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Joyce Carol Oates: Fantastic, New Gothic and Inner Realities

Tanya Tromble

1 The juxtaposition of highly realistic passages with others that much more resemble flights of fancy is an important characteristic of Joyce Carol Oates's fiction. However, it is not one that has been consistently accepted and understood. Readers have been disconcerted by the structure and language of long Oates novels such as *The Falls*[1] which begin in the past, using fairy-tale or mythological language and gradually give way, as the plot chronologically rejoins the present, to a language more resembling realism. This is a problem which has plagued the reception of Oates's work since the beginning of her career as scholars such as Rose Marie Burwell have pointed out. In an article about Oates's early novel *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, Burwell counters critics who lament the melodramatic nature of the denouement by focusing on the philosophical nature of Oates's realism, a realism "of a metaphysical brand that recognizes among first principles the existence of real evil—not the sentimentalized social evils of Steinbeck and Dreiser—but the ubiquitous, gratuitous evil potential in all human relations" (57). Indeed, Oates's realism must be understood in terms of unconscious, emotional response rather than as the expression of cold, hard fact. To this end, Oates's realistic stories often include fantastic interludes which are the result of characters struggling to make sense of mysterious elements of their existence. For the author, these different levels of meaning are not at all incompatible. Rather, their juxtaposition mirrors the way the difference between past and present is actually experienced in real life. In her essay "On Fiction in Fact," she explains that "the truth of one era becomes, as if by an artist's sleight of hand, the mythology of subsequent eras" (78). Thus, the past can only ever be viewed through a distorting lens, one of which is the fantastic mode. For the purposes of this article, Todorov's well-known definition specifying the fantastic as residing in the moment of hesitation will be the one of reference:

> In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know [...] there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and the laws of

> the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. [...]
> The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty [...]. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (25)

2 Oates's conception of the problematic nature of our relationship to time can help explain the reference to philosophical ideas that may be noticed throughout her fiction. In addition to the incessant existential questioning of her characters, Oates occasionally mentions the theories of actual philosophers. One of these is Arthur Schopenhauer, who developed a theory of knowledge that corresponds to the problematic dichotomy between past and present to be found in Oates's works. In Schopenhauer's philosophy, one can only ever know the present. In an essay entitled "On the Vanity of Existence," he explains: "Our existence has no foundation on which to rest except the transient present. Thus its form is essentially unceasing *motion*, without any possibility of that repose which we continually strive after" (52-53). This concept is rendered in Oates's work by an instability of meaning that the textual analysis in this article will seek to highlight.

3 Also in "On Fiction in Fact," Oates insists on the problematic nature of language when put to work in an attempt to communicate past experience: "In any case, language by its very nature tends to distort experience. With the best of intentions, in recalling the past, if even a dream of the previous night, we are already altering—one might say violating—the original experience, which may have been wordless and was certainly improvised" (77). This insistence on the problematic nature of language recalls the work of another philosopher alluded to by Oates, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who believed that our difficulty in deciphering the world around us is intricately related to our problematic understanding of the workings and limits of language. Wittgenstein argued that some things can only be "shown," and not "said," such as ethics, aesthetics, religion and "problems of life." A. C. Grayling explains: "In Wittgenstein's view such matters are not themselves ruled out as nonsensical; it is only the attempt to say anything about them which is so," as they belong to the realm of the mystical (19). Oates's adherence to such philosophical ideas combined with her desire to explore the emotional and unconscious realms contributes to the legitimacy of a project to employ different aesthetic modes to communicate different realms of experience. This article will discuss the way in which Oates uses the fantastic mode as a tool to create gothic effect[2] and convey an instability of meaning that she considers to be inherent to human experience.

