a broader context, feminist theory is used. This theory is chosen because, firstly, Joyce Carol Oates’s short stories have often been linked with feminism in scholarly criticism and often provided interesting analyses of Oates’s literary work. Secondly, both Beauvoir and Butler discuss terms that prove to be crucial in Oates’s short stories. Simone de Beauvoir is one of the earlier feminists and has been extremely influential. Her book *The Second Sex*, which frequently mentions the female body, will therefore be used to examine the early ideas of feminism. Sarah Butler is a more recent feminist, who has been very influential since the 1990s; Butler’s theory will be explored for a more current feminist view. Both frameworks will be used to explain how Oates’s characters deal with the female body.

Chapter 1 is a background chapter on the development of feminism. A short overview is given to indicate the main topics in the first and second wave feminism and in the more recent postfeminism. This chapter also looks at why – or why not – feminists, critics, and Oates herself consider the author as a feminist. Besides this, chapter 1 also briefly discusses some of Simone de Beauvoir’s key concepts, such as the dualistic gender system of the subject and the inessential Object and the biological differences between men and women. Judith Butler’s theory provides an insight in more current concepts such as sex vs. gender and performativity.

The second chapter discusses the female protagonists and their relationships with their own bodies. It investigates how in *The Wheel of Love* the female characters are dependent on male characters and how the female characters’ relationships with their own bodies become strained when they act on their own bodily urges. It also explores the female protagonists of *Heat and other stories*, who ignore their own bodies when they are attacked or when they experience feelings of love or lust and separate themselves from their own bodies. Lastly, the female protagonists of *Give Me Your Heart* are explored. These female protagonists no longer deny their own bodies, but they seem much more in control over their own bodies and bodily sensations and want to fight for the female body.
The third chapter discusses the male perpetrators and their view of the female bodies. In the first volume the male characters often sexually objectify women and even want to appropriate women in an attempt to fill up their own lives. In the second volume men are portrayed as dangerous animals and children who cannot control their own urges. In the last volume the men are ascribed different gender roles, they are no longer always perpetrators, but can act as protectors too. Besides this aspect, this chapter investigates how, in some of the stories in this volume, the roles have changed in such a manner that even men can become victims of women.

The conclusion summarizes all that has been said in the previous chapters and recaps the development of the consideration of the female body in Oates’s short stories. This development is then be compared to the development of feminism to answer the question in what manner the female and male characters’ relationships with the female body have developed in Oates’ short stories.
Chapter 1: Feminism and Joyce Carol Oates

In the history of feminism there are of two waves of progressive feminist activity discerned, though “it must be remembered that these are used only as terms of convenience and do not intend to convey the idea that feminisms can be easily historically classified into these two periods of activity, or that outside of these periods there was no feminist struggle” (Freedman 5). In awareness of this complexity, this part only gives a short outline of the development of feminism for introductory sake.¹

The first feminist wave took place between the turn of the twentieth century and the 1920s, although women had recognized women’s unequal position earlier. For example Mary Wollstonecraft, who published her famous A Vindication of the Rights of Women in 1792. Moreover, already in the 1840s suffragette movements started to appear in America and in Britain (Freedman 2). In the latter half of 19th century, women also slowly started to fight for custodial rights and legal rights in marriage and especially in divorce (Sanders 20 – 21). However, it is not until the turn of the 20th century that larger suffragette movements became prominent – and successful – in their fight for equal political rights. These suffragettes had a tough paradox to overcome. On one hand women had been excluded from politics because of their presumed biological difference, so they had to fight to claim that they were not different, but equal. On the other hand, “in mobilizing as women and claiming rights for women they were affirming their identity as women, and thus reinforcing the existence of sexual difference” (Freedman 32). This struggle is still present today, for although most women – at least in Western countries – have gained the right to vote, the right to eligibility is another matter; throughout the world there are still less women in politics then men.

Thirty years later, in the late 1950s, the next wave of feminist movement emerged, which “again centered on women’s inequality, although this time not only in terms of women’s lack of equal political rights but in the areas of family, sexuality and work” (Freedman 4). Freedman later explains this re-focus as “partly as a result of this failure of representative institutions to open up to women” (Freedman 33); they moved away from ‘formal political institutions’ and started to direct themselves to women’s struggles in power

¹ For a chronological and more detailed description of the main topics within feminism, see Jane Freedman’s Feminism, Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001.
relations in general. New topics were for instance the right for birth control and the right for adoption.

In this next wave, which culminated in the 1960s and 1970s, several new types of feminisms were formed. Jane Freedman loosely categorizes them in three groups: the liberal feminists, who strive for equal rights within the state that already exists; socialist feminists, who link gender inequality to societal oppression; and radical feminists, who feel that women’s oppression is the result of the patriarchal system (Freedman 5). However, next to these three groups there are more recent additions, such as psychoanalytical feminism and poststructuralist feminism. These groups deal with politics, psychology, biology, literature, art – and many other issues. Nevertheless, all feminisms deal with “the question of the meaning of equality for feminism, and more precisely the opposition between ‘equality’ and ‘difference’” (Freedman 6). Although the groups take a different angle, all the feminisms are concerned with women and their relation to the rest of the world.

Since the 1980s the term ‘postfeminism’ has become more and more prominent. The term is slightly problematic, because it implies that it comes after feminism, as if feminism is not present anymore. Moreover, ‘postmodernism’ is a generic term and encompasses many topics. Yet according to the Routledge Companion “the postfeminist debate tends to crystallize around issues of victimization, autonomy and responsibility” (Gamble 43). In other words, postfeminism considers the role of men, women and media in issues such as pornography, sexual harassment and rape. Moreover, postmodern feminists accept the cultural differences between women and take it to one step further. They explore if it is even possible to use the term ‘woman’ and “consider not only differences between men and women, or differences between women themselves, but also difference within and constitute of the female subject” (Freedman 88).

The difference between men and women is an important aspect in many of Oates’s short stories and history shows that already in the 1970s feminism becomes a much discussed topic in the reception of Oates’s short stories. Especially Oates’s short story collection The Goddess and Other Women (1974) shows a preoccupation with the psyche of women and therefore especially interests feminist critics. An important feminist critic is Constance Denne, who writes an essay called “Joyce Carol Oates’s Women” in 1974. In this essay she states how “women are at the present time more interesting to her [Oates] than men” (qtd. in Mayer 56). These feminist critics especially focus on the female characters in The Goddess and often link them with insanity. For example Charlotte Goodman, who wrote “Women and Madness in the Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates” in 1977, and focuses on the psychological disorders...
which the female characters seem to suffer from. At this time the feminist critics start to take a closer look at the female characters in earlier short stories written by Oates as well; examples are Kathleen Cushman, Mary Allen, and Charlotte Goodman (Mayer 56 – 57). In 1994 Greg Johnson links *The Wheel of Love* with feminism. He places this collection together with *The Goddess and Other Women* of 1974 under ‘Early Feminism’, “maintaining that most of the stories show how ‘male transgression and violence, whether through actual rape, psychological tyranny, or institutional dominance, lie at the heart of all these women’s torn and conflicted lives” (qtd. in Mayer 52).

It is no surprise that Oates’s fiction has been linked to feminism, because in her fiction, Oates crudely shows the implication of the patriarchal structures, for instance how men can have sexual power over women. She explores “how patriarchal society can dupe young women into thinking they are in control even as they are being manipulated” (Horeck 29). Oates repeatedly tells violent stories in which the woman is often powerless and escaping seems impossible. It seems that in Oates’s short stories, as Pamela Smiley has put it, “if one is a woman, one is doomed to victimization” (Smiley 38). Even though Oates’s fiction deals with themes such as sexual abuse and sexual politics, “Oates has not been openly embraced as a feminist writer” (Horeck 26). The female characters in Oates’s fiction are often victims who are wounded or under attack and feminist critics “regard her portrayal of girls and women as too bleakly passive and deterministic” (Horeck 36). As Henry Gates has put it: “Oates is a troubling figure for ‘normative feminists’ because ‘it is not her ambition to add to our supply of positive role models’; instead she ‘insists on exploring the structure of female masochism’ (qtd. in Horeck 30). As this quote indicates, Oates’s view on women was too negative for most feminist critics and therefore they have been reluctant to regard Oates’s fiction as feminist.

Joyce Carol Oates herself also does not think she is a feminist writer. As she states in an interview held in 1992: “I am very sympathetic with most of the aims of feminism, but cannot write feminist literature because it is too narrow, too limited. I am equally sympathetic with male characters as with female, which has been a source of irritation to some feminist critics. (...) An unfortunate situation, but one which I cannot help” (Sjoberg 273). However, Oates does have some of the same views on women and gender equality like feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir. For example, when she is asked in an interview how she defines feminism, she replies: “In a root way: Everyone should receive equal pay for equal work. To me, feminism is basically economic” (Grobel 151). This resembles Beauvoir’s view in that women should work and that women should be treated equally. There actually is a possibility
that she has read de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, considering she took philosophy as a minor in her undergraduate years at Syracuse University and “American college students encountered translation of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* in courses on French existentialism” (Card 1).

