

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

„Mystery and Suspense in Joyce Carol Oates’s
Recent Short Fiction”

Verfasserin

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, im Januar 2013

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:	A343
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:	Anglistik und Amerikanistik
Betreuerin:	Univ.-Prof. Dr. Margarete Rubik

I hereby confirm that this thesis was written by myself. I have clearly marked as a quote everything that was taken over by verbatim from secondary literature. I have also indicated when I have taken over ideas from secondary sources.

Marlene Kleinl

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1 Introduction

This Diploma Thesis focuses on the uses and effects of Mystery and Suspense in six selected short stories by Joyce Carol Oates. In order to provide comprehensive analyses of these literary methods, it is important to deal with the most important themes Oates is concerned with in her vast literary repertoire. Furthermore, Joyce Carol Oates's narrative methods and personal and professional understanding of literature is presented, so that the reader of this thesis gets a first impression of the author's literary oeuvre especially in short fiction. Additionally, this initial chapter will include responses of several critics to Oates's work. A further chapter will focus on the significance of short fiction in the American literary tradition, followed by a historical overview of theoretical concepts concerning the form, style, structure and themes of the American by famous authors such as Poe, James and Hawthorne in the 19th century. Modern views on the creation of short fiction will include opinions by Flannery O'Connor as well as Joyce Carol Oates herself. In the next chapter, theories of suspense in narrative fiction will be introduced, including factors that are to be obeyed in order to create a suspenseful text. The closing chapter of the thesis's theoretical part will deal with mystery, not in the sense of the thriller or detective story, but in connection with the popular Gothic literary tradition and especially the American Gothic in which Oates is integrated. Due to the fact that in Gothic fiction an author deals with strange and unexpected events that trigger the reader's curiosity and anticipation, it is a useful point of departure with regard to the mysterious experiences and actions of Oates's characters in the selected stories. In this context I will highlight three Gothic elements which can be identified in several stories: the notion of the double, the portrayal of male and female characters as well as the concept of abjection. These are significant elements in Oates's creation of mystery and suspense.

The analytical part of this diploma thesis will contain an in-depth discussion concerning mystery and suspense in the following six stories, which are taken from three different recent short story collections: "Fossil Figures", "Death Cup" (from *The Corn Maiden and Other Nightmares*, 2011), "The Museum of Dr. Moses" (from *The Museum of Dr. Moses*, 2008), "A Hole in the Head", "Beersheba" (from *The Corn Maiden and Other Nightmares*, 2011) and "Bleed"

(from *Give Me Your Heart: Tales of Mystery and Suspense*, 2011). I have specifically chosen these six short stories, due to the fact that they are part of collections that explicitly focus on personal conflicts between characters which evolve around mysterious situations and experiences. Furthermore, each of the stories includes at least one element of Gothic Fiction. Therefore it is my aim to arrange the six stories under the following considerations: the aspect of the double in “Fossil Figures” and “Death Cup”, the notion of the mad doctor as in “The Museum of Dr. Moses” and “A Hole in the Head”, the revengeful female character from the past as in “Beersheba” and the notion of rape and violence in “Bleed”. Moreover, in “Fossil Figures” and “The Museum of Dr. Moses” the gothic notion of abjection can be analysed.

Every analysis of the stories will consist of two points: the description of plot and characters with the aim to show that a conflict between two opposed characters creates suspense and that the events which are happening are mysterious. The second point is devoted to the formal criteria in the creation of suspense which includes point of view, structure and stylistic elements. The method I will use in order to highlight Oates’s creation of mystery and suspense is both descriptive and hermeneutical.

It is then the final aim of this diploma thesis to figure out in which ways Joyce Carol Oates creates mystery and suspense and its effects on the reader. In this sense it is also my aim to show how her method of mystery and suspense differs between the stories, which similarities can be identified and which story is most effective as suspenseful reading experience. These results will be presented in a comprehensive synopsis, which concludes this diploma thesis.

2 On Joyce Carol Oates

During the last five decades Joyce Carol Oates has become one of the outstanding serious authors in American Literature. Oates has achieved her status as prolific writer due to the fact that she has published a vast amount of fiction, including over forty five novels, eight novellas and more than fifty short story collections in which she established herself as an organ of contemporary American life and culture (see Creighton 151). It is especially the short stories which are praised but also criticised in countless journals, books and dissertations.

Born on June 16, 1938 in Millersport New York, Oates grew up as the eldest of three children in a “rural and impoverished environment” (Johnson 4) and was the first member of her family to enter university with a scholarship to study Philosophy and English (see Johnson 4-5). In this context one quote by her is of importance: “The real clue to me is that I’m like certain people who are not really understood – Jung and Heidegger are really good examples – people of peasant stock, from the country, who then come into the world of literature and philosophy” (qtd. in Creighton 16). After Oates had finished her studies with summa cum laude, she taught at the university of Detroit for six years until she moved to Windsor/Ontario where she established the literary magazine “The Ontario Review” together with her first husband Raymond J. Smith. In this context it should be mentioned, that Oates is also a “fine critic” (Creighton 19), which she shows not only in the Ontario review, but also in numerous other essays published in several magazines. Furthermore, Oates published “two books of critical essays: *The Edge of Impossibility: Tragic Forms in Literature*, New Haven, *New Earth: The Visionary Experience in Literature*”. In 1978 she went to Princeton New Jersey, where she teaches creative writing (see Johnson 3-8).

Due to the fact that her parents were working class people living under economically harsh conditions, a “deep identification with America’s lower classes” (Bloom 2) guided her ever since. In many of her stories, she broaches issues of insulted, injured and outcast American people. Hence, in her first short story collection *By the Northgate* (1963) she portrays a male dominated daily

grind with its violent outbursts and individual psychological struggles. Oates's early stories are marked by playful formal experimentations (see Creighton 113) and she argues that especially the short story genre offers space for "radical experimentation, which might be ill advised in the novel. I like the freedom and promise of the form" (qtd. in Johnson 93). In a further collection entitled *The Wheel of Love* (1970) she becomes devoted to "feminist concerns" (Johnson 95). In the story "Where are you going, where have you been" which is "the most anthologized and most discussed of all of Oates's stories" (Johnson 99), she explores a young girl's "youthful romanticism" (Johnson 101) which is abruptly destroyed when a seductive stranger enters her daily routine in order to trap her in "a conventional, male-dominated relationship" (Johnson 102). Here the fictional allusion to the Gothic romance of the Bronte sisters and the southern Gothic of Flannery O'Connor, as well as her keen sense of the protagonist's torn psyche becomes obvious. According to one of her first biographers Greg Johnson "psychological realism and gothic horror are her best fictional modes" (Johnson 92). Indeed many of Oates's most remarkable stories to follow are shaped around major gothic themes such as violent revenge, dark family secrets, mad male and female characters, sexual obsessions, and particularly an in-depth physical portrayal of the Grotesque. Oates even published two major short story collections which are entirely devoted to the notion of the Grotesque: In *Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque* (1994) and *The Collector of Hearts: New Tales of the Grotesque* (1998), she primarily explores the female body as abject space of horrific experiences concerning menstruation, childbirth and sexual intercourse.

However, in these stories on the Grotesque, as in other collections, it is her aim to re-shape Gothic issues to adopt them to the fears, needs and struggles of contemporary American society. In this sense Oates also defines what she understands by Gothicism: "Gothicism, whatever it is, is not a literary tradition so much, as a fairly realistic assessment of modern life" (qtd. in Johnson 18). Hence, she also makes frequent use of the Gothic mode in order to "create and to identify with heroes and heroines [...]" (Johnson 19). Moreover, the shocks and outbursts of violence that many of her characters have to suffer are a method to engage the reader and according to Walter Sullivan "[...] horror

resides in the transformation of what we know best, the intimate and comfortable details of our lives made suddenly threatening [...]” (8).

Oates constantly lays bare the displeasing thoughts and experiences of her fictional characters by means of obsessive violence, and the critical reactions to this mode of writing, often guided by the question “Why is your writing so violent?” (Johnson 9), inspired her to write an essay entitled the same question, where she argues: “serious writers as distinct from entertainers or propagandists, take for their natural subjects the complexity of the world, its evils, as well as its goods...The serious writer after all bears witness” (qtd. in Johnson, 8). Bearing witness is a crucial element for the creation of her countless different characters and closely linked to “her own creative process” (Bender 48) which she describes as follows:

My characters really dedicate themselves to me. I am not free of them, really, and I can't force them into situations they haven't themselves willed. They have the autonomy of characters in a dream...I am fascinated by people...and I hope my interest in them isn't vampiristic, because I don't want to take life from them, but only to honor life in them. (Bender 48)

This notion also depicts her disagreement with the romantic ideal of the “isolated artist”, who draws his creative genius from his own thoughts (see Creighton 19-25). Therefore in her fiction Oates follows an underlying “monistic philosophical tradition” (Creighton 22), against the idea of a split self (id/ego), arguing that the artist is part of a greater whole and works within a collective cultural tradition (see Creighton 23). Hence, “her fictional inquiry focuses obsessively upon the nature of the self and its relationship to ‘the other’” (Creighton 25). This inquiry also emphasizes her disagreement with a post modern view in some works of literature: “The *stasis* celebrated in much of contemporary literature, the erecting of gigantic paranoid delusion systems that are self-enclosed [...] and self destructing [...]” (Bender 5). Oates’s fictional voice is *dynamic* and created in a mode a reader can often easily follow. The dynamic portrayal of characters often creates suspense, especially in her short fiction, which is one reason why Oates has a large readership and this makes her a best-selling author (see Gardner 99). Due to this fact her work is partly criticised for being too mainstream and readable. This inspired her to write

against the belief “that a best-selling author cannot be good” (Bender 5). In the essay “Whose side are you on?” Oates argues:

For many years our most promising writers have lined up obediently behind Nabokov, Beckett and Borges, to file through a doorway marked THIS WAY OUT. How eagerly they have taken their places! If they glance around at the rest of us, who are holding back, they are ready with merchandized scorn: X is too bourgeois; X is too suburban; X is not experimental: X is being read. (qtd. in Bender 5)

Moreover, the critique Oates is exposed to is also closely linked to the fact that she is a restless and obsessive writer, regularly producing a large quantity of fiction in a short period of time (Johnson 21). In this context, Alfred Kazin argues: “Oates’s many stories resemble a card index of situations; they are not deeply plotted stories that we return to as perfect little dramas [...]” (qtd. in Johnson 21). Hence, this critic rather expects high literary quality by authors who publish less and take more time for a piece of writing. David Madden, another critic, declares: “There is nothing new, nothing avant-garde, camp, pop, absurdist about Miss Oates’s stories...It is difficult, if not foolhardy, to discuss her stories and novels as literary fabrications. If they have form, it is submerged in ‘experience’ as to defy analysis” (qtd. in Bender 3). Here, Oates is criticised for following traditional conventions in creating her fictional world and of being indistinctive in form or even lacking it. Madden’s view concerning her conventional use of fiction she qualifies by stating that: “There aren’t any conventions really...only personalities” (Bender 6). Moreover, it is crucial to add that it is not Oates’s primary concern to labour upon form or style. Concerning the creation of tension in the short story she argues against the significance of any specific vocabulary: “It isn’t ‘words’ or ‘style’ that make a scene, but the context behind the words, and the increase of tension as character come into conflict with one another. ‘Words’ themselves are relatively unimportant, since there are countless ways of saying the same thing” (qtd. in Creighton 25).

Of course, this radical view proves her obsessive fictional engagement with the individual character and his/her relation to culture and a collective experience. This might be true in older stories of Oates. However, as an ardent reader of her fiction, I disagree with her opinion as well as with Madden’s comments, when it comes to her more recent short fiction: The stories to be analysed in the thesis at hand manifest a strong interplay between style, form and content. It is

precisely this combination which essentially affects the reader's engagement with her narratives, as in "Fossil Figures" or "A Hole in the Head". The choice of words is not at all haphazard, but for the most part effective to the point. This view of mine also corresponds with the comment on page two, where Oates argues against the "stasis" in many post-modern works. Obviously in this quote she means a stasis in matters of closed systems of thought, content and character-portrayal that deny the importance of an individual's relation to society and culture, rather than in form and style. But it can be argued that in some of her recent stories Oates creates an overall dynamic and therefore suspenseful reading experience. "Text-as-experience" (Waller 162) is a crucial concern of Oates' and this does indeed also include a reader's experience of her style and form, aspects which Oates often uses and creates by means of a rhythmical, even poetical fluency that these can hardly be ignored and offer the possibility of in-depth analyses.

At this point it is important to mention that the most cruel negative critique of her fiction, which initially can be interpreted as personal attack against Oates, comes from Truman Capote, one of several authors she admires and has written numerous letters to. It is especially his 'non-fictional' novel *In Cold Blood*, with its documentation of a true crime and its detailed description of violence, which interests Oates. Capote, however, argues: "To me, she is the most loathsome creature in America. She is a joke monster who ought to be beheaded in a public auditorium or Shea-stadium" (qtd. in Johnson 306). This comment is rude and unjustified, since Oates herself has been devoted to the literary scene of her time with respectfulness and constructive critique. However, Oates counters self-assured with her general defence: "Perhaps critics (mainly male) who charged me with writing too much are secretly afraid that someone will accuse them of having done too little in their lives" (qtd. in Showalter 138). Hence, Oates assumes jealousy behind the attack on her continuous literary productiveness, a fact against what Capote cannot compare.

Actually it is mainly male authors which influenced Oates's literary career and from whom she obtained most of her inspiration. According to Greg Johnson in *Invisible Writer: A Biography of Joyce Carol Oates*: "[...] she confessed to feeling 'little kinship' with major women writers such as Flannery O'Connor,

Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Charlotte Bronte and Collette [...] but had always felt sympathetic toward the women's movement" (Johnson 308). Concerning the male authors, it is of relevance to mention those who influenced her short fiction: it was particularly Chekhov, Kafka, Thoreau, Calvino and Joyce as well as James (Bastian 15) who inspired Oates during the early years of her career and she even devoted to these writers a large short story collection entitled *Marriages and Infidelities* (1972). Oates justifies the title in the following words: "I imagine a kind of 'spiritual' marriage between myself and them, or let's say our 'daimons' in the Yeatsian sense" (qtd. in Bellamy 19). With such a declaration of love, Oates also emphasises the significance of a literary tradition in the ripening process and self-discovery of an individual author: Furthermore, this idea is closely linked to her opinion on the collective mind and culture, against the ego-centrism of the isolated artist. Indeed, especially three so called "re-imagined stories" in *Marriages and Infidelities* challenge resistance against a literary inheritance namely: James Joyce's "The Dead", Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (see Bender 45-59). In Oates's re-vision of these classic stories "Formal elements, style, narrative strategy and structure, patterns of imagery, are translated, recreated, distorted. Character relationships are cunningly inverted and both moral and aesthetic questions reopened" (Bender 49). Especially Joyce's "The Dead" is interesting to mention in brief in order to show Oates's intentions: According to Eileen T. Bender Oates "[...] focuses not on the bemused and disappointed man but on the woman who eludes his embrace, who feels she has lost the best possibilities of life and love" (54). Moreover, Oates projects a new meaning to the famous final snow-scene in this story:

In Oates's version of 'The Dead' the 'snow' falling at the end is not a sign of community or mutuality. Ironically, it suggests the pathetic and suicidal isolation in the 'snow' of drugs (cocaine); an escape from the harrowing demands of profane life, rather than a submission to its sacred rhythm. (Bender 55)

Another author lastingly inspired Oates's short fiction, who is known as the father of the American short story: Edgar Allan Poe. Especially his creations of pulsing suspense in combination with the mysteries of his characters' dark psychological turmoil as in "William Wilson", "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Tell-Tale-Heart" and "The Black Cat" fascinate Oates. Concerning the last

story mentioned, Oates also created a re-vision entitled “The White Cat”. According to Paul Vidich in *Narrative – A Nonprofit Organization dedicated to storytelling in the digital age*: “[...] ‘The Black Cat’ [is] a first-person confession by a husband on the eve of his execution for the murder of his wife. Oates turns the approach around, imagining a wife who, in an ironic turn of fate, survives the intentions of a jealous and destructive husband” (1).

The notions of personal guilt and confession with its horrific excrescences as presented in many of Poe’s stories are recurring motifs in Oates’s fiction. But also Poe’s crucial inventions concerning the mystery and detective story, with his central investigator C. Auguste Dupin and his innovative methods to evidence crimes, leave its mark in Oates’s episodic novel *The Mysteries of Winterthurn* (1984), where her young, ambitious detective Xavier Kilgarvan has to disclose three different crimes. Although Oates’s ingenious investigator is rather modelled upon Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes*, the influence can directly be traced back to Poe.

The short story is Oates’s best fictional genre, which brought her several literary awards such as the O. Henry price for “The Region of Ice” (1967) and “The Dead” (1973); as well as the world fantasy award for “Fossil Figures” (2011).

3 American Short Story Theory

3.1 General Introduction

The short story has inhabited a prominent place in American culture and literature. In this sense Martin Scofield even argues that: “[...] around the 1820s and 1830s the Americans virtually invented what has come to be called ‘the short story’, in its modern literary sense” (1). Important short story writers of this time are Edgar Allan Poe, who was also the first to compose a theory on this genre, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Herman Melville and Washington Irving. In the 20th century, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, Flannery O’Connor, Eudora Welty and later Joyce Carol Oates are productive concerning the genre and widely read. Several of these authors strongly influenced the further development and growth of short fiction, not only with their stories as such, but also with their theoretical approaches concerning form, structure,

themes and significance of the genre, which will be discussed at a later point in this chapter.

The origins of the modern American short story can be traced back to the “oral tradition of native American tribes”, who used the form to teach “through positive or negative examples, culturally appropriate behaviour” (Scofield 3). Especially the myth of origin, moral fables as well as the figure of the trickster, which mainly appears in the figure of the rabbit, are important elements in the early native story (see Scofield 3).

The short story genre as such is difficult to define, but of course it can be argued that in a simple and pragmatic way it is shortness that matters: “shortness has come to be defined in relation to the longer form, the novel, and when it comes to fictional prose means in practice anything between five hundred and fifteen thousand words, or between one and forty average printed pages” (Scofield 4). Hence, short fiction came to offer the ideal size for “busy readers” and “it has been seen as the precursor of the one hour television play or the two hour film” (8).

However, it turns out that many authors do not agree with this dictum and recognize other elements as essential parts of the genre. This includes underlying notions such as ‘the idea as hero’, which “was coined by the novelist Kingsley Amis in 1960” (5). According to Scofield, this term “suggests [...] a mode of story in which the overall idea, rather than character, plot or ‘themes’ in the usual sense, dominates the conception and gives it its unity or deliberate disunity” (5).

This comment could also be closely linked to the common definition of the modern short story at the end of the 19th and particularly beginning of the 20th century with its “ [...] ‘epiphanic’ perceptions of reality, which focus on lyric evocation and revelatory moments rather than plot or linear narrative development” (Scofield 4). Furthermore, the intention a short story writer wants to convey is of relevance and this includes the participation of the reader, which Scofield describes as follows: “that moment of understanding or cognition in which we grasp not so much ‘what the writer was getting at’, in the old phrase, as what the *story* may get at in its collaboration with the mind of the reader

reading" (6). At this point, this general idea can be closely linked to Joyce Carol Oates's notion of the text as experience with the crucial intention to engage the reader.

Another important point concerning the aims of the early American short story is the writer's originality this genre can convey. In this sense Washington Irving argues in a letter, written in 1824:

I have preferred adopting a mode of sketches & short tales rather than long work, because I chose to take a line of writing peculiar to myself; rather than fall into the manner or school of any other writer; and there is a constant activity of thought and a nicety of execution required in writings of the kind, more than the world appears to imagine. (qtd. in Scofield 6)

This idea of the originality and autonomy of literary production during the early years of the American short story was also a central aim of Edgar Allan Poe, who was eager to "create an independent American tradition" (6). In order to achieve such a tradition Poe "[...] turned to magazine publication as the best means of creating both a literature and a reading public" (6). Moreover, he was the first author who verbalized a theory of the short story, followed by Brander Matthews, both focussing on the formal issues of the genre.

