

Where has Joyce Carol Oates's Fiction Gone?

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at presenting a chronological view on Joyce Carol Oates's fiction, and thus its variation and evolution. The title of the paper springs from one of the most acclaimed short stories by the author in question, "Where are you going, Where have you been". A writing career which started with her first novel, *With Shuddering Fall* (1964), and continues to the day, speaks for an ongoing process of experimentation with the means of expression. If attempting to find a common thread pervading all her novels, violence can be said to carry the greatest weight in her thematic treatment. However, from the physical violence of the early stages, her novels of the 1980s move towards a more explicit featured violence reaching the phase where characters are able to verbalize violent incidents in the novels of the 1990s. The characters inhabiting her novels are as well a proof of this evolution process. Scholars have criticized the characters of the initial stage as being superficial and inarticulate, who sometimes commit suicide as they cannot bear the burden of their actions. Later novels witness characters, who despite their deficiencies, have learned to make their way through the dark reality of the American society, rarely resorting to suicidal attempts. The paper will also look at the issue of literary movements which have influenced and find reflection in the fiction of Joyce Carol Oates spanning over 5 decades.