

Marina Oswald & Kathleen Wade: Wives Involved in a Political Ambition

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Abstract

"I'm no psychiatrist, but if you ask me, politicians in general are pretty insecure people" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 97). This quotation describes politicians as insecure people, and the word "insecure" has more than one implication. It may mean that politicians are insecure to themselves or to people around them. It can also mean that politicians' actions are not trustworthy. This description indicates that one must fear or be aware of politicians in general. A politician's wife may need also to have this caution. According to such description, does a politician's wife feel happy or secure with her husband? This paper will focus on the life of two wives. The first one is Marina Oswald in Don Delillo's novel *Libra* (1988), and Kathleen Wade in Tim O'Brien's novel *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994). The main blame would be on husbands; however, this paper will explain the role of the wives as well. The absence of real communication, besides the extreme political expectations of the two husbands, leads to ending the two marriages unsuccessfully.

Keywords: ambition , politician, wives

شخصية مارينا أوزولد وشخصية كاتلين وايد: زوجات متورطات بالطموح السياسي

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المخلص :

" أنا لست طبيبا نفسانيا ولكن اذا سألتموني سأقول إن السياسيين بشكل عام غير أمنين" (اوبراين). يصف هذا الاقتباس السياسيين كأشخاص غير أمنين وكلمة "غير أمنين" تحمل أكثر من معنى. فقد تعني أن السياسيين غير أمنين على أنفسهم وعلى الناس من حولهم أو أن أفعالهم غير جديرة بالثقة. يوضح هذا الوصف أنه يتوجب على أي شخص الخوف والحذر من السياسيين بصورة عامة. ويتوجب على زوجة السياسي الحذر ايضا. وعلى وفق الاقتباس أعلاه هل تشعر زوجة السياسي بالسعادة والامان مع زوجها؟ سوف يركز هذه البحث على حياة اثنتين من الزوجات. الزوجة الاولى هي شخصية مارينا اوزولد في رواية دون ديللو (الميزان) التي نشرت عام ١٩٨٨ والزوجة الثانية هي شخصية كاتلين وايد في رواية تيم اوبراين (في منطقة ليك اوف وودز) التي نشرت عام ١٩٩٤. سيكون اللوم الرئيسي على الازواج ولكن سأسلط الضوء في هذا البحث على دور الزوجات ايضا ؛ لأن غياب التواصل الحقيقي إضافة الى طموح الزوجين السياسي الطاغى في هذه الروايات أدى الى انتهاء الزوجات الطلاق.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الزوجات ، السياسيون ، الطموح

Introduction

“I’m no psychiatrist, but if you ask me, politicians in general are pretty insecure people” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 97). This quotation describes politicians as insecure people, and the word “insecure” has more than one implication. It may mean that politicians are insecure to themselves or to people around them. It can also mean that politicians’ actions are not trustworthy. This description indicates that one must fear or be aware of politicians in general. A politician’s wife or family may need also to have this caution. According to such description, does a politician’s wife feel happy or secure with her husband? This paper will focus on the life of two wives. The first one is Marina Oswald in Don DeLillo’s *Libra*, and Kathleen Wade in Tim O’Brien’s *In the Lake of the Woods*.

Marina Oswald

Libra (1988) is a novel about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and its complications and secrets. This novel is also about the biography of Lee Harvey Oswald who shot the President. Lee shows an early disliking for the American capitalism. Although he joins the US Marine Corps during his adolescence, he develops an interest in communism. He, finally, decides to go to the Soviet Union thinking that he will have a better life there. In Minsk, where he lives, he meets Marina Prusakova in a dancing event. She is a beautiful, young Russian girl who is fascinated by Lee as an American young man. After their first meeting, Marina and Lee marry after a very short time. This section of the paper will be dedicated to Marina as a wife of a man of a political ambition.

An ambition to be famous haunts Lee since his early youth. He seizes “a chance to shoot his way from failure to fame” (“Marina and Lee: The Tormented Love,” 2013, p. 77). It is a failure of losing a father, and having a working mother that left him and his brothers in an orphanage. His family moves twenty times during his childhood and early adolescence. Lee leaves study in his high school. He feels a suffering of loneliness, and he has a struggle with poverty. His interest in politics starts at the age of fifteen or sixteen. He reads many books about Karl Marx and communism. He becomes a Marxist, and he believes that he can “strike the deadliest blow he could imagine at capitalism in the United States” (McMillan, “JFK and Oswald,” 2007, p. 99). Lee goes to the Soviet Union in 1959. He learns Russian quickly and tries to merge in the