Oates has made some other interesting remarks on the differences between men and women. In a 1982 interview she remarks:

> No, I don’t think the two sexes are that different. There’s an intensification of aggression, especially sexual aggression, in the male: Sexual feelings, instincts and desires of the male are in many cases more intense than in the female. For instance, female rapists or sex offenders are virtually nonexistent. There are 17 times as many male criminals as female criminals, and the sexual component has a lot to do with that. But it’s a continuum. If you got rid of all men and had only women left behind in some bizarre dimension, you would find them clustered toward one end of the continuum these adversarial and aggressive women. And they would be the ‘new men’. So I don’t feel the sexes are different in kind, only in degree. (Grobel 151)

Again there is a similarity in Beauvoir’s thinking, who also believes in a dualistic system where one cannot be without another. Moreover, Oates reveals a Beauvoirian view on men in general: men are more sexual and violent than women. This view is reflected in her short stories, as will be explained in the next chapters.

Oates has also commented on how she is treated as a female writer:

> A woman is often judged by her physical appearance or by the fact that she’s a woman. But a man is judged by his work. It would never be said about a male novelist that he was very handsome. You don’t say “Hemingway, a male novelist, has written some good books.” But people describe women writers in such a way that we are lumped together in some strange category that’s heterogeneous and kind of promiscuous. I’ll find myself in that chapter along with women who write about romantic experiences or domestic life or children. And my real kinship would be with someone in the realistic-novel category who’s a man. But I’m not put in that chapter because I am a woman. (Grobel 150)

Here she makes a point on how she is perceived as an author and how she apparently has often been signified as ‘female author’ as if it is presumed that in general an author is male.
So she has experienced firsthand how women are treated differently than men and does not seem to like it.

In his biography, Johnson described a moment when Oates’s feminist thoughts are revealed. In 1969 Oates was being painted by a friend and the friend “remembered that as Joyce sat there, perfectly motionless, she remarked that ‘women should be utterly independent in their marriage, and lead their own lives, and not be the pawn of husbands’” (Johnson 1998 168). Clearly – an already married – Oates believed that married women should not be too dependent on their husbands.

Oates has also mentioned feminist literature. In the 1982 interview she states:

Feminist literature per se is propagandist literature. And feminism, like any ism or ideology, exacts too high a toll. You can be politically incorrect and people get angry with you. I will always place a much higher value on aesthetic integrity than on any kind of political correctness, including feminism. (Grobel 150 – 151)

By making this statement she reveals that (her) feminist views are not the most important aspects in her writing. However, even though promoting feminism was not Oates’s main goal in writing her short stories; it is still worthwhile to investigate how her feminist views in her short stories are (aesthetically) presented, how they have changed, and if this development can be paralleled to the development of feminism.

Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex has been very influential on feminism. The Second Sex was published in French in 1949 and in English in 1953. Though the book was published “when the women’s movement was more or less dormant” (Lundgren-Gothlin 11), ten to twenty years later it became a popular book for the second wave feminism. It has influenced quite a number of second wave feminist writers, critics and philosophers. Consequently, many articles and books were written on The Second Sex using various approaches and fellow philosophers. For example, the book has often been investigated by specifically looking at the Marxist tendencies or by looking at the influence of Sartre and Hegel. However, for the sake of clarity this thesis only briefly explores Beauvoir’s opinions on the position of woman and the female body – the main topic of this thesis.

In The Second Sex there are several themes that are reflected in Joyce Carol Oates’s short stories and that is why – besides being a benchmark for early second wave feminist thinking – Beauvoir and this work is chosen to analyze Oates’s short stories. For example, Beauvoir elaborately describes how women are different biologically and how the identity of women has been constructed throughout history. She for instance talks about the unequal
gender situations in politics and in the ‘economic sphere’. In this biological, historical, political, literal and situational description, she explains how she thinks the position and identity of woman is constructed as dependent:

Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as a relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being… she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called ‘the sex’, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She 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. (Introduction xvi)

To Beauvoir, the gender system is a dual system: the man is ‘the subject’ and woman is ‘the inessential Other’, where the woman is oppressed by man. Even though women are as human creatures independent and free to do as they please, they are oppressed by men who perceive women to be less than them:

What peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since here transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego (conscience) which is essential and sovereign. The drama of woman lies in the conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego) – who always regards the self as the essential – and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential. (Introduction xxviii; emphasis in the original)

This division between ‘subject’ and ‘Other’ often comes forward in Oates’s short stories, which embrace this dual system. Especially in her early short stories there is a division between powerful men and powerless women.

Beauvoir explains how this oppression lies in the nature of men by looking at the master-slave dialectic. Her presupposition is that men constantly seek confirmation “as a human, as self-consciousness, in relation to other males, males who become either masters or slaves” (Lundgren-Gothlin 71). However, man does have the hope of achieving recognition without engaging this kind of dialectics and man thinks he can avoid this struggle in his relationship with women. Meaning men do not perceive a woman as an essential self-
conscious being, but feels that a woman “remains at a more animal level” (Lundgren-Gothlin 72).

The reason why women do not struggle for recognition as men do lies in biology. Beauvoir makes the distinction that “females are physically weaker and their role in the reproductive process predisposes them not to participate in the struggle for recognition” (Lundgren-Gothlin 76). Women have to struggle more with their bodies, their biological ‘enslavement’ to the species; i.e. menstruation, pregnancy, menopause. Women have more conflicts between their personal life and sexuality: “the softness of woman’s body, the secretions that flow from it, the doubling and blurring of boundaries that occur during pregnancy, the uncontrollability of conception, her penetration during sexual intercourse, and the diffuseness of her sexual pleasure are all understood to make her, by contrast with man, inert and passive” (James 158). Beauvoir does not say that the biological differences between man and woman “lead per se to the subordination of women, but that they are significant in the original historical situation” (Lundgren-Gothlin 77). In other words, the biological characters of women – although they are not crucial – play a part in men’s domination of women in the past. This explanation of the dualistic society is also represented in Joyce Carol Oates’ stories and will prove to be useful in the analysis of her short stories, as will be shown in chapters 2 and 3.

The female body itself is another important aspect in Joyce Carol Oates’s short stories and is also discussed by Simone de Beauvoir. To Beauvoir, the female body is crucial in women’s status as the Other. Even though ideals of feminine beauty may vary among cultures, according to Beauvoir they all have in common that: ‘since woman is destined to be possessed, her body must present the inert and passive qualities of an object’ (SS: 175, LDS: 165), they all express man’s desire to own woman” (Lundgren-Gothlin 194). For women their bodies are often a burden. Woman wants to be a complete individual, but her body prevents her from being one with her complete self. Her individuality and her nature clash, for example when a woman is menstruating or is pregnant. Then “she feels her body most painfully as an opaque alienated thing… Woman, like man, is her body; but her body is something other than herself” (qtd. in Lundgren-Gothlin 203; emphasis in the original). This view on the female body is represented in Oates’s short stories, in which the female characters often struggle with their own bodies, and will prove to be essential in the analysis of the female characters.

Beauvoir believes that historical and social dimensions are mostly responsible for the inferior position of women in society. To Beauvoir, “woman does not choose inferiority, but rather is born into a situation which compels her to it” (Lundgren-Gothlin 92). The situation
of women in the fifties is shaped by men and the patriarchal society; “girls are educated into becoming passive objects not only by being prohibited from asserting themselves in relation to the world and others, but also by being taught that if they do not behave in a feminine way, men will find them less attractive” (Lundgren-Gothlin 182). Women have been taught from a young age that passivity and the status of the Other is good for women. Examples can be found in the American and Western European societies of the 1950s, in which women are expected to marry and take care of the children, while they allow the man to provide for them.

Even though women have been taught that being the Other is a good quality and they have been oppressed by men for decades, this does not mean that women are completely powerless victims of the patriarchal system. Beauvoir believes that, although women are put in subordinate positions, women as human beings do have the existential potential of self-creation and the capability to make free choices. Even though biologically speaking men and women are different, and historically and socio-economically speaking women have been made inferior, and they may have the tendency to even like passivity; there is a way for women to be more than ‘the Other’ by using their existential freedom.