3.2 The 19th Century

3.2.1 Poe and Matthews

In a review on Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Twice told Tales" (1842) Poe lays the cornerstone for all theoretical debate on short fiction to follow. Initially he argues that Hawthorne fails to create an "attempt at effect" (59), which means that the reader is rather caught in a state of "*repose*" (59) than being excited or alerted. Hence, Poe prefers "*tales of effect*" (62) which are characterized by a thoroughly structured rise of action, similar to the composition of dramatic literature. The action must provide a "unity of effect or impression" (60), and that can only be achieved in literary productions which can "be completed at one sitting" (Poe 60), since "all high excitements are necessarily transient" (61). In this sense, the long form of narrative fails to catch the reader's full attention as well as an intense vivid reaction concerning its content. Furthermore, due to the fact that a novel creates multiple effects with its numerous characters and plot

lines, a longer duration of reading is demanded which destroys the unity created in a reader's mind (see Poe 61). Poe then highlights the importance of a unique or single effect in order to fulfil the demands of a successful short story:

A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents – he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tends not to the out bringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. (61)

Such a theory leaves no space for spontaneity and intuition, but promotes that the author should follow in every step “one preestablished design” (61) and every written word is subordinated to it in order to fulfil the purpose of this single effect, hence offering the reader full satisfaction (see Poe 61).

In his essay on “The Philosophy of Composition”, Poe even argues that a story should be structured “[...] with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem” (67). In general, Poe declares that the short story is *the* literary genre that offers completion and every long form may it be a novel or a long poem, only offer scatterings of form and plot. In this sense he also argues against the effect of mystery in the long form, since mysteries which are essential elements in most of his stories. Therefore, in a review on Charles Dickens novel *Barnaby Rudge* Poe argues: “[...] these points which we break out in all directions, like stars, and throw quadruple brilliance over the narrative – a brilliance which a correct taste will at once declare unprofitably sacrificed at the shrine of the keenest interest of mere mystery”(Poe 66-67).

Brander Matthews (1852-1929), a contemporary of Poe, initially also focuses on the form of short fiction in his essay “The Philosophy of the Short Story”. Here, he argues that most short stories “show one action, in one place, on one day. A short story deals with a single character, a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation” (73). These are important elements in order to provide the totality of impression toward a single effect, as promoted by Poe. Of course, Matthews offers a comparison to the novel of that time and argues that the long form “must be a love-tale” (74), whereas the short story can easily do without a love-plot due to its brevity and therefore leaves

more space for artistic freedom (see Matthews 74). This artistic freedom requires “ingenuity, originality, and compression” (74). Concerning the form of a short story “the construction must always be logical, adequate and harmonious” (75). However, what is more important to Matthews than form is the fact that a piece of short fiction “demands a subject” (76). In this context he once again draws a comparison to the novel, arguing that “[...] it would be easy to cite novels of eminence which are wholly amorphous – for example *Tristram Shandy*” (76). Since a compact plot or “plan” (76), as Matthew prefers to say, is the crucial task for a short story writer, he argues that “What you have to tell is of greater importance than how you tell it” (76-77). Here it can be argued that this is a view which roughly corresponds with Joyce Carol Oates’s perception that words are relatively unimportant in the process of creating a story.

3.2.2 Nathaniel Hawthorne

In contrast to Poe and Matthews, who expose a normative theory on short fiction, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) provides a descriptive-historical argument concerning the essence of the short story genre (see Ahrends 17). For this purpose he deals with his own stories. It can be seen that Hawthorne differs from Poe in several essential points: First of all Hawthorne’s intention of effect differs from Poe’s since he wants to address the reader’s intellect, whereas Poe focuses on arousing strong emotions by means of getting the reader under his control, an intention which is closely linked to his idea of plot-action (see Ahrends 17). Furthermore, Hawthorne “characterizes his narratives as follows” (Ahrends 17): “They are not the talk of secluded men with his own mind and heart..., but his attempts,..., to open an intercourse with the world” (17). Hence, he convinces the reading audience by providing stories that follow an arc of suspense (see Ahrends 17) and communication between writer, narration, and the outside. This combination challenges the intellect and demands that a reader dwells on the content and “poetic precision of language” (Scofield 19) of his stories, which is an aspect Poe criticises as being “all [...] quiet, thoughtful, subdued” (Poe 59). Furthermore, Hawthorne’s short fiction which covers a wide range of topics such as Puritan history, the connection between sin and guilt as well as art and science, also portray the Zeitgeist of American society and culture in the middle of the 19th century. In this context

Günter Ahrends aptly describes Hawthorne's intentions with the Latin verb "instruere" (17), which means that he wants to instruct people about moral, social and historical issues and to make them think about the larger connection to their own lives. In contrast, Ahrends connects Poe's aims with the verb "movere" (17) which is closely linked to sudden and strong emotions and these leave no space for long lingering.

Moreover, Martin Scofield argues that Hawthorne's fondness for the short form is construed from "the mode of 'Romance'" (19). Hawthorne's comprehension of Romance is the following: "[Romance] encourages an imaginative freedom with ordinary everyday circumstance and also a higher degree of metaphoric meaning, symbolism and allegory, and it can be argued that these elements are more easily embodied in the short story, or tale than in the novel" (19). This view is also shared by another important writer and theorist of short fiction, namely Henry James.

3.2.3 Henry James

James (1843-1916) was particularly interested in the short form since it offered "the possibility for mobility of point of view and variety of attack" (Scofield 78). Furthermore he used the short story in order to process his own impressions of the world he was living in: "[...] perfect *short* things, *nouvelles* and tales, illustrative of ever so many things in life – in the life I see and know and feel – [...] and of art, and of everything: and that they shall be fine, rare strong, wise [...]" (qtd. in Scofield, 78). Hence, it can be stated that James used the form to communicate the spirit, tastes and fears of his time, especially those "of the rich and cultivated upper class" (Scofield 79).

However, his aims to portray the "inner qualities of character and situation" (79) required more space and therefore James's works are frequently long stories or novellas. Concerning the novella he argued: "our ideal, the beautiful, the blest *nouvelle*, which allowed for shade and differences, varieties and styles, the value above all of the idea happily *developed* [...]" (79). In this sense James broke with the dogmatic set of regulations propagated by Poe and Matthews and was rather a historically oriented theorist. This can be observed in several fictional portraits concerning "the changing nature of the modern woman and

the social attitudes that surrounded her” (Scofield 80) as in *Daisy Miller* (1878). Here, it is relevant to mention that he portrays his female characters in a fairly realistic mode and less romantically loaded. A further notion frequently used by James is the “ghostly figure” (85): He disposed this gothic element in order to highlight “[...] some psychological point or human case that they bring to light” (85). Hence, it can be argued that James installed the ghost in order to provide a “close observation of the real” (85), rather than simply infusing fear and horror in the reader. This idea roughly corresponds with Oates’s perception of Gothic elements, since she also uses these to foreground a character’s inner fears as well as his/her experiences with the outer world.

Due to the fact that James followed the idea that the short fiction writer has the task to narrow down long-winded characterizations by means of formal composition and boundary, he agrees with Poe and Matthews in this point (see Ahrends 19). The formal boundaries to be used are also an instrument to achieve a “calculated effect” (Ahrends 20) on the reader and furthermore, he also shared the constructivist view of Poe/Matthews that the composition of a story can be compared to mathematical operations (see Ahrends 19-20).

3.2.4 Bret Harte

According to Ahrends, the first coherent historical descriptive poetic concerning the short story was provided by Bret Harte (1836-1902). At the turn of the 19th century, he attempted to verbalize a specific theory about the nature of the American short story, since he criticised that the short form in America existed as “sketches of American life in the form of the English essayist” (Ahrends 21). Thus, Harte was specifically concerned with the local customs of different regions and therefore a consequent elaboration of American reality. In this sense Harte argues: “It would seem evident, [...] that the secret life of the American short story was the treatment of characteristic American life, with absolute knowledge of its peculiarities and sympathy with its methods; slang with no moral determination” (Harte qtd. in Ahrends 22). This comment also highlights that Harte disagrees with Hawthorne’s idea that the short story functions as a vehicle to question as well as disclose social moral behaviour. The mode of showing American reality of his time, by means of concise

character portraits is also a crucial aim of Joyce Carol Oates, who is devoted to realistic descriptions of the contemporary American experience.

3.3 The 20th Century

3.3.1 Sherwood Anderson, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty

Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941) argued against the wide spread meaning that plot is the cornerstone of the short form as propagated by most authors and theorists of the 19th century:

There was a notion that ran through all story telling in America, that stories must be built about a plot and that absurd Anglo-Saxon notion that they must point moral, uplift the people, make better citizens, [...]. 'The Poison Plot' [...]. What was wanted was form, not plot, an altogether more elusive and difficult thing to come. (Scofield 128)

According to his perception of plot, it needs to develop from real life situations, but if plot dominates the scene, characters are degraded to a simple product. It is the form that is crucial and the exact use of it has a specific function, viz. to structure the chaotic reality of life and infuse meaning into it. Concerning a chaotic reality, Anderson was the first to confront his readers with inconvenient descriptions of sexuality "and the grotesque in human experience" (129). Furthermore, Anderson was one of the first writers who deployed more radical formal experimentation in his short stories in order to give his harsh naturalistic themes a proper shape. However, Anderson agrees with the old masters such as Poe concerning the "focus on one single action" with a "turning point or crisis" (Scofield 131) in order to provide a completed effect.

The notion of form as a regulative element was also crucial in the perception of Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980), who argued against the dogmatic rules for writing a short story: "[...] that can teach you exactly how to handle the 197 variations on any of the 37 basic plots" (qtd. in Ahrends 26). The true short story receives its special meaning and place in literature by means of the distinctive ideas, styles, various point of views an author deploys and also his/her devotion to the reality of human nature (see Ahrends 26). However, she agrees with Poe that she already imagines the ending of a story while composing it and Porter also recognizes the organic development of form which she metaphorically compares with a grain that slowly grows (see Ahrends 27).

Many of Eudora Welty's stories (1909-2001) are based upon a visual scene she has experienced. This strategy is due to the fact that she was also a professional photographer, who captured images especially of African Americans living under harsh conditions at the edge of society (see Scofield 173). She was a fairly realistic writer and a specific characteristic of her work is to describe "experience of violence or near violence in ways that reveal psychological workings from within" (Scofield 174). It can be stated that bearing witness was a crucial aspect in the process of composing a story, which is a similar attitude compared to Joyce Carol Oates's comprehension of fictional characters. Concerning theoretical statement on short fiction, Welty does not provide a critical view on the plot discussion (see Ahrends 30). However, she joins the discussion by arguing against a constructivist view on the short story: stories cannot be built upon a fixed plan, offering solutions to certain problems, but each story has an individual shape (see Ahrends 30). Therefore, she calls Poe's ideal conception of the short form "frozen perfection", which does not meet the essence of creative and serious literary production. Welty speaks of form as a necessary quality that develops from the interplay of several components such as character, plot as well as sensory impression. This idea of interplay roughly corresponds with David Madden's critique of Joyce Carol Oates, where he argues that if some of her stories have form, then it due to submergence of experiences.

3.3.2 Flannery O'Connor and Joyce Carol Oates

Together with Joyce Carol Oates, Flannery O'Connor is one of the distinguished female voices of the American short story in the 20th century. Analogies to Oates's modes and themes concerning the short form can be identified, since Gothic elements such as the Grotesque as well as "strange and violent experience" (Scofield 177) are also crucial notions in her work. Moreover, O'Connor frequently broaches the issue of "conflict between parents and children" (177), which is also a recurrent concern in many of Oates's stories. And indeed, although Oates is rather drawn to male authors, it can be stated that she is familiar with O'Connor's work and draws some inspiration from her.

Flannery O'Connor comments on her theoretical concept of the short story in the following way:

A story is a complete dramatic action – and in good stories, the characters are shown through the action and the action is controlled through the characters, and the result of this is meaning that derives from the whole presented experience. [...] A story always involves in a dramatic way, the mystery of personality. (qtd. in Ahrends 30)

Thus, it can be argued that a good short story needs a stringent interlocking of five elements: dramatic composition, plot, meaning, a touch of mystery and a correspondence to reality (see Ahrends 30). In this fictional structure, the plot functions as the disclosing element. In order to achieve such a disclosing function, Flannery O'Connor composes most of her stories by means of a clearly distinguished beginning, a clearly sketched middle as well as a sharp ending (see Ahrends 31). With such a format O'Connor aims to interrupt the classic structure of beginning, middle and ending in favour of a disruption, which should not be mistaken for formlessness (see Ahrends 31). Moreover, O'Connor follows Poe's idea that it is the author's task to affect the reader's emotions by means of a touch of mystery: This means that fictional reality is presented as a distorted and confusing entity and this is also a method to capture the true reality of a grotesque modern world (see Ahrends 31). In this context it is the Gothic mode with its elements of terror, fear and violence that O'Connor uses in order to emotionally engage her readership and for which she became famous.

It is Joyce Carol Oates who argues that the short story is "an absolutely undecipherable fact" (qtd. in Ahrends 33), which means that a comprehensive and general theory is not possible. This is due to the fact that the theoretical comments of every author are closely linked to his/her own literary experience (see Ahrends 33). However, like other writers she has also a clear conception of the short story genre, whereby it is interesting to mention that here she partly draws parallels to the psychotherapy of Freud and Jung: "The short story is a dream verbalized, arranged in space and presented to the world" (qtd. in Ahrends 33). In this context it is Oates's perception that all narration has its roots in the human subconscious, which does not ultimately mean that these narrative ideas are directly transported into literature (see Ahrends 33). But, it is the actual art of telling stories to structure these, or rather to transcend them in order to put the thoughts across for the reading audience (see Ahrends 33). This does not mean that this structure necessarily needs to be coherent or

rational. Since the modern living environment is a chaotic space with many contradictions, an author can either choose to orderly structure these impressions or he can, as Oates partly does it, by means of a certain incoherence disclose this true character of reality (see Ahrends 33). Hence, it can be argued that Joyce Carol Oates understands the short story's essence against the strict formalism of Poe and Matthews and explains it as something quite natural and dynamic that cannot be subdued under strict rules. Furthermore, since many of her short stories are quite long, she also argues against the notion of brevity and also thinks that Poe's theoretical ideas are out of date: "Poe's remarks are inappropriate to our time, and in fact to the marvellous modern tradition of the short story that begins with Chekhov, Joyce, Conrad and James. [...] It isn't even true that short stories are necessarily short" (Pinsker 38). Moreover in an interview with Sanford Pinsker (1985) she remarks once more that all theory concerning narration is rather subjective and even states that: "Those of us who love the practice of an art often hate theorizing, because it is always theorizing based upon past models: as such it must inevitably incline toward the conservative, the reactionary, the exhortative, the school of *should* and *should not*" (Pinsker 38).

3.3.3 Frank O'Connor

The author Frank O'Connor presents a different attitude toward the short story, since he does not agree with some general opinions that the short form has a communicative or social function. In the introduction to his comprehensive book *The Lonely Voice – A Study of the Short Story* (1963) he argues about the nature of short fiction: "the short story remains by its very nature remote from the community – romantic, individualistic and intransigent" (O'Connor 21). Due to the fact that every story has got an individual touch, "there is no such thing as essential form" (21). Hence, he also argues that "formalism's heyday is over" (21). However, in short fiction the function of form is to provide its length. It is the pragmatic elements as regards intention of themes and content of a story that is crucial to him. O'Connor also explores the differences between novel, drama, poetry and the short story and recognizes the latter as the genre which best represents "our own attitude of life" (13). The distinct moments of life which are explored in short fiction often show conditions of "human loneliness" (19),

which emphasizes his view that in comparison to the novel, “the short story has never had a hero” (18), but in the focus are “outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society” (19). Such a view expects a movement away from traditional “close reading of texts”, since it points “to a future beyond the closing text” (26). Furthermore he names “three necessary elements in a story: exposition, development and drama” (17). This idea corresponds with the views of several other authors and theorists such as Poe or Welty, that the dramatic quality with a classic triangle-like structure is essential in the short form.

4 Suspense Theory

4.1 Introducing the Concept of Suspense in Fiction

Suspense seems to be a familiar term, since people often use it in numerous daily situations. However, concerning narrative situations the term demands some explanation. According to Heinz Lothar Borringo, suspense can be traced back to the Latin infinitive “suspendere” (38) which means: being in a state of uncertainty (see Borringo 38). Hence, this first general definition can be closely linked to a reader’s cognitive experience as response to a narrative situation and its development. Indeed also in the Oxford English dictionary suspense is described as a: “state of usual anxious uncertainty or expectation or waiting for information” (OED 320). Carroll adds that suspense in fiction requires a “course of events [that] point to two logically opposed outcomes” (Carroll 78). Thus, the outcome is either “morally correct, but improbable” or “morally incorrect or evil, but probable” (Carroll 78). However, Alwin Fill argues against simple binary oppositions concerning the outcome:

Was ist eigentlich mit Spannung gemeint? Nicht einfach Gegensatz, sondern dynamischer Gegensatz, multipler Gegensatz – Gegensätzliches das zusammenstrebt und noch (!) auseinandergehalten wird [...]. Aber Spannung ist nicht Selbstzweck: sie strebt nach Lösung (tension and relaxation) bilden ein Schema. (10)

Indeed, it is the dynamic reciprocity between exertion and relaxation in a narrative situation which creates the emotion of suspense and this process also triggers a form of communication between reader, author and his/her fictional intention (see Fill 10). This dynamic interaction is triggered by suggested information at the beginning of a text, which is carefully arranged. However,

information concerning the solution of a story is detained as long as possible and as the story continues, different information is provided as at the beginning (see Fill 10). The information given need to be opened up by the reader, which triggers the emotional involvement of the reader (see Fill 56). Concerning the refusal of information, which is an essential element in the creation of suspense, the point of view the author chooses can also be suspenseful: for example the limited first person narrator or an omniscient third person perspective can be installed in such a way that the reader wants to know more about the character (see Fill 56). One example is the very beginning of Oates's story "Bleed", where a third person narrator introduces a character who is not the main protagonist. But already in the first sentences it is made accessible that this person will occupy an essential part in the development of the story and this fact already causes suspense: "Hadn't known the girl. He had not. All he knew was, she was the daughter of friends of his parents" (Oates 219). The reader wants to know who the girl is and the male protagonist (he). In this sense suspense always demands a solution and is a temporal experience.

4.1.1 The Dramatic Level of Suspense

Another theorist closely links the experience of suspense with a certain dramatic quality. This is due to the fact that "Furcht" und "Hoffnung" are essential feelings in response to fictional suspenseful situations and can therefore be compared to the original reaction, which is "Jammer und Schaudern" in Aristotelian drama (Borringer 38-39). This pair of concepts was used to achieve balance and resolution of a represented conflict. In a similar way the terms "Furcht" und "Hoffnung" imply that a reader is in "banger-furchtvoller Erwartung" (Borringer 38) concerning the outcome of the story. The structure of a suspenseful text only slightly differs from the construct of drama: Whereas in drama epilogue, rising action, climax, falling action, epilogue are essential, in suspense fiction the development is slightly altered by means of initial information and climax, which is identical with the catastrophe and often closes the story (see Borringer 39). Borringer compares the emotional position of the reader in such a structure, but this is very different from drama, with the ancient myth of Damokles, who suffered by being threatened that a sword above his head, hanging on a thin thread, crushes down on him. In this sense in

suspense fiction the reader is pushed into dangerous situations with the hero/heroine always accompanied by the threat that there is a sudden turn of events (see Borringer 38-43). In this context one example taken from Oates's story "The Museum of Dr. Moses" demonstrates such a situation: "*The Red Room. Not yet ready for visitors. It had been a warning, I knew. Dr. Moses had warned me. Still I pushed inside. I had come so far and would not turn back*" (Oates 222). In this scene, the reader follows the protagonist into obviously threatening and forbidden territory, with the question what she will find there. In this sense sympathy with the main character is a crucial part in order to achieve the feeling of suspense. Indeed, according to Brewer: "[...] when there is the potential for significant outcome for a character, the reader must be concerned about the character, in order for the reader to feel suspense for the character" (Brewer 116). Borringer describes this essential element in the following way: "Weiterhin zeichnet sich Spannung dadurch aus, dass durch den Zusammenprall bestimmter Gegensatzpaare – z.B. Gut und Böse – eine Anteilnahme des Rezipienten ausgelöst werden soll" (47). Hence, the universal dialectic of good and evil is central in many plots that operate with suspense together with other oppositional pairs such as "*Kampf-Sieg, Aufgabe-Gelingen/Nicht-Gelingen einer Aufgabe, Verfolgung-Errettung*" (Borringer 52). In case of the short scene by Oates it is suggested that the brave heroine might meet her mysterious antagonist Dr. Moses, which might lead to an altercation which needs to be solved. This triggers a "suspense effect" (Borringer 49) which he describes as follows: "Suspense-effekt meint [...] die textwirkungsmäßige Komponente, d.h., er zielt auf die technisch-strategiebehaftete Seite und sagt jeweils darüber etwas aus, wie der ‚Suspense‘ hervorgebracht wird und was er bewirkt" (49). The question concerning how suspense is created, and the subsequent effect it triggers in the reader, is a crucial point to be analysed in the six short stories by Oates.

