

## **Female Coming of Age: Journey of Self-Growth in *I'll Take You There***

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**ABSTRACT:** *I'll Take You There*, Joyce Carol Oates's 30th novel, published in 2002, has autobiographical overtones. The novel tells the story of Anellia, a lonely college girl who struggles to find warmth and love and grows. It reflects the awakening of a new generation of women's self-awareness. This paper focuses on how the heroine makes her own rational choices at the crossroads of her coming-of-age path and finally grows into an independent, mature and stable woman. Self-growth goes through three stages: self-deficiency, self-confusion and self-awakening, which presents us with an individual's life journey of coming of age and continuous transcendence of self, fully demonstrating the female coming-of-age theme and interpreting Oates's creative thought of desiring women to mature. Based on a close reading of the text, this paper intends to analyze how the heroine achieves maturity from self-absence to self-awakening in the process of pursuing herself.

**KEYWORDS:** female coming of age; self-growth; Joyce carol oates; *I'll Take You There*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Female coming of age is a universal and inevitable stage of life; it “emphasized the need to ‘actualize’ and ‘strengthen’ the self-in-the-world. In particular, it emphasized the ideological production of ‘femininity’ as the ‘other’ of patriarchy and the need for women to become ‘real’ subjects and to discover their ‘true’ selves.” (Waugh, 2012, p. 9). But for the girl, the influence of family, education, and environment wraps around her body and mind like a thick cocoon of

bondage and self-bondage. Female coming-of-age seems more of a hardship than male. The novel *I'll Take You There* describes the coming of age of Anellia, a hardworking and intelligent girl who grows up in a relatively closed, neglected, and poor *upstate New York*. Unable to endure the alienation and indifference of her family and the repression and abandonment of society, she stubbornly fights and insists on pursuing her ideals and freedom. After numerous trials and setbacks, she grows from a young girl who knows nothing about herself to an independent and mature new woman.

The main character, Anellia, is a poor girl without a family name. The indifference of her family and the hatred of others make her lonely and helpless, and her character gradually becomes lonely and self-absorbed. She yearns for a sister day and night, needs companionship and wants to be loved. She was lucky enough to receive a scholarship to study at Syracuse University. From then on, she escaped her family's dreary and lonely atmosphere and began the ideal life she had always dreamed of. She thought a new environment and friends would help her forget the past and look to the future, but it was not. She did not fit in with her surroundings and could not integrate into the group. After suffering severe mental trauma, Anellia learns that her father is still alive and decides to go alone to visit him, whom she thought was no longer alive. Within just seven days of spending time with her father, she remembered the support she had been looking for. She had an instant epiphany in the face of her dying father and seemed to have found herself. Her father's death gives Anellia a rebirth, and she finds the courage to live. The significance of this paper is that it takes a female coming-of-age perspective. Studying Anellia's coming of age as an intellectual woman makes it possible to discover the factors that lead women to lose themselves in a patriarchal society. The new generation of women experiences deficiency and confusion and awakens in their quest for an ideal state of existence.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF FEMALE COMING-OF-AGE NOVEL**

The term "coming of age" also called "bildungsroman", is "an imprecise, romantic phrase evoking the period in life during which a child is physiologically, sexually, morally, and socially transformed into an adult." (Rishoi, 2012, p. 47) Although the bodily transformation is involuntary, when children reach adolescence, they are expected to assume the responsibilities and benefits of adulthood. Usually accompanied by nostalgic adulthood, adolescents' memories rarely hold a vague romantic view of their coming of age. Bildungsroman originated in Germany and is a fiction genre that describes a young protagonist's moral or psychological coming of age. It developed in Germany at the end of the 18th century and was introduced to the United States

through England, where it took root and blossomed. Goethe's classic *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1775-1776) is recognized as the earliest example of a bildungsroman. In the coming-of-age novel's studies, all roads lead back to Wilhelm Meister and his odyssey to maturity. Every writer who attempts a bildungsroman and every scholar of the genre pays homage to Wilhelm Meister as the archetype. (McWilliams, 2017, p. 27).