Practically speaking, Beauvoir feels that women can gain ‘transcendence’ by productive societal work in the public sphere. By productive activity “one may reflect one’s existence” (Lundgren-Gothlin 189). Beauvoir implies that taking care of children and the home are not actions that can truly fulfill women’s humanity authentically. Yet she felt that women should have the same rights as men and therefore boys and girls should receive similar education. Moreover, Beauvoir states that women should exercise productive labor to ensure that women’s social and political status would be more equal. Another major help in the fight for equality would be the rather new innovation of birth control; “Beauvoir regarded this change as of extraordinary importance to women, since it would eventually give them an opportunity to plan their pregnancies rationally and limit them in number” (Lundgren-Gothlin 118). Oddly enough, Beauvoir’s fight for equality is one of the main reasons why the appraisal she received from the early second wave feminists slowly became criticism; while she “was the guiding light of early feminists in the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s, she was less well suited to the spirit of the age when later feminists began to upgrade that which was specifically feminine” (Lundgren-Gothlin 5). The later feminists did not only want equality, they wanted more. Where de Beauvoir talked about how women should attain equal rights to men, in the 1960s and 1970s more and more feminists started speaking of overturning the patriarchal system altogether.
Since 1990 Judith Butler has become very important in the feminist movement and is therefore chosen as a benchmark to show the main views of the feminist movement since the 1990s. In this year she published *Gender Trouble*. Later on she wrote *Bodies That Matter* (1993) and in 2004 she first published *Undoing Gender*. In all the works of Judith Butler gender, identity, subjectivity and performance are the key words; “to greater or lesser extent, all Butler’s books ask questions about the formation of identity and subjectivity, tracing the processes by which we become subjects when we assume the sexed/gendered/raced’ identities which are constructed for us (and to a certain extent by us) within existing power structures” (Salih 2). The second reason why Butler’s notions on gender and the body are discussed here is because the separation between gender and sex and the notion of gender performativity are very important in Oates’s recent short stories; in these stories the female and male characters try to move away from their sex-based gender roles and gender performativity becomes an important theme in the characters.

Beauvoir often linked the differences and inequalities between man and women to the animal kingdom and to biological qualities, but also states that one is not born, but becomes a woman. However, in this early feminist notion gender is still “intricately related to the sexed body” (Horner 1). Butler does not agree with the essentialist notions of Beauvoir, but she does agree with the Beauvorian notion of ‘becoming a woman’ and the influences the cultural context has on the gender inequalities. Yet Butler takes it one step further and she separates the biological sex and the artificial gender altogether. She states that the gender of a person is not necessarily related to the sex of a person:

The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. (GT 9; emphasis in the original)

Moreover, Butler feels that gender is something that one does, not something that one is. It is a verb, not a noun: “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being” (GT). Gender, to Butler, is also unnatural. Butler considers gender differences not to be the result of biological or natural differences, but focuses on how biological sex and social gender is ‘naturalized’ so that they seem natural,
even though both are unnatural performances. An example of this is when a gynecologist tells parents about their new born ‘it’s a girl’; “she is not reporting an already determinate state of affairs, but taking part in a practice which constitutes that state of affairs. The effect of repetition of acts of this kind is to make it appear that there are two distinct natures, male and female” (Lennon; emphasis in the original).

Another important notion of Butler is gender performance. To Butler gendered performances “are ones which we act out ourselves and which others act out in relation to us. They are acted out in accordance with social scripts prescribing ideals which are unrealizable, but which none the less provide the framework for our activities” (Lennon; emphasis in the original). Important in understanding gender performativity is that the performance pre-exists the performer, which means that the performer has already been shaped by his or her political and cultural surroundings. If gender is a historical category then, Butler states, we have to accept that gender “is open to continual remaking and that ‘anatomy’ and ‘sex’ are not without a cultural framing” (UG 10). And so “the very attribution of femininity to female bodies as if it were a natural or necessary property takes place within a normative framework in which the assignment of femininity to femaleness is one mechanism for the production of gender itself. Terms such as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are notoriously changeable; there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending on geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose” (UG 10). This changeability of the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ is important in Oates’s later short stories, in which these terms take on different meanings and shows that they are not immutable standards.

When considering the body, to Butler the subjection of our bodies to normalizing practices like using lenses, dying hair, following diets, “becomes not only a way in which already male and female bodies seek to approximate an ideal, but the very process whereby gendered subjects come into existence at all. Femininity and masculinity become, broadly, bodily styles which our bodies incorporate to yield a gendered subjectivity” (Lennon). In the chapter ‘Bodily inscriptions, Performative Subversions’ Butler questions if the body is: “a foundation on which gender operates or if the body itself is shaped by political forces that want to keep the body bounded to sex” (GT 175). She refuses to accept the notion that the body is “a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as ‘external’ to that body” (GT 175). To her, the body is itself a construction. She agrees with Beauvoir’s phrase ‘one becomes a woman’, but considers her assumption on embodiment problematic:
Beauvoir proposes that the female body ought to be the situation and theinstrumentality of women’s freedom, not a defining and limiting essence. Thetheory of embodiment informing Beauvoir’s analysis is clearly limited by theuncritical reproduction of the Cartesian distinction between freedom and thebody. Despite my own previous efforts to argue the contrary, it appears thatBeauvoir maintains the mind/body dualism, even as she proposes a synthesis ofthose terms. The preservation of that very distinction can be read asasymptomatic of the very phallogocentrism that Beauvoir underestimates… The mind not only subjugates the body, but occasionally entertains the fantasy offleeing its embodiment altogether. The cultural associations of mind withmasculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field ofphilosophy and feminism. As a result, any uncritical reproduction of themind/body hierarchy ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchythat the distinction has conventionally produced, maintained and rationalized. (GT 17)

To Butler “the sex/gender distinction and the category of sex itself appear to presuppose a generalization of ‘the body’ that preexists the acquisition of its sexedsignificance. This ‘body’ often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by aninscription from a cultural source figured as ‘external’ to that body. In Bodies That MatterButler takes a step further and states that not only “gender is the effect rather than the cause ofdiscourse”, but that the body “turns out to be a ‘naturalized effect’ of discourse. This is thebody as signified and as signification, a body that can only be known through language anddiscourse – in other words, a body that is linguistically and discursively constructed” (Salih80; emphasis in the original).

In Undoing Gender, Butler continues the discourse on gender and performativity, butrelates it more to cultural contexts. One can choose their own gender, but gender autonomyand self-determination is difficult, “since it turns out that choosing one’s own body invariablymeans navigating among norms that are laid out in advance and prior to one’s choice or arebeing articulated in concert by other minority agencies. Indeed, individuals rely on institutionsof social support in order to exercise self-determination with respect to what body and whatgender to have and maintain. One only determines ‘one’s own’ sense of gender to the extentthat social norms exist that support and enable that act of claiming gender for oneself. One isdependent on this ‘outside’ to lay claim to what is one’s own” (UG 7).
In *Undoing Gender* Butler also discusses, though in different words, objectification of bodies. She states:

the body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where ‘doing’ and ‘being done to’ becomes equivocal. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own. (UG 21)

As a result “the particular sociality that belongs to bodily life, to sexual life, and to becoming gendered (which is always, to a certain extent, becoming gendered for others) establishes a field of ethical enmeshment with others and a sense of disorientation for the first-person, that is, the perspective of the ego. As bodies, we are always for something more than, and other than, ourselves” (UG 25; emphasis in the original).

When one considers that the body is not only personal, but also communal – then the community must (re)consider the norms by which it considers the human body. As Butler states: “If we consider that human bodies are not experienced without recourse to some ideality, some frame for experience itself, and that this is as true for the experience of one’s own body as it is for experiencing another, and if we accept that that ideality and frame are socially articulated, we can see how it is that embodiment is not thinkable without a relation to a norm, or a set of norms. The struggle to rework the norms by which bodies are experiences is thus crucial not only to disability politics, but to the intersex and transgendered movements as they contest forcibly imposed ideals of what bodies ought to be like” (UG 28).

This relation between the gendered body and the political framework imposed by society surfaces in Oates’s more recent short stories, in which especially the female characters struggle with being objectified and societies impositions. The female characters struggle to be more than their own bodies, as is shown in the following chapter.
Chapter 2: Female protagonists and their bodies

This chapter investigates how the female protagonists regard their own bodies in *The Wheel of Love* (1970), *Heat and Other Stories* (1991) and *Give Me Your Heart* (2010). It explores the motivations and consequences of their – often violent – struggle with their own bodies. Yet this chapter not only identifies problems, it also explores the development in the relationship the female protagonists have with their own bodies: from self-destructive tendencies to reconstructed gender performativity and taking control.

*The Wheel of Love* is a short story collection that focuses on amorous relationships between men and women; all the stories contain a dualistic plot of a male and a female character of which at least one is in love with or fascinated by the other. This type of duality also occurs in *The Second Sex*; Beauvoir argues too there is a dual gender system. In this dual system woman is not an autonomous being, but only is what man says she is “she 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” (Introduction xvi). Though Beauvoir thinks that this dual system is only a myth, it is “maintained by the patriarchal society in order to justify the oppression of women” (Lundgren-Gothin 175). At the time of this publication, this was an important opinion that was hailed by all emerging feminists, including those in America.

The oppression of women is also an important theme in *The Wheel of Love*, because the – often dualistic – plots in this volume repeatedly show female protagonists being highly dependent on the male characters. A majority of the stories in this collection show how the female protagonists lose or give control of their bodies to male characters, albeit father, husband or lover. Some of the female characters surrender their bodies willingly, as slaves that cannot escape the patriarchic object/subject system. To these characters their own bodies are weak and they see their own bodies as useless, powerless shells.

