

Abstract

Seven short stories written by Joyce Carol Oates in the 1960s and the 1970s are analysed in this thesis from the perspective of various literary techniques that Oates employs in her writing. The stories are “Pastoral Blood,” “A Girl at the Edge of the Ocean,” “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?,” “Upon the Sweeping Flood,” “Norman and the Killer,” “The Dead” and “How I Contemplated the World from the Detroit House of Corrections and Began My Life Over Again.”

The first part of this thesis is theoretical. The introduction gives a sense of Joyce Carol Oates as a serious writer and presents her conviction to depict culture and people of her time. The second chapter introduces the American reality of the 1960s and 1970s and presents all key events of the era. The first part of the chapter focuses on Detroit and the de-civilizing process of the 1960s connected to the upsurge of violence in the U.S. The second part is concerned with struggles that began in the 1960s and continued in the 1970s and challenged the role of the president, and by extension of the upper classes, in society. The last part of the chapter contains a basic summary of the civil rights movement.

The third chapter gives an overview of some of Oates’s literary influences and literary streams and techniques often found in her work: realism, psychological realism, naturalism, surrealism and the grotesque and the gothic.

The fourth chapter presents arguments that form the foundation for the analysis and interpretation of the stories. The chapter, *A dichotomy of realism and of “the other,”* provides an introduction for two literary spheres that are found, in different amounts, in each story. The first sphere is more realistic and naturalistic as it is anchored in reality: either in details with which the characters are described, or in social realities of the time, including violence and crimes or political problems. The second sphere also reflects these problems, but is more subjective, dreamy, surreal and grotesque.

The fifth chapter moves on to the interpretation itself and applies the aforementioned theory to stories “Pastoral Blood” and “A Girl at the Edge of the Ocean” focusing especially on realism and psychological realism and on the themes of isolation, madness and also on love that is, in many variations, a central theme for all selected stories. One of the key terms of the chapter is “mimetic transcriptions” which emphasizes the role of experience in the narratives describing how the action is replaced by reflections on reality. Furthermore, this chapter presents typical Oatesian characters under the pressure of outside forces succumbing to threats of contemporary society. At the same time they are detached from the events that

are taking place around them. The sixth chapter shows a diminishing role of realism and stronger tendencies of surrealism in “The Dead.” It serves as a stepping stone to social and natural forces that become essential for the characters in the next chapter. Similarly as in the fifth chapter it follows a pursuit of love and shares its concern with mimetic transcriptions. Also, it deals with the narrative of a mind numbed by drugs and brings into the interpretation the importance of dreams.

The seventh chapter enriches the spectrum of analysed literary streams by examination of naturalism in “Upon the Sweeping Flood” and “Norman and the Killer.” The chapter focuses on the threats of natural, social and sociological forces to which the characters succumb and on violence they subsequently commit. The essential theme of the stories is human impotence.

The theme of dreams is further analysed in the eighth chapter that adds a dimension of the grotesque working within a frame of surrealism. The analysed story is the most anthologised story of Oates: “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”

The ninth chapter provides an insight into the most experimental story from the selection: “How I Contemplated the World from the Detroit House of Corrections and Began My Life Over Again,” notable especially for its use of experiments with time and narration which is given in a series of notes for an essay.

The concluding chapter presents a synthesis of all analysed stories; at first from the perspective of chronology; secondly from the perspective of interpersonal relationships: either intergenerational or relationships between a man and a woman. The chapter attempts to find connections between the thematic circles and the use of literary techniques. The role of violence (mainly gendered) is essential for the final synthesis, especially in its connection with communication (or more likely impossibility of communication) which reveals dysfunctional relationships depicted in many instances by different than realistic techniques.

Key words: Joyce Carol Oates, American literature in the 1960s and 1970s, Realism, Naturalism, Psychological Realism, Surrealism, Grotesque, Experiments