With the rise of the second-wave feminist movement in the 1960s, women's consciousness continued to be awakened, and the female coming of age began to receive attention. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, an anthology compiled by Elizabeth Abel in 1983, is one of the earliest critical studies of female coming-of-age novel. In contrast, it has some of the basic characteristics of the coming-of-age novel. As a relatively independent concept, a female coming of age novel has more distinctive characteristics than a male coming of age novel. This gender situation is, as Beauvoir put it, "She is defined and differentiated concerning man and not he concerning her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other." (De Beauvoir, 2014, p. 26).

In a patriarchal society, girls' coming of age seems extremely bitter and difficult, and they have to be caught in the struggle against gender discrimination and social traditions. A girl desperately needs to find herself, reconstruct, gain affirmation and find the meaning of existence. She must go through a spiritual journey from innocence to maturity to realize herself and reach the ultimate awakening. (Du, 2017) The key question of female coming of age is how women can break away from the male social roles under the inspiration of feminist concepts and reproduce the real self. The problems encountered by the heroine in it as she struggles from childhood confinement to the almost unimaginable goal of maturity and freedom are difficulties that every woman in a patriarchal society must encounter and overcome. (Gilbert & Gubar, 2020, p. 339).

Based on Buckley's prescriptions for the basic elements of coming-of-age fiction, it is safe to assume that *I'll Take You There* satisfy the basic characteristics of coming-of-age fiction: a teenage girl in her first year of college, Anellia, is in her teenage years. The heroine Anellia is a young girl in her first year of college. Anellia's indifference at home and her family's alienation create a conflict between the two generations. The depressing and eccentric town that Anellia is bent on escaping to the larger community of Syracuse University, where Anellia achieves self-education in a new environment. Anellia is alienated not only by her family but also by her classmates in

her new environment and also experiences hopeless love. In the end, Anellia finds herself by pursuing a career and work philosophy, gaining the courage to live independently while improving her social status.

## DISCUSSION

### Self-Deficiency at the Beginning of Coming of Age

Anellia, the heroine of *I'll Take You There*, is confronted with a broken family from the beginning. Her mother tragically dies of breast cancer when she is eighteen, and her father leaves the country irresponsibly. Her three brothers never take extra care of her because she is the only little sister, and her father and grandmother do not care for her because she is the youngest child in the family as if she was born an extra person. Anellia's family is so stifling that she has to escape to express herself, and as some scholars point out: "to become a woman in America, is a self that, like other selves" (Rishoi, 2012, p. 15) "you find through love and your relations with family and friends" (Jonathan, 1997, p. 115). So Anellia is always alone, depressed, and wandering from the edge of her home like a lonely ghost. Home brings the heroine only a feeling of brokenness and depression. The mother's absence in the novel directly leads to the permanent alienation of the mother-daughter relationship. Her mother's absence makes her guilty of murder, and in the eyes of her family, she is responsible for the murder of her mother. Because she is the one who made her father lose his beloved wife, her brothers lose their beloved mother, and her elderly grandparents worry about their self-loathing father, she suddenly becomes the target of all.

The lack of maternal love makes the heroine naturally pin her emotions on her father, the symbol of a patriarchal society. In Anellia's eyes, "he was hurt, sullen, angry, and baffled. He was a big man, well over six feet, weighing perhaps two hundred twenty pounds. His footsteps made the house vibrate." (Oates, 2002, p. 20) Here, her father undoubtedly became the most reliable and safe haven for her heart and spirit that she could imagine. Her father's strong arms would give her endless strength and courage to care for her, understand her, and support her! However, her father, addicted to alcohol and tobacco because of his grief, did not bring any light to Anellia, and he became grumpy and depressed. Her father became a stranger to her, and she eventually became emotionally isolated.

He would seem to forget my name; never would he call me by name; “you” would have to do; “you” was as much as I could hope for; “you” was much more desirous than “I” for “I” was uttered only by me, and “you” might be uttered, if only in a slurred, negligent voice, by my father. “You! —did not see you in here.” Or, “You?—not in bed?” (Oates, 2002, p. 20).