Nowhere this is more striking than in “Demons”, which shows the patriarchal system at its worst, in which the woman – as Beauvoir describes it – “is simply what man decrees” (xvi). In this story the female protagonist Eileen is frequently confronted with her own bodily weaknesses. Even though she is very intelligent, in her patriarchal family system this is not as important as a strong physicality. Her physically stronger sister is favored by her father and
mother. Even though Eileen is smarter than Marcey, has gone to college and has a proper job, she still feels the weaker one: “what did you do with intelligence, how could you use it? And her body was useless, just a thin body” (241). Eileen obviously feels that her body is worthless and expendable. Out of this feeling, Eileen readily gives over the power of her own body to an attractive stranger: “she felt the strength of her body flow over into his, lose itself in his” (252). When they stand together in front of Eileen’s house, her father wants her to come in. Yet she cannot obey her father, because she has given all control over her body to the other man; “she would have obeyed, except that all her strength had gone into this man” (252). In this story Eileen epitomizes Beauvoir’s notion that “females are physically weaker and their role in the reproductive process predisposes them not to participate in the struggle for recognition” (Lundgren-Gothlin 76). Eileen has no strength of her own and is doomed to remain a victim of the patriarchal system because she does not think she has the bodily strength to protest.

When the father dies, Eileen could have been freed from her father’s draconic patriarchal power, but instead she gives control of her body and life to yet another man. She still does not own her own life, her own body – she still wants to be controlled: “she knew that she belonged to him as a woman, her body and all the spontaneous womanly gestures of her soul, everything” (254). The stranger, just as her father, sees her as an object to be attained; not as an individual. Eileen remains to be the victim of a patriarchal system and is a female character is like the women that Beauvoir describes; she is a woman that find herself “living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other” (Introduction xxviii).

In a majority of the short stories, when female characters lose control over their own bodies they lose their sanity as well. When men violently force a physical relationship on women, the women feel as if the male perpetrators not only violated their bodies, but have violated their entire beings. As a result, the women cannot function properly anymore.

A striking example of this can be found in the story “Bodies”, in which Pauline is an independent and non-physical woman until a mentally disturbed man slashes his own throat right in front of her. The young man is Anthony, a man who has been stalking Pauline for a while. He attacks her with a knife and “staggering, caught her around the hips, the thighs, as he fell heavily, and she had not the power to break herself loose from him; she stared down at the top of his head, paralyzed. In a few minutes it was over” (274). Afterwards, Pauline thinks that she became pregnant, though only blood was smeared on her legs and it is impossible; “she knew that she could not be pregnant and yet she was certain she was pregnant” (278).
She feels sick, dizzy and has convinced herself that she is carrying a child. She has an image of her body that cannot be erased; “bleeding from the loins, she aches with cramps, coils of cramps. The blood seeps through the embryonic sack, not washing it free. How to get it free?” (279). Slowly it becomes clear that Pauline has lost her mind and has been admitted to some kind of institution; Though Anthony is dead, she cannot seem to move on from the traumatic event. She ends “in madness, repressed dreams of bodily contact erupting from her subconscious” (Waller 50). Someone attacked her body and now her body and her entire being has been tarnished forever.

Another theme in *The Wheel of Love* is that sexuality and pleasure can lead the female characters to have a strained relationship with their own bodies. Firstly, it makes the female protagonists physically suffer from these feelings. Besides this physical resistance of their own bodies, they struggle with their bodily urges and with sexual love, because it leads the female protagonists to feel guilty. When they have acted on their own bodily urges they even feel guilty enough to punish their bodies.

This guilt is mentioned in Beauvoir’s theory. She feels that women have more conflicts between their personal life and sexuality, because “the softness of woman’s body, the secretions that flow from it, the doubling and blurring of boundaries that occur during pregnancy, the uncontrollability of conception, her penetration during sexual intercourse, and the diffuseness of her sexual pleasure are all understood to make her, by contrast with man, inert and passive” (James 158). This passivity is troublesome for women, because they are supposed to be unfeeling, inessential Object. However, when they enjoy this passivity, this confirmation of their own status as the inessential Object, they start to feel guilty.

A clear example of this guilt can be found in the short story “I Was in Love”, which is a story about a woman who is married, has a son, but slowly turns crazy because she is having an affair. The affair is physically hurting the protagonist’s body. “Since falling in love I had headaches, my eyes ached, my throat ached with the need to cry perpetually, my loins ached from the love of two men” (405 – 406). Later on she states “beloved of too many men, I have given my body to too many men, my body is rebelling and wants to die” (407). She feels that her own body is rejecting the love that it is receiving, as if her body is not worthy of that much love. Out of guilt she starts to hurt and neglect her body. Although she still feels responsible for the bodies of others and does take care of those, she starts to starve her own; “My stomach was an empty sack, useless, but I remembered the uses of other stomachs, grinding up food to provide life. It was my responsibility to feed several people and keep
them living” (393). It is out of mental and physical exhaustion that death becomes a possible answer, because “dead, I would be unavailable to him” (398).

Another striking example of a guilty conscience leading a female protagonist to have a strained relationship with her own body is represented in “Unmailed, Unwritten Letters”, which “evokes through the confusion of metaphysical yearning, physical and emotional anguish, the fragility of the personality in sexual love and the tragedy of inner fear” (Waller 48). This female protagonist is having an affair too and again the downside of the affair is that she feels guilty of her bodily urges. She describes it as “giving myself up to that throbbing that arises out of my heartbeat and builds to madness and then subsides again, slowly, to become my ordinary heartbeat again, the heartbeat of an ordinary body from which divinity has fled” (72). Like the female protagonist in “I was in Love”, the female protagonist in this short story too punishes her body out of guilt. Firstly she tries to harm it by starving herself “to keep myself from feeling love, from feeling lust, from feeling anything at all” (70; emphasis in the original). Secondly, she resorts to auto-mutilation. She describes the moment when she is in a parking lot and she finds an empty can of tomato soup. “I pick the can up. The edge is jagged and rusty. No insects inside. Why would insects be inside, why bother with an empty can? Idly I press the edge of the lid against my wrist; it isn’t sharp, it makes only a fine white line on my skin, not sharp enough to penetrate the skin” (59).

The guilt these two female protagonists feel over their love affair, because they feel, as Joanne Creighton puts it, “to be either unworthy of love, unable to risk or experience it, or unhappy within it” (115). As a result, the affairs cause them to have a disturbing relationship with their bodies. They experience how “at its most demanding, sexual love is both a pathological condition and a religion, violent and deterministic, which invades our being” (Waller 42). The female characters feel extremely guilty that they are having an affair and that they are not in control of their own bodies in this sexual love. They both desperately want to be freed from their affairs, because – as Waller states in his analysis of Oates’s works - “it is in love, which is depicted ruefully as a kind of pathological state, that the personality is at its most vulnerable, and where preexistent concepts of one’s self, roles, and destiny are most radically challenged” (41).

Overall, the preceding analyses show that in stories in the collection *The Wheel of Love* women consider themselves to be inessential Objects. The dismal view that Oates gives in this collections seems to be that there is no escaping from the patriarchal system: women and their bodies will, willingly or violently, always belong to men; overpowering fathers, crazy stalkers or sensual lovers. Furthermore, the female protagonists have little control over
their own bodies and in most stories the women have willingly given up their bodies to men. This unhealthy relationship with their bodies could be at best described as them being “fearful of their bodies’ darker urges, buffeted by and largely formed by others’ reactions and desires” (Waller 44). Or as Oates has stated herself: “the mechanical fact of possessing a certain body must no longer determine the role of the spirit, the personality, for to be mechanically operated, to have one’s body moving along in a process that the spirit cannot control, to have the spirit trapped in an unchosen physical predicament – this is a kind of death” (qtd. in Waller 46). In this volume Oates clearly explores this ‘death’; she explores how female characters can become trapped in and lack control over their own bodies.

In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler argues that ‘gender’ is a performative construct and the body itself too is a construction. The body is not only personal, but also communal as a “social phenomenon in the public sphere” (UG 21); it is seen and experienced not only by ‘the owner’ but by people surrounding the owner as well. As a result “the particular sociality that belongs to bodily life, to sexual life, and to becoming gendered (which is always, to a certain extent, becoming gendered for others) establishes a field of ethical enmeshment with others and a sense of disorientation for the first-person, that is, the perspective of the ego” (UG 25; emphasis in the original). In other words: gender constructions imposed by society can be confusing for a person.