4.1.2 A Psychoanalytic View on Suspense

However, another access to the term suspense is provided by Garry Leonard, by means of psycho-analytical theories by Freud and Lacan. To mention this view is of relevance, since Joyce Carol Oates is familiar with these analysts and several of her characters are based on psycho-analytical background

knowledge. In his article “Keeping Ourselves in Suspense: The Imagined Gaze and fictional construction of the self in Alfred Hitchcock and Edgar Allan Poe”, Leonard initially discusses Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage which “is a process whereby an infant develops a sense of self through observing how he or she appears to other people. [...] The resulting subjective structure grants the child an illusion of coherence, stability and unification” (Leonard 20). Hence, an “illusion of autonomy (20)” is created, but the human being is always dependent on the gaze of the other in order to keep up this autonomy. Leonard continues: “The point I wish to make that relates to suspense is that for Lacan, the construction of the ego, and, by extension, a conscious identity, are both constructs that are already in suspense” (22). Furthermore, Leonard argues that:

The subject is dependent on a Symbolic order that must neither shift, nor reveal itself to be what it in fact is: a representation of reality, and not the whole of reality. Lacan insists the process of understanding the world and our experience of it through symbols, always leaves something out, because no signifier can perfectly embody what is understood. [...] This something that is left out is what Lacan calls the Real – some reminder of the Imaginary Order that escapes representation within the Symbolic Order, and so remains a threat to the fictional unity of identity. (22)

Leonard then adapts the Lacanian concept of the fictional self to the creation of suspense: “The suspense builds because the Symbolic Order that the protagonist has come to depend on begins to shift, revealing apparent reality as a fictional construction. In this sense, the villain of a suspenseful plot brings unwelcome evidence of something beyond the protagonist’s reality that calls that reality into question” (22). Here it is relevant to mention that this concept of suspense can also be observed in Oates’s stories on twin brothers, namely “Fossil Figures” and “Death Cup”. These narrations are based upon a morally good twin and his counterpart, whom Oates calls “the demon brother”. Especially in “Death Cup” the discrepancy between the protagonist and his antagonist brother is initially described in such a way that the reader feels sympathy for the former, who wants to kill his odious brother: “His mouth had gone dry, his heart was hammering against his ribs, he murmured, “Amen.” All violation seemed to have drained from him. Calmly he thought *I will kill my brother Alistor after all. After all these years*” (Oates 211). However, in the course of the story, the protagonist realises that he simply cannot exterminate

what is part of him and therefore it can be argued that the 'good' brother's Symbolic Order and hence his reality is disturbed by the unexpected bond to his counterpart and in the very end the normal moral order is re-established. This story can be roughly compared to Poe's tale "William Wilson", where he introduces the notion of the double. Indeed Leonard uses this example by means of adapting his remarks to Lacan: "Murdering this gaze, then, is a murder of the self" (Leonard 27). In this sense one quote from the story is essential: "In me didst thou exist – and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how thou has murdered thyself" (qtd. in Leonard 27).

4.1.3 Suspense in Style

According to Eric S. Rabkin in his book *Narrative Suspense* (1973) there are actually four levels in a work of fiction where suspense can be created: "plot/theme, character development and style" (Rabkin 10). Here, I will focus on the last point mentioned, namely style and hence language. Suspense on the level of style can already be created by the title of story. In case of the stories to be analysed by Oates this can be applied to some of them: "A Hole in The Head", "Fossil Figures", "Death Cup", and "Bleed". Especially the last title, with its deliberately inserted third vowel, mediates the guess that something terrible is going to happen to one character, since it can be argued that the extended spelling resembles an outcry of pain, hate or revenge. Concerning the word level the terms anaphoric and cataphoric (see Fill 49) are interesting to highlight: Anaphoric means that a word already used is readopted again (see Fill 49). In the case of one story by Oates viz. "Death-Cup" the Latin technical term *Aminata phalloides*, which introduces the story, is mentioned ten times on the first four pages until its meaning is revealed, which has a cataphoric function (see Fill 49). This means that the term becomes continuative and triggers a clue to the story's further development: "[...] and suddenly he remembered what *Aminata phalloides* was: the death-cup mushroom" (Oates 211). Concerning the lexical semantic level, the word "death", which is taken from the field of horror and dread, triggers suspense and points to the possibility that an accident or crime may take place in the course of the story. On the syntactic level, the use of questions is a method to create suspense, especially when they appear suddenly as in "The Museum of Dr. Moses": "His right hand was held at a stiff,

unnatural angle, however, pressed against a pocket of his slacks as if against – what? A weapon? Not a gun, it wouldn't have been large enough. A knife or a small hammer? A scalpel?" (Oates 199). Such questions triggers further questions to make the text accessible: What is really there in his pocket? Is there any danger for the heroine to get hurt? On the text-pragmatic level, restricted point of view can trigger suspense and in this sense also the use of dialogue or monologue (see Fill 76) as in the story "Beersheba", where initially, a phone-call takes place, whereby the identity of the caller is disguised:

"Well – your voice is familiar. It's a voice – I know."

"But not my name, huh?"

"Well – almost. I can almost –"

"*Your* voice is a voice I know, Brad. Your voice is a voice in my dreams, I would not likely forget." (Oates 141)

Furthermore, disruptions in narration or flashbacks are elements of suspense on the pragmatic level. These are methods which are often used by Oates in order to assemble information for the reader which is useful for the plot plan of the story.

Another useful element in the creation of suspense is metaphors. According to Eric S. Rabkin: "Most metaphors are actually single words operating within a context. Verbs, for instance often serve as metaphors favoured by writers for their potential vividness" (Rabkin 15). In the case of Oates it is often not verbs but nouns and adjectives which are used as metaphoric expressions as in "Fossil Figures": "On larges canvasses Edward transcribed his bizarre dream images, among galaxies of hieroglyphic shapes in a sequence titled *Fossil Figures*" (Oates 196). Here, not only a reference to the mysterious title of the story is presented, but the term fossil figures functions as metaphor for the weak twin brother, who is physically handicapped since his birth, whereas his brother is strong and healthy. Hence, it can be argued that the sick brother experiences himself like a bizarre human relict of his mother's womb, which he expresses in his art.

4.2 Suspense as Genre

Joyce G. Saricks analyses suspense as specific fictional genre in her extensive study *A Reader's Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction* (2001). In this context Saricks highlights the basic elements a novel or story must contain in order to

be defined as suspenseful. Initially the author quotes theorist Andrew Klavan who argues that, " [s]uspense is not about the things that are happening; it's about the things that might happen, that threaten to happen" (qtd. in Saricks 287). This comment is a useful point of departure since two common descriptions of suspense can be extracted: the author's withholding of information and the reader's anticipation. Hence, at least one character with whom he/she can sympathize and at best even identify, is required. Such a characteristic also demands an antagonist, who threatens the hero of the story, which then equals the dialectic of good and evil. Furthermore, Saricks argues: "The action usually takes place within a narrow time frame, often in only a few days, and the reader is made aware of the danger to the protagonist early on, generally in the first chapter or even prologue" (290). The characteristic of the narrow time frame can also be applied to the general form of the short story, especially in the case of Joyce Carol Oates, who often extends the content of her suspenseful stories over a few days in order to heighten tension. However, Oates has her own method to build up suspense, since it is a common method of her to allow the protagonist sudden thoughts or memories, usually printed in italics, which are sometimes repeated several times and thus catch the attention of the reader and alarm them that there is a mystery behind these thoughts that needs to be solved.

According to Saricks another characteristic in suspense fiction is important: "A dark, menacing atmosphere is essential and underscores the danger to the protagonist" (290). Indeed, this is true for numerous novels and stories, also by Oates, although in some stories to be analysed, atmosphere plays a minor role whereas dialogue, in-depth descriptions of the characters and the intruding voice of a third person narrator dominate the narration. Furthermore, fast-pacing is a significant element concerning suspense and this also includes the restricted time frame already mentioned, but also: "In fact, many authors use a prologue to introduce the villain and set up the atmosphere of danger and uncertainty before the story itself begins" (Saricks 291). Here it can be argued that this characteristic is just partly true for Oates, since she structures some of her stories the other way round and introduces the hero/heroine and their personal backgrounds before the antagonist enters the scene. One useful example is the story-line in "The Museum of Dr. Moses". Concerning the

general story-line in suspense fiction Saricks argues: “A nightmare intrudes into the hero/heroine’s normal life. He/she works out how to overcome this threat. The ending brings the confrontation between good and evil, and the protagonist always survives [...]” (292). The last sentence of the comment might be true for rather stereotypical suspense novels and stories. However, here it needs to be argued that Oates often deviates from such a clichéd outcome and even creates suspense by challenging the validity of binary pairs such as good and evil as in “A hole in the head” or “Death-Cup.”

It is also of relevance to mention that a distinction can be made within the genre between so called “softer-edged suspense” and “hard-edged suspense” (Saricks 297, 301). The former is characterised by a spares use of violence and blood, hence: “In fact, the plot may revolve around a secret from the past. More frequently there are threats of violence or indications that violence has occurred, again offstage” (Saricks 297). Solving a secret or crime from the past is in focus in numerous of Oates’s stories and although she is famous for her violent physical description there is also a tendency in some of her stories to hint at acts of violence in order to arouse the reader’s imagination and make him/her curious to read on.

Furthermore, Saricks argues: “The characters of softer-edged suspense are usually ordinary people whose lives are suddenly invaded by someone very dangerous, and they often do not know why. This creates a nightmare quality” (297-298). This soft-edged element is indicated in Oates’s story “Beersheba”, where a middle-aged man is suddenly threatened by a young woman from the past, who he cannot remember, but who wants to take cruel revenge on him. Three other characteristics are that romantic relationships are hardly ever used, a lack of police presence and the simple but crucial fact that “the reader is not continuously on edge, as we often are in hard-edged suspense” (Saricks 299).

Hard-edged suspense, in contrast, is described as “much more graphic” (Saricks 301) concerning the violence and crimes: “We see bodies, rendered in intimate and gruesome detail, and the victims are often described during and after the killings. Characters are involved in intimately depicted life-and-death situations [...]” (301). Moreover, final physical confrontations between hero and

antagonist and detailed police procedures are included in hard-edged suspense.

Concerning these two sub-categorizations of suspense it can be argued that Joyce Carol Oates often works with both methods, sometimes even in one single story, which can be seen in "The Museum of Dr. Moses". Here one part of the narration is softer-edged in terms of descriptions of the heroine's relation to her mother and childhood memories, whereas in the course of the story glimpses of hard-edged suspense are presented, when the protagonist is confronted with her antagonist.

4.3 Tension, Surprise, Mystery

In the first place it can be argued that the notions tension, surprise and mystery are integrated parts of suspense. However, in suspense theory these terms are often discussed in contrast to suspense. In the case of tension Broich argues: "Tension steht für den objektiv bestehenden, auf Konflikt und Ausgleich ausgerichteten Gegensatz und suspense für die subjektive Wahrnehmung dieser Tension als etwas Bedrohliches zu verwenden" (qtd. in Borringo 50). Hence, it can be stated that tension takes place on the plot-level, whereas suspense is a reaction to this tension. Due to the fact that suspense is rather described as an emotion to be found in the reader's processing of plot and tension, the very first definition provided in this chapter, is in accordance to this comment. However, in order to achieve a well-founded access to the stories by Oates, tension will occupy an important part of the analysis, since it is crucial to be integrated in order to find out how the resulting feeling of suspense is created. Therefore, in my opinion, tension and suspense form an interplay that allows a coherent analysis on several levels of narration.

When it comes to surprise, a more clear-cut contrast to suspense can be observed. According to Ralf Junkerjürgen: "*Surprise* bedeutet somit die plötzliche Konfrontation des Rezipienten mit relevanten, nicht erahnbaren Informationen. Damit spielen hierbei zwei Momente eine Rolle: die Plötzlichkeit als zeitlicher und das Unerahnbare als inhaltlicher Aspekt" (72). This means, that whereas in suspense clues and bits of information are presented so that the reader can at least guess two possible outcomes, in surprise situations

he/she is abruptly confronted with an unforeseen situation. In this context, Borringo argues: "Überraschung ist also nicht als handlungsförderndes Element zu sehen, sondern als Endpunkt eines Handlungssyntagmas" (49).

It is the term mystery that needs special attention, since it is not only suspense but also the occurrence of mystery that is important in the subsequent analysis of Oates's short fiction. In fact mystery and suspense have similar intentions when one takes the following definition of mystery into account: "Mysteries consist of a puzzle; the author provides clues to the solution but attempts to obscure some information so that the puzzle cannot be solved too easily" (Saricks 145). Indeed Carroll argues: "The mystery story, which engenders a sense of mystery in us, is a near relative to suspense fiction" (Carroll 75). The contrast between suspense and mystery rather lies in plot-structure and in a variable level of uncertainty. Carroll defines this as follows: "For in mysteries in the classical detection mode, we are characteristically uncertain about what has happened in the past, whereas with suspense fictions we are uncertain we are uncertain about what will happen" (75). Hence, in classic mystery fiction, the present incidents and their developments are in the centre of attention and this basically requires a crime and an investigator who solves it. Therefore mystery stories are often named under the synonym "who-dun-it" (Saricks 147). Due to the fact that a mystery story includes crime-investigations these two genres differ in the possibilities of outcome: "For with mystery, our uncertainty is distributed over as many possible answers as there are subjects, whereas with suspense we are 'suspended' between no more than two answers, which answers stands in binary opposition" (Carroll 76).

In the stories by Oates, mystery in its basic concept, which contains a murder followed by meticulous investigations, is not to be found. In fact, mysteries unfold by the subtle use of elements of Gothic fiction. In this sense, a mystery story contains dark family secrets, scenes of abjection and dangerous characters. All these elements are included in the short fiction to be analyzed: In the story "Beersheba" for example, the protagonist is suddenly haunted by a person from the past.

5 Mystery: Gothic Elements

5.1 The Gothic Tradition: English Origins

Since the second half of the 18th century, Gothic Fiction has fascinated both authors and readers since one basic ingredient is “a strange and unexpected event awakens the mind and keeps it on a stretch” (Aikin qtd. in Cooke 21). This idea closely links the Gothic to a reading experience which is suspenseful and mysterious. Indeed, the first prototypical Gothic text, *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole (1764), highlights this original aim of the genre, which is to excite terror and fear in the reader’s mind, by depicting typical elements such as supernatural events in a hostile and uncanny setting distant from society. According to Fred Botting the 18th century Gothic is also characterised by “tortuous fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents” and “horrible images and life-threatening pursuits” (Botting 2). Furthermore, in the rising years of the Gothic as a literary genre, authors liked to represent the suppression of a female character by a dominant and often monstrous male counterpart, as in Ann Radcliff’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). However, in the course of the 19th century, the threat is less supernatural, but rather to be found in science and therefore in the human being itself, who assumes to be in control of scientific experiments as portrayed in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), a novel which is also known as the first work of science-fiction. It is the uncontrollable, dark side of the human psyche which finds its entrance to the homely sphere of urban society in the second half of the century as in *Dracula*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In *Dracula* the vampire as something unidentifiable and foreign also functions as a contagious seducer who discloses male and female sexuality whereas in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* the element of the double in the sense of the dark nature of the individual is up to mischief. Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* represents the decadent lifestyle of late Victorian London and its egocentric and horrific consequences. These classic Gothic texts all play with binary oppositions and in this sense Fred Botting highlights the ambivalence of Gothic Fiction:

good depends on evil, light on dark, reason on irrationality, in order to define limits. The play means that Gothic is an inscription neither of darkness, nor of light, a delineation neither of reason nor of superstition and corruption, neither good nor evil, but both at the same time. (Botting 8)

This ambivalence is also another good reason why Gothic Fiction attracts so many readers: the insecurity, the not to be trusted character and the ambiguity of fascination, desire, horror and fear the Gothic triggers can be seen as a timeless ingredient for a suspenseful and mysterious work of fiction that can also be found in the 20th and 21st centuries in trivial as well as high literature. However, basic elements of the Gothic are adapted and re-shaped to the needs and fears of contemporary society, as it is done by writers such as Joyce Carol Oates, who needs to be added to the American Gothic.

5.1.1 American Gothic

According to Charles L. Crow,

To understand American Literature, and indeed America, one must understand the Gothic, which is, simply, the imaginative expression of the fears and forbidden desires of Americans. The Gothic has given voice to suppressed groups, and has provided an approach to taboo subjects such as incest and disease. (Crow 1)

In a similar manner Eric Savoy argues: “the Gothic, it is frequently reasoned, embodies and gives voice to the dark nightmare that is the underside of ‘the American dream’” (Savoy 167). Generally it can be stated that the American Gothic adapted the themes and elements of the British tradition, where the Gothic developed among aristocratic circles, to the “democratic situation of the new world” (Savoy 168). However, “what it makes distinctively *American* is the *formal* adaptability and innovative energy” (Savoy 168). This innovative energy can be found in many early works of American origin and “express a profound anxiety about historical crimes and perverse human desires that cast their shadow over what many would like to be the sunny American republic” (168). In this sense the first American Gothic novel was *Wieland; or the Transformation* (1798) published by Charles Brockden Brown. The story is based on a mysterious true crime and therefore Brockden Brown is regarded as the first author to document an uncanny historical event in the new world. Furthermore, American fiction in the early years was dominated by allegorical devices as in the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne. According to Eric Savoy “Like allegory, the gothic is a fluid tendency rather than a discrete literary mode, an impulse rather than a literary artefact” (Savoy 6). The concept of the American Gothic, which describes it less as literary genre and more as tendency, has been adapted by

several contemporary theorists and authors. Leslie Fiedler, for example, argues that the Gothic is “a pathological symptom rather than a proper literary movement” (qtd. in Savoy 168). Concerning the contemporary American Gothic Joyce Carol Oates argues in a similar manner: “Gothicism, whatever it is, is not a literary tradition so much as a fairly realistic assessment of modern life” (qtd. in Johnson 18). This shows the everlasting fascination to portray the fears, hopes and doubts of an ever changing complex civilisation, and the Gothic form is as useful as well as successful a vehicle to make readers aware of this. This was also the intention of early Gothic authors such as Hawthorne, James and Poe. However, all these writers made their own use of Gothic elements, primarily in short fiction: Whereas Hawthorne touched the reader’s intellect and moral attitudes with his allegories on Puritanism in America, Poe wanted to shock the reader with twisted tales concerning the dark side of the human psyche and James described the psychological turmoil and *Zeitgeist* of aristocratic circles.

In the second half of the 20th century, the Gothic mode continues to flourish. According to Crow,

The Gothic, adaptive as always, provided some of its most innovative works in the Age of Modernism both in Literature and in the new medium of film. As before, it offered a counter-reading to the American narrative. As might be expected in an increasingly secular age, there was little of the supernatural in most works of Gothic modernism (123).

In this movement the deep South of the United States provided the background for modern Gothic stories by William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Flannery O’Connor. Here, O’Connor is of special interest, since she sustainably inspired the work of Joyce Carol Oates, primarily her use of the grotesque: “The Grotesque may evoke horror and the uncanny, but it may also produce sadness, compassion or humour” (Crow 129). Indeed, Oates published two volumes of stories which are devoted to the Grotesque, a notion which Oates describes as: “blunt physicality that no amount of epistemological exegesis can exorcise” (qtd. in Araujo 91). In this sense, Oates uses the mode by means of describing “women’s conflict with their physical selves” (Araujo 92). Hence, the grotesque body is an abject body in the sense of Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytical concept (see 5.5 in this chapter). Oates also prefers to adapt

several Gothic elements to reveal “the mystery of human conditions... [and] the moral and social conditions of my generation” (Oates qtd. in Manske 134). This basic idea results in the intention to “lead her readers to a more profound sense of the mystery and the sanctity of the human predicament” (Manske 133). Hence, this attitude once more highlights Oates’s belief that literature, art and culture are an essentially communal concept.

5.2 The Double

The notion of the double is a crucial feature in Gothic Fiction and can be traced back to E.T.A Hoffmann in Germany, Mary Shelley in England and Edgar Allan Poe in the United States. Primarily, the double is an alter ego of one person who often commits crimes and is therefore featured as the evil nature of the character. This is explicitly depicted in Poe’s story “William Wilson”, as well as in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In this sense the double represents the split personality which is out of control. In case of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the monster created by the doctor is a physical double, which represents the fears and dark sides of the famous Victor Frankenstein. Indeed, according to Milicia Zivcovic: “The double motif is clearly secularized: the other is no longer designated as supernatural, but is an externalization of part of the self” (122).