A name symbolizes identity and a sign of an individual's existence. The absence of a name means that Anellia occupies a position of powerlessness in a patriarchal society. She was given a baptismal name at birth, but no one wanted to call her by her real name. Her father's “you” relegated her to object and nothingness. An identity without a name is vague and indeterminate, like rootless duckweed that will eventually drift to nowhere. However, in Anellia's eyes, even a cold “you” is a thousand times better than the first-person “I” which proves that her father is still communicating with her, or at least paying attention to her. She is eager to get her father's attention and care, even if accidentally stepping on her foot is enough to intoxicate her for a long time.

The trauma of coming of age without a father's love reflects that women in real life are still shrouded in the shadow of patriarchy and are considered marginalized and “others” who have lost their identity and position as subjects. Anellia has lost her mother's and father's love and has become a spiritual orphan. Even her elderly grandparents did not care for her young granddaughter because of her intergenerational relationship, not to mention her three older brothers of the same generation. Anellia's situation at home was like a walking corpse. She could not be her parents' precious daughter, let alone receive the slightest sympathy from everyone, and was reduced to a despised “prisoner”. After unsuccessfully searching for love among her family members, Anellia pins her hopes on the strange outside world.

Menstruation is a sign that a girl has entered puberty, a natural expression of femininity, and a symbol of the beginning of her adult life. However, the disdainful gaze of her brothers strikes Anellia deeply. It leads to feelings of disgust and fear of herself, and Anellia's denial and rejection of her femininity are demonstrated by washing her body repeatedly. In the male-dominated society represented by her brother, she becomes even more suspicious and disgusted with herself, living in constant worry and fear, as Beauvoir said:

Menstrual periods inspire horror in adolescent girls by thrusting them into an inferior and damaged category. This feeling of degradation will weigh heavily on the girl. She would retain the pride of her bleeding body if she did not lose her self-respect as a human being. And if she succeeds in preserving her self-respect, she will feel the humiliation of her flesh much less vividly. (De Beauvoir, 2014, pp. 378-379).

Faced with society's overwhelming sexism, Anellia once lost her way and became so extreme in her worship of male power that she could not face herself. She fears and worships them, looks up to them, and is even obsessed with them. In the eyes of her brothers, it seems that women are born to be jokes and deserve to be the object of men's ridicule and satire. Under the heavy oppression of the patriarchal society, Anellia gradually lost confidence in herself. She dislikes her womanly body and begins to reject all the physical reactions of puberty, hates the hair that grows out of her body, hates the smell of a sweat from her body, and seems to want to refuse to grow up. This suffocating environment distorts all normal things; the ubiquitous hostility, jealousy and even resentment between the siblings completely expose the selfishness and ugliness of human nature. The older brother, Hendrik, hates Anellia the most and has always held a grudge against his sister for her outstanding high school grades and a college scholarship. He always thought that he was smarter and tougher than his sister, such as excellent grades, winning bonuses and attending prestigious universities should not be Anellia -- a girl. As a man, Hendrik considered it extremely humiliating to work a demeaning job to pay for school, let alone study electrical engineering at a vocational school. In his eyes, it was "God-damned unfair" and became the biggest obstacle to sibling communication: "The few times we had met in our new, awkward disguises as adults I'd felt the weight of his brotherly disapproval, his envy and dislike a hand shoving at me, backing me from him." (Oates, 2002, p. 244).

In such a confusing world, Anellia feels increasingly confused and helpless about her intelligence, and she even thinks of begging her brother to stop being jealous of her. It is easy to see that Anellia is the "other" and that she has grown up in a situation where she has been overshadowed and bound by the "other". At home, Anellia is a complete outcast; for her, home is like a birdcage with no freedom. As the youngest girl in the family, she suffers from gender discrimination imposed by her father and brothers. Without a female role model to lead and guide her, Anellia's confidence and sense of femininity were blurred. Anellia is broken physically and emotionally by the indifference of human relationships and the hypocrisy and ugliness of human nature. However,



this confusing and repressive social reality did not cause Anellia to lose her sense of female subjectivity. As she struggles clumsily and tenaciously with her surroundings, her dissatisfaction and disappointment with reality drive her to escape.