In *Heat and Other Stories* gender constructions imposed by society is a recurring theme in several short stories. The female body is often a troubling construction, conflicted by two forces: gender constructions imposed by patriarchal society and gender performativity by the female characters themselves. The female characters want to see their own gender roles as independent, physically strong and rational, while society wants them to be child-bearing, docile housewives. The body is an important aspect of this opposition, because these contradicting views become apparent in the bodies of the female characters and the bodies “turn out to be a ‘naturalized effect’ of discourse” (Salih 80). This becomes most apparent when female characters are the victims of violence. In these moments the female characters want to deny their bodies altogether – as if their bodies betray that they are weak. Especially then, the female characters seem to deny their bodies and show their determination to uphold their own gender performance as composed women, while their surroundings expect to see helpless, overemotional victims.

A noteworthy example of a female protagonist who tries to maintain her constructed identity of an intelligent woman can be found in the story “The Knife”. In this story a woman
is attacked in her own house by male burglars. By trying to be rational and composed, the female protagonist Harriet thinks that the male attackers will be more lenient on her; she was thinking that the men would be yet more impressed, how could they not be impressed—a woman behaving so rationally so cooperatively you might even say so sweetly under these emergency circumstances; surely they would feel admiration for her? sympathy for her? Surely they would go away quickly with whatever she could give them and would not injure her or her daughter—wouldn’t they? (27)

Although it is a horrifying situation, where one of the burglars is holding a knife and is constantly threatening her, Harriet comes across as strong and under control; “she was panicked, swaying, on the verge of fainting again, and again she willed herself to recover: head lowered, blood rushing into the arteries with a terrible percussive force” (29).

Afterwards, when she calls the police and her husband, Harriet again tries to come across as composed and rational: “she was determined to demonstrate that she wasn’t at all upset, she certainly wasn’t hysterical: only a robbery after all, and they hadn’t taken very much” (36).

Harriet refuses to be emotional, as if that would make her weaker. She also does not tell the police that she had been raped; she renounces any physical damage and thereby ignores her own body. Not only does she refuse to show emotional weakness, she is weary to show any physical weakness as well.

“Naked” is another short story in which a woman wants to be emotionally strong and does not want to show any physical weakness. In this story, the female protagonist is gruesomely attacked by children, yet she refuses to become a helpless damsel in distress. The female protagonist is a woman who always has been very independent; she “had married late, by choice, and had had her children late, also by choice” (128). Even after the attack, she does not want to people to know what has happened to her; she is too ashamed and does not want her constructed image as a strong, powerful woman to be tarnished:

She was, and had always been, a woman of principle: a woman who believed in intelligent, considered, but not overconsidered action. Everyone who knew her respected her; yes, and some who did not know her quite as she knew herself envied her, and that too was good, or at least provided satisfaction. She could not be exposed now and would not be. (133)

As a result, she does not ask for help, even when she sees two hikers: “the terror of being discovered naked as she was, battered, bruised, disheveled as a wild animal, as simply too much for her: she wanted only to hide and not be seen” (128). The woman is scared that when
people will find out, they will only be able to see her as “the woman who was found naked in the Meadowbrook Wildlife Preserve” (129). Even when the woman is bleeding, limping and her body could very much be damaged in a life-threatening manner, she only cares about her gender performance. As other female characters in *Heat and other stories*, she does not want to show her emotions and her body – because that would make her weak and weakness does not fit in the gender performances she want to give.

This tendency of the female characters to deny their own bodies does not only become apparent in situations of violence, but also in situations when the bodies of the female characters experience feelings of lust. When Oates’s female characters experience feelings of lust they are confused by their bodily messages, because they are messages that do not correspond to the visions of how the patriarchal society wants them to behave. As their solution for this conflict, they reject their bodies altogether.

An example of this can be found in “Morning”, in which a young, married graduate student called Lydia Freeman has an affair with a professor. Lydia has distanced herself from her body, which to her is pure lust and not rational – almost the opposite of her mental activities as a philosophy student. Her marriage lacks lust and passion, but she does not seem to mind that she does not have sex with her husband often, “for his behavior exempted her from the obligation of being a wife, a woman, a physical being. She told herself that wasn’t her really. Her body perhaps, but not her” (105; emphasis in the original). To Lydia, women – or at least their bodies – are obliged to have sex with their spouses. She does not think of sex with her husband as an act of love, but more of a corporal requirement which she does not have to fulfill.

However, when she falls in love with the professor her perception changes and passion takes over her life – and her body. She becomes a powerless victim of her own emotions and bodily experiences. When Lydia and the professor fight, Lydia becomes a helpless, powerless victim: “Again and again she was shaken by the power of the sensations Chaudry causes her to feel, as if such sensations were in fact impersonal, marauding, violating her deepest self, the *I, I, I*” (113; emphasis in the original). In her passionless marriage she was living an uneventful life, but in her affair the passion changed her into a helpless being; both options do not seem fulfilling for a woman.

When Lydia and Chaudry end up together as a couple, the passion disappears and their sex life has changed for the worse, “their new kind of love, Lydia thought it: slow, calm, domesticated, patient” (121). Lydia returns to an uneventful life, to a passionless marriage in which she will probably lose the connection to her body again. Moreover, she makes the
remark: “The world is perfect if you don’t set yourself in opposition to it!” (120). It is as if she is saying that a woman can only be happy if she accepts that bodily needs are not important enough to throw your life upside down over it. If a woman can resign in her constructed gender role as a docile housewife and deny her body, she can truly be happy. So the female protagonist surrenders to the patriarchal gender construction as a docile wife and chooses to deny her body in order to live in some form of happiness. Apparently there is a clear pressure on women and their bodies to behave ‘feminine’, which means to be passive, child-bearing housewives. This reminds of Beauvoir’s vision on society, in which “girls are educated into becoming passive objects not only by being prohibited from asserting themselves in relation to the world and others, but also by being taught that if they do not behave in a feminine way, men will find them less attractive” (Lundgren-Gothlin 182).

However, in The Wheel of Love not all female characters can physically conform to the biological standards set by the patriarchal society. Some female characters struggle intensely with themselves when their bodies cannot conform to the demands required of their ‘sex’. When women cannot live up to these expectations, this results in a psychic conflict and they reach a state of crisis in which they blame and therefore hurt their own bodies.

A telling example of this can be found in the story “White Trash”, in which Melanie struggles with her body. She especially feels the social pressure that she, as a female, has to carry a child, yet her body is unable to. She claims that she was not on drugs when she was pregnant, though she is a very unreliable narrator: “I told them I wasn’t a junkie, think I’m crazy? (...) ‘White Trash’ I know they been calling me on the street, but I wasn’t ever a junkie and surely not this past year” (324). Because of the miscarriage and the pressure she feels because she cannot meet this social demand of motherhood, she starts to punish and abject her body by using drugs and having sex with uncountable male ‘contacts’. Melanie punishes her body for failing to meet the gender standards set by society and increasingly starts to deny it. She is a prime example of Beauvoir’s claims that a woman suffers because her individuality and her nature often clash. Then, just as Melanie experiences, “she feels her body most painfully as an opaque alienated thing... Woman, like man, is her body; but her body is something other than herself” (qtd. in Lundgren-Gothlin 203). Melanie too is distancing herself from her own body. Towards the ending she cannot even look at herself: “eyelids are puffy and I don’t need to see Melanie stretched out in this tub to her full length” (330). She is increasingly losing the connection with her own body.

As Beauvoir explains, women are taught from a young age that passivity and the status of the Other are good qualities. Beauvoir also states that woman refuses to demand
recognition as subject and refuses to rebel, because “she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity and because she is often well pleased with her role as the [inessential] Other” (Beauvoir xxvii). To her, women can escape this position, but only if they exercise productive labor, receive similar education as men and have birth control. For the late 1940s, in which *The Second Sex* was written, these were indeed pressing matters. However, in 2010, when *Give Me Your Heart* was written, these matters were already considered to be ‘outdated’. By then, Western women were thriving in their own independence. They were able to receive the education they wanted, they could make a successful career for themselves and could even control if and when they wanted children. So in light of Beauvoir’s theory, politically and socially speaking – by 2010 women should have gained a more important position than the inessential Object and should have broken free from the patriarchal master/slave system. Indeed Butler’s introduction of the separation between sex and gender and the performativity of gender aligns with women’s awareness since the 1990s to become more than their own bodies. As chapter 1 showed, in this decade women increasingly started to see themselves to be more than passive child-rearing beings and started to construct their own identities, separated from biological and sexual constrictions.

Similar to this development, there is also a clear difference between the female protagonists of the first two collections and those in *Give Me Your Heart*. The female protagonists in *The Wheel of Love* and *Heat and Other stories* struggled with the patriarchal demands and so they wanted to punish their bodies or lose the connection with their own bodies altogether. Yet in *Give Me Your Heart* the female protagonists regain control over their own bodies. The female characters no longer physically suffer when they suffer from a violent assault or when they experience feelings of love or lust. The female protagonists no longer feel guilty or damage their own bodies because of it. In this collection, the female protagonists have a more harmonious connection with their bodies and can even control them.