However, also the biological twin functions as double, as presented in Oates’s stories “Fossil Figures” and “Death-Cup”. In these stories twin brothers are deliberately opposed in terms of moral attitudes and physiognomy. For example in “Fossil Figures” one brother is healthy and narcissistic: “A boy! Nine-pound boy! A beautiful – perfect – boy” (Oates 186), whereas the other brother is described as a small sickly creature which was not supposed to live: “Oh, but the poor thing won’t live – will he? Tiny caved-in chest, something twisted about the tiny spine and only faintly, as if at distance, came the choked bleating cries” (Oates 187). Here, the actual bond, the duality of the twins, is split from the very day of their birth: At the very beginning the stronger brother is called “a boy”, whereas the weaker is named “poor thing” (187).

Hence, the stronger brother rejects the handicapped one: “Why there be this other here, why this, why brother, why twin, when there is me. Only be one of

me. Yet not one: two" (Oates 187). According to Paul Coates: "Fear of the Double is fear of self-knowledge: The Romantic's fear of feasibility of the self's total reification by science" (Coates 3). Of course, Oates's characters are contemporary and have less to do with the artificial self of *Frankenstein* or *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, but it is a matter of fact that the stronger brother denies the other brother, who is part of him since they grew in the same womb. The sick brother represents everything the stronger brother is not, which can be indeed compared to the function of the double in *Frankenstein* or in *Jekyll/Hyde*. Here it is also interesting to mention that Coates makes a rather stereotypical difference between twins and doubles in his work, arguing: "Whereas twins are staple figures of comic literature, which feeds on the confusions their similarity generates, the double recaptures the image of the twin for non-comic literature: The Double is the emissary of death" (Coates 3). Taking this comment into account, Oates's depiction of characters clearly fails to fit the comic stereotype and can be rather compared with Coates's non-comic depiction, which is ultimately the double: This is because, first of all, the brothers are not identical twins and secondly they complement each other. In the tradition of Gothic Fiction, a character's bad habits and moral decay, had been regularly put onto doubles who are deformed and ugly and here once again *Frankenstein*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and also the *Picture of Dorian Gray* are accurate examples. However, in Oates's use of this Gothic element it is the other way round: In "Fossil Figures" the deformed twin represents creativity, gentleness and love, whereas the strong brother is an unscrupulous, narcissistic politician, who is rich and prestigious, a luxury which is transient in contemporary society. Concerning the contemporary aspect of the double, Zivcovic argues: "The double in modern fiction reveals a tragic truth of the whole western civilization – a reluctance to give in to a desire for something other, which can only be experienced in its devouring and horrific aspect, yet apprehending this other as the only alternative to a hostile, patriarchal, capitalist order" (124). Indeed this statement applies to Oates's depiction of the double as twin, since the weaker brother desires to be unified with the selfish and strong one, but it is not the other way round: "*I am your brother, remember me? You are nothing of mine. Go away! But I am in you. Where can I go?*" (Oates 191). In this sense, the weak brother is constantly denied and therefore, experienced as a horrific other

to which the strong brother reacts in hostility: “*Could have killed you, freak. And I will if you tell*” (Oates 190). In a world where fame, public image and success dominate society, a sensitive side of a human being has no place, and this is also reflected by means of isolation of the weak brother, who works at home and is rarely seen in public and hence never seen with his brother: “*Edgar Waldman. Edward Waldman. But you never saw them together*” (Oates 191).

5.3 Male and Female Characters in Gothic Fiction

The Gothic form has always provided space to unfold power-relations between men and women. In the early works by both male and female authors plots featured a “monstrous masculine” (Baker 168) who threatens and subdues the heroine. The heroine then tries to flee from this patriarchal prison, while having uncanny encounters with supernatural creatures and discovering the dark secrets of the villain’s past, until she is finally free (see Milbank 155).

The characterization of men and women in the Gothic form became increasingly interesting with the rise of second wave feminism in the 1960s and 70s when “the Gothic heroine thus became a proto-feminist in her resistance to patriarchal control” (Milbank 155). This concept also left its traces in the novels and short fiction of Oates. It can be seen that in many stories to be analysed female characters are indeed responsible for the doom of their male protagonists, who outwit them by means of sudden appearances and assumed knowledge of the men’s past.

However, at this point I would like to briefly sketch the role of women in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, since it can be roughly compared to Oates’s story “The Museum of Dr. Moses”. In *Frankenstein* “[...] the author characterizes each woman as passive, disposable and serving a utilitarian function. Female characters like Safie, Elizabeth, Justine, Margaret and Agatha provide nothing more but a channel of action for the male characters in the novel” (Haddard 1). In a similar way, although set in the 20th century, in Oates’s story, the mother of a young and independent woman re-marries a famous oculist who carries a dark secret, and is submissive to his mysterious actions. In *Frankenstein*, Victor is portrayed as an aspiring scientist who is eager to create life and play God by

means of new technologies. The word creator also appears in Oates's story and her depiction of the male character resembles the basic idea of the mad scientist: "How dramatically the man spoke! In our naiveté some of us may have confused white haired Dr. Moses in his gray pinstriped suit with a *creator*" (Oates 196). Indeed it turns out that Dr. Moses is a creator, but the result of his creations is even more threatening than Victor's monster. In this story, then, the daughter of the victim functions as the saviour who takes action and causes the death of the mad scientist: "She was clearly a woman in distress, in thrall to a tyrannical male" (Oates 203). In a second story, "A Hole in the Head", another modern Victor Frankenstein is in the focus: "Few of his patients ever 'bled' in his office. Dr. Bede is a cosmetic surgeon and the procedures he performed on the premises – collagen and Botox injection, microdermabrasion, laser, chemical peeling – involved virtually no blood loss" (Oates 316). In this case it is a female patient who believes in the creative hands of the doctor, and who pushes him to the limits of his profession.

Here it can be stated that Joyce Carol Oates depicts many of her male and female protagonists and their relationships in such a way that they can be analysed as Gothic in their mysterious behaviours: a revengeful step-daughter, who chooses a graveyard as the place of vengeance and a young man who has a mysterious encounter with an obviously raped child.

5.4 Abjection

A character's confrontation with the abject is one of the key features in Gothic Fiction. According to Kelly Hurley "the content of the abject is always loathsome, a point of particular interest for the studies of Gothic Horror" (Hurley 144). What then does Abjection actually mean? Etymologically, the word can be traced back to the "Latin term *abjectus*", which means "to 'reject' or to 'throw away' but also 'cast off'" (Hurley 144). Furthermore, the word is "used as synonym for the debased, degraded, humiliated [and] despicable [...]" (Hurley 144). However, the term was specifically used in a psychoanalytical context by the French philosopher Julia Kristeva in her book *The Powers of Horror: An essay on Abjection*. She describes the significance of the abject as "[...] what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Another psychoanalyst, namely Jaques Lacan, described the abject as

follows: “[...] abjects are things/events in the face of which the subject experiences absolute dread” (Berressem 20). Such encounters with abjection are also part of many stories by Oates: In “The Museum of Dr. Moses” the heroine Ella is confronted with bizarrely conserved body parts: “I found myself staring, at first without comprehension into a glass display case containing human skulls: except, when I looked more closely, these were heads; human heads; somewhat shrunken, and the faces shrivelled; they had swarthy coarse complexions [...] their eyes still intact, though half closed, sullen and unfocussed” (Oates 223). Furthermore, Berressem argues: “Abjects [...] are experienced, much like traumatic events” (Berressem 20). One can find characters, who are traumatized, in the stories “Bleed” and “Beersheba”. In the last story mentioned a young girl is confronted with her former step-father: “Killed my mother you sorry prick, [...]. You can crawl like a worm, make your way home like a worm” (Oates 154). The encounter with the past in form of an assumed monstrous male, fills the heroine with disgust and hatred, so that she reduces the male subject to a non human creature. In these examples, one can recognize that the abject is mostly material: human skulls/heads, the antagonist imagined as a worm. Indeed, according to Berressem: “Actually, abjects are extremely, one might even say *excessively*, material” (21).

Another feature of the abject is described in the following way by Kristeva: “[...] so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims – if not its submissive and willing ones” (Kristeva 25). Such ambiguous feelings of both disgust and fascination are also verbalised in “The Museum of Dr. Moses”: “On a dressmakers dummy was the skin of a big breasted female torso, flayed and made into a kind of vest, sewn onto a durable material like felt. Appalled, yet fascinated, I turned over the hem of the vest...” (Oates 225). In this scene, the protagonist discovers a dead body, or rather parts of it: “The decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the animate and the inorganic [...] the corpse represents fundamental pollution” (Kristeva 109). Not only corpses, rotten things and the manifestation of trauma are elements of abjection, but also the human body as such and especially the female body, which is forever marked with the burden of giving birth. Oates is devoted to this specific notion of the abject or grotesque in a volume of short stories entitled *Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque* (1994). In these stories “Oates uses

physiological imagery to describe specific contexts of women's lives [...] isolation and sexual fantasies, pregnancy and motherhood, abortion and domestic abuse" (Araujo 95). In this context critic Mary Allen aptly argues: "the female body is a liability always out of control, the centre of pain and the source of excretions that proliferate in Oates's work: vomit, blood, diseased tissue, menstrual blood, and the new born child [...]" (Allem qtd. in Araujo 95). A glimpse of this concept of abjection also occurs in "The Museum of Dr. Moses" when the young heroine remembers the suffering of her mother, pregnant:

Poor Ginny. She hadn't been well... Because, it was vaguely said, of the miscarriage; because she'd never gotten over giving birth to the little girl, a thirty-hour labour; because of certain 'female weaknesses'. (Meaning what? In that era in which breast, cervical and ovarian cancer as well as more ordinary menstrual problems were mysteriously alluded to as 'women's shame' [...]) (Oates 188).

6 Analysis and Interpretation of Six Selected Stories: Mystery and Suspense

6.1 "Fossil Figures"

6.1.1 Mystery and Suspense: Plot and Characters

It can be argued that "Fossil Figures" unfolds as a mysterious parable concerning the duality of human existence. In this case it is the life story of the twin brothers Edgar and Edward Waldman, whose personal and biological evolution is documented from the embryonic stage on, tucked in the mother's womb. This early phase of the unborn brothers is vividly described by Oates in a realistic rhythm with the very first sentence: "Inside the great belly where the *beat beat beat* of the great heart pumped life blindly" (Oates 185). In this initial scenario, the fate of the two human beings is already ascertained, one being "the demon brother the larger, ravenous with hunger and the other the smaller brother" (185). As they are born their physical and psychological discrepancies are relentlessly narrated: Edgar is the tall, strong, quick, clever and healthy one: "...for the demon brother has sucked up most of the oxygen in the room" (189). Edward is crippled, small and lacking everything: "His lungs were weak, his heart was weak" (188).

During their lives the stronger brother achieves a career as a conservative politician while the younger one is still living at home, bound to a wheelchair. In order to come to terms with his physical handicap, Edward becomes devoted to abstract art, which is in great demand. The brothers have no contact to each other, until one day, when all of a sudden, Edgar wants to reunite with his weak twin. This plot appears to be rather simple and straight-forward, but it is the theme of brotherhood and especially the notion of the bond between twins which makes this short story a suspenseful reading experience from the very beginning: in the first place the reader is stunned by the vivid start where the mysterious evolution of human life during pregnancy is introduced, which is actually a painful but still joyful experience for women. However, "[...] in her ignorance the mother did not yet know that inside her belly there was not one but two" (185). The fact that these babies are not equal in terms of physiognomy, alarms the reader with a first question: How will these boys develop and why is the so called stronger brother so hostile toward his twin? In this context another question can be: will there ever be any kind of bond between them? This is a plausible question, since the initial information given, is rather pessimistic concerning sibling-love. All these questions can be closely linked to plot-suspense, which can also be described as an initial experience for the reader: this means that on this "level of narration" (Rabkin 74), the reading audience receives a first impression, concerning the course of events and a possible outcome. The outcome of the presented plot can be reduced to the same binary opposition which can be found in the description of characters: both are very different, one being the assumed good and the other the bad guy. Therefore the final outcome expected by the reader is either good or bad; viz. either the brothers come to terms with each other and in this sense that the 'bad' brother gives in and re-animates the broken bond which is desirable, but improbable, or the two will never come to terms due to their very different attitudes.

In this context, Oates manages to keep the reader in suspense, due to the fact that she tells the whole life-story and the two different ways the brothers go: on the first pages Oates leaves the reader with the impression that the weak brother has no chance in life and is just a passive figure: "He lived by himself outside the city and never came into the city" (Oates 201), whereas the stronger

brother is part of the world outside and actively participates in social conventions: “[...] Eddie Waldman was recruited by a dozen universities offering sports scholarships and, shrewdly, he chose the most academically prestigious of the universities [...]” (193). This interplay between passivity and activity creates a tension on the narrative level, since it promotes the plot. This in turn triggers a feeling of suspense in the reader’s mind. This observation corresponds with Alwin Fill’s argument that one of the key ingredients for creating suspense is a demonstration of oppositions (see Fill), which are initially distinguished, but throughout the text a dynamic interplay between them is created until these oppositions either merge in the end or drift apart again, whereat the former possibility provides the actual outcome, which once more affirms that a suspenseful text contains two possible outcomes. Hence it can be stated that the plot of “Fossil Figures” unfolds in the presentation of oppositions, which is at the same time one element in order to create suspense.

“Twins? How can that be possible?” (Oates 188). This is a legitimate question, since Edgar and Edward Waldman are so unlike that it is hard to believe that they have any connection to each other. From the very beginning, growing in their mother’s womb, the discrepancies between the brothers are documented:

And yet not two equally, for the demon brother was the larger of the two, with but a single wish to suck suck suck into his being the life of the other, the smaller brother, all of the nourishment of the liquid-dark womb, to suck, to suck into himself the smaller brother about whom he was hunched as if embracing him, belly to curving spine and the forehead of the demon brother pressed against the soft bone of the back of the head of the smaller brother (Oates 186).

This is an uncanny scene, where one brother is characterised as “demon” who leaves little space for the other brother’s development and nourishment. Indeed, it can be stated that this scenario foreshadows the personal histories of the twins: During their childhood, Edgar, the stronger brother, is “first in all things” (187), clever, self-assured, always achieving his goals and described as “*all boy*” (188). Edward, on the other hand, is often called “*poor thing*” (188), continuously sick, with a crippled spine and a lack of oxygen, struggling to survive: “[...] his weak lungs unable to breathe [...] and whimpering in a plea for help” (189). Edward is helpless in the face of Edgar’s energy, a masculine energy he regularly acts out on his brother: “[...] pushing him, shoving him,

wrestling him to the floor, as the smaller brother drew breath to protest straddling him with his knees, gripping the breakable rib cage like a vise, thump-thump-thumping the little freak's head against the floor" (190). With such violent actions, Edgar wants to show his brother that he does not want him to be part of his life, a life where he "was a natural leader, an athlete. His grades were never less than B, his smile was a dimpled smile, sly-sincere" (191). Edgar denies Edward, who is described as "a broken, freaky figure, with a small pinched boy's face, waxy skin and slack lips, drowsy from painkillers [...]" (193).

As both become adults, Edward remains a freaky figure, living isolated from social life, mainly sunken in thought and devoted to art, creating his own bizarre world on a sketch-block. Edgar is never satisfied and solely interested to move on in life, to achieve a career regardless of other people's feelings, since emotions and charity have no space in the world of politics, but appearance, influence and strength is everything: "No values, no morals, no goals other than economic interests. This was the triumphant politics of the era. This was the era of the self" (198).

After many years, when Edward's abstract and alien art becomes popular and is exhibited, Edgar assumingly overcomes his distance and visits a gallery, but with some shame "The handsome congressman wore very dark glasses, he looked at no one, in dread of being recognised in this sordid place" (199). Here it can be argued that Joyce Carol Oates constructs the two characters in such a way that the reader feels empathy with Edward, who is portrayed as a figure on the margin. Furthermore, the reader is affected by his life-long history of pain and austerity. In this context it can be argued that the author provides what Peter Vorderer calls "*experience text*" (238) where "the presentation of a character's experiences, thoughts and emotions [...]" are in the focus in order to create empathy which he distinguishes from "*action texts*" (238) where "the focus is usually on physical action" (238). Furthermore, Oates's construction of the main characters triggers the reader's curiosity concerning the outcome with another important question in mind: Will there be justice in the end, with the 'bad' brother being punished? Empathy and curiosity are crucial elements in order to feel suspense.

However, two other suspense factors are equally important, concerning the characterization of the protagonists, which can be closely linked to the Gothic concept of the Abject and the Double: although the concept of the double is rather associated with a character's alter ego as presented in classic Gothic texts such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, it can be argued that also the twin functions as double. There is much evidence in the text in order to approve this argument: a person's double embodies everything he/she is not, as it is presented by Oates. Furthermore a person often wants to get rid of this other as it is the case with Edgar, who does not want to accept Edward as his brother, which can be recognised in a thought that occurs several times in the story: "*Why there be this other here – this thing! Why this, when there is me!*" (Oates 186,193,194). Here it can be argued that Edgar even does not recognise his brother as a full human being, but as a failed creation that can be roughly compared to Gothic characters such as Frankenstein's monster, a something which is there, but actually has no place. In this context, the notion of the abject can be applied: the portrayal of Edward as debris of his brother, physically deformed and weak, suggests picking up this Gothic element, since the abject is similar to the double characterised as something other which does not resemble me and is relentlessly rejected. One can already recognise Edward as abject figure at the hour of the twin's birth: whereas Edgar is proudly described as "*A Boy! Nine pound boy! A beautiful-perfect-boy*" (186), the fact that there is a second baby coming gives the mother a shock: "[...] there was another baby inside [...], but this not a perfect baby, a runt, cloaked in oily blood, a tiny aged man with a wizened face [...] a final spasm of waning contractions *Another! There is another boy* yet so tiny, malnourished, five pounds, most of the weight in the head [...] purple flushed skin [...] eyelids stuck together with bloody pus [...]" (186-187). Here, it is of interest to mention that although the act of birth is in general painful and bloody, Edgar's birth is described as less abominable, since he is the one that is gladly expected by the mother. Concerning Edward's delivery phrases such as "bloody pus", "skull-forceps" and "bulbous blue veined head" rather raise feelings of disgust. Furthermore, the thought "*Oh but the poor thing won't live – will he?*" (187) can be closely linked to one feature of the abject, which is that the abject is "death-infected life" (Kristeva 5). However, Edward becomes a sensible and intelligent man, who is keenly aware of his

physical handicap and knows what people think when they see him. He implements his fate in abstract art, which is ultimately abject:

“and, protruding from the rough surface of the canvas, a thing so unexpected, so ugly, the congressman stepped back in astonishment: was it a nestlike growth of some kind? A tumor? Comprised of plasticine flesh and dark crinkly hairs and – could it be baby teeth? Arranged in a smile? And a scattering of baby bones” (200).

In this vivid scene one can recognise that a confrontation with the abject is both daunting as well as fascinating. Hence, these feelings correspond with how Edgar experiences his twin: as a grotesque comic figure from which he wants to stay away, but is still being gravitated to it.

The fact that Edgar does not take his brother very seriously can also be interpreted as a sign of fear, a fear of the moment when he recognises that there exists a part in him that resembles Edward's sensible feelings and awkward attitude to life. It is Edward who is not afraid to see a certain hidden resemblance with his brother: “*Resembling each other as a shadow can be said to resemble his object*” (193). This thought is followed by the dry sentence: “Edward was the shadow” (193) and being a shadow figure is also one aspect of the double: Edward lives apart, somehow in oblivion, but not without hope, since he constantly thinks about his other self: “*Alone yet never lonely. For is a twin lonely? Not so long as his twin-self continues to exist*” (197). This thought shows that there is indeed an invisible bond between the two and also that the twins are dependent on each other, even if they have different perceptions in terms of brother-hood.

The mysterious connection between the twins becomes abundantly clear, when both brothers think about each other at least once every year which is inescapable, since they share the same birthday:

January 26. The dead of winter. Each year on that day the brothers thought of each other with such vividness, each might have imagined that the other was close beside him or behind him, a breath on his cheek, a phantom embrace. *He is alive, I can feel him* Edward thought with a shiver of anticipation. *He is alive, I can feel him* Edgar thought with a shiver of revulsion (198).

