

## **Stylistic Analysis In The Select Short Fictions Of Joyce Carol Oates**

**<sup>1</sup>R. Moorthi, & <sup>2</sup>Dr. C. Govindaraj**

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Research Scholar (English P/T), Periyar University PG Extension Centre, Dharmapuri, T.N.

E-mail: [moorthi.r770@gmail.com](mailto:moorthi.r770@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor & Head i/c, Dept of English, Periyar University PG Extension Centre, Dharmapuri, T.N.

---

### **Abstract**

*The present research article analyzes about the style of writing adopted by Joyce Carol Oates in her short fictions. Oates' literary works are experimenting with form, genre, allusion, Gothicism and presents post modern allegories of American life. Most of her writing mainly focused on female experiences as both woman and a writer. Oates' experimentation is with fictional form and genre in short fictions dealing with the psychology and culture of the contemporary life. It aims to analyze the story from stylistic point of view discussing the literary and rhetorical devices used in detail. The literary and formative elements of the story, such as first person point of view narration, characters, techniques and allegorical elements are discussed in detail, so as to study a better insight of the story. The article brings out the literary elements that Oates used in her short fictions are to justify female experience, obsession and transcendence and other recurring themes of the story.*

**Keywords:** *stylistics, analysis, short fiction, Gothicism, parody, allegory.*

---

Literature is a form of artistic creation both in criticism and idealization of life. The term Stylistics extract from the word 'style' which makes different sense. It is used to describe the writing pattern of the author. The writer can adopt the style to express the inner thoughts through any form of style into the text. Such style in literature is called 'literary stylistics'. It is used as a symbolic reference to the literary text. Stylistics is a kind of methodology to study the concept of style in language. The study of style in literature can be regarded as a study of the fusion of style in its content. According to Stanley Fish, an American literary theorist has obtained the analysis of Stylistics, an objective way of looking at the language of literature or literary language. It is used to bring out the readers' limelight for better explanation and understanding of the text. Stylistics is a scientific approach to any literary text by investigating and showing its genesis, definitions, concepts and categories. It is a recent development in attempting to study styles, forms, contents in the text. Though it is like a human shadow, it seems to be with man for centuries. Stylistics as a serious multidisciplinary attempt to study styles and as a field that attracts amplified interest in its study.

The writing styles of Oates are from, style, gothic and technique. Her methods always have been to combine the naturalistic world with the symbolic method of expression, so that Oates use to write about real people in real society, but means of expression may be naturalistic, surrealistic or parody. The select short fictions are from the anthologies *Wheel of Love (1970)*, *Faithless: Tales of Transgression (2001)*, *The Female of the Species (2006)*. Symbolism and Temptation are the key terms of Joyce Carol Oates' writing style. According to Creighton claims that Oates' works belong to traditional American Romanticism, her focus is on personality and desire to transcend limitations.

In special qualities, Joyce Carol Oates employs a dense, elliptical prose style, figurative language, the sudden changes between several narrative levels, quick skips between the different levels of time, place and actions, applies flashbacks, foreshadowing, long unstructured sentences, there is some gap in the narration, so that it changes to another character's point of view. An extended metaphor has a symbolic meaning, and teaches a lesson. Being a female writer, Oates also depicts innovative narrative techniques to deliver some cruel and macabre actions such as rape, incest, murder, child abuse, and suicide to delineate the forces of evil with which individuals must challenge. Most of her short fictions are dealing with the themes of grotesque, illusion, reality and obscene and aptly used words that shape her themes and tone. Joyce Carol Oates compared to keep in mind Oscar Wilde, *A little sincerity is a dangerous thing, and a great deal of it is absolutely fatal*.

Oates' portrayals of female characters are almost stereotypes and symbolism of the typical white girl and the devil. She used her writing to reflect her life into the stories, writing style is affected by her own upbringing. Most of her stories are set in suburbs of America where Oates was raised in. Oates has a very contemporary way of writing, the settings and characters in her stories are based on the real life. The protagonists are mostly teenage girl usually addresses them as experiencing a horrific situation. Her writing is so violent and approved from her short fictions have tragic endings, resulting in bloodshed, but sometimes happen to be out of the character's control. Oates' writing style is very serious and it carries the sensation in everyday life. Such issues are kidnapping rape, it has been portrayed sensitively on the protagonist Connie in the short story, *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*, and it is analyzed stylistically based on Oates' forms, genres, symbols, methods, techniques and parody are considered. Finally, the findings and analyses are listed in the article.