Russian life. First, he meets Ella German in the factory where he is working. He is involved in love with her for eight months and proposes to her, but she rejects him. He feels disappointed because of her rejection. To spite her, Lee marries Marina after a six-week relationship. He promises Marina a kind of privileged life that she is ready to it. She is an orphan and she lives with her aunt and uncle in Minsk, and she wants to escape her narrow life in Minsk, in her uncle's house. She is attracted by Lee's good looking and nice clothing as he is attracted by her "brocade dress and upswept hair" (Delillo, 2006, p. 201). She looks to live in his lovely apartment that overlooks Minsk River. She imagines how wonderful to live there (Delillo, 2006, p. 204). Marrying an American man is by itself a privilege for Marina. She loves hearing English and feels so enthusiastic to learn English later on. Marina and Lee have a brief relation and then a quick marriage. A reader may argue here whether this period is enough to know each other. Is six weeks enough for a woman to know a man from another country? Is it a real love? What kind of attraction do they have to each other? Lee's attraction and quick decision to marry Marina is described as a reaction with distress and anger to Ella's refusal to marry him (Cohn, 2014, p. 84). Marina has been in love with the young Anatoly (her former, Russian boyfriend) and she switches at once seeing the "polite and neatly dressed [Lee]" (Delillo, 2006, p. 201). Her marriage to him is seen as an escape from her current life into a better one: "America and Americans appealed to her" (Cohn, 2014, p. 84). Delillo, on the other hand, describes Marina and Lee's meetings before marriage as follows: "They flattered each other, made each seem unique and marvelous. It is the lie everyone accepts about being nineteen, which was Marina's age when she met this unexpected man" (Delillo, 2006, p. 201). Thus, flattering, teasing another lover, fascinated by another culture, and attracted by each other's lovely clothes are among the reasons behind their decision of marrying each other. They have a same scar (same size and shape) near their elbows, and this sign becomes another reason that convinces them that they should marry. This scar gives them a sense of destiny. A reader may find these reasons as not good bases for a marriage.

In their wedding day, Marina discovers Lee's first lie: he is twenty one and not twenty four as he has told her. Lee immediately justifies his lie. She is disappointed, but in a busy wedding day she forgets about it. A few weeks later, she discovers another lie that his mother is not dead as he has mentioned before. By time, she knows that lying is

a part of Lee's life: "Lying and keeping secrets were a way of life, independent of what the lies or the secrets were about. They made [Lee] feel important" (Boisvert, 2013, p. 36). Seeking fame makes him do a variety of weird things. He wants to do "something big," (Boisvert, 2013, p.36) but he does not know how. His political ambition takes a different number of ways or shapes that Marina witnesses. Gradually, she realizes something about her husband's personality that makes her life with him unstable: Lee is overwhelmed by seeking a political fame.

In the Soviet Union (Lee's first stage of political change), Marina and Lee live happily during the first week of their marriage. He cares for her, and he used to do the household duties. He feels so happy knowing that Marina is pregnant. He likes the idea of being a father, and he "promised to take better care of her than anyone ever had" (Delillo, 2006, p. 207). They lead a good life in Minsk. However, this happy, calm husband feels dissatisfied with communism in the Soviet Union. He finds out by time "the contrast between the lifestyle of the working class and the Communist Party members, the inability to travel freely and the scarcity of food" (Fagin, 2003, p. 70). He yearns for the personal and economic freedom of the United States (Balter, 2009, p. 140). He tells her about his intentions to go back to the United States. Lee promises his wife a charming life in the United States. Marina is really amazed by the life in the United States, wearing shorts, walking bare legged in the streets, and having a short haircut. In Fort Worth, she is astonished by seeing the racks of clothes and the great deal of furniture in the shop windows. On one occasion, she is walking with Lee and their baby and they pass by a department store, and she sees herself on television in the department window. She stares as if seeing the most remarkable and the strangest thing in her life. She looks at herself, checks herself and Lee holding the baby, turns one more time to look at the people behind her, and looks at the screen once again. This is really incredible for her walking out of the picture and come back again. She is stunned by the American technology.

As Marina is surprised by her new life in America, Lee does not feel at home "especially because the country had changed direction under John F. Kennedy...[who] had called for militancy against the Soviet Union" (Cohn, 2014, p. 84). As a reaction to his disappointment of returning to America and the time he has spent in the Soviet Union, Lee changes his behavior with his wife. He "takes out his frustration on his

wife” (Fagin, 2003, 70). He starts to see her as a lazy, careless housewife. He starts to blame her for smoking although she assures him that she reduces the number of her cigarettes. He starts to beat her in many occasions with no real reasons. He beats her once in front of people because the zipper on the side of her skirt is partly open. He refuses to teach her English in order to keep her isolated from others or from going out alone without him. Delillo regards Lee’s behavior as an expected behavior: “They were like people anywhere, people starting life a second time. If they quarreled, it was only because he had a different nature in America and that was the only way he could love” (2006, p. 226). Lee does not know settling down in one place for a long time. He gets used to constant moving since his childhood. He moves from one place to another trying to achieve the big thing he seeks to be. His unstable life makes him have a blurred view of his future. That is why he has been submitted to more than one psychiatric evaluation and he even tries to commit suicide before meeting Marina: “Oswald was mentally unstable man, whose Soviet adventure pushed him over the edge” (Farrell, 2011, p. 84). It is the edge of his anger and unstable behavior that “turned to violence after his return to the United States in 1962” (Cohn, 2014, p. 83).