Here it is obvious that the two brother's feelings for each other diverge: Edward longs for his brother and wishes to be re-united with him, whereas Edgar is

rather disgusted when he thinks of his twin. Furthermore this is an interesting scene in terms of suspense on the level of characterisation, since it corresponds with Oates's own view that suspense is created by means of a conflict between characters. However, in suspenseful texts such oppositions aspire at a resolution, a resolution which is also expected by the reader and indeed Oates releases the reader from deliberate uncertainty, when Edgar finally recognises that he truly needs his brother's support after he loses his public reputation as conservative politician, since he falls prey to his own greed and selfishness: *"Indicted on multiple charges of bribe taking, violations of federal campaign laws, perjury before a federal grand jury (202).* Hence, his last resort is his brother, who never had any anger against Edgar, but even mysteriously foreshadows this incident: *And I won't go away. You will come to me instead (201).*

Finally the twins even die together as very old men and the surprising revelation is that in death, they merge as they once did in their mother's womb: In their mother's body "the smaller brother about whom he hunched as if embracing him, belly to curving spine and the forehead of the demon brother pressed against the soft bone of the back of the head of the smaller brother" (186). In death they mysteriously occupy a similar position:

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, two figures coiled together like a gnarled organic material that has petrified to stone (205).

6.1.2 Formal Suspense: Point of View, Structure and Style

In "Fossil Figures" Joyce Carol Oates installs a third person omniscient narrator, who narrates the entire life-story of the twins and thus knows the outcome of their conflict. However, this form of narration is consistently disconnected by means of the characters' own thoughts, which allows the reader to get glimpses of how the brothers experience one another. Oates highlights these individual thoughts by using italics: *"Freedom! Misery and Wonder!" (196).* Due to the fact that by this method of narrating the story is promoted, it can be argued that the reader is provided with a comprehensive portrayal of the twins. Furthermore, the interplay between an omniscient voice and the presentation of inner thoughts

creates suspense, since once the reader is familiar with this technique, he/she is eager to find out more about the characters' own views and expects this method to lead him/her to the outcome of the story. In the very last passage Oates uses italics beyond the thoughts of the character but rather to document their mysterious death and to inform the reader that the circle is complete, since in death the twins form a unity again as they once did before they were given birth, marked by a foetus position.

The story is structured by means of three numbered parts, which correspond to the periods of life of the brothers: Hence, the first part contains the foetus-stage, birth, infancy in which a new paragraph introduces how they experienced childhood, school and the teenage years. In the second chapter, Edgar's and Edward's adult years from their twenties to their fortieth birthday is portrayed and the third part marks the turning point where Edgar overcomes his distance, deals with his brother's art and loses his reputation. However, Oates reveals the outcome in an epilogue, which is actually more frequently found in drama, where it functions as an afterword in order to explain the full meaning of the preceding conflicts. In the case of "Fossil Figures" the epilogue provides the final meaning and is at the same time the climax of the story, which is one indicator of suspense fiction: suspense and tension are created by means of an on-going conflict which allows no relaxation until the very last passage.

In "Fossil Figures" suspense is also created on the level of style. Already in the very first sentence Oates makes use of repetition: "Inside the great belly where the *beat beat beat* of the great heart pumped life blindly" (185). It can be argued that the author deploys the method of repetition to imitate the mysterious procedures in the foetus's evolution. Then the pace becomes fast, indicated by long sentences stretching up to eleven lines, which is a good method to capture the reader's attention from the very beginning. Furthermore, this use of hypotaxis sensibilises the readership for the differences between the brothers:

The demon brother did not yet feed by mouth, had not yet sharp teeth tear, chew, devour and so could not swallow up the smaller brother into his gut, and so the smaller brother survived inside the swollen belly where the *beat beat beat* pumped life blindly and in ignorance until the very hour of the birth when the demon brother forced his way out of the womb headfirst, a diver, a plunger, eager for oxygen, thrusting, squawling, struggling to declare himself, drew his first breath in a shudder

of astonishment and began to bawl loudly, hungrily, kicking his small legs, flailing his small arms [...] (186).

Although Oates argues that it is rather unimportant which and how many words she uses in a text, one can recognise in this quote that it does indeed play an important part concerning empathy and understanding and it also makes a difference whether she uses epithet or not: words like “loudly”, “hungrily”, “swollen” or “shudder” additionally consolidate the reader’s awareness of the twin’s continuous conflict during life. Furthermore, the interminable sequence of clauses motivates the reader to go on, which is one method of Oates in order to heighten tension.

Stating questions, which is also an important element in the creation of suspense, also occur in “Fossil Figures” and is mainly used in order to leave the reader in uncertainty, since both brothers ask question with different intentions: Whereas Edgar asks himself: “*Why be this other here – this thing*” (193)!, Edward constantly asks: “*For is a twin lonely*” (197)? [...] “*Where else can there be, that I am*” (198)? Hence, one brother does not even understand why he got a twin whereas the other is glad to share a life with another human being and these questions also trigger the reader’s curiosity whether both come to terms in the end.

It is also interesting to highlight that the title of the story unfolds as metaphor, since it corresponds with Edward’s life of suffering and as a key to the brother’s final reunion. The expression “Fossil Figures” does not in itself create suspense, but curiosity. However, after a few pages, Oates gives a first hint that she might reveal the meaning of the title by means of describing Edward’s fondness of drawing, which he already had in school: “[...] he only pretended to take notes while in fact drawing bizarre human figures – geometrical, humanoid” (193). Three pages later, Edward indeed becomes an artist: “On large canvasses Edward transcribed his bizarre dream images, among galaxies of hieroglyphic shapes in a sequence titled *Fossil Figures*” (196). Afterwards a first meaning of the Fossil Figures is revealed when Edgar visits the gallery and wants to make sense of his brother’s work: “A fossil it was. A thing removed from the human body. Something very ugly discovered in a cavity of a surviving twin’s body. The fossil soul of the other, that had never breathed life” (200). This information

shows that it is the handicapped Edward who is a fossil figure. However, the full meaning of the title is revealed in the very last sentence: “[...] *the two figures coiled together like gnarled organic material that has petrified to stone*” (205). The comment can be interpreted as a synonym for the expression Fossil Figures: in death the brothers are truly equal.

6.2 “Death-Cup”

6.2.1 Mystery and Suspense: Plot and Characters

In “Death-Cup” Oates continues to be devoted to the theme of brothers in conflict. The plot takes place in a small town called Contracoeur, where the twin brothers Lyle and Alastor meet each other again at their uncle’s funeral after many years apart. From the very beginning the mood between the twins is affected by mistrust and loathing and especially Lyle, who is still resident in their hometown, feels nothing but repugnance against his globe-trotter brother Alastor: “As, seated beside his brother Alastor of whom he disapproved strongly, he leaned far forward in the cramped hard wood pew, framing his face with his fingers so that he was spared seeing his brother’s profile in the corner of his eye” (Oates 207). Lyle expects his brother to leave Contracoeur soon, but Alastor tries to readopt the broken contact with Lyle and is planning to stay in town and Lyle silently accepts this decision, but not without a hidden agenda: he prepares a plan to kill his brother, due to the fact that Alastor brought too much pain upon many people in the past, but constantly masquerades himself as a heroic man vis a vis their relatives, by inventing adventures he experienced all around the world. Concerning Alastor’s treatment of women, Lyle is constantly reminded of one crucial occasion in the past: “Alastor had secretly seduced their seventeen year old cousin Susan, and within a week or two lost interest in her, causing the girl to attempt suicide and to suffer a breakdown from which she would never fully recover. Yet, maddening Alastor had continued to live, and live” (213).

In the first place, Lyle wants to kill his brother by preparing a poisonous lunch, which fails to unfold its deadly effect. However, it is this scene where plot-tension heightens and the reader is entertained by the uncertainty whether Lyle achieves any effect with his deceitful plan: “He watched, mesmerized, as

Alastor lifted spoonfuls of soup to his mouth and sipped and swallowed hungrily, making sounds of satisfaction [...] He'd had the idea that the poison was nearly instantaneous, like cyanide" (228).

In a second attempt, Lyle wants to drown his brother, after he takes a swim in a drunken condition, but after some consideration, interrupted by the fact that Alastor actually loses consciousness in the pool, Lyle even saves his brother's life.

The whole plot is pervaded by a silent conflict between the twins. Silent in the sense, that no physical fight or even a battle of words takes place. It is rather Lyle's passive disgust against Alastor and his behaviour that is continuously described. In this story, Oates once more deploys the opposition between a morally good and morally bad character, so as to cleverly pull the reader on the side of the good one, Lyle: Alastor's cruel and dark side is narrated, whereas Lyle is portrayed as a loyal, modest and honest man, despite the fact that he constantly plays with the thought to murder his brother. This empathy is levelled out at the very end of the story, since the outcome shows that the brothers belong to each other, but it is the way Oates re-enacts a bond between them that leaves the reader in astonishment and at the same time with a clear message concerning Oates's understanding of the mysterious relationship between twins.

Lyle and Alastor are described as two very different characters: Lyle is a modest and thoughtful man who dearly loved his uncle who was always an alternative-father, due to the fact that the two lost their true father during childhood: "*I would not wish to benefit in any way from my uncle Gardner's death, I could not bear it*" (209). Furthermore, he is portrayed as a non-manipulative and honest man, who stands in the shadow of his brother's masculine and seductive appearance: "[...] the less demonstrative brother [...]. Lacking somehow manliness himself [...]. Lyle's thinning hair was limp and straight [...]. Lyle's duller blue eyes were gently myopic and vague behind glasses that were invariably finger-smudged" (217). In contrast: "Alastor's sharply blue eyes were alert and watchful and flirtatious [...]. In particular, women were drawn to his energetic, boyish good looks and bearing" (217). Furthermore, the 'bad' brother is always well dressed for the right occasion, which promptly catches people's attention and although Lyle is similarly

dressed, he is only noticed as Alastor's identical twin and mostly ignored: "He was a sweet-natured, vague minded young old man with the look of a perennial bachelor" (218). Moreover, it can be argued that Lyle is rather recognised as a boring, dutiful citizen, who has not seen much of the world and therefore less to tell, whereas Alastor appears as a mysterious "explorer" and traveller, constantly on the quest for new challenges and admired for the adventures he pretends to have experienced. Taking this thought into account the reader could also impute that Lyle is jealous of his brother, due to the fact that he is always in the centre of attention. But of course there is more behind Lyle's hatred against his brother, which can be closely linked to fact that he knows that Alastor is a liar and constantly manipulates people for his own purposes: "*See how clever I am? And what gullible fools these others are, to take me seriously*" (220). With his manipulative attitude, Alastor constantly provokes Lyle, leading him to the question: "*How can so evil a person deserve to live?*" (213).

This question brings the notion of the double into effect. In this context one striking sentence catches the attention of an experienced reader of Oates's fiction: "It was no longer possible for him to work even on projects, like the book design for Poe's "William Wilson", that challenged his imagination" (237). This comment in turn stimulates the reader's imagination that he/she is invited to reside in a similar scenario as in Poe's story, which is known as the prototypical tale of the double, where the protagonist wants to get rid of a man who looks just like him, but acts in an evil manner. According to Spark-notes: "Although Poe's focus is undoubtedly the alter ego—the part of the self that haunts us against our will—he portrays this psychological condition through the manifestation of another body" (<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/poestories/section4.rhtml>, 1). Here it can be argued that in "Death-Cup" Oates picks up this Gothic motif by installing the identical twin as being haunted by a corrupted brother: "Lyle had no freedom from thinking of his evil brother" (237). Hence, he is trapped, since this demon from the past occupies Lyle's life, not letting him go until the bitter end. He is forced to deal with his brother and listens to his unsettling stories of which Alastor seems to be proud: for instance, how he seduced a young woman the other night, biting her lips until she started bleeding and forcing a gag into her mouth so that she is not able to scream. Lyle is disgusted, but mysteriously also

feels guilty: "As if, merely hearing such obscenities, he was an accomplice of Alastor's. *And perhaps somehow in fact he'd been there, helping to hold the struggling girl down, helping to thrust the gag into her mouth*" (238). This shows the involuntary bond between the unlike brothers. Every cruel and morally reprehensible action that Alastor commits affects Lyle's consciousness and he is the only human being that knows Alastor's true face. In front of other people and relatives, he constantly plays a role, making people believe he is a good natured and trusted man. In this context, Lyle thinks that he mysteriously puts people under a spell: "[...] looking upon Alastor as if he were a fairy prince, promising them their youth again, their lost innocence" (221). In Lyle's opinion, Alastor is insidious and all fake, which is uncritically admired, and therefore he wants to get rid of his demon-brother, so that he can prevent him from committing other crimes. Due to the fact that Lyle is his flesh and blood, it is his task to do this: "*It's my moral obligation to destroy this man, because he is evil; and because there is no one else to destroy him but me*" (239). Hence, the distaste for his sinister brother causes Lyle to leave his moral path in order to become a possible perpetrator, but still he is constantly in doubt whether to commit fratricide or not: a large part of the story is centred on this conflict; scenarios of hatred and near crimes are followed by doubts and regret. This inner conflict creates suspense: The question of "to kill, or not to kill" is central and triggers the readership's interest. One is dragged into the scenarios and particularly involved when Lyle is on the verge of realizing his plan, but when the character's tension and anticipation sharpens, nothing happens and the reader, who is in a similar anticipation, is put off with comments like: "*It hasn't happened yet. I am not a fratricide yet*" (233).

However, there follows a mysterious turn in the good brother's intention once he saved Alastor from drowning. It appears that he finally gives up on trying to kill him: "Lyle would have to live as if it were, for his brother Alastor could not be killed. Evidently. Or in any case, Lyle was not the man to kill him" (242). On these last pages of the short story, the project concerning the cover of a new edition of Poe's "William Wilson" is mentioned again: "a dozen rejected drawings for "William Wilson, scattered and crumpled before him [...]" (242). One could argue that the project will never be finished, since in "William Wilson" the protagonist actually kills his unwanted image and therefore himself. At this

point in the story, close to the end, Oates lulls the reader into safety, that everything turns out fine between the twins and shows Lyle's newly found attitude to life: "Why had he, Lyle King, been a puritan all his life? [...] *Look! Look at me! This is the first day of my new life*" (246).

However, in the final scene there is another twist in the story that unfolds that the first day of his new life is at the same time the last, since it is Lyle who causes a momentous car-accident, with Alastor as front seat passenger, and both die immediately. Here it can be argued that Lyle still implemented his plan to kill his other self, as William Wilson did it at the end of Poe's story and with the consequences that he ultimately dies together with him. This ending corresponds with Poe's famous last sentence of his tale on the double: "In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself" (Poe 448). However, it is Oates's intuition that enables her to put very essence of the narration into a nutshell in two final sentences:

It was known that the remains were those of the Kings brothers, Alastor and Lyle, fraternal twins who would have been thirty eight years old on the following Sunday. But which body was which, whose charred organs, bones, blood had belonged to which brother, no forensic specialist would ever determine. (248)

This ending functions as being both illuminating and uncanny for the reader. Furthermore it shows that the twins merge into one person in death where the morally good and bad is united and some kind of transcendence has taken place, which is an attribute of Oates's fiction.

6.2.2 Formal Suspense: Point of View, Structure and Style

Concerning point of view, Joyce Carol Oates once more installs a third person omniscient narrator, who is not integrated in the events and knows more than the characters as well as the reader. However, Oates also makes use of the italics font in order to highlight glimpses of thoughts of the characters. This method is intended to explain to the reader the immediate reactions and thoughts of the protagonists in certain situations; for instance on the first pages when Lyle recognises his brother after many years of absence at their uncle's funeral, he tries to concentrate on the sermon but is constantly absent minded

due to his brother's presence, which leads to one crucial thought that triggers the coming of events. This alarms the reader's suspense: "*I will kill my brother Alastor after all. After all these years*" (Oates 211). But also Alastor's thoughts appear in the course of the third person narration. In the following sequence, for example, he demonstrates his superior appearance over his brother in company: "*See how natural I am, how spontaneous and loving, and how stiff and unnatural my brother is, and has always been, though we're supposed to be twins*" (215). However, a few pages later the reader is informed by another thought of Alastor that he is a faker, who has the corrupting gift to draw people to his side: "*See? How clever I am? And what gullible fools these others are, to take me seriously?*" (220). Furthermore it is of interest to mention that in a large part of the story the content of short direct speeches considerably differs from that of narration and thoughts, since Lyle or Alastor never openly speak of their dark thoughts on each other: "'You have more talent brother than you know', Alastor said with a wink. 'We might open a restaurant together: I, the keeper of the books; you; the master of the kitchen'" (229).

The story is structured by means of seventeen passages, whereby the initial sentence counts as a self-contained mini-passage, since it introduces the meaning of the stories title "Death-Cup". However, the actual meaning of the Latin word "*Amanita phalloides*" is not revealed to the reader until page five. Most passages are about Lyle's animosity against his twin and their hidden conflict in general, which results in an overall coherent and fluid narration the reader can easily follow. However, the thirteenth passage may surprises the reader, since Oates introduces an unknown woman who is seduced by Alastor, and this scene contains a separate description of how coldly Alastor abuses women: "[...] he bit her lips, hard; she recoiled from him , and still his teeth were clamped over her lips that were livid now with pain. When at last he released her, she was sobbing and her lips were bleeding and he the European gentleman, with genuine regret crying *Oh what did I do! – forgive me, I was carried away by passion, my darling*" (235).

Directly after this passage it becomes clear that Alastor proudly communicates this episode to his good twin, who is disgusted by this abusive act. This is one of the two passages where the reader is directly confronted with Alastor's cruel

actions. The second one is centred on a provocative conversation with a waitress when Alastor makes her cry and Lyle is present. In the rest of the story, provocations and doubts are presented by the narrator and by short glimpses of thoughts. It can be argued that these two situations finally animate Lyle to use the Death-Cup in order to attempt to kill his brother. This is one of the essential passages in the story where tension and suspense is heightened: "It would be cream of *Amanita Phalloides* soup that Lyle served to his brother Alastor [...]" (226). At this point of the story the meaning of this Latin foreign word is known by the reader, since it has already been revealed on page five after it was mentioned several times to stimulate the reader's expectations: "*Amanita phalloides* [...] *Amanita Pahlloides* [...] and suddenly he remembered what *Amanita Phalloides* was: The death-cup mushroom" (207, 208, 209, 211). However, after this explanation, the poisonous mushroom is not mentioned again until it is finally taken up again in the suspenseful scene, where the reader wonders whether it takes effect or not and is able to put himself/herself in Lyle's position: "The 'Phallic' nature of the fungi was painfully self-evident. How ironic, Lyle thought, and appropriate. For a man like Alastor, who sexually misused women" (227). This sequence shows one major reason, why Lyle wants to get rid of his brother, since it is installed after the scenes of provocation and abuse. Suspense is intensified when Lyle watches his unsuspecting brother eating the supposedly poisonous soup: "He watched, mesmerized, as Alastor lifted spoonfuls of soup into his mouth and sipped and swallowed hungrily, making sounds of satisfaction" (228). On the next page, first doubts are raised in Lyle's mind, whether his plan will work out, which Oates wraps up in a question: "Or had – the possibility filled him with horror – boiling the chopped-up toadstool diluted its toxin?" (229) Unpleasant words from the field of dread such as "horror" are rarely used by Oates in this short story. She rather operates with a subliminal language that perfectly fits the actual events where the deceit of both brothers is in focus and with this method she mediates her intention to the reader.

Besides the repetition of the foreign word for the death-cup mushroom, there is a phrase that is also repeated several times: "*The world is a beautiful place*" (242). This is one of Lyle's thoughts which are intended to pacify his sinister plans against his brother, after he has already failed in killing his brother.

Another interesting episode occurs after their uncle's funeral when Lyle gives Alastor a drive to his motel:

His thoughts flew ahead swiftly – there was Cemetery Hill that was treacherously steep, and the High Street Bridge – opportunities for accidents? Somehow Lyle's car might swerve out of control, skid on the wet pavement, Alastor who scorned to wear a seatbelt might be thrown against the windshield, might be injured, might die, while he, Lyle, buckled in safely, might escape with but minor injuries. And blameless. Was this possible? (212)

In this scene the final accident, where both are going to die, is mysteriously foreshadowed by Lyle, a foreshadowing which does not unfold its specific intention until the reader has finished the story. Then the reader is also provided with the answer that a blameless accident is possible.

6.3 “The Museum of Dr. Moses”

6.3.1 Mystery and Suspense: Plot and Characters

The story focuses on a young woman who decides to visit her mother in the North of the state New York in Eden County and the plot is set in the mid 1970s. The protagonist's name is Ella and she has not seen her mother in many years, who is now married to the famous oculist and county coroner Dr. Moses Hammacher. However, a short introductory episode takes place in Ella's childhood, when she remembers her mother's commitment, after she has been attacked by bees: “She didn't hesitate for a moment. She ran swift and unerring as a young girl, though she was thirty two years old and had not fully recovered from a miscarriage the previous spring, and was not in any case a woman accustomed to running “ (Oates 186). At that time the innocent girl adores her mother's heroic actions. But later as an adult, Ella thinks back to her mother's forgiving and passive behaviour concerning her drunk and careless father as well as her misbehaving brother, which lead to a failed relationship with her mother: “Forgiving! That was the primary reason I'd become estranged from my mother” (188). Hence, Ella, who has achieved her independence by attending college to become a teacher, has mixed feelings before arriving at the doctor's house.

