

**OPPONENT'S REPORT  
BA THESIS**

**“A Serious Writer”: Various Literary Techniques and Devices in the Selected Short Stories of  
Joyce Carol Oates from the 1960s and the Early 1970s  
Bc. Daniela Rydlová**

In ten short chapters, Bc. Rydlová's thesis sketches the sociocultural climate in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s; offers brief definitions of realism, naturalism, surrealism and the grotesque; and analyzes selected stories by Joyce Carol Oates. The weakest here is the section that aims to “introduce[...] the American reality of the 1960s and 1970s and present[...] all key events of the era” (4) as four pages may hardly cover “all key events” of these complex decades; moreover, the relevance of this sketch for the subsequent literary analysis is not clear (i.e. the connection between the stories analyzed in the thesis and the sociocultural context in which they emerged should have been further developed, particularly in the chapters devoted solely to Oates). The section on realism, naturalism, surrealism and the grotesque—albeit also brief and somewhat abrupt at the end—is more thorough. The actual analysis of Oates's stories, particularly their movement between “realism” and “surrealism” as well as their recurrent preoccupations, is clear and supported by a good number of secondary sources.

The prose itself is occasionally terse but clear. There are minor errors and stylistic problems, such as “[h]e did not have the same believes” (13), “[i]t has been already mentioned what is the role of violence in Oates's stories” (26), and “[t]hat is that side of her that is presented to the world” (27). Block quotes are incorrectly formatted throughout.

Some questions for the defense:

1. The thesis aims to “construct[...] the notion of Joyce Carol Oates as a serious writer” (9) and indeed, it is repeatedly stressed that Oates is “a serious writer.” What is Bc. Rydlová's motivation for emphasizing the seriousness of Oates's writing? Has it been questioned? Or, is it intended as a contrast with writers who are not serious? Who would these be, in her view?
2. It is argued that “Oates revealed many influences among the giants of the American literature: admitting affiliation with William Faulkner, Henry Melville, John Updike, H. D. Thoreau and Theodore Dreiser, and, understandably because of her use of psychological realism, of Henry James; but her inspiration reaches even to the classics of European literature, for instance Franz Kafka, James Joyce or Fyodor Dostoevsky, and even to the influences of Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche” (16). Flannery O'Connor is mentioned as well; however, aren't there other female writers whom Oates considers influential? And since it is rightly argued that Oates “is a contemporary writer who belongs to the tradition of female writers writing in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (16), could Bc. Rydlová suggest specific names here?
3. As Bc. Rydlová concludes, the thesis focuses on stories about dysfunctional relationships of characters who are for the most part traumatized, suffering and resigned. (Why) is this, in her view, “an accurate representation and an exploration of American lives” (17, 32)?

Proposed grade: 2 (velmi dobře)

Pavla Veselá, PhD.  
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