Dissatisfied with his return to the United States, Lee decides to move to Cuba or even to return to the Soviet Union again. This is the next stage of his quest of fame. So, he plans to go to Mexico City to seek visa either to Cuba or to the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, he will let the pregnant Marina and his little daughter (June) to stay with Ruth and Michael Paine, who are good and generous friends, in Dallas. At some time before Lee’s decision to go to Cuba, he thinks to send Marina and his daughter to the Soviet Union because he cannot support them in the United States. He applies for a couple of jobs but his attempts are unsuccessful. He writes to the Soviet embassy in Washington requesting visas for Marina and June. Marina finds Lee’s decision to send her back to Russia as an act of banishing herself and June out of his way to seek more ambitions and dreams in other countries: “[H]e doesn’t love me anymore... He thinks I am binding him like a rope or chain. His Attitude is I bind him. He has the high-flying world of his ideas if only he didn’t have a wife to hold him back, how perfect everything would be” (Delillo, 2006, p. 306). She does not want to go back to Russia and she is afraid that he will force her to return. She tells him that “[a] gloomy spirit rules the house... I am not receiving happiness” (Delillo, 2006, p. 324). She married

Lee having a number of dreams in her mind: “She thought they would have a life that was not unusual in any way. Simple moments adding up... She thought of walking the aisles of Montgomery Ward... music... ringing bells... shiny handbags... fragrance drifting everywhere” (Delillo, 2006, p. 241). Her dreams are simple dreams of a happy life in the United States. She and her husband live a life of separation after leaving Fort Worth as she stays with half a dozen families. She moves from one family to another without Lee except for one night that Lee spends it with her in one of the houses. She feels that “[i]t was beating on her nerves, all that moving around,” (Delillo, 2006, p. 286) and she feels that she makes her baby suck nervous milk. Lee lives in his own world that is just like his writings (his Historic Diary that he used to write): “The pages were crowded, smudged, urgent, a true picture of his state of mind, of his rage and frustration, knowing a thing but not able to record it properly” (Delillo, 2006, p. 211). His ideas are as chaotic as his relation to Marina. He is thinking also of going to China and trying socialism there, and Marina analyzes it again to mean stashing his family in Russia and then travelling by himself to China where he might see an ideal communism there: a communism that is better than the one in the Soviet Union (McMillan, “JFK and Oswald,” 2007, p. 101). Both Cuba and the Soviet Union reject Lee’s petition to get a visa. Lee is raged by this rejection and returns to Dallas completely dejected. According to Susan Farrell, the result of this sense of failure is the assassination of Kennedy (2011, p. 84).

Shooting politicians seems to be another way for Lee to gain fame. On April 10, 1963, Lee shoots (but misses) General Edwin Walker, a Dallas right-wing extremist. Lee practices working the bolt of his rifle and poses with his rifle and some political magazines of the Left (*Militant* and *Worker*) and asks Marina to take pictures for him. He wants the news of shooting Walker to reach Havana and Casrto, and he imagines the cover of *Time* holding his picture (Delillo, 2006, pp. 280-281). Marina recognizes that her husband is obsessed with shooting and guns. She sees what he is doing with his guns, and “she had a close view of the moods and thoughts that led up to the Kennedy assassination” (Boisvert, 2009, p. 36). He shoots politicians to gain a political fame: “an act of self-definition that depends on an audience” (Rizza, 2008, p.182). He needs an audience that sees his picture in a newspaper. He chooses a particular performance and determines who his audience is: “Oswald sees himself in a den, seemingly in middle

America” (Rizza, 2008, p.181). When Marina tells him that he will be a father, Lee (as well as the reader) thinks that being a father will change his personality. This perception does not happen. As Michael James Rizza puts it “[t]he final version of [Lee] is the media’s version” (2008, p. 182). So, Lee cannot see himself (see his real identity) away from media and fame. Finally, Marina makes a decision to stay with Ruth and not to go with him to Dallas. She finds herself completely unable to experience a new adventure with two little girls (she gave birth to a second daughter). She wants to settle down, and she feels a kind of settlement with Ruth. She says that there is a yard in Ruth’s house where the daughters can play, and Ruth is there to talk to her all day. She repeats again that her daughters will not be sucking nervous milk (Delillo, 2006, p. 389). Obviously, he is the source of her nervous milk. He goes next morning leaving Marina some money and his wedding ring.