Psychological Realism

4 Oates's use of the fantastic in her fiction is intimately related to her understanding of her work as "psychological realism," which she sees as a mode that seeks to mimetically depict the mental states of her characters, thus opening up to her readers the possibility of accessing the unseeable dimension of lived experience.[3] With Oates, realism, as understood in its strictest sense as "a mode of writing that gives the impression of recording or 'reflecting' faithfully an actual way of life" with an "emphasis on external reality" (Baldick, *Literary Terms* 281-282), does not apply because of her insistence on the importance of depicting the interior life. Pam Morris explains:

"from an anti-realist, postmodern position [...] unmediated knowledge of the world is not available, discourses or textuality constitute the only sense of reality we can possibly perceive and know" (142). On the other hand, Wayne C. Booth, in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, offers a discussion of realism that gives the concept pertinence in Oates's fiction. Booth argues most novelists would agree that realistic effect is their goal. The problem arises from the fact that there are different conceptions of what constitutes "realistic effect" and therefore different ways of achieving it. Booth's analysis leads him to conclude that there are different views of what "realistic" writing really is and to identify three main variables: subject matter, structure and technique. Realism in the traditional sense concerns those "interested in whether the *subject matter* does justice to reality outside the book." However, a more contemporary view of realism allows for the exploration of metaphysical "Truth" through various techniques such as stream-of-consciousness and open-endings (55-57). It is this latter form of realism, as a mode of writing that explores metaphysical "Truth," that provides the context for Oates's literary project, encompassing her mixture of the gothic, grotesque and supernatural which attempts to represent her characters' emotional states. Her realism is one that seeks to convey "real" emotions, which she considers to be at once "real" and "incalculable," a type of writing she refers to as "psychological realism."[4]

5 In her introduction to *Best New American Voices 2003*, Oates discusses what is meant by the term "psychological realism":

> By "psychological realism" we mean, usually, the establishment of a central consciousness through whose perspective a story is narrated or unfolds; our involvement in the story depends largely upon the plausibility and worth of this central consciousness. Do we believe in him or her? Is the fictional world convincing? Unlike fantasy, realism derives much of its power from a skillful evocation of time and place. (x)

6 Three years later, she explains in an interview: "The tradition in which I see myself is that of psychological realism, which attempts to mirror the complex outside world of society, politics, art, domestic life, as well as to interpret it" (Burns). This conception of her fictional project has remained steady throughout her career as she referred to herself as a "psychological realist" as early as 1974, explaining that this involves taking "the area of the human psyche, or mind, as the centre of all experience of reality" (qtd by Waller 41).[5] Thus, for Oates, psychological realism involves recounting a story from the rational view of a coherent (realistic, because believable) personality, meaning that developing the unconscious depths of the characters is as important as positing them in an authentic and believable exterior world.[6] To this end, the careful selection of detail is an important component of Oates's psychological realism: "There are in general two kinds of writers. The first—and older—kind wants to report incidents as if they were real, things that have already happened. The second is not content with 'reporting' events but wants to evoke their pyschological reality for the reader, through the use of sensuous details and symbols" (Oates, "An Eye for Detail" 41). In creating the various psychological realities that make up the "lives" of her many characters, Oates occasionally uses the fantastic mode, with its inherent hesitation, to depict characters permanently trapped in liminal states, struggling with shifting identities. In this way, she attempts to account for the reality of the mysterious states of the mind.

7 Oates's fantastic stories are almost always gothic stories as well in that the event that causes hesitation on the part of the reader is intimately linked to the mysterious

element of the past that weighs so heavily on the character's present. The story "Fossil-Figures," for example, appropriately highlights the relationship in her work between the fantastic and the gothic by literally transforming the protagonists into buried secrets. In the three other short stories chosen for this study, Oates takes a slightly different approach to the use of the fantastic than that used in "Fossil-Figures." In each of them, fantastic occurrences are used to propel the action of the story, occurrences that remain unquestioned by the protagonists but which the reader, through the stories' constructions, is invited to doubt. In "The Temple," otherworldly noises lead to a shocking discovery. In "Secret Observations on the Goat-Girl," a seemingly marvelous creature lives on the outskirts of a family farm. For the insomniac narrator in "Why Don't You Come Live With Me It's Time," dreams really do seem to be true. Each of these stories has been associated with the New Gothic through its collection in a volume of gothic stories[7] which seems to indicate that Oates considers the fantastic mode particularly apt at evoking the interior entropy characteristic of the new gothic.