A striking example of this can be found in “Split/Brain”, in which the female takes control over her own body in a potentially dangerous situation. In this story, the female protagonist, the middle-aged Trudy Gould, comes home and finds the car of her nephew oddly parked near her house. He has been arrested several times for breaking in and so it is very likely that he is now robbing her house. She imagines walking into the house and being attacked by her own nephew “Jeremy is crying, Shut up, shut up you old bag, old bitch, even as she screams at him to get away, to stop what he is doing, she slaps at him, blindly Jeremy has snatched up a knife from a kitchen counter, a small paring knife, yet sharp, blindly he is
stabbing at her” (19; emphasis in the original). When she snaps out of her imagination, she considers not entering the house and “sheerly by instinct she retreats from the door” (20). Yet she changes her mind and enters the house anyway; “she will not retreat, certainly she will not retreat” (20). Her main reason is that “this is her house, in which she has lived with her husband, Jim Gould, for twenty-six years; no one has the right to keep her from entering the house, no one has the right to enter this house without her permission, even a relative” (20 – 21). So she enters the house:

she will not give in to fear, she will not flee from her own house, she will not be saved from suffocating in her own blood, it is her decision, she is Jim Gould’s classic brunette beauty, she has never been a vain woman but she thinks well of herself, she is not a weak woman like her sister-in-law and so she will not retreat in undignified haste from her own house, instead she will step forward with a scolding clatter of her shoe-boot heels, sharply calling, Jeremy? Is that you? (21; emphasis in the original)

Similar to “The Knife” in Heat and other stories, the female protagonist of “Split/Brain” will most likely be the victim of a home invasion. Yet this female protagonist chooses to be so willingly. Trudy is aware of the danger, but she does not back down. Moreover, from the quote it becomes clear that she is in full harmony with her body. Though it could be argued that she must be unhappy with her life and/or her body to walk into the house, there is at least some sort of ownership, some sort of responsibility of Trudy’s own body which the female characters in the previous short story collections lacked.

In another short story, “Strip Poker”, the female protagonist again takes control over her own body in a possible violent situation. The protagonist, Annislee, is on vacation at Wolf Head’s Lake. One afternoon she decides to go with some twenty-something men to a cabin to play poker. When they start playing, the men become more and more up-front. A first she is flattered: “these guys like me, the way Deeks looks at me, pulls my ponytail, slaps my rear, maybe I am a pretty girl after all” (70). Yet more and more she feels threatened and when she has to play for clothes, she loses the game. They take her bikini top and Annislee runs into the bathroom. She initially freezes up: “how long I am crouched in the bathroom in terror of the guys breaking in, how long I am shivering and trembling like a trapped rabbit, I won’t know afterward” (75). However, when she comes out of the bathroom she regains control over her own body and takes control of the situation. She tells about how her imprisoned father killed a man who tried to attack her. The men seem taken aback and Annislee states “I can see in their eyes, and to irises of their eyes, and as far into their souls as I need to see” (82) and she goes
back to playing poker. The story could end in many different ways, but the overall sense of the
ending is that Annislee is in full control of the first threatening situation.

Both Trudy and Annislee could have frozen in panic and fear like the female protagonists in the previous short story collections, but they do not. In this volume the female protagonists take control of their own bodies and do not let fear change them. Both women choose not to be the helpless damsels in distress, but to remain the empowered, strong women that they want to be. Choosing this gender autonomy however is not as independent as it looks, because as Butler states “individuals rely on institutions of social support in order to exercise self-determination with respect to what body and what gender to have and maintain. One only determines ‘one’s own’ sense of gender to the extent that social norms exist that support and enable that act of claiming gender for oneself. One is dependent on this ‘outside’ to lay claim to what is one’s own” (UG 7). So not only women choose to be strong women, the cultural context of their time has allowed them to choose this gender construction. Oates shows here that the present-day society allows stronger gender performances of women.

In other stories the female protagonists take the power to control the men which potentially are or have been dangerous and harmful. The women are no longer docile housewives that suffer under the imposed gender roles ascribed by society; they themselves become active rebels against them.

An example can be found in the short story “The Spill”. In this story, the female protagonist Lizabeta has been the victim of male domination. She has married a farmer, Walter Braam and has had several children with him. Lizabeta is a housewife and is in full servitude of her husband. Living with the Braam-family is John-Henry, a mentally challenged nephew of Walter Braam. He helps around the house and seems harmless, until one moment one of Lizabeta young daughters takes off her T-shirt:

Lizabeta saw John Henry staring at the three-year-old girl’s bare, smooth chest, the tiny flat breasts, tiny nipples; John Henry was unsmiling hunched over Melinda, his strained face gleaming with sweat and his hands uplifted, not touching the child, but staring at her, unmoving. In that instant a cold rush of panic coursed through Lizabeta like an electric current, and the conviction came to her with the force of a truth already known but not acknowledged: He can’t live here. He can’t stay with us. He will have to leave. (167; emphasis in the original)

From that moment on, she feels that John-Henry is a possible threat to her and her girls. She starts to loathe him and his eyes, “wanting to scream at them, as at the children: I
am more than this, my body. A woman is more than her body” (169; emphasis in the original). This quote explains that she not only refuses a potential perpetrator to be around her own children, she also seems to willingly protest against men who view women simply as bodies. A few months later, in stormy weather Lizabeta takes a walk to a – dangerous, overflowing – river. When she sees John-Henry she persuades him that one of the girls is in the river. Out of loyalty and fear that one of the girls might be in danger he steps into the river – and dies. Whether Lizabeta was right about John-Henry or not, she took control and became a perpetrator herself. Yet not only did she take action against a possible male threat, she took action against “a world ordered by sexual imbalance, [in which] pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (Mulvey 442).

This female protagonist does not have to refuse her emotions or her body anymore, she can take action and as a result she becomes the superior and the man becomes the victim. Smiley’s analysis of earlier Oatesian female characters “if one is a woman, one is doomed to victimization” (38) no longer applies. Women are no longer obliged to be the passive Other, but are freed from their biological constraints and can perform any gender type that is allowed by society. That is why in this extreme example, the docile housewife can choose to become a coldblooded murderer. By appropriating these different types of gender performances, Oates’s characters seem to show that the current society is changing and that gender roles are blurring: women are no longer helpless victims.
Chapter 3: Male characters and the female body

So far, this thesis has looked at the female characters and their relationship with their bodies. Yet another interesting aspect is the male characters in these short story volumes. Their perception of the female body is also important, because the male characters heavily influence the female characters.

One characteristic of the male perpetrators in *The Wheel of Love* is that they objectify women. Objectification is an important theme in feminism and has been central in debates on for example pornography and advertising. Andrea Dworkin, one of the leading feminists on this issue describes it as follows:

When objectification occurs, a person is depersonalized, so that no individuality or integrity is available socially or in what is an extremely circumscribed privacy. Objectification is an injury right at the heart of discrimination: those who can be used as if they are not fully human are no longer fully human in social terms; their humanity is hurt by being diminished.

(qtd. in Lennon; emphasis in the original)

When men objectify women, they consider women not as equal human beings, but as objects to be used. Often this objectification is linked with sexuality and women are not only objects, but sexualized objects.

Sexual objectification is a major theme in *The Wheel of Love* and recurs in the majority of the stories. An example of this sexual objectification can be found in “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been”. When Arnold first sees his victim-to-be Connie, he is erotically gazing at her: “it was a boy with shaggy black hair, in a convertible jalopy painted gold. He stared at her and then his lips widened into a grin” (37). Arnold is already gawking over her body and objectifying her; he does not see Connie as a whole being with soul and body combined, but only has eyes for her body and considers it to be merely an object.

Some male characters in this volume not only sexually objectify women, but consequently appropriate them as well. They not only regard women’s bodies as objects but use women’s bodies as if they were objects too. They consume the female body for their own (sexual) pleasure and when they are no longer interested in the body they replace it with a new one.
The most striking example of this can be found in “Accomplished Desires”. The male protagonist Mark Arber is a professor at a university and is somewhat of a control freak, who hates disruption and wants to control his – domestic – life. Though he is not a clear-cut perpetrator because he does not use any physical violence, he too objectifies and appropriates women. He uses them as objects and replaces them as he would cars. There is no real sense of love, he seems to take in every woman that is attracted to him and replaces the old with the new. His second wife Barbara was a replacement and at the end of the story she is being replaced with Dorie. When he ends his marriage with Barbara there is no emotion; “It’s been an extraordinary marriage. I don’t want it to end on an impulse, anything reckless or emotional” (144). When Barbara kills herself he states “She did it for the baby, to preserve life. It’s astonishing, it’s exactly like something in a novel,” he said. He spoke with a perpetual guilty astonishment” (147). He does not feel sad at all, he only feels slightly surprised and guilty by his easy way out. As the critic Torborg Norman states, the story is a satire of a conceited, egocentric male writer, whose fascination with his own genius far exceeds his everyday use of considerate thinking. At the same time it is a vehement social attack on the negative effects of the limitations of the remote intellectual male, whose isolated structures cause much damage to the people who are fascinated by the empty promises that sustains such a man. (178)

This type of appropriating of women as described here, is explored by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. According to her, woman is subjugated. Women are inferior sexual Objects and man “in his sovereignty indulges himself in sexual caprices, among others – he fornicates with slaves or courtesans or practices polygamy” (49). Women are lower in rank and are to be owned and used for the sexual pleasures and needs of men. The stories in *The Wheel of Love* correspond with this vision and Oates seems to agree with the notion that men regard women’s bodies merely as objects to look at and to use. Oates even takes it a step further and shows that when men are no longer interested in the women’s bodies they simply – without any feelings of guilt – discard them.

