

Parodies in Joyce Carol Oates's *Bellefleur*

Miho Morii

Joyce Carol Oates (1938–) comments about her series of postmodern experimental novels — *Bellefleur* (1980), *A Bloodsmoor Romance* (1982), and *Mysteries of Winterburn* (1984) — in an interview with Jay Parini: “I like to call these novels ‘parodistic’” and “They’re not exactly parodies, because they take the forms they imitate quite seriously” (156). What these comments suggest is that Oates thinks of parody as a comical imitation or funny distortion of the parodied texts, not considering her works as authentic parody.

Linda Hutcheon, however, proposes a new definition of parody that does not always have to include such humor and ridicule: “[. . .] parody can obviously be a whole range of things. It can be a serious criticism, not necessarily of the parodied text; it can be a playful, genial mockery of codifiable forms. Its range of intent is from respectful admiration to biting ridicule” (15–6). Applying Hutcheon’s definition, Oates’s three novels are included in the category of parody without question. Especially, *Bellefleur* involves the parodies of other literary works: Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854), Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), and Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” (1819–20). These parodies not only suggest the American history of modernization, of women’s status from the 19th century to the early 20th century, and of racial discrimination, but also seriously criticize them.

Bellefleur is a very long, 558-page novel. It is composed of 78 episodes of the influential Bellefleur family across seven generations. Oates narrativizes and criticizes the history of America through the history of the Bellefleurs. Dominick LaCapra explains the past: “[. . .] the past is not an ‘it’ in the sense of an objectified entity that may either be neutrally represented in and for itself or projectively reprocessed in terms of our own narrowly ‘presentist’ interests” (10). Historians, however, tend to interpret history by narrativizing

historical events with the inclusion of their own opinions and social morality. Like such historians, Oates criticizes the history of America through parody implicitly including her own opinions. Moreover, *Bellefleur* shows the fact that the historical account as history proper is not neutral but is narrativized with the writer's view and social morality; in other words, it includes judgment.

In this paper, I develop my argument regarding *Bellefleur* as criticism of the artificiality and fictionality of the representation of history. I consider three concrete historical descriptions as typical representations of American history. These are John W. Caughey and Ernest R. May's *A History of the United States* (1964), John A. Garraty's *The American Nation: A History of the United States* (1971), and Hugh Brogan's *Longman History of the United States of America* (1985). Contrasting them with *Bellefleur*, I analyze how *Bellefleur* uncovers the inevitable artificiality and fictionality of general historical descriptions and criticizes them by means of parodies of literary works. Through this analysis, I will reveal that historical descriptions are constructed fiction in a sense.

I. Jedediah: A Symbol of the Transition from Pastoral America to Industrial America

Jedediah, a second-generation Bellefleur, who secludes himself in the mountains, can be seen as a parody of transcendentalist thought, especially that of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854). In *A History of the United States*, Thoreau is introduced as a representative transcendentalist:

[. . .] he preferred to secede from society and live almost as a hermit in a cabin at Walden Pond. [. . .] Thoreau saw his world with remarkable acuity. His observations as a naturalist are flashes of crystalline clarity.

His strictures on society persuaded few of his contemporaries. They and his much larger circle of later readers might admit that grubbing for money is often a bore, that emphasis on materialism produces effects that are sordid, and that a simpler life might well be more beneficial to the spirit. The literary dividend in his *Civil Disobedience* (1849) and *Walden* (1854) justifies Thoreau's asceticism, yet without establishing it as the perfect model for all mankind. (198)

The above passage seems to be an accurate representation of Thoreau. However, the sentences in the present tense or with the auxiliary verb "might" are

not facts of the past but a general estimation of Thoreau in accordance with the present-day common social notions.

Jedediah is a character who embodies the social estimation of transcendentalism implicit in the above quotation, an idea of true greatness that was not widely accepted in society. Moreover, Jedediah as a parody can be thought to pose the problem of transition of the U.S. from an "agrarian or civic humanist" society to a "commercial enterprise" (Gilmore, "*Walden*" 178). He reveals Oates's opinion of transcendentalism and the development of American society after it. Though Oates does not clearly state that Jedediah is a parody of Thoreau in *Walden*, it is certain that she takes an interest in Thoreau's thought because she wrote the introduction to *Walden* published by Princeton University Press in 1988. It is also true, however, that there are many differences between Jedediah's life and Thoreau's. For example, Thoreau lived in the woods, but Jedediah lives on a mountain. It is only two years and two months that Thoreau lives in the woods; on the other hand, Jedediah withdraws from society for twenty years. Moreover, Jedediah retreats to the mountain in 1806 but Thoreau began to live in the woods in 1845. Therefore, it may not seem that Jedediah is a parody of Thoreau. However, what Oates parodies is not the surface of Thoreau's life but the significance of his experimental life in American history.