Immediately after that, “[a] new political vista opened for Oswald on Tuesday, November 19 [1963]. That day he spots a story in either the *Dallas Morning News* or *Times Herald* that describes the parade route of President Kennedy’s upcoming visit to Dallas. The presidential motorcade will be passing directly by the windows of the Texas School Book Depository” (McMillan, “JFK and Oswald,” 2007, p. 101). Texas School Book Depository is the place where Oswald finds a work recently. It is his fate calling him because he does not shout for the president to come but the president comes to him (Savvas, 2010, p.26). Before he shoots President Kennedy, he imagines his audience in advance: “People will come to see him, the lawyers first, then psychologists, historians, biographers” (Delillo, 2006, p. 435). Shooting the President of the United States makes Lee establish a sort of communication between himself or his fame and the fame of President Kennedy. Lee Harvey Oswald’s name becomes part of Kennedy’s history or history in general, and this connection gives Lee a kind of relief and satisfaction: “He and Kennedy were partners. The figure of the gunman in the window was inextricable from the victim and his history. This sustained Oswald in his cell. It gave him what he needed to live. The more time he spent in a cell, the stronger he would get. Everybody knew who he was now. This charged him with strength” (Delillo, 2006, p. 435). Hence, a reader can describe Lee’s act of shooting the president not as a “self-destructive” but rather a “self-constructive” (Balter, 2009, p. 134). When Jack Ruby shoots him at the end of the novel, Lee sees himself as the camera catches

the scene of shooting. People will see that scene on television. He already imagines himself watched by somebody on television (Delillo, 2006, p. 440). Finally, he might find the fame that he seeks but he pays his life and leaves his family early as a price for this ambition. Marina says later after Lee's death that if Lee had had a trail, he would have boasted that he was trying to bring capitalism down (Boisvert, 2013, p.36). Lee is "a man prepared to take dangerous and dramatic action for the sake of his political beliefs" (McMillan, "JFK and Oswald," 2007, p. 101). As Marina describes, Lee is ready to claim that he brings capitalism down (although he does not). He takes such immature action in order to attract the court or even Americans' attention or in order to prove his importance. Lee has "a confused political ideology" (Fagin, 2003, p.72). This unclear political pursuit makes him alienated from his marriage.

There were two choices or two needs for Lee: his need for love and family, and his need for power and fame (Balter, 2009, p. 155). At first, these two needs are in conflict. Lee in Russia tries somehow to satisfy the need of love and having a family when he proposes to Ella and then to Marina. But by the end, his need to establish fame prevails. It is significant to argue whether he finds at all his need of love with Marina. Priscilla Johnson McMillan writes a book about the historical Marina and Lee. McMillan has really a couple of notes about the sort of love between Marina and Lee. McMillan says that Lee wrote in his Diary (after his marriage) that he remained in love with Ella, and that he married Marina to hurt Ella (1977, p. 85). The book shows that Marina, on the other hand, was in love with Anatoly who felt angry knowing that Marina would marry Lee. Anatoly told her that no one falls in love in two weeks and that Lee has this privilege because he is a foreigner (McMillan, 1977, p. 83). Delillo emphasizes also in *Libra* Marina's love for Anatoly when she believes that she sees Anatoly in Minsk train station as she is leaving to the United States with Lee: "A man at the train station stood watching, half hidden in the crowd. She saw him briefly through the window. Was it her former boyfriend Anatoly, with the unruly blond hair, who'd once proposed to her, whose kisses made her reel, or was it the KGB?" (2006, p. 213). During her last minutes in Minsk, she remembers her ex-lover Anatoly and thinks that she sees him. Could that mean that Anatoly is her real love that she forces herself to leave in order to fulfill a dream of marrying an American that all girls will envy her for? Formerly, she tells Lee after many occasions of beating her that "I never loved you. I

took pity on a foreigner” (Delillo, 2006, p. 239). A reader can conclude that Lee marries Marina as an emotional recovery after losing the chance of marrying Ella, and Marina loves an American image and she has a dream to go out of Russia. She has nothing to do with politics and he has everything to do with politics, and ultimately they fail to continue together. Norman Mailer in his *Oswald Tale1* gives a very interesting and thoughtful elaboration on this marriage and politics saying that “Marina inhabits only the small-scale landscape of her personal experience: ‘Of course Marina’s grandmother used to tell her [that politics is bad!]... my private life is my only wealth!’ She was in this sense the worst possible wife for Oswald” (qtd. in Balter, 2009, p.155). Marina is the worst wife for Lee because she has other interests rather than Lee’s unstable political ambition. She dreams of a clean, neat apartment and living a happy, comfortable life going from one American store to another where “colors and abundance [are everywhere]” (Delillo, 2006, p.226).