#### Self-Confusion on The Road Of Coming Of Age

Leaving home is a necessary element of the coming-of-age novel. As Rishoi points out:

The boy's search for his true vocation is the outward manifestation of his simultaneous search for selfhood, usually requiring him to leave his family and home at a young age to find his path as an individual. Moving from a rural, protected home to a dangerous urban setting brings about the most significant educational experiences of his life, leading first to self-doubt but ultimately to a reconciliation with the world as he finds it. (Rishoi, 2012, p. 59).

In other words, the protagonists of coming-of-age novels often run away from home to a completely new environment, usually from a small, isolated place to a prosperous metropolis, thus embarking on a difficult journey in pursuit of their ideals. After being freed from the constraints of their old environment, they begin to step into the wider world, learn about society and gain knowledge from it to continue to understand themselves and realize themselves.

As a young girl of the new generation, Anellia desperately wants to escape because the cold and distant family relationship and the suffocating and desperate environment of the town make Anellia unbearable. "Schooling is often depicted as a stifling form of education in contrast to the value of educative experiences in the wider world." (Rishoi, 2012, p. 59) Because of Anellia's natural talent and hard work, she was fortunate enough to receive a scholarship to attend Syracuse University. Since then, she has begun a new chapter in her life in a new and unfamiliar environment.

The fierce competition in her studies made Anellia stand out from the crowd and she was awarded a scholarship to study at Syracuse University. For the first time in her life, she could break away from her family and make positive contact with the outside world through her extraordinary talents. Her abnormal family relationships distorted her mind and a denial of her self-worth, and her thirst for love became overwhelming. To escape from the emptiness and loneliness of her inner world and thus gain a new identity and freedom, Anellia embarks on a journey to find love in the outer world. "In adolescence, because of the loosening and shelving of ties with parents,

adolescents find it difficult to endure the initial loss and separation in their lives and become desperate to find new connections, and same-sex friendship takes on this vicarious nature.”(Bukowski, 1993) Therefore, in this social community, represented by the school, she believes that the only way to save herself is to gain the approval and acceptance of others, and therefore joining the Kapa Gama faction in search of sisterhood becomes one of the most important choices she makes.

Once a sorority girl is granted membership, she enjoys privileges and is welcome to do as she pleases. Luckily, Anellia is granted membership and looks forward to her future. As she strives to excel in her studies, she also tries to gain the approval of the Kappa girls. Kappa Anellia is striving to excel in her studies while trying to gain the approval of the Kappa girls. The various prohibitions within the kappa building could not stop her desire for sisterhood: “I’d yearned for sisters of my own.” (Oates, 2002, p. 16) She tries to change her awkward situation by being accepted by others and thus finds herself. But again, she lacks the skills to communicate with others and has no idea how to be friendly with others and thus be accepted by them. To get along with the Kappa sisters, she risks defying the authority of the warden by waiting for the late Kappa girls and opening the door for them; at the end of each semester, she also writes assignments and papers for them; to cover up their mistakes, she twice impersonates them and becomes an innocent scapegoat.

However, all her efforts were worthless to the sisters; she was just a tool to raise their grade point average. In the face of the Kappa sisters’ ignorance, she began to suffer from insomnia, frantic reading of philosophy books and even eating disorders. She no longer had the same yearning and excitement before joining. “Reluctant to return upstairs because to my dismay I was finding myself as isolated as I’d been before I had become a sister—an ‘active’—of Kappa Gamma Pi with no recourse except to conclude.” (Oates, 2002, p. 9) She felt as if she had been an alternative from the beginning. The Kappa sisters had rich families, doting parents, and many boyfriends. They were all heavily made up, fragrant, smoked and drunk. Anellia, on the other hand, was poor and shabby, with plain face and ragged clothes, covered in second-hand goods, without a single piece of decent cosmetics, even to the point of picking up garbage. All that Anellia did eventually made herself more and more lose her personality and temper more, and she could not find herself. The loss of the Kappa badge means the disappearance of Kappa’s membership. In the European philosophy class, the professor is sure of her name for a moment but suddenly forgets her name,



“Not on the list. Not on any list. Not registered at the university. Not registered in the Universe.” (Oates, 2002, p. 74) And the most frightening thing is that she can’t remember her name either, which marks the beginning of the disintegration of her sense of self and her inability to find the meaning of her self-existence.