Hutcheon explains the presupposition to decode parody: "[. . .] when we call something a parody, we posit some encoding intent to cast a critical and differentiating eye on the artistic past, an intent that we, as readers, then *infer* from the text's (covert or overt) inscription of it" (84). The "encoding intent" is just what the writer who uses parody wants to describe. Oates's encoding intent can be seen in Jedediah's unwilling return to the world from his simple life as a hermit. That is, Thoreau's life in *Walden* is here not acknowledged as practicable in the American history of industrial and capitalistic development, even though his life in nature may be an ideal model of human life as also mentioned by the writers of *A History of the United States*.

Oates writes on Melville's *Moby Dick; or, The Whale* (1851) in her essay: "Like Thoreau's *Walden* it is in part a cautionary work, warning that the wages of sin (our plundering of Nature) is death for our own species" (*Occasions* 151). In other words, she sees *Walden* as an admonition against the neglect

of Nature in modern times. Moreover, she describes in her introduction to *Walden*: “We believe even while disbelieving, even as we cannot entirely believe, but do — or wish to — in what Thoreau tells us repeatedly of the autonomy of the human soul” (xii). Oates wants to believe in Thoreau’s spirit. What precisely is this spirit?

Nine stories in *Bellefleur* are connected with Jedediah. He sets out on his pilgrimage to the mountain to run away from his father, Jean-Pierre, and one of his brothers, Louis, who are only interested in moneymaking, increasing their land, and obtaining influential power. He also wishes to escape his sister-in-law (Louis’s wife), Germain O’Hagan, with whom he is in love. Jedediah cannot bear his father’s and brother’s aspirations. He confesses to Germain his inexpressible feeling: “I must — I want — You see, my father and his friends — Their plans for cutting down timber — Their plans for building roads and bringing in tenants —” (51). It is obvious that Jedediah wants to say “stop” after “I must” and “I want.” But because he cannot raise an objection against his father and brother, he can only say “I want to — I want to withdraw from the world and see if I am worthy of — of — God’s love” (51). All he can do to resist his father and brother is flee from the Bellefleurs. In spite of this, after twenty years he must come back. Because his father, two brothers, two nephews, and niece are all killed, he must leave their children with his sister-in-law Germain.

In *Walden*, Thoreau criticizes American industrialism and capitalism, which are incompatible with his thought:

Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry. Men say that a stitch in time saves nine, and so they take a thousand stitches to-day to save nine tomorrow. As for *work*, we haven’t any of any consequence. (93)

He looks at people who slave away for a better material life with a critical eye. Jedediah’s father and brother, who think only to gain money and power, are examples of such people. Jedediah has the same regret about the materialism of his family as Thoreau has about materialistic people. Oates, who is impressed by Thoreau’s spirit, makes Jedediah pursue the true nature of human beings by questing for God away from the world. She parodies Thoreau’s life

to ask what the most important thing is for human beings.

Thoreau gives an answer to this question. He writes about how human beings should live:

When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence, — that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality. This is always exhilarating and sublime. By closing the eyes and slumbering, and consenting to be deceived by shows, men establish and confirm their daily life of routine and habit every where, which still is built on purely illusory foundations. (95–6)

He insists that human beings should live in quest of the truth, not allowing themselves to be deceived by the surface of things. Jedediah seems to look for “the truth” on the mountain. Though he is the embodiment of Thoreau’s ideas, his inability to find the truth at the end suggests that Thoreau’s ideas have not had a wide influence down the ages, as the writers of *A History of the United States* maintain.