After Lee’s death, Marina sees her husband for the last time in his coffin. She kisses him and puts their two rings on his finger. She sobs and dresses in dark clothes. By these last minutes at the grave, she completes her abandonment (Delillo, 2006, pp. 451-452). The first period of time after Lee’s funeral is not easy for Marina who stays in a motel with many armed men who are protecting her. She is a widow with two little girls. In his last reference to Marina in the novel, Delillo gives a positive note about Marina after Lee’s death: “It is amazing how her English improved right after Lee is killed. It is amazing how she suddenly has a cigarette in her hand, which I never witnessed when Lee was alive” (2006, p. 452). It seems that she becomes finally free, and she starts anew. Ultimately, she might have loved Lee, but her love and decision to marry him was hasty and immature.

Kathleen Wade

Tim O’Brien’s *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994) presents a marriage that is not based on a hasty or an immature decision but it ends unhappily too. Kathleen married John Wade who is not only a man of political ambition but also a politician (a U.S. Senate candidate) who wants to be a more successful politician. A good part of O’Brien’s *In the Lake of the Woods* deals with the relationship and the marriage of Kathleen (or Kathy) and John. Another main theme in this novel is the Vietnam War –

John's participation in it and his subsequent feelings and reactions to his experience in My Lai Massacre. John's experience in Vietnam has certain considerations in Kathy's final disappearance. She disappears while being with John in the Lake of the Woods in northern Minnesota where they retreat after John's defeat in the senate election. They escape the hard shock of the defeat and the humiliation of others, especially after the revelation of Wade's participation in My Lai Massacre.

Kathy and John meet when they are students in the University of Minnesota. They fall deeply in love. After graduation, John decides to volunteer for Vietnam service in 1967. He joins Charlie Company which gets involved in My Lai Massacre. Kathy and John keep in close touch and they write to each other. After his return from the war, they marry and he decides to study law. He confides his ambition to Kathy as the narrator asserts: "Politics, it was all he'd ever wanted for himself" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 49). Attending College of Law is a good start for him in his political ambition. After that, he spends three years as a legislative liaison, six years in the state senate, and four years as lieutenant governor. Finally, he fails in the senate elections.

O'Brien announces from the very beginning of the novel that Kathy and John are unhappy. His title for the first chapter of the novel is "How Unhappy They Were" (1994, p. 1). So, the reader expects to meet unhappy couple. They come to a cottage in the Lake of the Woods as an attempt to reconstruct their life that is spoiled by revealing John's involvement in the Massacre. Kathy and John want to be happy. They want to believe that things are not so bad. They want to believe that losing the election is not the end of the world. They pretend to be happy and able to start anew in a different place like "Verona," (O'Brien, 1994, p. 2) and then they can have a house and many children. They speak about a lot of dreams while under blankets at night. They dream of the furniture of their house. They play a wishing game of the places they will travel to where life is perfect and nothing ends terribly: "They envisioned happiness as a physical place on the earth, a secret country, perhaps, or an exotic foreign capital with bizarre customs and a difficult new language, but they were willing to learn" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 3). Their dreams appear so romantic and their wishes are difficult to be believed like having thirty-eight babies and hiring a bus in Verona for them (O'Brien, 1994, p. 6).

The reader might wonder that if they are unhappy now, are they happy before John's defeat in the election? Their relation before marriage seems to be normal in

general. They have been a lively couple. They used to date each other, go out, and play games. However, there are few things that create an early suspicion for the reader about John's way of thought about Kathy. He used to spy on her in the university. He wants to know what she does during his absence. Kathy knows about his spying but she ignores it. The other issue that arouses the doubt of the reader or even Kathy herself is the language of some letters that he writes to her during his service in Vietnam. In one of his letters, he writes to her describing their love as two snakes that he has seen in Pinkville which are swallowing each other's tail. It is a weird circle that brings the two heads closer to each other: "a perfect Number One Yum-Yum" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 61). He can see this act of eating or ending one another as a typical act of love. The narrator of the novel states that "[John] was crazy with love" (1994, p. 60). In another correspondence, he tells Kathy how the guys in Charlie Company admire and believe his magic tricks and how they call him Sorcerer. This note makes Kathy fear him and she stops her letters for a while. Then, she sends him a card advising him to "[b]e careful with the tricks. One of these days you'll make me disappear," (O'Brien, 1994, p. 38) and she includes no funny stories about her family and friends as she usually does.

Kathy probably fears John's behavior of spying and his acts of magic, but she married him upon his return from Vietnam in 1969. She announces in front of John in her wedding day that "[w]e'll be happy... I know it" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 148). In order to make everything clear or ready for this happy marriage, Kathy asks John as early as their honeymoon about any secret or misgiving he wants to tell her about and he "shook his head and said no" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 45). Apparently, she trusts his answer, and she does not expect any ill doing. Her question indicates that she wants their life to be clear at the beginning of their marriage although the narrator reveals nothing about her past and John does not ask her about it. In the tenth chapter of the novel, the reader knows that after six years of marriage, the passion is still there between Kathy and John (1994, p. 59). However, Kathy notices a strange thing about John. She finds him yelling in his sleep loudly and desperately. She asks him about it, and he answers simply with a laugh that it is a bad dream. She finds his voice a strange one, and she feels that he is another person while he is yelling; nonetheless, she does not insist that he should see a psychiatrist. She convinces herself that he is fine (O'Brien, 1994, p. 75).