"Fossil-Figures"

8 In October 2011, Oates was awarded a World Fantasy Award for Best Short Fiction for her story "Fossil-Figures"[8] in which she returns to one of her gothic themes of predilection: the doubling of the self. This story is the tale of two fraternal twin brothers whose unhappy fusion in the womb leads to the development of two complete opposites who share only a birthday and become estranged in adulthood. The "demon brother" is charming, handsome and successful (15). He becomes a lawyer, then a senator. The "smaller," "sickly brother" is introverted and crippled, possibly as a result of abuse received from his brother in childhood (15, 18). He remains in the family home and becomes an underground artist recluse. The prodigal demon brother, disgraced by indictments for bribery and various other federal violations, eventually returns home to his twin who has been waiting for him for over twenty years. The two presumably live out their days in fusional bliss for we learn in an italicized passage at the close of the story's epilogue that their bodies are found in an unusual position:

> The brother to be identified as Edgar Waldman, eighty-seven, embracing his brother Edward Waldman, also eighty-seven, from behind, protectively fitting his body to his brother's crippled body, forehead tenderly pressed to the back of the other's head, the two figures coiled together like a gnarled organic material that has petrified to stone. (28)

9 The two brothers have been transformed, in death, into the same sort of "dream/nightmare" figures depicted by the artist brother in his series of collage canvases entitled "*Fossil-Figures*" (24). The fantastic element of this story is contained in the single pronoun "it" at the beginning of the final italicized passage—"*...When* it *happened could never be determined precisely since the bodies were frozen and preserved from decay* [...]" (27, my emphasis)— for the reader is not to know the details of the deaths. The modal "must" is used for one possible explanation: "*the elderly Waldman brothers in layers of bulky clothing must have fallen asleep in front of a fire in the otherwise unheated house, the fire must have burnt out in the night and the brothers died in their sleep in a protracted January cold spell*" (27-28). However, the reader cannot help but wonder whether there can be another less rational explanation.

10 Thus, the fusion of the two corpses in "Fossil-Figures" can be read as a fantastic episode embodying the hesitation between a scientific explanation of the event as the result of

various modifications in the room's temperature and a supernatural explanation in which the brothers somehow managed to physically, as well as emotionally, merge. In this case, the fantastic occurrence concludes the story, leaving the reader to ponder over the ambiguity of the final image. In the three stories discussed next, however, the fantastic takes a more central role as narrative catalyst.

"The Temple"

11 "The Temple" involves a fifty-year-old woman literally digging up a sordid piece of the past. In this three-page sketch, the female protagonist imagines hearing a "vexing, mysterious sound! [...] as of something being raked by nails" and upon investigation, which involves digging in an abandoned corner of her family's property, unearths a dozen or so "child-sized" bones, including a well-preserved skull (346, 348). She collects the bones and places them lovingly in a privileged space in her bedroom, promising never to abandon them: "In this way the woman's bedroom became a secret temple" (348).