Most teenagers are full of beautiful fantasies about love, but in the face of harsh reality, disillusionment cannot help but arise. The experience of love is one of the essential elements in a Coming of age novel, and Buckley mentions in his book that the main character’s growing-up process is completed “at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values.” (Buckley, 2013, p. 17) After experiencing the disillusionment of love, the protagonist takes an important step forward on the road to maturity. Ms Rui points out, “There is a close relationship between the confusion of female adolescents' coming of age and their love and marriage.” (Rui, 2012, p. 33) Every girl wants to find her true love and be able to marry her beloved lover. Unfortunately, Anellia is infatuated with a married man, so her love is destined to end in sorrow and disillusionment. Her love affair with Vernor Matheius is an important stage in her coming of age in the search for herself and a catalyst for Anellia’s maturity. The frustration of love changes her consistent approach to life, thus driving her away from dependence and towards independence and freedom. To attract Matheius’ attention, Anellia makes every effort to change herself. She decides to win Matheius’ love through her actions. Because “love, and especially being loved, is the key to building a positive self-image for most girls.” (Rui, 2012, p. 89) She changed her timid and timid ways and went to Matheius to talk to him, secretly moved her seat closer to him, and visited his house alone countless times. She also continued to draw from social learning, accepting the new personality pieced together, such as learning how to maintain dignity, be polite, be a good person, etc. She also deliberately gave herself a new name, Anellia. The given name of the main character is “a symbol of subordinating the woman described by Oates to her successive roles.” (Zawadzka, 2016, p. 224) Anellia desperately wants to break free from the past to move into a broader future. To show her charm in front of Matthews, she decided to buy second-hand clothes to dress. She also went to the hair salon and spent twenty dollars to do an incredibly beautiful new haircut. To please Matthews, she also pretended to be interested in chess. She decided to sharpen her brain and write better papers to bring herself closer to Matthews' mind. She also knows Matheius only likes intelligent women, so she finds ways to improve her academic skills. She constantly reminded herself to behave better:

I was required to be “good.” I smiled often, I was gracious, courteous, patient, and kind even when the effort was exhausting. Even when my heart was breaking, even when I wanted to die, to extinguish myself completely, to be free of my sick, radiant love for Vernor Matheius, to be free of love. (Oates, 2002, p. 193).

The obsession with Matheius makes Anellia feel immensely happy and gratified. She feels that life is full of vitality and excitement, but at the same time also faces strong social pressure, as racial discrimination was also a part of social life in America at that time. Anellia’s journey of self-discovery had to be a difficult one of rebellion. Her lover Matheius is a black man, but not his skin colour or appearance that first attracts her attention, but his cool, vapid language and voice.

Anellia has long been conscious of racial inequalities. Still, she does not believe that racial ideas affect her thinking, even though in American history, differences in skin colour have meant differences in class, meaning, and aspiration. In the 1960s, gender relations between white women and black men remained taboo. On a late-night walk, the two are confronted by a group of drunken white males, and the unpleasant words “Nigger!—Nigger’s bitch!” (Oates, 2002, p. 174) deeply sting Matheius and hurt Anellia. Matheius’ calmness could not conceal his inner anger, and when he reached the apartment building, he asked Anellia to stay with him and ordered her to take off her clothes. The expression of his anger and the rough and unreasonable movements made Anellia feel so uncomfortable that she was almost suffocated. “his tongue an agent of his cold, purposeful fury; for the jeering white boys in the careening car were vanished, and only I remained; I was seized with panic, unable to breathe.” (Oates, 2002, p. 175).

After the abominable white children fled, Anellia undoubtedly became the closest white representative to Matheius, and his desire to vent his anger inevitably fell on the tender woman. And this love should become clear evidence of knowledge and existence. Yet Matheius’ coercion and domination make her infinitely sad, where there is no equality or freedom, only coercion and submissiveness. Matheius’ behaviour is aggressive, and although he is unsuccessful, he ultimately plays the role of a black male sexual assault to overcome the hurt and pain of repressed racial discrimination. However, without the foundation of love, even the most passionate intimacy seems insipid, and the act is based on revenge and anger.