John's political career starts immediately after marriage. Kathy is a good supporter for him during his career and in his final campaign for senate elections. Mostly, she trusts her husband and has confidence in his political goals: "John wants to do things. That's the point of it" (O'Brien, 1994, p.150). John spends six years in the state senate and works hard in his campaigns with Tony Carbo, who is John's campaign manager. John, also, spends a lot of money on his political goals. He is admired by people and there are talks about his bright, successful future in politics: "[H]e found his greatest pleasure in the daily routine of legislative politics, the give and take, the maneuvering" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 151). Steven Kaplan points out that politicians in general create an image of themselves and perform various roles for the public in order to be liked. This role suits John Wade very well because he is a sorcerer and his magic makes him a master of manipulation (O'Brien, 1994, p. 208). Carbo says in one of the novel's evidence chapters that "politics and magic were almost the same thing for [John]. Transformations—that's part of it—trying to change things. When you think about it, magicians and politicians are basically control freaks" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 27). "Manipulation" is exactly what Kathy herself feels about John's political career when she asks him what is behind his political ambition. His answer is that he wants to change things. He tries to explain to her how she is wrong and how there is no need to be sinister: "He talked about leading a good life, doing good things for the world. Yet even as he spoke, John realized he was not telling the full truth. Politics was manipulation" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 35).

Deception wraps up John's political life and it is reflected on his relation with his wife. He does give her a lot of promises about a happier life and a better future but everything is dependent on his political success: "[I]t was a happiness directed toward the future" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 152). John's feelings and promises are not true; he himself cannot believe them. The narrator shows how John's quest for this political success eats up all John's time including weekends and holidays. Kathy and John defer many things, cancel travelling to save money for John's campaigns, cut back on luxuries, and even cancel having a house of their own. Ultimately, a feeling of strain is created between them as an outcome of these limits. They do not go out much and they do not even find the energy to make love (O'Brien, 1994, p.153). John focuses on his future as a politician and makes Kathy focus on that too: "At times it seemed as if they

were making their way up a huge white mountain, always struggling, sometimes just hanging on, and for both of them the trick was to remain patient, to keep their eyes fixed on the summit where all the prizes were” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 153).

He makes his wife dream or think that the prizes are ahead: “A few elections to win, then a few more, and then they’d have the beautiful lives they wanted and deserved” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 226). To realize this end, he convinces her of abortion when she tells him that she is pregnant: “In bed that night John held her close. They were young, he told her. Plenty of time. They were near the top of that mountain they’d been climbing, almost there, one last push and then they’d rustle up a whole houseful of kids. In the morning[,] John made a phone call. Forms were signed” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 155). Kathy, to the reader’s surprise, neither says “no” nor tries to argue about the abortion. She wants to have a baby. After abortion, she has been uncomfortable and there is almost silence that evening between her and John. He tells her that it is a bad timing to have a baby, and she answers with uneasiness that “[a] baby. It’s all I wanted” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 157). Kathy wants to be a mother. Having a baby is something important for a marriage, especially that they seem a happy married couple. In fact, both that night feel uneasy: “[L]ying there in the dark, they also understood that they had sacrificed some essential part of themselves for the possibilities of an ambiguous future. It was the guilt of a bad wager” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 158). She might appear submissive to the reader, but her sister, Patricia S. Hood, describes Kathy in a more practical way. Patricia says addressing John: “Like a little girl or something, all tied up in knots. Couldn’t even think for herself” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 183). Patricia says also that “[Kathy] almost lost herself in you. Your career, your problems” (1994, p. 184). According to Patricia, Kathy tries to play the role of the good wife and to have a kind of self-denial to support her husband.

Thus, everything is sacrificed for John’s political success. Does that mean that Kathy is a happy wife after all (even before John’s defeat)? In Farrell’s perspective, Kathy “seems to be extremely depressed by the abortion she undergoes... since she longs for children and a stable home” (2011, p.144). Farrell adds also that John is busy all the time, and Kathy “grows increasingly dissatisfied with her role as a politician’s wife” (2011, p. 144). As a result, she has a brief affair with a dentist at some point of her marriage. She wants to fulfill the emotional emptiness that she feels. Her sister does not

call that as unfaithfulness. She tells John that Kathy uses this dentist as “a walking panic button, something to wake you up” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 184). Furthermore, Patricia explains that John is the one who acts as unfaithful husband forgetting that Kathy has her own private needs while he is busy all the time with “Little Miss Politics? Wooing the bitch day and night” (1994, p. 184). Another hint about her unhappy life is given by Kathy’s colleague Bethany Kee in the admission office in the University of Minnesota where Kathy used to work. Kee says in an evidence chapter after Kathy’s disappearance that nobody in the office can figure out whether Kathy is happy in her life or not. Kee explains that she tries to remember whether Kathy shows any sign of depression, but Kathy reveals nothing about her life: “You got the feeling that she was basically happy, or that she thought she *could be*... Maybe she was just a great actress” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 289). Patricia explains also later in another evidence chapter that her sister loves John so much but she cannot see what is happening around her (1994, p. 96). In other words, Kathy cannot see that John is hiding the secret of My Lai Massacre that spoils their life.