Jedediah’s main motive for retreating to the mountain is to run away from his family, the incarnation of materialism; a second motive is the quest for God. Actually, he prays for God to appear in front of him every morning. But one day when he is praying, he is attacked by a fierce pain in his abdomen and a chill. He is attacked by the pain over and over again, voiding and being tormented all night. Then he recognizes the pettiness of his existence in the pain:

He saw that his entire lifetime [. . .] had been nothing more than an organism’s process, an ongoing ceaseless remorseless insatiable process — the gluttonous ingorging of food, the digesting of food, the voiding of food [. . .]. And were there worms in his guts, were there thin white slugs crawling dazed in the liquid shit he had voided all across the mountainside . . . ?

[. . .] And the excrement was alive with them [worms]. Of course. The excrement *was* them, as it was himself. (440–1)

This scene reminds readers of Thoreau’s description of food:

Not that food which entereth into the mouth defileth a man, but the appetite with which it is eaten. It is neither the quality nor the quantity,

but the devotion to sensual savors; when that which is eaten is not a viand to sustain our animal, or inspire our spiritual life, but food for the worms that possess us. (218)

The significance of Jedediah's "worms" and "thin white slugs" may be seen as equal to that of Thoreau's "worms." Thoreau's "worms" can be interpreted as a metaphor for the "avarice" which everybody has. Judging from the cited sentence from *Bellefleur* — "The excrement *was* them [worms], as it was himself," — "excrement" here means both worms and Jedediah himself. Therefore, Jedediah is avarice itself. Oates shows in this scene that Jedediah's quest for God is complacent and ultimately, though he regards himself as nearer to God than other people, he is not so different from people like his father and brother who desire money, power, and a better material life to the point of greediness. Oates indicates the limits of transcendentalism with Jedediah's excretion, though Thoreau himself also admits the impossibility of the perfect purity of human beings:

We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled; like the worms which, even in life and health, occupy our bodies. Possibly we may withdraw from it, but never change its nature. I fear that it may enjoy a certain health of its own; that we may be well, yet not pure. (219)

In the last section of the novel, "The Angel" Jedediah is informed by a young Indian man that all of his family except his sister-in-law Germain have been killed. Jedediah is shocked and does not know what to believe. With the massacre of his family, he has no choice but to come back so as not to let his family's blood die out. Considering Jedediah as a parody of Thoreau's *Walden*, his realization of his own filthiness in the pain of voiding and his fate that he must return home suggest the decline of transcendentalism. In other words, Oates models Jedediah on the idealism and unreality of transcendentalism. She regards the transcendentalist idea as a wonderful one, but also knows that the real world goes further than transcendentalism. She shows that transcendentalism has changed with the times from a precious admonition to an abstract idea.

II. Violet Odlin: A Symbol of Women in Patriarchal Society

None of the three historical accounts dealt with in this paper take up the general history of women. Women's history is described by referring to topics such as slavery, education, suffrage, labor, war, and so on. How women have lived in society may be too abstract to be regarded as important in the large-scale stream of history.

In *Longman History of the United States of America*, writer Hugh Brogan refers to the lives of Southern white women in the time of slavery by quoting Mary Chesnut's diary. Chesnut was the wife of a Southern planter in the middle of the 19th century. In her diary, she wrote of her fury toward and envy of Northern people who criticized the situation of the South. Brogan describes Southern women's situation at that time on the basis of this diary:

She was the victim of the planters, who, in a sense, owned the whites as well as the blacks. Certainly they owned their own wives and daughters. Mrs Chesnut loved her husband, or told herself she did; but he treated her abominably. Once he locked her up in her room rather than allow her to keep an appointment to meet a gentleman of whom he disapproved solely, it seems, because his wife liked him. [. . .] she had no hope of a career. [. . .] White ladies had to be idle, else they would not have needed slaves to work for them. They had to be sexually cold and rigidly chaste, or there could be no justification for their husbands to chase after black women. They had to abandon their function as mothers to black "mammies," so that they could parade before the world perpetually in fine dresses, jewels and carriages [. . .]. White women had to be denied education and political rights, so that no challenge could be made to the supremacy of the white male [. . .].

It was a violent world. In part this was the legacy of the frontier, which persisted longer in the South than in the North [. . .]. (293–4)

This situation for women may be most noticeable until the middle of the 19th century in the South. But in fact, it can be seen in other times and places. Brogan infers the lives of Southern white women as a whole from the life of one woman. The comment "It was a violent world." is a historical judgment from the viewpoint of present-day beliefs and the writer's morality. This historical account universally narrativizes the life of women in the 19th century from one woman's diary and criticizes the society at that time.