12 When the woman first begins hearing the noise, she imagines there must be some rational explanation: "a small animal, perhaps a squirrel, trapped in the attic beneath the eaves, or in a remote corner of the earthen-floored cellar." However, when her search turns up nothing, she begins to look outside for the origin of the noise and becomes increasingly, the text suggests, open to a supernatural explanation. The sound evokes in her "an obscure horror" and is compared to "a baby's cry." Finally, after two months of increasingly disrupted sleep, she feels she has no choice but to "trace the sound to its origin." As she heads outside to do so, textual clues are already pointing to a relationship between the aural disturbance and a buried part of the family's past as the protagonist follows the sound to "the lush tangle of vegetation that had been her mother's garden of thirty years before" (346). In order to uncover the point of origin, the woman must dig in the dirt as an archaeologist excavating fossils. To do so, she uses garden implements "festooned in cobwebs" which suggests she is venturing into a long-forgotten space, a buried past (347). The hole she digs is compared to "a wound in the jungle-like vegetation," evoking the notion that she may be uncovering a wounded part of the past, both literally and metaphorically. Indeed, the fact that the "terribly distressing" sound has no effect on the steadiness of her heartbeat as she heads to investigate seems to suggest she has a notion, even if it remains unconscious, of that which she is likely to discover (346). This idea is reinforced by the way she responds verbally to the sound as if talking to a living being such as a sibling or a child: "'Yes. Yes. I'm here,' she whispered" (347). Once the skull has been uncovered and lifted gently out of the ground, we read:

> The woman lifted the skull to stare into the sockets as if staring into mirror-eyes, eyes of an *eerie* transparency. A kind of knowledge passed between her and these eyes yet she did not know: was this a child's skull? had a child been buried here, it must have been decades ago, on her family's property? Unnamed, unmarked? Unacknowledged? Unknown? (348, my emphasis)

13 The term "mirror-eyes" together with the unusual attachment the woman feels for the remains—she looks upon them with a "loving eye"—suggest this might be the skull of an unlucky sibling, or ancestor of another generation (348). Oates thus creates an uncanny doubling effect in Sigmund Freud's sense of the uncanny as "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once known and had long been familiar."

The child's skull both frightens by the mysteriousness of its origins and evokes familiarity through the notion that it is a long-lost part of the woman's past. Interestingly, the translation of Freud's essay indicates that both "eerie" (used by Oates in the above passage) and "uncanny" are semantic English equivalents to the German word *unheimlich* used by Freud (124).

14 The shortness of the story encourages speculation on the part of the reader who is told next to nothing about the woman's background, current situation or mental state and is left to make his own conclusions about the authenticity of the supernatural sounds which are wholeheartedly embraced by the protagonist herself. The reader hesitates between embracing the protagonist's interpretation of the noise as the work of a ghostly revenant desirous of having its remains uncovered and considering it rather to be hallucinated or imagined by the protagonist as a way to confront family secrets that have been weighing on her unconscious and have somehow risen to the surface as a result of sleep disrupted by the myriad sounds of the spring thaw.

15 In her introduction to the volume *American Gothic Tales* in which this story is collected, Oates identifies "the surreal, raised to the level of poetry, [as] the very essence of 'gothic': that which displays the range, depth, audacity and fantastical extravagance of the human imagination" (9).[9] Indeed, only in the irrational reality of a dream could the events of this story unfold exactly as they are narrated. Thus, "The Temple," though short, effectively evokes the gothic themes of family secrets and a repressive past, together with both literal and metaphorical feelings of confinement, and an uncanny doubling effect, using the fantastic as a tool by which to evoke the psychological reality of the protagonist.

"Secret Observations on the Goat-Girl"

16 Another example of this technique can be found in "Secret Observations on the Goat-Girl." In this four-page sketch, a young girl tells the tale of a grotesque creature, which appears to be half human and half goat, living "in an abandoned corncrib" at the edge of the family farm. To the narrator and her eight siblings on this timeless farm situated outside an unnamed village, the creature is a source of fear: it has no name and no known family or origins; it is a forbidden object of which the children are not supposed to know; it is "awkward" and therefore "frightening" in its abnormality (187); the uncanny creature is composed of a mixture of goat and human features and makes a sound that is identifiable neither as human speech nor as a goat noise. Furthermore, the creature's arrival at the outskirts of the family property seems to coincide with mental and physical decline in the mother who "rarely comes downstairs now," has stopped dressing and doing her hair, no longer embraces her children, and has acquired a "faint and shrill" laugh (188).