Even after revealing this secret by John’s opponent during the election, Kathy confesses to John in the cottage of the Lake of the Woods that she loves him: “there’s this wonderful man I love and I want him to be happy and that’s all I *care* about. Not elections” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 7). After all, she really loves him and sacrifices a lot for his happiness, but hiding the secret from her is the fact that disappoints her. In a conversation with him after the defeat, he apologizes and tells her that “we lost,” but her answer indicates that the matter for her is more than an election defeat: “It was more than that” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 21). In the cottage, she starts to reject him: “John Wade would remember how he reached out to take her hand, the easy lacing of their fingers. But he would also remember how Kathy pulled away after a few steps. She folded her arms across her chest and walked up to the yellow cottage and went inside without waiting for him” (1994, p. 22). They begin to have problems making love; when they go to sleep, Kathy says sarcastically that it is dream time. They lay quietly waiting for a miracle to happen suddenly and their dreams of children and Verona come true. Kathy is not feeling well. She takes Valium and Restoril (1994, p. 9). She becomes tired of “tricks and trapdoors, a husband she had never known” (1994, p. 23). In one morning in the cottage, John notices a look of distance on Kathy’s face while she is washing breakfast dishes. She focuses her eyes elsewhere beyond him (1994, pp. 16-17).

Explicitly, it is the distance that exists between them now. Previously, she knows about his spying on her in the university, but she accepts to be part of that “sick act of his” (1994, p.95). However, she cannot accept another sick act which is, this time, his participation in the massacre. Indeed, she feels frantic and worried for his absence after the newspapers write about his secret (O’Brien, 1994, p. 293). But as time passes in the Lake of the Woods, Kathy feels that there is “a problem of faith. The future seemed intolerable. There was fatigue, too, and anger, but more than anything there was the emptiness of disbelief” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 4). It is not only the emptiness of disbelief, but it is also the illusion and uselessness of pretence. She pretends to be in control of her life and that her marriage problems are soluble. She pretends to maintain their marriage’s old habits and routines. Kathy and John try to simulate their marriage by dreams and clichés: “how it was not the end of the world, how they still had each other and their marriage and their lives to live” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 51). John is defeated in the election but they try to “believe it was not the absolute and crushing thing it truly was,” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 2) but it is the crushing thing that destroys their life and causes Kathy to disappear. It is his lie to her that is crushing. The shock and anger that Kathy feels at the terrible secret that her husband keeps for years along with her seething for years over the abortion. So, all these pains have been enough to drive Kathy away (Farrell, 2011, p. 130).

The narrator suggests many possibilities to explain Kathy’s disappearance. Whatever possibility the narrator suggests for her disappearance, it implies some negative implications. One of them is Kathy’s escape to join another lover. If she really leaves to another lover, this means that she passes through many frustrations. She is fed up with John’s deceit and wants to start anew. If she commits suicide, this also means that she passes through many disappointments and she reaches a peak of distress that leads her to end her life. If John kills her by boiling her face as he boils the house plants the night before her disappearance, it means that her life is ended by the man whom she loves and supports all the time. The happy ending is not expected. The narrator struggles to put a happy ending by suggesting the possibility of Kathy’s and John’s plan to meet somewhere and have a new life together: “My heart tells me to stop right here, to offer some quiet benediction and call it the end. But truth won’t allow it” (1994, p. 301). Hence, the reader regards the possibility of a happy ending as unlikely, and the

tragic end is more probable. In other words, the separation between the husband and the wife, as an end, is more probable.

John (and the reader) does not know after all Kathy's past or more about her personality: "[T]he novel quite openly signals its inability to fathom [Kathy's] complex personality and to provide a confident rendition not merely of her mysterious disappearance, but also of her past" (Ciocia, 2012, p. 145). Wade admits that he has a limited knowledge of his wife despite all of his past spying (O'Brien, 1994, p. 197). He realizes that while he is trying to find clues or reasons for Kathy's disappearance. Her sister reveals that "*Kathy* had troubles, too, her own history, her own damn life!" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 263). However, she does not clarify Kathy's history, or she does not describe how her "damn life" looks like. One puzzling thing about Kathy's character is her sudden vanishing. John says that "she had a personality that lured him on, fiercely private, fiercely independent" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 33). She may vanish just like that while they are in a shop or a cinema to buy a pack of gum, for example, and forgets to return. Then, John will find her somewhere else like the library, as she does one time. John understands "her need to be alone, to reserve time for herself, but too often she carried things to an extreme that made him wonder" (O'Brien, 1994, pp. 33-34). So, Kathy seems to have her own world sometimes, or she needs to resort to herself at certain times. This habit might or might not affect her disappearance's possibilities, but it means that she has a background of unknown troubles that do not end after her marriage. Her marriage or love to John does not give her any better life.

