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‘STANDING NOWHERE’ IN JOYCE CAROL OATES’S *HEY DAD*

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ABSTRACT

Multifaceted writer Joyce Carol Oates deals with the human mind precariously and enters its nook and corner to explain its complexities vividly in her writings. Her short story ‘Hey Dad’ tries to explain one such circumstance of seeking one’s own self. Cry of maturity plays a significant role in one’s life. Man reasons out and opines that his age and experience cause for the attainment of maturity. He thinks his age makes him sagacious to judge rightly, and emerge as a role model to his posterity. The paper is an in depth study of *Hey Dad*, a satire by genre. The story pivots on a prudent teenager who controls his overwhelming feelings. The story as a whole is unveiled through the soliloquy of an adulterous boy on meeting his father on his graduation day, but his father is unaware of the whole situation. Here the young man is represented as judgmental of the age, whereas the old is portrayed egotistic and coward. The story is well acclaimed for its dexterous and incomparable narrative technique.

Key words: Identity, Maturity, Sagacious, Soliloquy, Prudence

Discussion

What is reputation and who is to be respected? The world is vain glorious with its inaccurate judgment. Social power and status sometimes demands reverence. In the story, Joyce Carol Oates opines on the attitude of a son and his father. It is accidental that a father and his son of illegitimate birth meet for the first time on the graduation day of the son. He is twenty one, whereas the father is sixty two years of age, and is awarded with honorary degree, and makes an everlasting impression in the photograph shot on the same day. The son calls it a coincidence and at the same time highly ridiculous of the situation. Both of them appear wearing black gown for the academic suasion. It is noteworthy that the son identifies his father, whereas the father is oblivious of his son.

The teenager son is cautious and determined that he will not transform the graduating platform, the quasi-Greek amphitheatre, for a lurid TV melodrama, recognizing his father. In his soliloquy he states: “Hey Dad, relax: I’m not the type to confront, or to confound. I have never been the type, I think.” He doesn’t want to infringe the esteemed and weighty biographies of the old man. He considers himself “God-damn sober” on confronting the rest of his life, as he is going to remain fatherless. His life happens to be gloomy and he considers it as his fate. He will not blame his father to spoil the happy mood of his deceptive father.

Despite his illegitimate birth, the young man, the narrator, pays high regard for his mother, for her strong grit for not aborting her unmarried pregnancy, while she was a graduate student. She happens to be a scholar in his father's seminar and later becomes his dissertation advisee, a rare opportunity. She yields herself to the timely situations by sustaining her academic commitments. When she becomes pregnant it is her strong, clear and unafraid mind though unmarried refuses to get it aborted. Later in the story, as a grown up child he gains not his father's love, as he has not even met him once, but his love for his mother is unsurpassed. He claims: "Because Mom wanted *me*. If it meant pissing you considerably, and losing you—still, Mom wanted me." Then she joins the struggles of life teaching in universities though she cannot become a distinguished career woman as that of a man, despite being highly talented in writing articles for journals, though unpublished, and remains in the infant stage. The narrator's pride too is marveled here, just like his mother's, when she is portrayed as, "Not that Mom talked about you. Never, Not that Mom thought about you. In recent years" She never wants it to be a cherished memory or make it known to others that she begot his son. It is at this point in time he understands that he is an orphan despite having biological parents. "But mostly I'm alone. My truest self is alone."

The story gains a remarkable satirical touch throughout when Oates deals with the psychology of the man and the woman here. She spits the fire of irony by portraying the preoccupied hypocritical nature of the father, an Honorary Doctorate awardee, a known figure for decades, and an influential professor. He is the one who is never mindful of dissensions and controversies, whereas his mother being a young graduate student who refuses to take any aid but determines to have the baby born and succeeds in bringing him up without any support from the father, or the society. At the same time she does not want to identify him as her son. It is here he stands alone where his pain is indescribable. Above everything, he an individual standing nowhere, gaining entry to the world, but not gaining a stand for himself, either from his maternal or paternal side. Though they stand in close proximity, they are strangers.

Conclusion

Oates' early writings ignite one's soul and entertain their hearts too. The voluminous representation throughout her writing career reveals many views of life. They opine, envisage, attribute, train and teach the human minds to discharge from uncertainty to certainty in the finest language to study the ways of the world and to entrust it to provide stability and hope. Her short story, 'Hey Dad' exposes her resentment to the intricacies of the world. E. E. Cummings says, "It takes courage to grow up and turn out to be who you really are". No doubt Oates' characters are the living epitome and display the human intricacies of the world.

Work Cited

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