In at least two other short stories in this volume, male perpetrators appropriate women to fill up their own lives. They want to consume women to fill a void in their own lives; they want to appropriate women as if that would make them ‘whole’. Beauvoir has explained this tendency as men trying to evade their responsibility. They do this by holding on the position of the subject and oppressing the inessential Other, the women. Men have “tried to flee from the demands of existence through the oppression of women. Man has nurtured the hope that
he may be recognized as freedom through woman (…) and may bring this desire of being to realization through possession of the woman’s body” (qtd. in Lundgren-Gothlin 193). So man tries to realize himself through possession of another: the women. Yet this is pointless to Beauvoir, because “man must become body in order to possess a body, and in doing so he runs the risk of being possessed” (Lundgren-Gothlin 195). So his quest for responsibility leads to a – futile and therefore – constant need to own the female body.

A striking example of this can be found in “Bodies”, in which the female protagonist Pauline is followed and eventually attacked by a man called Anthony Drayer. This male perpetrator is clearly mentally disturbed. Yet Drayer does not only want to own a female, he wants to consume her entire life. He is not really interested in Pauline, but more in filling up his own life: “‘I want to talk about different kinds of living, I want to know you … how it is for you, your life, a woman who looks like you … I spend my time watching things, or listening to things, music in a bar or in somebody’s apartment, listening to records…’” (267). Drayer is not just a maniacal, obsessed man; he is a lost, unfulfilled man who seeks to be whole by being with this woman.

This type of character recurs in “I Was In Love”. The female protagonist is having an affair with a tall man who is too thin for his height and cannot take care of himself properly. The female protagonist learns from a cousin that her lover is at his core unfulfilled; “there was this emptiness in him that was a sin – he got filled up with anyone who came along. People filled him up. Then he left them, frightened, and then he met someone else and as filled up again, like gas” (397). He too is unhappy and seeks fulfillment in women – over and over again. When the female protagonist tells him this, he pleads for understanding and for her not to leave him;

‘There is something empty in you – there’s nothing in you,’ I said bitterly. ‘I can’t fill it up. Let someone else fill it up. What’s inside you … what’s empty inside you … you yourself –’ I stammered, out of breath… The shirt was not tucked in is pants. I hated that look, it reminded me of Bobby and his friends.

‘Please, please …’ he said”. (399)

In both examples, the men want to completely absorb the female body; mere objectification is not enough, they want to appropriate the female body for their own benefit.

In Heat and other stories again the majority of the male characters are perpetrators. Roughly about three quarter of the stories are about (violent) male perpetrators. What is most striking about the perpetrators in this collection, is that they are often portrayed as being animals or childlike. Simone de Beauvoir has written much about men and women in relation
to the animal kingdom in *The Second Sex*. To her, male animals are more often assertive and aggressively show their identity in their fights for females and territory, while female animals are more preoccupied with reproducing life and their identity is not that important. To Beauvoir the female human has stayed closer to her ‘animalistic’ nature, because women remained close to her body in maternity. Men became more active, invented tools and created a man-made world, while women remained to be near her animalistic tendencies.

However, Joyce Carol Oates seems to disagree with Beauvoir on this matter in *Heat and Other Stories*. To Oates men can also become ‘animalistic’ and merely act on (sexual) impulses when they see the female body as if they are animals. Yet she does make a distinction, because it seems that only mentally unstable men are incapable of controlling these urges and it is only these men that are dangerous. That is why a majority of the male perpetrators in this volume are portrayed as or mentioned to be mentally incapacitated. These men cannot control their bodily urges; this leads to them attacking women or girls. They are like impulse-controlled animals without any ratio; merely by being in the vicinity of the female body they can attack women as predators without being bothered by their own conscience.

An example is the assailant in “Hostage”, who is “a man of fifty-eight, an ex-mental patient now living on a disability pension from the U.S. Navy” (292). He attacked a young girl in the library, but afterwards he could not remember the attack and was unable to explain his reasons. He acted on impulses because he was mentally unstable and attacked an innocent woman. The girl herself does behave in such a manner that might provoke the attack and it seems to be solely her femaleness, her body that provoked the attack.

Another striking example of an impulse-controlled male perpetrator is the retarded adolescent Roger Whipple, who kills twin girls in “Heat”. He was long thought of as a big but harmless boy, who liked kids and “was happy with children that age, he was that age himself in his head” (144). Remarkably, he is not really the type of perpetrator as we have seen in *The Wheel of Love*. He is not smart or cunning; he does not cognitively want to own a woman. Again, the motif of the story is that a mentally challenged male attacks innocent women merely because the bodies of the women evoke a violent reaction. The female characters do not act in a manner which can cause an attack, they are merely physically present in the vicinity of the male characters and it is only this physicality that can be the trigger.

Some of the male perpetrators in this volume are dangerous predators because they resemble uncontrolled teenagers or young children. Young children and teenagers are impulse controlled and cannot or do not want to see the consequences of their actions. Beauvoir
mentions being childlike, yet she links it to the women. She states that “as Others, women are returned to the metaphysically privileged world of the child. They experience the happiness brought about by bad faith—a happiness of not being responsible for themselves, of not having to make consequential choices.” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) So again Oates turns Beauvoir’s ideas around: men can be like children too, they too can want a life without any responsibility and well-considered choices. They merely want to ‘own’ the female body.

A prominent example can be found in “The Knife”, in which the female character Harriet is the victim of a home invasion. The two male burglars are her age, but “loud, loutish, deliberately clumsy, it almost seemed, like teenagers. Scared of what they were doing but exhilarated by it too – showing off, Harriet saw, for each other’s benefit” (26). When one burglar searches her bedroom “he went to the clothes closet and pawed furiously through Harriet’s and her husband’s clothes, cursing in a loud whining voice like a small child” (33). When one burglar leaves the house “bold, brash, stupid, unthinking” (30), the other becomes even more angry. He even rapes Harriet and striking is when the perpetrator states: “You’re nice. You’re pretty. You owe me money. You owe me fucking something, and you know it. Just lay still” (35). Out of anger he rapes her. Even as he does this he still does not look like an adult as “his tongue appeared between his teeth in a parody of intense childlike concentration” (35 – 36; emphasis in the original). The perpetrator comes across as a teenager, who is angry at life, angry at the unfair world where Harriet owns a lot and he – presumably – does not.

Another striking example of the male perpetrator behaving like an uncontrolled child can be found in “The Boyfriend”. In this story a female protagonist again is the victim of an assault, though this time the male perpetrator is too drunk to follow through. Yet again the male perpetrator is like an unsatisfied child and feels that the female protagonist owes him;

He accused her of ‘exploiting’ him. He accused her of ‘never looking him in the eye’. He accused her of trying to put words in his mouth to make him into a ‘puppet’. His boyish face was flushed and his eyes glassy and heavy-lidded as if he were doing a crude imitation of a drunk. (74)

So not just men, but childlike men or even children themselves can be dangerous. They cannot truly understand the impact of their actions, they too cannot mentally control their urges and so they are dangerous to women.

A possible explanation for the violent behavior of the men in this volume can be the hypersexual society of America in which women are portrayed as sex symbols. In advertising
and media, women in the 1980s became more and more sexualized; women seem to portray their bodies as displayed candies that need to be grabbed. The men in these stories regard the female protagonists as teases; they want to attack and own the female body in a very irrational manner. This irrationality might come from a lack of control, aroused feelings, or pure frustration in a hypersexual society in which women are showing off their bodies everywhere, but men cannot obtain them. In this volume, it is not so much the objectification by men, but by society as a whole that turns women into sexualized objects. Out of frustration, lack of power or mere lust, the male characters sexually attack the female protagonists.

In *The Wheel of Love*, the perpetrators objectify and appropriate women. In *Heat and other Stories* the female body evokes violent reactions out of mentally unstable or mentally undeveloped men, most likely due to objectification by society. In *Give Me Your Heart* Oates returns to men as objectifying and appropriating the female body as demonstrated in the short story volume *The Wheel of Love*. Men view women as sexualized objects, not as human beings, and the female bodies are objects they want to own. However, not all the male characters view the female body as an object, because some choose the gender role of protector.