Actually, John's own background, on the other hand, affects Kathy's life more negatively. He has a drunken father who used to tease John. The father committed suicide and John finds suddenly that his father whom he loves is gone. This sense of loss makes John obsessive of loving the ones close to him. He always remembers the fact that the people he loves might go or leave him to pain unexpectedly. Similarly, he is obsessed with loving Kathy as Patricia points out: "She was my sister—why can't you just leave her alone? It's like you're obsessed" (O'Brien, 1994, p. 191). If he might have killed her, it would be because he feared to lose her like his father (Farrell, 2011, p. 132). John's love for Kathy seems really a weird kind of love. He develops a desire to merge with her and meld their bodies together: "There were times when John Wade wanted to open up Kathy's belly and crawl inside and stay there forever. He wanted to

swim through her blood and climb up and down her spine and drink from her ovaries and press his gums against the firm red muscle of her heart. He wanted to suture their lives together” (qtd. in Farrell, 2011, p. 129). This kind of merging and the snake image that he mentions before to Kathy indicate how his love for Kathy is really obsessive. In addition to obsession, Farrell finds that John’s love for Kathy is “destructive, an urge to actually consume the other person [or Kathy]” (2011, p. 129). So, again if he might have killed her, it would be to possess her completely (Farrell, 2011, p. 130).

Such kind of love will not make a happy wife. Her sister and colleague provide plenty of evidence that Kathy is discontent with her role as a politician’s wife and that her life has been troubled long before John lost the election (Farrell, 2011, p. 130). He makes Kathy live a life of manipulation and deception. Out of her great love for him, she aborts her baby and plays the game of climbing the political ladder along with her role as a good politician’s wife. Previously, Carbo points out that Kathy “got you galore. You here, you there” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 221). Carbo’s remark refers to Kathy’s dissatisfaction with her identity as a politician’s wife. Perhaps what she looks for at all is having a baby and having a house of their own to live normally like any other family. She prefers this ordinary life to the “political wifey routine—paste on the smiles and act devoted. It gets pretty demeaning” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 184). Kathy hates all that time: “[She] despised it all, every crummy minute” (O’Brien, 1994, p. 184). By time and by the disclosure of My Lai secret, her relation or love for John reaches a new height of estrangement (Kaplan, 1995, p. 197); consequently, she disappears from her current life with John (no matter what really happens to her).

Conclusion

One of the important questions that O'Brien's novel explores is: "... how well does one ever get to know the person one marries? To what extent can such [a question] even be answered?" (Kaplan, 1995, p. 211). The novel does not really answer the question. This question is also applied to Marina who does not know Lee very well before deciding to marry him. She does not even know his motives after marriage. She is shocked like other people when knowing that he assassinates President Kennedy. The same way, Kathy is shocked when knowing about John's experience in My Lai. Both Lee and John have mental troubles. Lee and John are affected by a troubled childhood, an absence of a father, and painful experiences. These circumstances are reflected on their lives and marriages. What Marina and Kathy repeatedly and obviously ask for is happiness. Marina wants to live happily with Lee in America, a country that fascinates her. Kathy looks to have a baby and live with John in a house that they own, and to travel together and hang out with friends. If Lee and John have a political ambition, their wives do not seem to object if it takes a normal process: not to get rid of a baby, not to hide horrible secrets, not to kill others, and not to assassinate a president. Being a politician or having a political expectation does not mean to sacrifice a family, but this is what happens to Marina and Kathy.

Covertly, one cannot put the blame only on the husbands here. What about Marina and Kathy's effect on their marriages or husbands? One can consider Marina and Kathy acting submissively or emotionally at certain times. For example, Marina could refuse Lee's beating instead of accepting it silently. She might convince him to stay in Russia instead of leaving to the United States. In Russia, they lead a good life and Lee used to be a good husband. She follows her overwhelming desire to go to the United States. Kathy, on the other hand, does not argue with her husband about abortion. She does not suggest thinking about this matter carefully. She does not argue about keeping their personal life away from his political career. Even when she has a tongue slip criticizing the political career, she immediately says that she is joking (O'Brien, 1994, p. 20). She does not consider seriously his sleeping disturbance or some of his unstable behavior. She does not try to consult a doctor for him; instead, she vanishes at times indifferently. There is no real conversation between the husband and the wife in these two novels. There is no fruitful argument. There are only hints and

angry silence. The absence of real communication besides the extreme political expectations of the two husbands lead to ending the two marriages unsuccessfully.

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