Indeed, it turns out that her mother does not feel well, but is too anxious to admit it. Due to this fact, Ella carefully observes the strange atmosphere in Dr.

Moses house and specifically her mother's behaviour in his presence: "I noted that mother, too, called her courtly husband Dr. Moses. I wondered if such old-fashioned formality was a natural part of their relationship. For mother was so much younger than Dr. Moses Hammacher, [...] clearly dependent on him, it would have been difficult for her to call him Moses, as if they were equals" (201). It turns out that her mother is under Dr. Moses mysterious spell, being not able to turn against him.

In the course of events, Ella is introduced to Dr. Moses own created private exhibition which shelters dozens of collections of bizarre relicts of human body parts conserved in formaldehyde. She becomes increasingly mistrustful concerning Dr. Moses actual intentions and the more she finds out by investigating the hidden parts of the museum on her own account, the more she realises that the famous oculist conceals a sinister secret. This is also the point in the story-line where suspense heightens, since the heroine, as well as the reader, recognises that she and her mother are in a highly dangerous situation. The actual dimension of the doctor's perverse actions unfolds, when Ella finds out that he forced her mother to undergo a painful face-lift. This alarms her to take action and she persuades her daunted mother to escape from this horrible place, before the mad scientist spots them.

Once more Oates's creates a plot that focuses on the opposition between morally good and bad characters, which allows the following outcomes: either Ella achieves to rescue her mother from the spell of the monstrous doctor, or she fails to open her mother's eyes to his cruel behaviour and gets herself into danger. It turns out that the former outcome takes place after many suspenseful situations.

Ella's mother, who is called Ginny, is the first character to be introduced in the story as the heroine re-visiones her childhood. Soon the reader recognises that she is a devoted mother-figure that does everything to protect her young daughter from being harmed: "Mommy shielded me from the wasps with both the towel and her bare, vulnerable flesh. She was stung herself, a dozen times, yet tried to comfort me as I screamed in pain and terror. [...]. For nothing mattered except rescuing me" (186). However, the mother's care is not only viewed positively, especially by her daughter: in the marriage with Ella's father

back in the 1950's she is also portrayed as a passive housewife who remains mute to the actions of her alcohol addicted husband: "[...] she had a husband with a quick temper and quick fists who'd tired of loving her during her first pregnancy" (188). Furthermore the mother suffered from a miscarriage which back in the fifties was blamed on the woman and her "female weakness" (188). When one takes a look at the mother's behaviour, one is reminded of the good natured 'angel in the house' as it was promoted in the Victorian era and presented in many works during this era. The servility to a male dominated society is manifested in Oates's description of the mother.

Due to the fact that during her childhood and teenage years Ella's mother was too forgiving, also concerning her son, who became a drinker too, Ella was estranged from her: "Ella, you're too hard to your brother. Ella, he's *your brother*" (188-89). Ella never really understood her mother's good natured attitude toward everything and therefore decided to break the contact to her mother for a few years. However, at least Ginny succeeded to divorce her first husband, which still does not free her from any conventions since it turns out that in her re-marriage with Dr. Moses she appears even more dependent on the actions of her male counterpart. The obvious differences in character between Dr. Moses and her mother are accurately described in the following hesitant comment: "I mean...your mother is so *sweet*. So *trusting*. And Dr. Moses is, well... a kind of strong-willed man, I guess" (194). Hence, it can be argued that Ginny is a Gothic victim at the mercy of a monstrous male scientist. Indeed Oates alludes to such a relationship in the story: "She was clearly a woman in distress, in thrall to a tyrannical male" (203) Furthermore she is afraid to admit that also her second marriage is affected by relentless fear and abuse and therefore she tries to convince everybody that she is happy and thankful to be married to such a respected doctor. The fact that the couple is living isolated from town life and any social contact, increases the possibility that mysterious things are happening in their house: "For who would ever come to such a remote, dreary place" (198)?

The reader suffers with Ella's mother, since Oates constantly provides information that suggests that something terrible is going on: "I am happy, Ella. My life was empty and selfish before I met Dr. Moses" (203). From the context

the reader soon recognises that this is a lie. However, it is a certain relief it turns out rather early in the story that Ella is a brave heroine who is in the position to give the story a happy turn. She is portrayed as an independent young woman, who chose to leave the backwater where she grew up in order to attend college to become a teacher and earn her own money: “[...] [I] was proud of my independence. I associated Strykersville with the past and I had no nostalgic yearning for the past, I’m not a sentimental person. For what is sentiment but weakness and usually ‘female weakness’? *I am not one of you*” (189). With such comments, Ella makes clear that she does not intend to follow her mother’s way of life in order to prevent herself from making the same mistakes. Hence, she embodies a new generation of women back in the 1970’s who are self-assured, have their own say and do not necessarily need a man in their life. It is Ginny’s luck that her daughter represents an image of a woman that differs from her, since Ella soon realizes that she and her mother are in danger. Therefore, she is presented as being constantly mistrustful toward the apparent harmonious marriage: “And now, as in a malevolent fairytale, Dr. Moses had married my mother” (196).

These feelings emerge due to the fact that Ella and Dr. Moses have known each other since he once visited her junior high-school to teach the pupils on “‘The Miracle of Eyesight’” (195). In this sense Ella remembers how she and her girlfriends experienced the doctor: “[...] my high school girlfriends made a show of shuddering and shivering as Dr. Moses passed by us on the sidewalk, tipping his hat and smiling his white toothed smile, [...]. His gaze mildly defracted by bifocal lenses, lingered on us. We had to wonder who would wish to be a county coroner and examine dead, sometimes badly disfigured and mangled bodies extracted from wrecks (194-95)?” This scene shows that people face the doctor with both respect and fear, which gives him a mysterious aura. Moreover, she also vividly remembers the closing words of his presentation on eyesight: “No organ so complex as the human eye could have ‘evolved’ in a hit-or-miss fashion as the Darwinists say [...]. It would have to have been, like our souls, *created* [...]. How dramatically the man spoke! In our naïvité, some of us have confused white-haired Dr. Moses, [...] with *creator*” (195-96). This is an uncanny vision and not so far-fetched, since he indeed becomes the creator of a morbid collection of medical artefacts by carefully preserving dead body-parts. This fact

allows the reader to imagine the doctor as a kind of Frankenstein figure who is eager to keep long-dead organs intact for visitors, which would have been decayed by nature.

In this sense Ella does not feel well when Dr. Moses actually shows her his museum:

I found myself staring wordlessly into a large display case of metal specula, [...] which made the pit of my belly – or the mouth of my uterus – contract in an involuntary spasm. [...]. An entire section of the museum was devoted to childbirth but I wasn't in the mood to examine anatomical charts of pregnant bellies, embryos curled in the wombs of headless female bodies. Nor did I want to see close-up the 'birthing table', [...]. A centuries-old odour of urine, blood, female suffering wafted from it. (208)

Here it can be argued that Ella is confronted with abjection: In this sense it is particularly interesting that relicts of the female body are displayed, since it is the female body with its reproductive organ, among other elements, that is connected with abjection. At the sight of the instruments, preserved wombs and embryos, Ella feels a mysterious spasm in her own organs which she experiences with disgust and this results in the fact that she actually does not want to see these things. Moreover these parts of the body are no longer intact but prepared for the mere gaze of visitors and that creates a kind of abnormal function of the organs: naturally they have the function to bear new life and are therefore active and essential parts of the female body, but in this case these are presented as 'art', which causes a feeling of disturbance and rejection in the visitor. Here it can be argued with the words of Julia Kristeva that these body parts mysteriously appear as being "blurred between the animate and inorganic" (Kristeva 109). Furthermore the use of words like "blood" and "urine" fills Ella with disgust. However, it is not only disgust but also fascination Ella experiences when facing abjects such as the womb, relicts of human skin or other inner organs which are normally invisible to the human eye: "On a dressmakers dummy was the skin of a big breasted female torso [...]. Appalled, yet fascinated I turned over the hem of the vest..." (225). This experience shows another effect of the abject, which is the ambiguity between fascination and rejection that it triggers in its beholder. At this point it is important to mention that Ella revisits the Museum to explore a forbidden part, which is called the red room: experienced readers of Gothic Fiction are may be reminded of Charlotte

Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, where in the second chapter the female protagonist is locked in the red room, imagining a ghostly figure: "and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, [...]" (Brontë 18). The difference to Brontë's novel is that the visions and images Ella is confronted with are indeed real. In this sense it can be argued that in the case of Oates's story these preserved objects appear as ghostly images of bodies that should actually have been long decomposed to dust in the natural course of death.

Moreover, Ella finds out that the eighty-five year old Doctor does not only preserve dead parts of the body, but also experiments on the living object in terms of re-storing female youth. For this purpose he forced a face-lift upon Ella's mother, which shocks her: "Dr. Moses gave you a face-lift? Here? In this house? But – it looks infected" (217). Hence, one can argue that Dr. Moses is also a re-creator of female youth and builds it according to his own idea. It then turns out that the doctor was already married before and it is his opinion about his first wife that additionally alarms Ella: "His first wife, he said, disappointed him. She had no *imagination* and she had no *courage*" (219). It appears that the doctor exploits his wives for his own cruel purpose and if they do not act as he wishes, they are rejected and punished. It is due to Ginny's good and submissive nature that she is still his wife, or even still alive? In this sense it can be argued that he chooses a woman that lacks self-confidence, as is the case with Ella's mother, and lures them in by making them feel worthy and desired before he victimises them (see Oates 219). Ella, representing a different female character, who is critical and independent, somehow understands her mother's fascination for the demon doctor, since she admits: "Though I feared and distrusted Dr. Moses, knowing him now to be a domestic tyrant, and possibly a dangerous one, I found myself charmed by him, as I'd been in the museum. His sensual, powerful will. His sexual will. *Women have been captivated by him*" (215). Such a comment shows the doctor as representative of a prototypical Gothic villain and allows comparisons to characters such as Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* or, who is both threatening and fascinating due to his individual charm and strong willed masculine nature. This is one mysterious reason, why Ella's mother cannot cut loose from this man, even after the reader finds out that in a hidden part of the museum even more horrible and grotesque

collections of human-skin lampshades and relicts of female hair decorated with pretty satin ribbons existed, which finally proves that the doctor is a psychopath. Indeed, the descriptions of human-lampshades and other horrible works of “art” may remind some reader of the U.S. real-life serial killer Ed Gein, who in a similar manner, collected human skin and female genitals back in the 1940s and 50s. He became the model for the character of the barbaric Leatherface in the trash-horror cult movie “The Texas Chainsaw Massacre” (1975).

However, the pretty satin ribbons tied to the dead female relicts, are also found by Ella in her mother’s bedroom, whereby her mother argues that this was a wedding-gift of the doctor. Ella immediately draws the connection to the dead people in the museum and this is the point when she takes her mother’s arm to actually flee from this place. The doctor’s reaction to this sudden flight reveals his true character, which he carefully disguised by his former charming and respectful appearance:

‘Ella, where are you taking my wife?’ Dr Moses was waiting for us on the front porch. He’d circled the house as if guessing my intentions. His voice was coldly furious, threatening. He possessed little of his courtly charm: he’d become an old, ravaged, truculent man with glaring eyes who hadn’t yet shaved, stubble glittering like mica on his jaws. He wasn’t wearing his starched white cotton shirt, or his dapper straw hat. Instead he wore work clothes, soiled. On the trouser cuffs were earth stains, or bloodstains. *His butcher’s uniform. And now he has come for you.* (228)

6.3.2 Formal Suspense: Point of View, Structure and Style

This is the first of the six stories to be analysed where Oates installs a first person limited narrator who is an active part of the story: Ella. The way the protagonist experience the nightmarish scenarios around the demonic doctor intensifies the reader’s personal commitment with the female characters, since they can actively intervene in the events and are not at the mercy of an objective narrator, who knows their fate from the very beginning. This heightens the reader’s feeling of suspense, because the situation the character is in appears in reach and can be followed more precisely. Furthermore, Oates rarely uses italic font in this short story due to the protagonist’s intense narration of events. However, sentences or phrases appear in italics, when Ella additionally communicates hidden thoughts: “*I am in the Museum of Dr. Moses.*”

I, too, am a specimen" (220) or imagines that her mother urgently needs help: "And my mother's voice sudden, pleading – *Ella? Come to me! Help me*" (191).

The story is carefully structured by means of eight chapters with different headlines which give a hint to what may happen. These are as follows: 1. 1956, where the reader soon realizes that this episode takes place in the past. 2. The Summons, which indicates that it is Ella's task to visit her mother in order to check whether she is doing well. 3. In Oriskany. In this chapter she finally arrives at the isolated house on the countryside and gets a first impression of her mother's marriage with the doctor. 4. The Museum of Dr. Moses: First Visit. Here, Oates provides a relentless description of his bizarre collection. The title also indicates that this was not Ella's last visit, although at the very end of this episode the doctor declares that there is nothing more to see: "The tour was over [...]. But I noticed double carved-oak doors at the rear of the room, and asked what was behind them. Dr. Moses said, "A new wing of the museum, the Red Room – not yet ready for visitors" (212). 5. The Revelation, where Ella discovers that her mother had a facelift and learns that she is the doctor's second wife, whereby the fate of the first wife remains a mystery, but one can only guess from the context that she had been murdered by him, since the reader learns that she was a disappointment for the doctor. 6. The Museum of Dr. Moses: The Red Room. At this point of the story the reader, as well as Ella, know that this place is "Not ready yet for visitors", still she dares to enter which indicates that Ella breaks the rule and put herself in a dangerous situation, which marks the climax of the dramatic events. What she finds there takes the reader's breath away: "The hands were claw-like, some of them blackened and missing fingers and nails, but otherwise perfectly preserved. [...]. As I nudged against the hand, the hand naturally moved" (223). In another creepy scene Ella recognises "[...] lampshades of fine, fair human skin, meticulously handsewn; the facial mask of an attractive woman, skin peeled carefully from her bones, attached to a mannequin's egg-smooth, featureless face; [...]" (224). The detailed description of this grotesque cabinet captivates the reader and makes him/her eager to go on. Relentlessly, Oates provides distressful images which prove that one is in the house of a perverse maniac, who does not use naturally deceased corpses, but deliberately kills these people in order to create an abject world. The red room symbolizes dread and pain that still linger here and

that the victim's must have felt in their hour of death. The mixed feelings this episode arouses in the reader, between the shock of the revelations in the red room and the constant anticipation whether Ella will be discovered by the monstrous doctor contains suspense in its very essence. However, at the end of this chapter, the reader finds out that she is discovered by her mother, who once more saves her daughter from this dangerous situation, which is straight followed by 7. Morning, when Ella is fully aware that she needs to act immediately, takes her mother and pushes the doctor away, so that he accidentally dies. 8. Escape presents a kind of epilogue which informs the reader that the women are driving away from Dr. Dead and his Museum of Horrors. Oates knows how to round up this story, since in the end the circle closes again. The initial glimpse back into Ella's childhood, with the crucial experience that her mother bravely saved her life finally shows that at the very end it is Ella's turn to take action and bravely save her mother's life.

With "The Museum of Dr. Moses" Oates manages to provide a truly Gothic tale that contains several elements of the Gothic such as the Grotesque (Abject), the female victim as well as heroine and a dark secret disguised by a monstrous male. It has already been argued that the use of Gothic concepts can be closely linked to the suspense genre due to the fact that: "A strange and unexpected event awakens the mind and keeps it on a stretch" as it is the case with the mysterious attitude of the doctor. Furthermore, the atmosphere in the story underlines the danger the protagonist may encounter, which is a crucial ingredient for both Gothic and Suspense Fiction and therefore suggests that Oates combines both genres: "[...] the nightmare bridges of my childhood: below, the creek was diminished and mud coloured, its gnarled banks exposed in the languid heat of August" (196). The description of an old bridge which reminds Ella of her childhood and that she connects with nightmares foreshadows to a certain degree the nightmare she might experience when being confronted with doctor Moses. Indeed, by means of the detailed descriptions of the landscape, which is both familiar but still uncanny for Ella, Oates creates an uncomfortable initial atmosphere. It is never indicated that this is going to be a pleasant visit, but the reader can feel that a dangerous or strange upcoming event lies in waiting to shock both readers and the protagonist. Hence, Oates constantly keeps the reader in "a state of anxious

uncertainty” (OED) as the Oxford English Dictionary describes suspense. Step by step, the author reveals crucial information concerning the doctor’s true nature and his perverse intentions, which she cleverly announces in the headlines of the eight chapters.

The explicit descriptions of the dead body-parts in combination with the meticulous revelation of Ella’s anxiety when she returns to the museum in the middle of the night in order to explore the forbidden red room heightens also the reader’s anxiety and does indeed keep the mind on a stretch: “Unknowingly, I’d begun to speak aloud. The shock must have been so profound. The flashlight beam seemed to be moving of its own volition, jerkily. My hand had begun to sweat, I could barely hold it. I was staring at a large, rectangular Plexiglas case in which luxuriant coils of lustrous, glossy hair were displayed” (223). Moreover, the deliberate use of questions posed by Ella, even intensify the reader’s involvement, since similar thoughts rise in the reader’s mind and this shows that nothing is safe and danger lingers in every corner. For instance, after Ella has found out about her mother’s painful facelift, she has a restless night and when she then stands in front of the bathroom mirror: “My eyelids were reddened. Had I been crying? In my sleep? I ran my fingers quickly through my hair, drew my nails across my scalp, searching apprehensively for – what? Staples? Small nails? Behind my ears where I couldn’t see, the skin was tender as if inflamed, but there were no stitches” (221).

Here it can be argued that Ella is afraid to fall prey to the doctor’s insidious action. The overall pace in the story is fast, so that Oates leaves no room for relaxation, which is another crucial factor in the creation of suspense.

In comparison to the other stories already analysed, here Oates places emphasis on slowly developing the conflict between the characters in the course of the story and does not introduce the differences on the first few pages. This is a useful method to move the reader into suspense, since the plot is applied in such a way that the consumer of the text suffers step by step with the heroines until the cruel nature of the doctor is finally proven.

6.4 “A Hole in the Head”

6.4.1 Mystery and Suspense: Plot and Characters

With “A Hole in the Head”, Oates provides the second story that focuses on a doctor. This time, the action takes place in Hazelton-on-Hudson, New York, in the 21st century, which can be recognised by means of allusions to war against terrorism and the recent financial crisis. The central character is a cosmetic surgeon named Lucas Brede, who discovers in the initial scene that there is blood beneath his glove, a strange incident which he has already experienced before: “In recent months it seemed to be happening with disconcerting frequency” (Oates 315). Hence, he feels quite uncomfortable with this defective gloves, blaming the ongoing economic crisis that leads to “[...] a discernible decrease in quality and business ethics” (316). However, Lucas boasts of being a trustworthy and devoted surgeon, who had never committed malpractice and is adored by his mostly female patients. His profession with all its different methods is accurately described, followed by a longer digression back to his student years, where it is revealed that he actually aimed at becoming a neurosurgeon, but due to the fact that he failed in drilling open the skull of a living person, he never had the chance to follow this profession (see Oates 323). Hence, “As a suburban physician Dr. Brede avoided all surgeries involving pathologies and all surgeries except the most familiar and routine, and high paying- face-lifts were the most lucrative and the most reliable” (325). Concerning face-lifts Lucas Brede experiments to create an alternative liquid to replace the standard Botox formula, which he believes to be a good idea and which he intends to apply to a patent. However, doctor Brede secretly injects his patients with “Formula X” as he calls it, pretending that he is using the usual Botox. But the experienced female patients are not satisfied, claiming that: “It feels different. It stings and *burns*” (327). This fact proves that his newly invented mysterious formula does not work out as it should and is probably dangerous. One devoted patient even wants to sue him for malpractice, which ends up in the fact that the woman refuses to pay the bill, declaring that she will never return to his practice. The story becomes even more mysterious when another female patient pleads with doctor Brede to do a so-called “Trepanning” (333) on her, which turns out to be an old-fashioned and controversial

intervention which he dismisses as a “[...]medieval pseudoscience in which holes are drilled into the skull to reduce pressure or to allow ‘disease’ or evil spirits to escape.