Oates employs symbol as one of the literary elements in her short fictions, it analyses that Oates used culture as a symbol, the ultimate fragmentation of reality and existed as real things. In writing, the symbols and images are to be considered as mental picture which means to the senses. The main focus of the readers is on looking at the writer's choice of language. Oates used to signify symbols, images like car, house, gun, and rabbit in a hut are the key images to describe the symbolic references in her short fictions. Oates considers her writing style more experimental than literary. On *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been*, the protagonist Connie, the teenage girl, Oates makes an ordinary tale into an extraordinary tale by combining two powerful symbolic character traits. The traits are exposed in the form of the modern rock hero and the ancient demon lover, Arnold Friend. One day Connie's parent went out of the house; Arnold kidnaps Connie into a local Restaurant for his convenience and abuses her sexually. Violence is the root cause of sensation and suffering on Connie's innocence and adolescence.

With her unique use of descriptive words, Oates makes the readers to feel disturbing experience by the violence in the story. Connie, a young girl is the victim of sexual violence, but it is symbolically treated a perfect female figure. This story is similar on many levels to analyze literary elements but differs in the symbolic reference of the sexual threat. This story was dedicated to Bob Dylan, and Oates has claimed that the story was influenced by Dylan's haunting song *It's All Over Now, Baby Blue*. Connie spent her time daydreaming, but she is a symbolic tale of an under privileged girl who became a globally recognized icon of the American dream. The narrative setting, its structure and the portrayal of its characters, suggest that

*Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been*, is a parody of the inspiration by the tales of Charles Howard Schmid also known as *The Pied Piper of Tucson*, was an American serial killer.

Another story of Oates' *The Female of the Species* consists of nine short stories collection of mystery and suspense which is no less violent and impressive. Oates borrowed this title from Rudyard Kipling's poem but she literally exemplified his refrain: *The female of the species is more deadly than the male*. Oates reveals her female experience from the dark and deadly sides of females irrespective of age like young girls, housewives and old aged mothers. In recent short fictions of Oates applies mystery and suspense are the two different innovative themes make the readers to create interest like a powerful drug. It emphasizes that the readers at one page, one taste, can tempt speedy feeling that it takes an almost superhuman effort not to finish everything off in just single sitting. From the short story *Banshee*, the unnamed protagonist as Baby is six years old girl who extremely anti-sentimental towards her Mother and Father due to new born baby in their family. Oates creates a darkly threatening mood which demonstrates precisely achieved through her artistic creative writing.

*The Banshee* is concerned with her new Baby, a half brother get into upstairs of a high tower to a widow's walk, during a summer party in the family's seaside house. Though no tragic incident has happened yet, the narration ends with suspense and sadness have reached a climax. Because of the narrative techniques used by Oates, namely a combination of third person narrative and intension of the readers makes to feel as first person view, so that everything is seen through baby and only her voice is heard. Thus the reader finally identify with the central character the girl, climbing the steps with her new baby brother in her arms and states that *Her arm was hurting too, Where Baby flailed and kicked like a crazed cat, her arm was so tired* (49). This emphasizes the sense of suspense and mystery that Oates' narrative techniques to highlight the message to the readers.

In the short story, *Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi* is an example of third person narrative with an omniscient narrator and focus internally. The title of the story is ironic, the language and semantic ambiguity are striking grotesque form. The narrative technique works somewhat differently the protagonist teenage girl, heroine nickname as *Doll*. Her cunning plan with her step father happens to kill the client in his bath with a razor blade. In addition to that, the main focus is not only on the girl, but also her father, the client to divert the narrative to get more attention of short narration, i.e., the central theme is highlighted in the simple sentences without conjunctions. Oates describes the characters to be equally evil and pitiful in many ways, *Doll* should make more sympathy over the other child character *Banshee*. The readers have no sympathy over the two girls due to grotesque description of the child, half woman, half child. *Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi*, that Oates creates more suspense and fears among the readers, by focusing on the narrative techniques successively, the writer makes it clear in addressing the literary elements like realism, expressionism, symbolization, and literary manipulations.

The purpose of this article is to analyze literary elements from the select short stories of Oates, in these stories, Oates portrays that women of all ages and situations are represented as murderers thus they were out of control. It is found that the first time Oates addressed women as murderers but in the two stories even six years child and twelve year old girls are turned into killers. Therefore, Oates turns her stories with the help of usual conventional images, such as women as the weaker sex and children as symbols of innocence and purity, but sometimes projected children as victims. Thus, Oates aptly uses the narrative

techniques, approaches, form, style and genre to offer challenging stories in which ends in moral values, traditional representations and formal patterns. The climax part of the stories are disturbed, but not distorted, it leaves to the understating of the readers.