17 Oates enjoys creating stories that allow for the possibility of multiple interpretations and "Secret Observations on the Goat-Girl" does not deviate from this practice. At first glance, this story seems more like a marvelous tale than a gothic one; it could take place in the fairy tale realm of magical births, for example, if we understand the creature to be half human and half animal. However, a closer look reveals a very common Oates theme at the heart of the story, namely, that of children who are deliberately left in the dark about a family secret, but nevertheless sense the secret's dark imprint on the household: "Shame, shame!—the villagers whisper/But never so

that any of us can hear" (188). It is unclear, however, whether this shame should be attached to the father's frequent absences, the mother's seclusion and madness, or the reason for these two which may be either literally or symbolically linked to the presence of the goat-girl. The narrator imagines the creature as her sister and secretly names it "Astrid," which points to the possibility that a new child was expected in the family around the time of its arrival. Thus, in a psychoanalytical, new gothic reading of the text, the deformed goat may be read as the symbol of a human birth tragedy (birth defects, miscarriage, still birth, etc.) of which the children have not been informed, leaving them with the unique coping strategy of projecting their feelings of fear onto the unusual farm creature. Repression, this story seems to show, breeds fear and further horrors as the creature, of which the children have accentuated its human characteristics, is destined for the butcher's block. This is a theme that Oates links with the gothic tradition in America as far back as "our first American novelist of substance, Charles Brockden Brown" who in *Wieland, or The Transformation* created a novel which "is a nightmare expression of the fulfillment of repressed desire" (Oates, *American Gothic* 2).[10]

18 Read in this way, Oates's text provides a fitting example for the anthology in which it is collected: *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*. Her depiction of the terrifying, grotesque farm creature that symbolizes both the fear of unknown origins and the terror of unspoken family tragedy corresponds well to editor Chris Baldick's explanation of the Gothic effect.[11]

"Why Don't You Come Live With Me It's Time"

19 The surreal, hallucinatory, dreamlike quality of Oates's fantastic stories takes a more subtle turn in "Why Don't You Come Live With Me It's Time" where the line between dream and reality seems to become permanently obscured. The story's opening seems at first to present the reader with an actual ghostly apparition: "The other day, it was a sunswept windy March morning, I saw my grandmother staring at me, those deep-socketed eyes, that translucent skin, a youngish woman with very dark hair as I hadn't quite remembered her who had died while I was in college, years ago, in 1966." Yet the remainder of the paragraph reveals the apparition to be nothing more than the woman's own reflection: "Then I saw, of course it was virtually in the same instant I saw the face was my own, my own eyes in that face floating there not in a mirror but in a metallic mirrored surface, teeth bared in a startled smile and seeing my face that was not my face I laughed, I think that was the sound" (149). The grandmother is perhaps no ghost, yet the uncanny apparition in the mirrored surface triggers a troubling memory on the part of the narrator.

20 In the pages that follow, the insomniac narrator, Claire, thinks back to when she was twelve or thirteen years old, remembering the loneliness of the insomniac struggling to understand the phenomenon of elusive sleep, especially a certain type of sleep which can feel so much like death: "sheer nonexistence, oblivion" (150). The majority of the story focuses on one memory in particular. Upon this occasion, Claire remembers sneaking out of the house at three in the morning, shimmying across Ferry Street Bridge which was closed for repairs, and walking to visit her grandmother—a fellow insomniac—who lived several miles away on the other side of the river. However, this is not the simple story of an insomniac's nighttime adventure. As Claire remembers it, the

journey to grandmother's house takes on the full horror of the "Little Red Riding Hood" fairy tale it calls to mind. Grandmother's warm welcome, her kind words and offer to make Claire's favorite oatmeal, take on a sinister tone as the memory progresses and becomes more confused and dreamlike. Claire is ultimately uncertain as to whether the woman who welcomes her so warmly is really her loving grandmother or rather someone out to harm her. She remembers feeling bits of glass in her oatmeal, though she rationalizes the experience, saying "but I never knew absolutely, I don't even know even now: if they were glass and not for instance grains of sand or fragments of eggshell or even bits of brown sugar crystalized into such a form not even boiling oatmeal could dissolve it" (163). Claire eventually runs away in sheer fright and cannot even remember how she got home.