It’s a thoroughly discredited procedure that’s very dangerous – like exorcism” (334). He consequently declines to perform such a procedure on a client whom he does not even know, also due to the fact that she demonstrates pseudo-knowledge on this subject, arguing that it is an easy job to do for him. However, another well-known patient, Mrs. Irma Siegfried also wants to undergo this awkward procedure and this time, strangely after some discussion, the doctor agrees, since Mrs. Siegfried persuades him with a different reason that ultimately strikes him: “It’s believed that this is what poets mean by ‘trailing wisps of glory’ – ‘memory’ – this return to the pure child-self. I remember my child-self, Doctor – I was so happy then! [...] He felt a tug of emotion for the agitated woman, as for himself” (341). The two then come to the agreement that they will meet secretly without the knowledge of anybody else. The doctor thinks himself capable to do this, but something goes wrong during the procedure which caused the sudden death of Mrs. Siegfried. Hence, Lucas Brede needs to act quickly and get rid of the dead body without being found out, which includes destroying all evidence.

The dynamic of the plot in “A Hole in the Head” is somewhat different from those of the other stories which have already been analysed: the focus is solely on the doctor and therefore no additional character who is either good or bad is installed. Hence, it is doctor Brede himself who is his own worst enemy since he is constantly urged, due to his profession, to scrutinize his actions and decisions as either ethically good or bad. This inner conflict, ranging from being proud of himself and his work up to crucial doubts with its final fatal decision makes this plot highly suspenseful for the readership.

The character of Dr. Lucas Brede is initially portrayed as being thoughtful and insecure: “In the mirror above the sink the familiar face confronted him – a hesitant smile dimpling the left cheek, a narrowing of the eyes, as if Lucas Brede at such close quarters he couldn’t somehow believe what he was seeing. *Is this me? Or who I’ve become*” (317)? This scene triggers an impression that Lucas has undergone some change and that things are not working as they

actually should. However, he is further described as being proud of the results of his work and being a widely trusted physician who is always focussed on his work and never makes any mistakes (see Oates 317). His clientele, who is invariably female, is devoted to his art and many of the women regularly visit him to re-new their appearance. In this sense it is interesting to mention what kind of women these are: "They were the wives. Ex-wives or widows of rich men; some were daughters of rich men; a significant fraction were professional women in high-paying jobs – determined to retain their youthfulness and air of confidence in a ruthlessly competitive marketplace" (318). Hence, it can be argued that most of them bow to the stereotypical obsession with youth which the media and society propagates, in order to remain successful and adored. Even though Dr. Brede earns a lot of money with being a re-creator of beauty, he secretly disagrees with the opinion that these short time changes make a woman more adorable: "Lucas couldn't imagine any husband – any man – embracing one of these women, in the night; they must insist upon sleeping alone, as they'd slept alone as girls" (318). This scene also shows that his own wife, from whom he is estranged, is not obsessed with her appearance, but it turns out that she is fixed upon being a mother, a wish that had been never fulfilled, since she aborted a child, due to the fact that its heart and brain was heavily damaged. Hence, the doctor became a lonely man, since after this incident his wife became depressive and was never happy with his distasteful job. However, at this point it is crucial to mention that indeed, Dr. Brede compares the women's behaviour with those of children: "His patients were devoted to him, but they were uneasy and emotional, like children – who could be angry with children" (319)? Therefore, the doctor always makes sure to be hyper-careful with the rich ladies, which is one reason why he is favoured by them. However, the ethically darker part of Lucas Brede comes to light when it is demonstrated that he experiments with an illegal substance that is "much cheaper" than Botox: "There was a marginal risk of allergic reactions and chemical 'burning' – he knew and was hypercautious. This magical substance, to which he'd given the name Formula X, Dr. Brede could prepare in his own office suite and be spared the prohibitively high prices the Botox manufacturer's demanded" (320-21). He then betrays not only the manufacturers but also his patients who blindly trust him, when he regularly injects Formula X without their

knowledge and therefore misusing them as test-objects with the selfish excuse that he has everything under control. This is a form of hubris that can roughly be compared with Dr. Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's novel, who also sees himself as an ingenious creator, who thinks he can trick nature and is obsessed with the belief in modern science and his own skills, not thinking about the fatal result of his actions. Similar to Victor Frankenstein, Dr. Brede sees himself as a kind of Messiah and additionally as a last resort for desperate and unhappy women: "*My touch is magical! I bring you mercy*" (320). Moreover, also the female patients themselves put all their trust into the doctor's skills: "*Help me Doctor! You alone have the power*"! Hence, it is indeed in the power of Dr. Brede to decide whether to implement the mysterious method of trepanning or not. In general he is used to restoring appearance, and once one little intervention is done the female patients become obsessed: "The more Dr. Brede injected gelatinous liquids into their skin-collagen, Botox, Restylane, Formula X – the more eager they were for more drastic treatments: chemical peels, dermabrasion, cosmetic surgery" (319). However, some women are tired of extrinsic treatment and demand radical spiritual healing in order to extinguish bad thoughts and painful memories. This is to be done by means of drilling three small holes into the patients head, which seems to be a barbaric and dangerous method for Dr. Brede in the first place and therefore he turns down a new patient who expects him to act this out. Another patient, however, persuades him to take this risk: "I need to relief the terrible stress of my nerves and certain 'noxious memories – as *trepanning* has done for so many others" (339). It is Mrs. Irma Siegfried's wish to become innocent in spirit again without the dead weight of all the bad experience she had gone through. She desperately wants to be easy-going again as she was once in her childhood. This finally triggers the doctor's sympathy for the woman and starts thinking about his own childhood: "It was so – so many years! His childhood in Camden, Maine, belonged now to a boy he no longer recalled, on the far side of the abyss" (341). In addition this surgery repatriates the doctor to a long lost dream, his wishful job to be an ingenious neurosurgeon:

"As in the Darwinian nightmare-struggle for existence, Lucas Brede hadn't quite survived, he'd been devoured by his fierce competitors, he'd been the runt of the litter. [...] – how envious – observing with what confidence the most revered neurosurgeons dared to open up the human

skull and touch the brain – the *living brain*. He was eager to be accepted by this elite tribe of elders – [...]” (321).

He never achieved this elitist career as a neurosurgeon, since he made a fatal mistake as he was “*Going in*” (323) and the patient eventually died. However, due to this rather unethical offer which is the dangerous procedure of trepanning, by Mrs. Siegfried Dr. Brede is once again given the chance to prove that he has the power to do such a risky intervention and that he can manage to go into the living brain again and do what has fascinated him most during his medical studies: “The procedure was so simple, he wouldn’t need an assistant” (345). He will be terribly mistaken, which proves that he made a precipitous decision. One initial mistake which leads to problems during this operation was that he had not bought an appropriate surgical instrument but an “[...] eight-inch stainless-steel PowerLuxe. A handyman’s tool, there was no disguising the fact” (347). Moreover, he was extraordinarily nervous, drinking scotch and using tranquilizers during the procedure. At this point in the story the reader can already guess that this was a fatal decision, which can, however, not be retracted any more. That triggers an ambiguous feeling in the reader concerning sympathy with the doctor: on the one hand one pities him, since he only wanted to help a devoted patient and show his true skills to become a saviour; on the other hand one meets with incomprehension that he finally gave in, abandoning all his ethical and moral attitude toward such an action. However, this turns him into a highly interesting character, who is permanently torn between his own morals, ethics, medical knowledge and his pride, hubris connected with the will to self-realization as a neurosurgeon, since he is somehow satisfied, but still not happy with his profession, which is proved by the following comment: “He liked – loved – his work – his practice at Weirlands – but there were times when the prospect of doing what he was doing forever filled him with sick terror” (320). Concerning this ambiguous statement it can be argued that Oates also intends to challenge the reader’s empathy for Dr. Brede. It turns out that the patient dies, since he drilled too deep and then the respected doctor, who thought everything is under control, becomes a murderer within a minute:

Soon then the convulsing body lay limp. The struggle had ceased, the muffled screams had ceased. Dr. Brede staggered with exhaustion. He could not have been more drained if he’d performed an eight hour surgery before witnesses [...] Forty minutes he’d laboured to revive the

patient. [...] His excellent medical training was of little use to him now for a dead body will remain *dead* (353).

Hence, Lucas Brede is confronted with the woman's dead body, a fact which makes him sick to the heart: "His nostrils pinched. A pungent odor of singed flesh, singed hair, rank animal panic and terror. In her death throes the woman had soiled herself" (354). Ultimately the confrontation with death is a confrontation with the abject: the urine and burned flesh triggers feelings of rejection. Furthermore at this point in the story, the doctor also thinks about Chloe, his faithful assistant and is relieved that she is not here: "His heart like a metronome. If he'd had to kill her, too. Poor Chloe who was in love with him" (354). This scene shows that Lucas Breed, who "was a good man, a generous man" (354) would not flinch at committing another crime, just to cover his deadly malpractice. Here it can be argued that once a person has committed a murder, even if unintentionally, a second one would be much easier. However, he needs to get rid of the body: "No time now. He had to be practical [...]. The urgent task was the disposal of the body. He envisioned a remote wooded area, a river – the deep rushing Hudson River, by night – [...]. Not a trace would remain" (355). The actions that follow this comment reveal how hardly-bitten and clearly-minded the recently insecure physician actually acts. However, on his way to the remote area around the Hudson there is a traffic jam with police presence and it is interesting that his first reaction is to tell an officer that he is an M.D. and probably can help with injured people, in order to prevent the man from distracting his car. In this sense it can also be argued that he wants to restore his fallen image that he has of himself, since nobody yet knows what he did that night. In the very end he is lucky and can move on.

6.4.2 Formal Suspense: Point of View, Structure and Style

In "A Hole in the Head" Oates installs a third person omniscient narrator who describes the doctor's present actions as well as experiences in his past. Furthermore, the narrator also knows what the protagonist would do in certain situations: "He would ask his nurse receptionist Chloe to complain to the supplier – to demand that the entire box of defective gloves be replaced" (316). Once again Oates also uses italics, which is clearly a special attribute in many of her short stories. This time she also clearly indicates that this font is intended

to offer the personal thoughts of the character: “He thought, *There must be a flaw in the gloves. A tear*” (315).

This short story is quite long with exactly fifty pages. This corresponds with Oates’s view against Poe’s doctrine of strict brevity. “A Hole in the Head” consists of fourteen passages, which are not strictly chronological, since some of them contain short flashbacks to Doctor’s Brede’s academic years. Concerning the initial passage, Oates typically starts in medias res, with a strong first word that ultimately triggers the reader’s anticipation: “Strange! – [...]” (315). Indeed this single adjective foreshadows the mysterious actions that are following. The first passage then shows the Doctor after an intervention, being confused about having blood beneath his gloves. Furthermore the desperate economic situation in the U.S. is mentioned as an excuse for lower quality in medical supplement. It ends with a crucial thought: “*Is this me? Or who I’ve become*” (317). At this point the reader already knows that he is a beauty surgeon, but can only guess that, in addition to the defective gloves, something is going wrong in the doctor’s life. In the second paragraph Oates reveals a lot of information concerning his methods, his patients’ characters as well as the fact that he experiments with the so called “Formula X”. The third paragraph starts out with direct speech: “I’m going in” (321), which indicates that the story moves from the present to the past, narrating his experiences as a medical student and here it is clarified that Lucas Brede actually wished to be a neurosurgeon. Furthermore his fascination with the human brain is portrayed, as well as his failure to become a neurosurgeon. At this point it becomes clear for the reader that he actually has the wrong job, a fact which explains his strange feelings toward his profession. The fourth passage, which is a shorter one, brings the reader back to the present, where his work as a beauty surgeon is described as being “trivial, contemptible” (326). Passage five shows the doctor at work with his Formula X, whereby for the first time “the needle slips, and strikes bone” (330) with the consequence that the devoted patient refuses to pay for this treatment. Here it can be guessed that these mistakes are just a drop in the bucket, before the actual catastrophe arises. The seventh chapter introduces “Trepanning”, at which the reader is urged to read on swiftly in order to find out what this procedure actually is: “it’s medieval pseudoscience in which holes are drilled into the skull [...]” (334). This revelation explains the meaning of

the story's title and furthermore the doctor's refusal to act out this procedure convinces the reader that he is a morally and ethically correct physician and the patient is rather mad and naive. However in chapter ten another woman demands this mysterious procedure and this time he feels rather encouraged that he may do it, since he is fascinated by the woman's wish to have an innocent mind again. Still he turns her down. The following short passage, which is entirely in italics, highlights his disgust concerning this procedure and its terrible results: *"No we can't. It would be a tragic mistake we could never undo. [...] The eyes aren't in focus. There's a look of cretinism [...]. No. No. No. Absolutely no"* (344). In the next passage, Oates installs a sudden shift of theme, as if the doctor has left the notion of trepanning behind him. Here, the conflict with his wife is shortly introduced, in which it is revealed that he is to be blamed that Audrey underwent an abortion, due to the fact that the embryo's brain and heart was damaged. This causes a break in their marriage. This seems to be a confusing shift for the reader but here Oates implements her idea that the structure does not necessarily need to be coherent or rational. Since the modern living environment is a chaotic space with many contradictions, an author can either chose to orderly structure these impressions or he can, as Oates partly does, by means of a certain incoherence disclose this true character of reality (chapter 2, 15).

The following passage is the longest where the doctor suddenly decides to do the dangerous trepanning. This comes as a surprise for the reader, since he repeatedly insists upon not doing it. Furthermore, Oates never informs the reader why the doctor changed his opinion on this delicate subject. On the next nine pages suspense heightens, since Oates meticulously describes the procedure, giving the exact time as well as the doctor's mixed feelings: these are ranging from total confidence in his skills, to the doubts on whether this was a good decision, when the patient loses too much blood, further to the final slip of his hand that causes the injury of the so called "dura mater", up to the final spasms of the woman's body which lead to death. Here the pace should be fast, but a fast reading is actually hindered, since Oates constantly installs em-dashes, a method which is used in the entire story, but appears especially awkward in this crucial passage. Of course, these constant breaks "in the flow of a sentence" (<http://www.cs.tut.fi/~jkorpela/dashes.html>), are used on

purpose, viz. to highlight the doctor's insecurity concerning his decision and this also triggers the reader's insecurity about his/her attitude toward the protagonist. It also shows that although there is danger in the air, there is no turning back and in this sense his conviction proves to come true: "*It would be a tragic mistake we could never undo*" (344). Here it is also of interest to mention that in the middle of the procedure, Oates ties in with an initial thought of Lucas Brede, that he has changed and is not the same person that he once was: "The revelation came to him as if from a great distance *This is not Lucas Brede, M.D. This is another person, who does trepanning*" (349). Both the narrator and the reader helplessly follow the doctor's way to his doom, since although he knows that this procedure is going to be a failure, he is still trying to finish it. The em-dashes formally equal the doctor's hesitation. The last paragraph then is introduced by the declaration that the patient is dead and here it is interesting to mention that Oates lessens the use of em-dashes as if the doctor's doubts and insecurities had vanished and the foreshadowing of a bad ending is proven to come true. Here it is much easier for the reader to follow his measures, which are mysteriously clear and feasible. In this final passage suspense is triggered by the question whether Dr. Brede gets away with this unintended murder or not.

In this context suspense heightens when he comes to a scene of accident with policemen on the spot and the dead body in his trunk. On the last pages, the reader reckons that he could be detected any time, but it never happens. On the contrary, he even offers his help, which seems strange but somehow plausible in the end: it could be argued that this is his method to clarify that he is one of the good guys, he is a physician and it is his duty to rescue his fellow-men. The story then closes with an open ending, which is a typical element of short fiction.

6.5 "Beersheba"

6.5.1 Mystery and Suspense: Plot and Characters

The story focuses on the character Brad Shiftke, who receives an anonymous call from a woman who claims that they know each other, but does not reveal her name. Brad becomes curious and takes the female voice's offer to meet at the Star Lake Inn, a bar familiar to him, which is located a few miles outside his

present residence Carthage. The meeting takes place directly after their telephone call and when he is confronted with the young woman, Brad initially still does not know who she is. However, during the first few minutes of their encounter, he gets a vague idea that comes to him as a surprise: "Took a second look at the girl and saw – Jesus, was this Stacy Lynn? The daughter of Linda Gutshalk, who'd been Brad's second wife" (Oates 146)? Indeed it turns out that the young woman is his former step-daughter, who is already in her mid-twenties. After a little while of talking and drinking beer, Stacy-Lynn comes up with the suggestion that the two of them could drive to a more quiet and remote place. Brad agrees once more and they drive to Star Lake, where they walk a little and finally find themselves on a graveyard near the shore. There it does not take long until Stacy-Lynn reveals her true intention why she has contacted Brad and why she brought him to this place: she blames him to be responsible for her mother's death, since her mother was desperate after he left her. Furthermore, the young woman also accuses him of treating her mother badly and of child molestation of her. These are the reasons why her mother committed suicide by driving too fast, which caused a deadly car crash. Moreover she blames him that she had to spend many years under psychological treatment, due to the abuse and her mother's early death. Brad is unable to cope with these accusations, affirming that he never touched the girl or treated her mother the wrong way. However, Stacy-Lynn is so furious about Brad that she inflicts a deep cut with a sharp object upon his Achilles heel and curses at him, feeling relieved about the fact that he eventually got his punishment after all the years that have passed. In the very end the disturbed woman leaves the location and therefore also abandons Brad Shiftke to his fate.

Brad Shiftke is described as a diabetic in his late forties, who has never been keen on taking any responsibility: "He'd married young, and separated; divorced, and married again; and in the interstices of domestic life in Florida and upstate New York, for which he'd been no more suited than a wild animal-racoon, chimp – that can't be tamed, he'd seen women in secret" (140). This scene also shows that Brad has a freedom-loving, unfaithful masculine nature which is overtly compared to animals which follow their basest instincts. The middle aged man does neither regret his ephemeral amorous adventures nor his short marriages: "Overall he'd had a good time. He'd taken for granted that

women liked him and liked what he did with them and probably it could be said he'd had the whip hand in any relationship" (140). Here it can be argued that Brad was a sexually attractive but self-complacent womanizer who twisted women around his little finger and haphazardly dumping them when it pleased him. However, this behaviour belongs to his past, since in the present he is an overweight man suffering from diabetes, a fact with which he cannot fully cope: "What the doctor told him felt like a dull edge of an ax slammed against his head when he hadn't been prepared for such a blow but insulin injections kept it under control [...]. Hated injecting himself like some strung-out junkie [...]" (143). It appears that he had been so used to his carefree life as a navy-officer and fly-by-night lover and husband that he feels ashamed of his handicap. He had always been a healthy and powerful male, who was adored by the women, but this is no longer the case. It is the phone call of an ominous female from the past, which raises his memories of the good old times. It is his curiosity which seduces him to accept the unfamiliar voice's invitation to meet promptly. When the two meet at a bar, Brad is rather disappointed that the young woman is not beautiful to his taste: "[...] her finger were solid and strong, handshake firm as a man's and the way she presented herself before him, bemused and open-faced, feet apart, looking him in the eye, reminded him of a man. [...]. Trying not to show the disappointment he was feeling the woman wasn't very attractive – not like what her voice had hinted [...]" (145). This scene shows that Brad still has grand expectations concerning a woman's appearance, which means that she needs to look stereotypically feminine, being delicate and sexy. Since this is not the case with the woman he is facing, he cannot imagine that she is one of his past adventures and the fact that she is much younger than him proves this estimation. However, Brad Shiftke soon recognises that the woman is Stacy Lynn, the daughter of his second wife Linda Gutshalk: "Linda was one of the women he didn't care to think about especially when he was in a down mood like tonight" (147). This feeling rises in him, due to the fact that he remembers her as "[...] difficult to live with, to put it mildly – she hadn't liked being touched in a way she considered 'over-familiar' – a problem in a marriage" (148). Hence it can be argued that this was not a successful and satisfying marriage for a man who is described as a womanizer and therefore sexually very active. Furthermore, Linda has had bad experience with sexually violent men before

she met Brad. However, for Brad Shiftke: “Linda Gutshalk was the most beautiful girl he’d ever seen in actual life when he’d first met her, he had to concede that” (147). Here it is interesting to mention that Brad can be characterized as a rather superficial man, who is just interested in having physical relationships with beautiful women, collecting them as trophies. And when it comes to the women’s personal problems, he has no patience and understanding, but is rather annoyed. Furthermore, the fact that his former wife had a little daughter overextended him: “[...] it hadn’t exactly sunk in on him, Linda had been married before and had a little girl – meaning *responsibility*” (148). Hence the relationship was doomed to failure.