In *Bellefleur*, the episode concerning Violet Odlin, the wife of third-generation Raphael Bellefleur, one of Jedediah's sons, criticizes the persecution of women in male-dominated America by parodying Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Moreover, by indirectly criticizing the patriarchal society where women's independence from men is not accepted through this parody, Oates indicates that writers of historical accounts naturally narrativize facts from source books, changing them into "typical" facts of a given period and latently making their own historical judgments.

Violet Odlin exemplifies the victim of and objector to male-dominated society. Her gloomy life resembles Edna's in *The Awakening*. Oates writes of women writers: "There are writers, born women, who rarely think of themselves, when they write, as women; there are other writers, similarly born women, who believe their writing to be conditioned at all times by their gender" (*Occasions* 25). Chopin is probably one of those writers who believe their writing to be conditioned by their gender. Wendy Martin explains Chopin's severe trials as a writer:

The flood of reviews condemning the book [*The Awakening*] eventually led to its being banned by the Mercantile and St. Louis Public Libraries. In addition, Kate Chopin was shunned by many people who had formerly attended her literary receptions, and she was not admitted to the St. Louis Artist's Guild. (8)

Oates criticizes society's treatment of women writers including Chopin and women like Edna in *The Awakening* in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century by overlapping Edna and Violet in *Bellefleur*, in other words, by parodying Edna.

Violet Odlin is, like Edna, a melancholy wife and mother until new encounter with Tamás, a stammerer and clavichord craftsman. In the end, Tamás disappears from Violet's mansion after completing her clavichord and some years later, Violet throws herself into Lake Noir. In *Bellefleur*, Violet's story "The Clavichord" begins as follows:

Contrary to rumor, and to her husband's embittered and reiterated conviction, it was not the Hayes Whittier episode that plunged Violet Bellefleur into a dreamy melancholy that ended with her taking her own

life [. . .] one chilly September night; it was not even the neurasthenia brought on, or exacerbated, by her numerous pregnancies and miscarriages. Nor was it the unfortunate woman's perversity. [. . .]

Nor was it love. Not love in any commonplace sense. For love between a man and a woman not related by blood would necessarily have to be erotic; and there was no provision, in Violet's world, for erotic love outside marriage. (425)

Thus, Violet's suicide seems to originate neither in simple love affairs nor in mental disease, but in more complex causes. So, what is the true cause of Violet's suicide?

The key to deciphering the enigma of Violet's psychology seems to lie in an investigation of Edna's mentality. When Edna swims in the sea, she "was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her" (57). In the sea, Edna recognizes the triviality of her existence and perceives her identity. Michael T. Gilmore says of Edna's suicide: "Her quest for self-fulfillment, though it ends in death, is an insurrectionary act because it calls a civilization into question; it has to end in death because there is no way for the world she inhabits to accommodate the change in her" ("Revolt" 62). Thus, Edna's suicide can be regarded as a consequence of her pursuit of her identity. It is similar to Violet's "taking her own life" (*Bellefleur* 435). In other words, through Violet, Oates parodies Edna's desire to be released from the social conventions that decide woman's role, identity, and individuality. She describes Violet as a "repetition with critical distance" (Hutcheon 6) of Edna.

To pursue her identity, Edna throws off her role as obedient woman and good wife:

She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked. [. . .] She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household *en bonne ménagère*, going and coming as it suited her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice. (107)

Similarly, Violet rejects her role as mistress of the Bellefleurs after Tamás's disappearance and begins to play the clavichord:

She refused to accompany her husband on his most ambitious campaign

journey about the state [. . .]. It was not uncommon for the mistress of Bellefleur Manor to descend to her drawing room immediately upon rising, and, in her dressing gown [. . .] quite indifferent to the demands of the household, and even, frequently, to the presence of household guests, seat herself at the clavichord and play for hours, the door locked behind her. (434)

The abandonment of their roles as subordinate individuals and good wives, their quest for their identities, shows Violet's and Edna's bold defiance of male-dominated society.