21 Control of the body in the face of danger and fear is one of the central motifs of this story. Not only must Claire master her movements during the dangerous bridge crossing so as not to fall off the unprotected beam into the roaring river below, but the incident is set against the background of insomnia, a troubling state in which one cannot even will oneself to sleep but must simply wait hours for it to come. In this way, the horror Claire experiences at the thought "that meat and bone should define my presence in the universe" (162) is intensified even more by the realization that the body cannot always be controlled.

22 Claire's experiences with sleep can be divided into two kinds. The first, the preferable one, is a constant shifting in and out of wakefulness. The second, the dreaded one, is a heavy, deep, plunging into a state that leaves her feeling "a sense of total helplessness and an exhaustion so profound it felt like death" from which she emerges "shivering and sweating with a pounding heart and a pounding head" (150). In this context, the reader wonders about the reality of the nighttime visit to Grandmother's house and is ultimately uncertain as to whether Claire did indeed make the journey she claims to have made or rather her memory is the result of an insomniac's troubled nightmare, the remains of one of the dark, troubled sleeps she describes falling into. Indeed, Claire's observation upon the occasion that sparked the memory seems to point to such an interpretation: "When you're insomniac the images that should be in dreams are loosed and set careening through the day like lethal bubbles in the blood" (154). If this is the case, Claire's "memory" might be read to hint at repressed terrors in Claire's supposedly privileged relationship with her grandmother whose memory seems to haunt her, as indicated by the ghostly reflection she imagines at the opening of the story.

* * *

23 In August of 1979, when she had recently completed her rambling gothic/fantastic novel *Bellefleur*, Oates quoted Nietzsche in her journal:

> On the artist's sense of the truth ... He (the artist) does not want to be deprived of the splendid and profound interpretations of life... Apparently he fights for the higher dignity and significance of man; in truth, he does not want to give up the most effective presuppositions of his art: the fantastic, mythical, uncertain, extreme, the sense for the symbolic, the overestimation of the person, the faith in some miraculous element in the genius. Thus he considers the continued existence of his kind of creation more important than scientific devotion to the truth in every form, however plain. (Johnson 327)

24 In this way, she seems to suggest that the fantastic is an integral part of the fiction writer's arsenal, intimately integrated into the very act of writing fiction. In the stories studied here, the fantastic mode becomes a tool used by Oates to create gothic effect and convey an instability of meaning that is a hallmark of her fiction. The way in which the fantastic elements are linked to past family events becomes an integral part of Oates's "psychological realism" and, therefore, in the words of Neil Gaiman, a tool by which she seeks to "illuminate the real" (3).

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NOTES

1. Part III of this novel includes a truly fantastic episode in the sense of Todorov's understanding of the fantastic as a moment of hesitation. See the chapter entitled "The Woman in Black."

2. For the purposes of this article, the term "gothic effect" corresponds to the explanation provided by Chris Baldick: "For the Gothic effect to be attained, a tale should combine a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration. This [...] may be translated into more concrete terms by noting that typically a Gothic tale will invoke the tyranny of the past (a family curse, the survival of archaic forms of despotism and of superstitition) with such weight as to stifle the hopes of the present (the liberty of the heroine or hero) with the dead-end of physical incarceration (the dungeon, the locked room, or simply the confinements of a family house closing in upon itself)" (*Gothic Tales* xix).