In the two stories, Oates therefore using children's voices to create suspense and fear that makes the readers more interesting, thus, it is utterly controlling and even manipulating. On the whole, the first story *Banshee* can be read as Gothic fiction, but the second one *Doll*, the portrait of the girl and equally ambiguous portraits of the male characters. Oates represents horror and even dramatizes and objection to put them at a distance.

Oates' another recent trending story *Gun Love*, the protagonist is so young, attractive, fair-haired lady who realizes her discomfort that she has molested sexually by her ex-lover. This story is written in sexy, episodic prose style that Oates has used this disconnected style in older works especially in novels. Meanwhile, the prose style breaks where the action twists between the encounters is likely in the form of diary entries, before shifting from one to another. This is the special form of writing style what Oates has deliberately used in short stories to make the audience to imagine the suspense in her style, especially in short fictions. Violence, Death and Sexual threats are the most predominant themes of her writing.

In the story, *Lover*, Oates used first person narration that a beautiful young single woman is having affair with a married man who is very obsessive, but the man does not faithful to her, so that the man ends it. Oates uses the realistic style to expose the nature of woman with chaos and disaster caused only to woman. Usually, woman feels pride of herself toward men. Therefore, Oates' narrative skill in this story describes herself as having intentionally disguised herself. The woman is not killed instead she gets the experiences of self-pride only. *Pride would never allow her to risk such hurt (48)*. *Lover* could be read as a narrative about a woman who simply loses the faith on men, later becomes suffered in mental disorder and Oates attacks that the man who she had loved once through this narration is highlighted intentionally. The lady failed in her focus to kill the man behind the wheel of her brand new Saab car, as a murder weapon.

In these stories, Oates explores how western culture's attitude of female violence affects their own chosen modes on expression of aggression. Oates' female characters are portrays as insane, aggressive, freaks and finally punishes her violent behavior with death. In other aspects, the narrative style of Oates is more complex than male, the treatment of minorities and weaker individuals like women by the stronger collective groups (men) of the society. Women alienated by her and by the society and other destructive force like fevered imagination and evil. The causes may be love and lust lead to violence on women, but sexual abuse on female child is highly violent. The sensational themes like emotional distress, incest and racism are appreciable. Liberty of using weapons in the American society like guns, rifles, other destructive tools are the main causes lead to violence on women and children.

Joyce Carol Oates is certainly not the first woman writer to address the issues of American society, but her approach, style and techniques are very unique then her contemporary writer. Her writings of short fictions make valid interpretation and standard judgement about the society of America. Most of her writings focus on themes of grotesque, violence, death and lust are all present in her novels, short fictions, but the presence of these elements never accompanied by emotional involvement on the part of the author. Female characters are daring enough to face the challenges and fit right to the male dominated society, they

are not evil, but merely human. As the Critics analyzed these characters are more realistic than artistic, that Oates claims herself a woman first than a writer by presenting immoral characters in an immoral society.

According to the lexicographer, Dr. Samuel Johnson, *Language is a dress of thought*, to prove the statement, Oates' style is formal, carry away an impression entirely feministic that Oates seems to be writing her own emotions and mental catharsis. Her style would be added feather to her language in short fictions that are gothic genre and horror stories. Oates was strongly influenced by the renowned literary figures such as Kafka and James Joyce in writing. Moreover, the writing style reflects certain attitude towards the female characters that deprives their misfortunes of situation and significance. Oates gives a clear vision to the readers through the prism of her unique style and creates suspense at the end part in the story. The readers may contradict to guess the completion of the story.

#### REFERENCES:

- [1] Oates, Joyce C. *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?: Selected Early Stories*. Princeton [N.J.: Ontario Review Press, 1993. Print.
- [2] ---. *The Faithless: Tales of Transgression*, The Ecco Press, 2001. Print.
- [3] ---. *The Female of the Species: Tales of Mystery and Suspense*, London, 2006.
- [4] ---. "Why is Your Writing so Violent?" *New York Times Book Review*, 1981.
- [5] Sjoberg, Leif "An Interview with Joyce Carol Oates." *Conversations with Joyce Carol Oates*. Ed. Lee Milazzo. Jackson: UP of Mississippi.