Moreover, both Edna's love for Robert Lebrun and Violet's love for Tamás are their only means of self-realization. In other words, what they want is not love itself but freedom from the social convention of a married woman as one of her husband's possessions. Edna says to Robert when he talks about husbands setting their wives free:

"You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,' I should laugh at you both." (167)

Edna does not want to be possessed by anyone, even Robert. Therefore, her love for Robert is not so much romantic and passionate as it is rational, where "rational" does not mean "calculating" but "self-possessed."

When Edna goes to her friend Madame Ratignolle to attend her childbirth, she tells Robert to wait for her no matter how late she is. But Robert does not wait, and leaves her a note: "Good-by — because I love you" (176). Reading it, Edna thinks "he did not know; he did not understand. He would never understand" (176). What does Robert not understand? The answer is Edna's philosophy of love, moreover, of living. Gilmore states that "the denial to women of autonomous or initiating selfhood, and their reduction to the status of persons owned by others, is so prevalent a condition in Creole society that it is uncritically endorsed by Robert Lebrun even though he would like to marry Edna" ("Revolt" 62). Edna's suicide is caused by her despair at Robert's lack of understanding of her desire, namely, the negation of her selfhood by

society, including by Robert and her husband.

In the same way that Edna's love for Robert is self-realization in opposition to social convention, Violet's attachment to Tamás and the clavichord made by him can also be regarded as rebellion against male-dominated society. Before Tamás's disappearance, Violet imagines sitting in front of the completed clavichord, on which

one day she would play not only her simple girlhood pieces but ambitious, brilliant, heartstopping pieces by Scarlatti and Couperin and Bach and Mozart, perhaps she would even have a kind of salon, and invite intelligent, cultured men and women — not Raphael's acquaintances, not his contemptible political associates! — and Tamás would be the guest of honor — he might live at the manor as long as he wished — he would become famous throughout the state [. . .]. (432)

Violet achieves confirmation of her identity through her devotion to Tamás up until the time of his disappearance, and after that, through playing his work of art, the clavichord. Her attachment to Tamás and her clavichord is similar to Edna's love for Robert with respect to the quest for selfhood.

Marilyn C. Wesley states that "a silent lover [Tamás] transforms himself into the music of the clavichord he builds for his beloved [Violet]" (137); the clavichord makes a beautiful sound like human voices. Although nobody is with Violet in her room, Raphael mistakes the sound of the clavichord for the voice of Violet's lover and breaks the instrument. The fate of the clavichord is described thus: "Though it was repaired afterward [. . .] the clavichord was never quite the same again. Its tone was flat and tinny and dead though of course it remained, and was, still, in Germaine's time [the latest generation in the novel], an exquisitely beautiful piece of furniture" (435). After this incident, Violet throws herself into Lake Noir. When Raphael destroys the clavichord, Violet loses her means of confirming her identity as well as her means of confronting male-dominated society. In spite of this, Violet does not surrender herself to society, instead disappearing in water. This last scene is a parody of Edna's death. Violet's ruined clavichord shows that the grudge of oppressed women against society will continue forever, even if their existence is forgotten.

Using parody, Oates describes the male-dominated society that refuses

women's quest for their own identity and for their own way of living from the 19th century to the beginnings of the 20th century as seen in *The Awakening*. Violet's story reveals and implicitly criticizes the history of discrimination against women.

III. **Nightshade: A Symbol of Racial Discrimination**

In *Bellefleur*, through a parody of the mysterious people in Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," the story of Nightshade describes the history of blacks who were captured in Africa and brought to America by whites. Nightshade is an ugly hunchbacked midget. He is captured by Gideon, the sixth generation of the Bellefleurs and his fellows when Nightshade is bowling with his fifteen companions in the field on the Bellefleur premises. Following is the scene in which Gideon finds the dwarves:

[. . .] he [Gideon] found himself staring down in astonishment at a group of children. [. . .] The children were playing rowdily, shouting at one another, emitting high-pitched squeaking laughter. They were bowling — lawn bowling — it must have been a schoolhouse picnic — but why were they trespassing on Bellefleur land, and who were they? — and where was their teacher? The sound of the wooden balls (which were about the size of croquet balls) striking the clubs was disproportionately loud [. . .]. Gideon flinched. [. . .] Though ordinarily Gideon liked children and even the idea of children it struck him suddenly that he didn't like *these* children and would take pleasure in running them off his land. . . .