An example of sexual objectification can be found in “Strip Poker”, in which Annislee, a young girl, is going to a cabin with some twenty-something men and she too is being object of desire because of her body. When they start playing poker the atmosphere changes; it turns into strip poker. One guy, Croke, takes off Annislee’s halter top against her will. “Croke manages to untie the straps and pulls of the halter, Ohhhh, lookit! – the guys are whistling and stamping their feet, teasing, taunting like dogs circling a wounded rabbit” (75; emphasis in the original). When she returns from the bathroom she thinks “I will pretend I haven’t heard Deek. How he’s staring at me with a loose wet smile, running the tip of his tongue around his lips” (77). Again, men are described as lustful, passionate beings that see woman as objects of desire.

However, in this volume not all the male characters are dangerous impulse controlled beings; only in one of the ten stories does a male character actually sexually assault a female character. This is a difference from the earlier volumes; in this volume men can behave rationally and can control their natural, sexual urges. Oates seems to make a distinction between gender and sex. This is, as seen chapter 1, the main idea of Judith Butler’s theoretical works. She states that gender and sex are two different concepts and differences between men and women are not the result of biological or natural differences, but because of gender performances imposed by society. Gender performances “are acted out in accordance with
social *scripts* prescribing ideals which are unrealizable, but which none the less provide the framework for our activities” (Lennon). This is similar to this volume, in which biological urges are not ‘male’ properties per se and men can be more than this gendered identity as the violent perpetrator. They do not have to be sexually motivated assailants, they can also be protectors. Whether or not this is out of free will is debatable, because Butler thinks that performance precedes the performer, so that a person can only behave a certain way if it is an available role for him. Regardless of this imposition by society, this new type of gender performance leads to less (violent) attacks on the female body.

In “Strip Poker”, for example, there is one man who does have a moral standard when it comes to objectifying young girls. When the men start reading pornographic magazines, Jax “says quick and sharp, ‘This ain’t for her, Deek. Fuck off’” (66). When the men want to take the young girl’s bikini top off Jax again protests: “Jax says, disgusted, ‘She’s just a kid. Ain’t even in high school, I bet’” (73). He even returns the halter top to her, saying: “‘Here’s the swim top. Nobody’s gonna hurt you’” (76). So even though the majority of the group is objectifying women, by looking at the pornographic magazines and wanting to see the young girl’s naked body, there is one man who is capable to think more of women than just objects of desire.

In “Nowhere”, again, not all the men are bad. When the young female protagonist ends up in a local tavern with some guy called Kevin, she is protected by the young men in the tavern who know her. When one man notices that she has been hurt by Kevin, they all try to find him and when to do, they beat him up. Especially Oz Newell protects the female protagonist; “Oz Newell swaying on his feet and oozing sweat would protect Miriam, she knew. There was an understanding between them” (213). When he drives her home, she tries to seduce him, but he does not go into her advances; “She was too young, Gideon’s kid sister. She was a sister to him, or she was nothing. He was sure she’d never had sex with anyone, and damned if he’d be the first” (216).

It appears that these stories offer a balanced view on the – as Beauvoir describes it – the conflicted opposition between men and women. To her there is a way to overcome oppression and conflict, if “each individual freely recognizes the other, each regarding himself and the other, each regarding himself and the other simultaneously as object and as subject in a reciprocal manner” (qtd. in Lundgren-Gothlin, 70). In these two stories, at least some male characters have found a way to offer friendship and generosity to the female characters. Whether or not this type of equality as Beauvoir describes it is really achieved in this volume is debatable, but it is clear that the men do try to become the object in a reciprocal
manner. Though it is possible that men are conditioned by predetermined gender roles, in this volume men are not only dominant, sex-driven patriarchs but can be protectors of the female body too.

Another theme of this volume is that the previous described gender roles of the other volumes – where the man has all the power and physically or psychologically hurts the woman – are overturned. Men are no longer the untouchable subject, but become victims themselves and women seem to break free from their position as the helpless, inessential Other. In this volume, gender has more than in earlier volumes truly become independent of sex. It has becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that “man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one” (GT 9). Though this only occurs in a fifth of all the stories, In these stories this role reversal comes forward in the female characters taking on ‘masculine traits’ such as the lack of impulse control and the male characters taking on ‘feminine’ traits such as being the helpless victim. In this role reversal the male characters no longer dominate the female body, but women control the female bodies.

The most prominent example is found in “The Spill”. In this story a possible male perpetrator is a mentally challenged; he has the mental age of a child and is “eager to work as a work dog, restless and uneasy and doubtful of being loved when not working” (158). This character is very similar to the male man in “Heat” from Heat and other stories, in which a mentally challenged man too is the possible perpetrator. However, the difference is that the female protagonist Lizabeta soon discovers that John Henry’s intentions with her kids might not be completely innocent – and she acts upon them.

Lizabeta saw John Henry staring at the three-year-old girl’s bare smooth chest, the tiny flat breasts, tiny nipples; John Henry was unsmiling, hunched over Melinda, his strained face gleaming with sweat and his hand uplifted, not touching the child, not daring to touch the child, but staring at her, unmoving.

(167)

In that moment, in which John Henry sexually objectifies the young girl, Lizabeta is convinced that John Henry is a danger to her children. Not much later, John Henry is led into a rough, overflowing river and dies.

It has become clear that in this volume Oates changes her own ‘standard’ gender roles, which she has created in The Wheel of Love and Heat and Other Stories. In this volume, not all men are possible dangerous, passionate, potentially uncontrollable lustful beings. Moreover, the women can become the possible perpetrators. In this volume every human –
male or female – can be a perpetrator and every human is vulnerable to violence. As Butler states: “As sexual, we are dependent on a world of other, vulnerable to need, violence, betrayal, compulsion, fantasy; we project desire, and we have it projected onto us” (UG, 33).
Conclusion

There are various conclusions to be drawn on the development of the female and male characters’ relationships with the female body in Oates’ short stories. When analyzing the female characters, I have shown that in *The Wheel of Love* Oates follows Beauvoir’s dualistic system in which the man’s position as the subject and the women’s position as the inessential Other. The female characters are – mentally and physically – dependent on male characters and easily surrender their bodies to men; they embody the notion of ‘the inessential Other’. Besides this, when the female characters do act on their own bodily urges – albeit out of love or lust –, this often leads the female characters to have a strained relationship with her own body. Their bodies physically start to resist or the female characters start to feel guilty and hurt their own bodies.

In *Heat and other stories*, the female characters often want to deny their bodies, because their bodies betray that they are weak. Especially when the female characters are under attack they seem to ignore their physical weakness and show their determination to uphold their own gender performance as composed women. In *Give Me Your Heart* the female characters no longer deny their own bodies, but they are much more in control over their own bodies and bodily sensations. When they are physically attacked they no longer feel guilty, but instead want to fight for the female body. Though in *Give Me Your Heart* the female characters still struggle with the socially imposed patriarch-based gender roles, they rebel – successfully – against the gender roles ascribed to women. They no longer deny their own emotions and their own bodies; they redefine their own gender performativity and are no longer defined by their sex.

When considering the male characters and their view of the female bodies a few interesting developments can be ascertained. In the first volume, *The Wheel of Love*, the male characters often sexually objectify women and even want to appropriate women in an attempt to fill up their own lives. In *Heat and other stories* again the majority of the male characters are perpetrators and men are portrayed as dangerous animals and children who cannot control their own urges. These perpetrators are like impulse-controlled animals without any ratio; merely by being in the vicinity of the female body they can attack women as predators without being bothered by their own conscience. A very likely trigger for their behavior could
be the hyper sexualized society, which objectifies women and – as has been shown – creates crazed feelings of lust, frustration in the male characters that they are unable to control.

In the last volume, *Give Me Your Heart*, the male characters are ascribed different gender roles. They are no longer always perpetrators, but can act as protectors too. Besides this aspect, in some of the stories in this volume the roles are changed in such a manner that even men can become victims. In a true Butlerian point of view, the differences between men and women are not the result of biological or natural differences, but because of gender performances imposed by society. Sexual, biological urges are not ‘male’ properties per se and men can be more than this gendered identity as the violent perpetrator. They do not have to be sexually motivated assailants; they can be protectors or even victims. Whether or not this gender role is imposed on men by society or not it leads to less violent reactions on the female body. The female characters take on ‘masculine traits’ such as the lack of impulse control and the male characters take on ‘feminine’ traits such as being the helpless victim. In this role reversal the male characters no longer dominate the female body.

As this thesis shows, the development of the characters’ view on the female body is similar to the development of the main feminist view on the female body of at first Beauvoir and later Butler. The stories move from a dualistic system in which the man has all the power over the female body to a more balanced view in which gender roles are no longer fixed to the biological sex. The male characters can choose another gender performance in which they are protectors that control the sexual urges when they are around a female body; the female characters have taken ownership of their own bodies and no longer suffer from feelings of guilt and now experience feelings of power and revenge.
Bibliography

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