However, despite all the efforts and sacrifices Anellia makes for love, the result is a basket case. Matheius' deceit and betrayal trample on the heroine's spirit and body, leaving her in pain. A few old photos eventually brought the truth to light: he was married and had a wife and children. Faced with such a cruel and heartless lie, Anellia fell into the abyss and no longer dared to live. "Anellia whose soul quavered at the brink of extinction; about to be sucked into the void, which was Nothingness; the bliss of Nothingness;" (Oates, 2002, p. 235). The awful experience completely shattered her infinite illusion of love, pulling her mercilessly back into the midst of reality and simultaneously making her braver.

I would return to my room and toss my costume clothes into a heap, my cheaply glamorous second-hand things purchased with such misguided hope; I would cut these things into pieces with scissors, as once I'd cut my long, bristling hair; ...I would step into history, as Vernor had scorned; I would join demonstrators marching and chanting and waving hand-made signs; I would join CORE, I would join SANE; I would find a way of bringing my intense inner life, my questing life, into balance with history; I would be fearless, or give that impression; I would be fearless, though frightened; I would march with Negroes and whites and con-front the race-hatred of my race; I would expose my heart, as I would expose my body; I would make myself vulnerable, I would expiate my guilt; I would remake myself another time, empowered by loss, grief. No longer Anellia. Waiting to see who I might be after Anellia. (Oates, 2002, pp. 235-236).

Torn by the tragic loss of her love, Anellia is determined to change herself completely. Her act of destroying her former clothes and makeup seems to indicate that she wants to sever all ties with the past because "Dress is, however, also an arena for the expression of identity and exercise of agency." (Twigg, 2007) She becomes bold and fearless, decides to take on all kinds of political activities, and never back down! The disparity between the beauty of love and the harsh reality finally makes Anellia realize the importance of female independence. She decides not to place her hopes in love and marriage but to take the pulse of her destiny. The disillusionment of her love makes Anellia speed up her steps toward maturity. While learning to face reality, Anellia is also preparing to become a new, independent-minded woman.

#### Self-Awakening After Coming of Age

After the humiliation and helplessness of her "symbolic death", the loss of her virginity, deception

and abandonment, Anellia learns from her mistakes. She begins to reflect on herself and readjust her relationship with Matheius. She stopped relying on men to find her true self because she realized that she did not need Matheius but had only been using him to find herself. Anellia eventually realizes that her failure in love stems from the fact that she has been looking for dependence and has no initiative, rights, freedom, or even choice. Living in a time when women were inherently inferior to men, women usually went against the grain and passively accepted their miserable fates. But in reality, that was not their default fate; it was imposed on them by the patriarchal society and social system.

With this realization, Anellia believed that her spiritual bondage, inferiority, and repression were not her destiny. She began to re-examine her identity and saw herself as an independent individual. She decided that she would no longer be dependent on anyone and that as a woman she should enjoy the same equality, independence and freedom as men. To do this, she must leave Matheius completely, as described in the novel: “My sleeping fingers in the man’s hair as I drifted off at last to sleep, knowing where he’d gone I could not follow.” (Oates, 2002, p. 204) When she takes practical action, she feels that life turns out to be so easy and carefree. “My heart continued to beat calmly with the certainty of what I would do, and what I would not do; what I would not ever do again; and I didn’t turn to look up the steep steps at Vernor Matheius.” (Oates, 2002, p. 236) Anellia has grown from her attachment to men and has become independent and free.

Although Anellia has lost her love, she is happy to have an epiphany. Her inferiority complex, cowardice and other immature manifestations are fully stimulated in the complete break with Matheius; she is more conscious that others cannot be relied on; she should learn to be independent, pursue gender equality, to have freedom. She is no longer the little girl afraid of others who seeks shelter and approval from others. She is free from mental shackles, has gained freedom and independence, and has grown up. Thus, the love defeat can be considered an important preparatory stage that facilitates her transformation.