So he descended the slope, shouting at them. They turned in amazement, their faces screwed up in angry, belligerent expressions, and he saw that they weren't children — they were midgets — some fifteen or twenty midgets — or were they (since their heads were oversized and their bodies misshapen, some of them quite grotesquely, with humps between their shoulders and crooked, caved-in chests) dwarves? (334)

These mysterious dwarves bowling remind the reader of the mysterious people playing at ninepins in "Rip Van Winkle":

On a level spot in the centre was a company of odd-looking personages playing at nine-pins. They were dressed in quaint outlandish fashion; some wore short doublets, others jerkins, with long knives in their belts,

and most of them had enormous breeches, of similar style with that of the guide's. Their visages, too, were peculiar: one had a large beard, broad face, and small piggyish eyes; the face of another seemed to consist entirely of nose [. . .].

What seemed particularly odd to Rip was, that though these folks were evidently amusing themselves, yet they maintained the gravest faces, the most mysterious silence, and were, withal, the most melancholy party of pleasure he had ever witnessed. (Irving 45–6)

What is important here is that what Nightshade's story parodies is not the people themselves playing at ninepins but their mysteriousness and queerness for Rip. That is to say, this parody emphasizes that Nightshade is an unfamiliar creature for the Bellefleur people.

Though his companions all run away, Nightshade, the only one who fails to escape, is hit by the bullet Gideon's nephew Garth fires and is captured. When one of Gideon's companions, Albert, asks him to kill Nightshade, Gideon says, "No, better not [. . .] after all the thing is *human*" (336). It is obvious that Gideon and his companions recognize Nightshade as a human no matter how grotesque his appearance. Nightshade is taken to the Bellefleur manor and becomes a servant but he continues to be mysterious for the Bellefleurs. This incident where Nightshade is captured and made to be a servant can be thought of as a renarrativization of the capture of blacks in Africa and their subsequent enslavement.

In *The American Nation*, Garraty describes how white people regard black people. But this account can be regarded as a white, one-sided view of slavery and blacks.

Most 17th-century Englishmen were prejudiced against Africans; the usual reasons that led Europeans to look down on "heathens" with customs other than their own were in the case of Negroes greatly reinforced by their blackness, which the English equated with dirt, the Devil, danger, and death. [. . .] That Africa was also the habitat of the great apes suggested, furthermore, that black men were somehow related to these human-appearing creatures, and thus inherently bestial and inferior. (70)

This description discloses the prevalent white stereotype of blacks. By adopting Rip's impression of the people playing at ninepins as odd, Oates expresses

whites' view of blacks. The ugliness of Nightshade's appearance reflects the subconscious white contempt for and feeling of superiority to blacks. Moreover, his mysteriousness represents whites' terror of blacks.

Nightshade as a servant of the Bellefleurs is in favor with Leah, Gideon's wife, and wins her confidence. As he adapts to life with the Bellefleurs, his hunched back becomes straighter and he grows taller.

In fact, in recent weeks it seemed to Leah that the poor hunched-over man [Nightshade] had grown an inch or two taller; or, at any rate, his severely stooped posture had begun to correct itself. The good food he received in the castle, and the pleasant surroundings, and, perhaps, her frequent small kindnesses to him were having a salutary effect. (447)

Though Leah thinks that it is because of the change in his life circumstances that Nightshade has grown taller, her view is that of a white who has made him a servant. Leah's understanding of Nightshade is the same as white people's prejudice toward blacks in *The American Nation*. Nightshade's episodes are all narrated from the viewpoint of Gideon and Leah as his masters, rather than from his own. Taking Nightshade's gradual increase in height at Bellefleur manor into consideration, his story discloses the history of black people brought to a foreign country, America, without recognizing their own doom and made to gradually get accustomed to life as slaves to white people. Underlining the narrativization of slavery and racial problems from the biased viewpoint of the white race, Nightshade's story reveals the historical view of whites toward other races found in general historiography.

Thus, Oates's parodies reveal the fact that even historical accounts as representation of fact include narrativization or judgment from today's viewpoint. Moreover, *Bellefleur* criticizes historical fact by renarrativizing existent literary works from the viewpoint of the writer Oates as well as from that of historical accounts.

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