3. In this respect, Oates's literary project is not so far-removed from that of nineteenth century realist novelists. In his discussion of mimesis and realism, Matthew Potolsky points out: "Language corresponds less obviously to the material world than do the visual arts, so the

differences between a reflection and a conventionalist account of realism in literature take a unique form. Most notably, they turn upon the sincerity of the author. Realist writers often stake their claim to mimetic fidelity on the honesty and objectivity of their aims rather than on the exact correspondence of the work to reality. Realism here is an ethical ideal" (102).

4. Explaining her fascination with the grotesque, Oates writes that it "is both 'real' and 'unreal' simultaneously, as states of mind are real enough—emotions, moods, shifting obsessions, beliefs —though immeasurable. The subjectivity that is the essence of the human is also the mystery that divides us irrevocably from one another" ("Afterword" 307).

5. In a recently reprinted review about Flannery O'Connor's fiction, Oates writes that "the most elevated psychological realism [...] takes as its natural subject the *humanness* of its characters" ("Large and Startling" 109-110).

6. This is similar to the process described by Flannery O'Connor when she evokes the notion of a "realism of distances," distinguishing "a realism of fact" from "the deeper kinds of realism." O'Connor's "realism of fact" is concerned "with the movement of social forces, with the typical, with fidelity to the way things look and happen in normal life" (39). In other words, this is the term she uses to refer to traditional concepts of fictional realism. The kind of realism that interests O'Connor, however, is of a sort that leans "away from typical social patterns, toward mystery and the unexpected" (40).

7. "The Temple": collected in *American Gothic Tales*, Ed. Joyce Carol Oates. "Secret Observations on the Goat-Girl": collected in *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, Ed. Chris Baldick. The edition used in citations for this paper is that found in Oates's collection *The Assignation*. "Why Don't You Come Live With Me It's Time," collected in *The New Gothic: A Collection of Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, Eds. Bradford Morrow and Patrick McGrath.

8. Oates's fiction, especially in its short forms, is increasingly being selected for anthologies of fantastic stories such as Al Sarrantonio's *Flights: Extreme Visions of Fantasy* and Sarrantonio and Neil Gaiman's *Stories: All New Tales*.

9. Oates equates Surrealism with the "elevation of interior (and perhaps repressed) states of the soul to exterior status" ("Afterword" 307). The surreal is thus the realm of a literal reading of the supernatural events alluded to in her stories.

10. In this way Oates puts a new gothic twist on John Barth's postmodern *Giles Goat-Boy*. As if to refute his concept of a literature of exhaustion, she shows how a very tragic, yet human, fear can be attached to the symbol of the goat-child by pointing to the very gothic fear of the unknown that is at the dark center of humanity.

11. See definition in footnote 2.

ABSTRACTS

Joyce Carol Oates fait appel, de manière récurrente dans ses nouvelles, à des événements d'ordre surnaturel : des bruits émanant d'un autre monde peuvent déboucher sur des découvertes macabres ; des créatures fantastiques peuvent cohabiter avec les personnages ; des expériences peuvent se dérouler dans la zone liminale entre rêve et réalité. Pour leur part, les personnages ne se posent pas de questions sur la réalité des différents événements surnaturels survenant dans le récit. De ce fait, les nouvelles s'intéressent non pas à ces événements, mais plutôt à la façon dont ils peuvent être employés comme outils d'exploration de la psychologie des personnages. Cet article examine les apparitions fantastiques dans quatre nouvelles de Oates — « Fossil-Figures »,

« The Temple », « Secret Reflections on the Goat-Girl » et « Why Don't You Come Live With Me It's Time » — afin de voir comment Oates utilise le « réalisme psychologique » dans ses nouvelles gothiques pour représenter l'état d'esprit des différents personnages.

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Tanya Tromble received her PhD from the Université de Provence in 2010, defending her dissertation entitled "Interminable Enigma: Joyce Carol Oates's Reimagining of Detective Fiction." Much of her work in the past few years has been devoted to different aspects of this author's works, including the gothic, parody and metafiction. She has presented papers on Oates at AFEA and SAES conferences in France and her current interest is in Oates's writing style.