If the love defeat is an important stage in Anellia’s maturation, her father’s death allows her to achieve real spiritual coming of age. She completely abandoned her immature thoughts of inferiority, cowardice and avoidance and became brave enough to face reality and take responsibility. She finally made a qualitative spiritual leap toward true maturity. During the seven days she spent with her father, Anellia constantly examined herself, reflected on her past, and

gained insights into her life. Her knowledge and understanding of herself, others, and society led her to a spiritual epiphany and maturity. When Anellia learned that her father was still alive and critically ill, she decided to travel to Utah to visit him. Considering the distance and strangeness of the journey, Anellia begs her brother Hendrik to accompany her but is ruthlessly refused. The other two brothers could not be reached, so Anellia had no choice but to travel alone.

The 2,500-mile journey was an adventure for her, and she was baptized and reborn. Anellia was in the unfamiliar West as if she was feeling her way in the dark, which was a first for Anellia. During the walk, she not only had to pay close attention to her safety but also had to overcome her inner fears. Her Volkswagen needed to be better equipped, dilapidated, and in constant danger. She slept in the car to save money but never dared to sleep at night. Even during the day, she had to be prepared to run away immediately in case of danger. Usually, she could only wash in the public restroom. The hardships and sorrows along the way did not deter Anellia but honed her. Instead, she developed her strong, bold, confident character and independent, self-improvement spirit. She finally realized that she could stop being dependent on anyone.

While her father, who symbolizes the patriarchal society, is weakening physically, Anellia's feminine consciousness, representing the underprivileged, is gradually awakening. The father loses his ability to speak due to cancer and has to let his girlfriend Hilde speak in his place, i.e., a woman replaces her father's voice. As a man, he loses not only the right to speak but also the right to express his thoughts. The father's physical weakness, blurred vision, loss of speech, and delirium reflect the weakened authority of a male-dominated society while also highlighting the importance of women's right to speak.

In addition, Anellia is forbidden to look back at her father when he faces her three times, and this life with a mask makes him "silent" and loses his clear face, thus blurring his gender role as a man. During these seven days, Anellia neither sees nor speaks to him; all she can do is face "death. For an adolescent, facing death is a special experience in coming of age, which will also prompt her to think about the real meaning of life for the first time in her life. At this point, Anellia begins to leave her old self behind and look at the past with new eyes, determined to take control of her destiny and not become a victim of a patriarchal society. Her father's death brings her a spiritual epiphany and a complete awakening of her feminine consciousness. She decided to become a responsible female writer and find the true meaning of life.

As Finke points out, “Feminist literary criticism was marked by an often contentious split between those pragmatically committed to the recovery of the woman writer and, with her, something usually called women’s experience.”(Finke, 2018, p. 1) Anellia slowly makes herself independent through her writing, transcending herself in a constant attempt to explore herself and her reality. At the end of the novel, Anellia’s act of arranging alone for her father’s body to be transported back home to be buried with her mother is the best evidence of her maturity and transcendence, as described at the end of the novel: “It was my first plane flight, a thrilling experience; in a delirium of exhaustion, sorrow, relief; but the relief was predominant.” (Oates, 2002, p. 290) Accordingly, Anellia has a new understanding of herself, others, and society. She courageously challenges her fate, abandons traditional social values, completely breaks away from dependence, moves toward epiphany and maturity, and finally completes her quest for self.

## CONCLUSION

*I’ll Take You There* describes Anellia’s spiritual journey in pursuit of herself in a patriarchal society from a simple, dependent, and ignorant girl to a modern, mature woman with an independent mind. Oates demonstrates the constraints and dilemmas of the heroine’s upbringing and emphasizes Anellia’s psychological and intellectual progress and development. In the novel, Anellia’s pursuit of her female self is difficult in the face of a powerful patriarchal society. However, she is encouraged and learns from her various experiences to educate herself. The unfortunate experiences make Anellia aware of the tragic fate of women in a patriarchal society. She understands that her mother, grandmother, and Madame Thayer represent the past of women's destiny - a tragedy that cannot be erased and changed. Thus, Anellia begins to readjust her relationship with her surroundings and decides not to submit to male power but to take control of her destiny. In conclusion, analyzing *I’ll Take You There* from the perspective of women's growth can help us better understand the growth traces of young women in the twentieth century, explore the existential dilemmas they faced, and find answers for women's liberation. It also inspires contemporary women in the pursuit of self and the realization of their values.

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