Brad is also annoyed by the fact that Stacy-Lynn does not look in the least like her mother and still can only guess what the young woman actually wanted after all these years of being out of touch. Stacy-Lynn’s behaviour toward him appears friendly but still inappropriate, even mocking: “Oh Brad – Daddy-Brad – this is amazing isn’t it? Never thought I would see Daddy-Brad again, my heart was broken when you and Mom split” (149). She then persuades him to drive to a more remote place and insists upon driving herself, at which Brad feels rather uneasy: “Weird to be in a car – in a passenger seat – with a female driving – like he’d become some kind of disabled person and this strapping young woman with shining eyes and Indian braid halfway down her back like a horse’s braided mane was in charge of him” (149). Hence, Brad is not used to sitting in the passenger’s seat and interprets this as loss of familiar male control and as a personal weakness. When the two arrive at the destination, which is Star Lake, it is also Stacy Lynn who determines which way to walk: “Brad! This way.” Again her manner was girlish, provocative” (152). The young, self-assured woman retains that provocative and dominant manner, when she finally leads him to an old cemetery: “Brad-Daddy – I mean *step*-Daddy – this is a secret place I used to come. [...]. Mom isn’t buried here but I came here, by myself. I have some good memories of this place” (153). She then continues to boss Brad, demanding: “Hey Brad, c’mon sit by me. See, it’s romantic here” (153). At this moment she got Brad where she wanted him and starts to attack him, inflicting a deep wound above his ankle. Stacy-Lynn then starts to shout at him in a fury: “Killed my mother you sorry prick, you God damned wicked man – evil son of a bitch now you will pay. How’d you like it? That’s your ‘Achilles tendon’

that's been severed, asshole. You can crawl like a worm, make your way home like a worm" (154). In this miserable situation, nothing is left of the self-loving, careless man Brad used to be, since it is him who is at the mercy of his female counterpart and it is him who has to beg for not being left alone: "Help me' – Brad was begging" (154). But the young woman is blinded by hatred, accusing Brad again and again, showing him quite plainly that he had been a hideous husband: "You killed my mother! You treated my mother like shit! She was so hurt by you – so miserable-depressed – she'd drive her car half-drunk like nothing mattered to her – late at night she'd drive on the interstate – [...]. What're going to do now, asshole? Big-Daddy-Brad-asshole? How's it feel, you're the one in pain" (154-155)? It appears as if Stacy-Lynn takes revenge not only in the name of her mother, but representative for all women he frivolously tossed away like trash. In her unrestrained hatred, she even accuses him of sexual abuse on her when she was a child: "Also you did things to me, asshole. [...]. Got drunk and had me unzip your disgusting trousers. Had me 'scratch' you – ugh" (158). Concerning this accusation the clever girl even prepared a dictation which he should sign and which contains the following: "I, Brad Shiftke [...] am the cause of Linda Gutshalk's death in June 1985. I was the molester of her daughter Stacy Lynn [...]. I molested that pathetic little girl sticking my fingers inside her and I made her touch my ugly nasty thing [...]. I made her *beg for food* like her mother had to *beg for love*" (161). In his panic that the girl will leave him to bleed to death, he even tries to sign this sheet of paper: He understood now – the girl was insane – he had no choice but to cooperate with her, or he would die" (161). However, it turns out that she lied about the sexual abuse; it was just a trick to have something on him, since she cannot attest that he caused her mother's death: "You're old now, you'd believe any shit to save your worthless life" (162). Moreover, Stacy Lynn blames Brad for spending most of her life in rehab, since she had mental health problems during her teenage years after her mother's early death. However, in the very end she has mercy on Brad, the careless womanizer, a fact which makes even Brad thoughtful and thankful: "Yet she'd let him live. She'd had mercy on him, she'd given him back his life and he meant to take the gift of that life. When his strength returned he would crawl out of the ravine" (163).

“Beersheba” is the second story where Oates provides no obvious distinction between good and bad characters, although the readership is apt to feel empathy with the girl, who is obviously traumatised and has not yet fully recovered from the early loss of her mother. Brad Shiftke is the seducer, who led a life without sorrows until he was diagnosed being diabetic and until this woman from the past takes revenge. It can be argued that the readers respond to Brad’s character with mixed feelings: on the one hand they feel sorry for him that he falls victim to such an insidious attack, but on the other hand this is the price he has to pay for his insensitive behaviour towards women’s problems and feelings. He had never been physically violent but has no patience when there are problems in a relationship that need to be worked on. Rather he leaves, with a disastrous impact in the case of Linda Gutshalk and her daughter. However, he had been oblivious of this fact and finally has to learn a lesson that such psychological scars do not expire. Finally, he is the one that is left behind and is in pain.

The atmosphere and setting of the story is overall suspenseful and in this sense Gothic: The accurate description of the old Lutheran graveyard by night gives the impression of a classic Gothic scenery: “The stone markers were mostly fallen, crumbled-covered with lichen – choked with vines and weeds – their inscription faint, flattened, unreadable by moonlight. Brad saw that some markers dated to 1790 – [...]” (152). Furthermore, this long forgotten and remote place is the ideal location for a crime, since very few people come here: “No one knows where I am. No one knows where you are” (162).

6.5.2 Formal Suspense: Point of View, Structure and Style

As in most of her recent short stories, Oates installs a third person omniscient narrator who is in the position to describe the characters. However, in “Beersheba”, direct speech between characters dominates the narration and therefore the reader ultimately becomes witness of the ongoing conflict. Therefore, Oates’s typical use of italics to highlight individual hidden thoughts plays a minor role concerning the meaning of events. Furthermore, with three marked passages the text’s structure is less tight than in other stories: in the first passage, the character of Brad is introduced and the focus lies on the telephone conversation. Here the identity of the mysterious caller is deliberately

not revealed in order to create suspense. There is just one indication concerning the caller: it is a woman from the male protagonist's past, who is obviously keen on playing a kind of game with him: "Brad Shiftke? – is that you?' 'Sure is. Who's this?' [...] 'Guess!'" (139). This game also shows that it is the woman who is in control of the situation from the very beginning: "Your voice is a voice I know, Brad. Your voice is a voice in my dreams, I would not likely forget"(141). Hence, Brad is confronted with a role allocation to which he is not used: "[...] and probably it can be said that he'd had the whip hand in any relationship" (140). In this sense, this surprising call triggers glimpses of Brad Shiftke's past which reveal his attitudes to women and relationships. Hence, this part can be interpreted as preliminary, since it introduces the central character as well as his future opponent and triggers the reader's anticipation of a possible conflict that needs to be resolved. The second passage then, which is the longest, includes the main body of the story, where Oates heightens suspense by revealing information bit by bit. It can be argued that this chapter consists of two crucial phases: the blind-date with the mysterious woman which includes the revelation of her name and gives the reader a first hint how the story might evolve. The excessive friendliness and provocative comments by Stacy Lynn give the reader the feeling that it is her aim to lure him in and probably confront him with a dead secret from the past later on in the text. Such a presumption is additionally starched by the fact that she is his former step-daughter and that the relationship with her mother was difficult. The second phase includes the arrival at a remote place by night, which is also the setting of the story's turning point. The turning point comes suddenly and is incorporated in the flow of the text:

'Hey Brad, c'mon sit by me. See it's romantic here' – as Brad stumbled toward her, not sure if he wanted to sit so close to Stacy Lynn, but aroused, excited by the prospect; somehow it happened that, as Brad approached her, the girl stooped, as if to snatch up the flashlight, but instead tugged Brad's pant leg upward – roughly, his left pant leg – so swiftly this bizarre action took place, Brad was too astonished to react, still less to shove the girl away or defend himself – even as something razor-sharp was being drawn – swiped, sawed – against the exposed skin of his left leg, above his ankle – there came a bolt of pain beyond measure – Ben [sic!] screamed, lost all his strength and fell heavily into the rubble-strewn grass' (153).

In this crucial scene, Oates intensifies suspense by means of slowly approaching toward the actual attack, which is packed into one long sentence that is just slightly interrupted by the use of a few em-dashes. On the next page the true revengeful-character of Stacy Lynn as well as her intention why she contacted him are relentlessly revealed and suspense lessens, but still until the very end of this second passage the reader is confronted with the question whether his opponent will attack Brad once more or even kill him: "But know what? – I will let you live. God says forgive the worst enemies. Christ says forgive so I'm letting you live, Brad" (163). This is the closing sentence of the story's main part and reveals that she has mercy on him. The last paragraph then includes Brad's final thoughts as he lies on the floor and the girl has left him. Here he also gains new hope and strength that he will get away alive.

Oates has one basic pattern in most of her stories: she regularly reveals the meaning of the story's title and this is also the case in "Beersheba": "[...] – suddenly they were in what appeared to be a cemetery – a ravaged-looking old cemetery – behind an abandoned church. Once, there'd been a settlement here, oddly named – Beersheba – this had been the Beersheba Lutheran church-some name out of the bible, Brad supposed" (152).

6.6 "Bleed"

6.6.1 Mystery and Suspense: Plot and Characters

This is the most mysterious of the six stories analysed. The plot focuses on a young boy named Jess, who is thirteen years at the very beginning of the story. He comes to know that a little five year old girl from his home-town has been raped and in this context he is confronted with uncomfortable questions by his mother: "If you've heard anything, Jess, will you tell me? Tell me what you've heard" (Oates 220). But the boy insists on knowing nothing about this cruel crime. It is this incident that estranges him from his mother, since this case accumulates the topic of sexual matters: "At thirteen you no more want to speak of sexual matters with a parent than you would want to speak of God with a parent" (220). Furthermore, the mother is even suspicious of her own son. A few years later, when Jess is seventeen, there is another strange case of a young girl's abduction, and this time the suspects are indeed of Jess's age,

since this happened after one of several graduation parties and to some of them Jess was also invited. However, it is known that the abduction took place after a party “at Andy Colfax’s house” (224) and Jess was not invited: “Possibly Jess would have been flattered, grateful to be included by such popular jocks and rich kids after years of being excluded” (224). Due to the fact that it was boys of his age that committed the crime, Jess’s father becomes suspicious on him:”– know anything about this...abduction, do you’? [...] ‘– boys in your class? Not friends of yours, are they?’” (222). Concerning the period when the abduction happened, which was long after midnight, Jess insists that he had already been in bed. The next incident is taking place another few years later, when Jess is 23 and driving home from college to spend the Thanksgiving holidays with his parents. This time he is the one who is indeed confronted with a strange girl that he discovers on a field near the street. She is barely clothed for this cold season of the year and Jess recognises that it is his duty to help the obviously lost child. Hence, he takes her with him, which turns out to be a fatal plan, since his little passenger is confused and starts kicking and screaming at him with blood all over her body. The attacks of the girl, does not allow him to drive on, so Jess has to stop the car. Shortly afterwards, the child runs away and Jess is needs to take up the chase, since there is evidence of her blood in his car and he does not want to be mistaken as the perpetrator. Finally, he catches the girl and cannot help himself but kills her.

In “Bleed”, Oates deviates from her usually in-depth description of the leading character, which makes the story less accessible for the readership. However, there is still some information given about Jess: initially he is portrayed as a shy and reclusive teenager, who had a very close relationship to his mother until the incident of a raped girl triggers an awkward behaviour in his mother, which is strange to him:”[...] and he saw a shudder of revulsion in his mother’s face, and quickly he looked away, for there was something wrong in this, his mother speaking to him in a voice he rarely heard except when his parents were speaking together in the privacy of their bedroom and the door was closed [...]” (219). It appears that he does not want to hear anything about this crime, since he realises himself that it must be a sexual crime, which is indicated by his mother’s comment:”That poor child! And her parents! Of course, they have to be grateful that she’s alive, and that terrible man has been – [...]” (219). The

young boy does not want to be confronted with such topics and he is even embarrassed by the thought of rape and just wants to escape his mother's talk to be left alone in his room. The actual estrangement from his mother is triggered when she says: "I wish I could believe you" (221) when Jess is insisting on not knowing something about the crime. "And this was the final moment of Jess's childhood, as it was for Jess's mother, the final moment of a phase of her motherhood" (221). This shows that Jess is no longer protected by his mother and therefore no longer fully innocent in the eyes of her, but a young adult who may know more than he actually admits. In this context also Jess starts to experience his mother with different eyes: "It was the sex secret. That thrilled quaver in his mother's voice. That look on his mother's face. For now he would see his mother at a distance and recognise her as a woman, a woman among other women: female" (221). Here it can be argued that by means of this mysterious incident the actual severance process between mother and son takes place, since tabooed questions concerning sexuality and sexual violence bother him and cannot be communicated to his mother, with whom he had such a deep relationship once. Furthermore, the talk about the child molestation also leaves a mark on Jess's understanding of sex, since it appears to be something cruel and unnatural: "Sex was 'porn', and sex was 'sex-pervert', and sex was 'rape-murder', and sex was that 'terrible man' who'd done that 'terrible thing' to a little girl whose name Jess would try not to remember" (222). The true character of Jess, however, remains a mystery even when a few years later, when he is in his senior year in high school and an under-aged girl is abducted by some guys of his age, which makes him a potential confidant: "Jess was seventeen years, ten months old and still one of the younger, shyer, and less experienced members of his class, but Jess did have friends, Jess did get invited to a number of parties. "[...] He'd been co-editor of the North Hills year book" (223). Hence it can be stated that he was a normal teenager, committed in school activities and with a steady circle of friends. However, at this point in the story it is not easy for the reader to feel empathy for this boy, since he is neither in any danger, nor has he any special characteristics. Quite the contrary, due to the fact that he is insisting upon not knowing the girl and the boys that abducted and raped her, he becomes a suspect. This is indicated by a disturbing passage:

Especially Jess could not have told his father about the blood. He had not seen any blood, that was a fact. That was the truth. Hadn't seen any blood smeared on the girl's body, the insides of her fleshy thighs and in her tight-coiled bushy pubic hair lavish as a strange wiry growth. And on her young round breasts, olive-skinned, with nipples like purple stains. So much blood, on the girl's legs, on the sheets, and on the mattress, on the guy's penises and groins. A wild crazy scene made deafening by high decibel music (226)

This scene arouses questions in the reader's mind: does Jess know more than he admits due to the fact that this is a rather detailed description? Or does this scene only show how a teenager secretly imagines such a crime? It can also be argued that the boy, at this point more mature than when he was thirteen, is ready to deal more explicitly with the topic of rape and remembers that in the last crime a few years ago, the girl bled considerably and this might be one reason why he also imagines this attack as a bloody scene.

It is constantly repeated that he was not at the crime scene: "Jess Hagadorn had not been there, of course. Jess Hagadorn had not been within twenty miles of the Jersey shore, this was a fact that was pledged to his parents: Jess had been home at that time, in his bed. Through the night sweating and sleepless [...]" (227). This is a rather convincing scene, since it becomes clear that he is a young adult, who desperately wants to assure his parents that he is one of the good guys.

In this sense, it appears to be an irony of fate that another few years later, Jess himself, becomes involved in a crime, even if involuntarily. The unexpected encounter with an obviously confused and lost child and his immediate reaction to provide help, displays Jess in a different light and therefore reader-empathy rises at this point in the story: "[...] for clearly this was an emergency situation. Clearly the little girl was in distress and needed help" (229). In this sense it can be argued that he tries to play the role of the hero, since no one else seems to care about the young girl. Furthermore, this action consolidates his reliability. However, it is Jess himself who has also bad feelings whether it is the best decision to take the girl offhandedly with him, but realises that he has no other choice. The girl appears scared and confused and therefore it is not easy for the main protagonist to find access to the girl: "He assured her that she would be safe, and taken care of, and no one would hurt her again, but instead of

comforting the girl, Jess's words seem to upset her, for she became more agitated, protesting, 'No – go *home*. Want go *home*. Go *home*'" (231)! The situation becomes critical when Jess discovers that she is all covered in blood, which is leaking on his passenger's seat and when she starts attacking Jess in her confusion: "How like a frantic little animal she was, giving off heat, her little body quivering with energy, with the wish to resist him" (233). The girl then even bites him, which Jess ultimately interprets as evidence that could be used against him. This shows that he is a smart young man, who is aware of the fact that this attempt to rescue the girl, may pan out badly for him: "*Life plus ninety-nine years* would be the sentence. *No possibility of parole* would be the sentence, to be begun shortly after his twenty-third birthday" (232). This desperate situation the young man is confronted with triggers pity in the reader. Now that he has proved to be a good guy, he is the one that is in danger, since the girl mistakes him for a perpetrator, which can be interpreted as a sign that she is highly traumatised and underwent some tortures. When she flees from the car and recognises other human figures, she screams: "'Help! Help me! He hurt me! Bad man hurt me'" (235). Hence, Jess needs to act and tries to resolve this misunderstanding, but the group of derelicts get him, while the girl keeps on running:" So abruptly where the men struggling with Jess, cursing striking, and pummelling him [...]" (235-36). However, he can escape his attackers with the plan to catch the girl, before she meets other people. Jess catches her, but unfortunately he kills the girl in his desperation, which comes as a shock for the reader and once more the empathy for the main protagonist is troubled, since it is just the guy who struggled all these years with all these cruel crimes, crimes that estranged him from his parents' trust and security, who is finally a child murder himself. The tragic and the circumstances of this unintended murder leave the reader with ambiguous feelings of pity for both the girl as well as the main protagonist, who needs to pay a high price, for trying to help a maiden in distress.

6.6.2 Formal Suspense: Point of View, Structure, Style

Concerning the point of view, there is less to argue about, since Oates uses a third person omniscient narrator, who is not an active part of the story and describes Jess's experiences and thoughts on the three crimes in three different

stages of his life, and most parts of the story are occupied by defending the protagonist that he has known nothing about the crimes and was never one of the perpetrators. The story is structured by means of four separate passages: In the initial paragraph, Jess is thirteen years old and the rape of a five year old girl is in focus. In the course of this incident it turns out that his close relationship with his mother takes an abrupt end, since she mistrusts her son and hence he sees the mother in a different light. It is also Oates's credit that the reader is also not sure whether the boy is fully innocent, or knows more than he admits, since the continuous insistence that Jess is blameless, raises the reader's uncertainty and therefore creates suspense. Oates's portrayal of the boy's character is never dense enough to trigger the reader's empathy, a fact that corresponds with Joanne V. Creighton's critique that: "her characters sometimes fail to coalesce as credible creations or fail to arouse the reader's empathy and concern" (Creighton 145). Furthermore, Oates detains all information concerning the girl's name and the actual sequences of events. The story's second part is the shortest, where the protagonist's insecurity concerning sexual matters is highlighted. He asks himself whether the act of sex is something natural and good and comes to the conclusion that he rather connects it to notions like "porn" and "pervert". This shows the reader that this cruel incident left a mark on him and how he understands sexuality. The third part takes place four years later, when Jess is seventeen and this time some senior schoolmates are suspected of having abducted an under-aged girl and raped her and in this case, Jess needs to defend himself even more. This is the part of the story where the reader's empathy is raised and one is rather sure that Jess is not a potential suspect. However, the forth passage is the crucial part of the story, where she installs the fatal as well as fateful twist in the story. Here it is interesting to mention that this passage starts with the very same short sentences as in the very beginning: "Hadn't known the girl, he had not" (227). Due to the fact that this is a revisited information, it indicates the reader that Jess is probably once more confronted with a female in distress and that he is somehow an active part of the events this time and has to defend himself once more. This is indicated by the sentence that follows: "All he knew was, he'd tried to help her. He'd been the only one to help her" (227). The reader also learns that he is a responsible young adult in this situation, since he is

driving home from college by car. The appearance of the girl in distress comes abruptly and is incorporated in the flow of the text, while Jess is occupied with questions concerning his parents: “[...] he had disappointed his father by declining to study engineering, he had disappointed his mother by declining to be the reliable loving son his mother required; and in a nearby field a child suddenly appeared, a small figure running and stumbling in the tall grass, in the icy rain [...]” (229). At this point in the story it is already clear that he is going to take the child with him and indeed this proves to be true, also the fact that he has no bad intentions and wants to help the child is revealed soon, which is installed in italics: “He thought, *The crucial thing is to help. To help her. To rescue her. That is the crucial thing*” (230). However, his good intentions do not reach the mysterious girl’s understanding and soon Jess is overstrained with the situation when the girl starts to attack him. In this sense, suspense heightens when it is revealed that the young victim is bleeding: “Another time asking her, had she been hurt? For he saw that the little girl’s clothing was stained with something darkish – was it blood? And her hair was clotted with – was it blood” (230)? From this scene on it becomes obvious that it is Jess, who is in a dangerous situation and due to the fact that the reader has gained empathy at last, he/she suffers with him. Even more, when the evidence against him increases:

Jess was holding the girl tightly, to calm her. For the girl had to begun to squirm, writhe, kick. Savagely she kicked at the car dashboard was if she’d have liked to smash it. [...]. And now, suddenly clambering over him, a little wildcat digging her claws into him, laughing, straddling him awkwardly as he sat behind the wheel, her thighs bare beneath the stained dress. To his surprise, he saw that her wax-pale little-girl thighs were smeared with blood. So she had been injured, and had kept her injury from him, bleeding from a secret wound between her legs, and now there were blood smears on his trousers, and on the leather seats of the Audi. (233-34)

This is a suspenseful situation, since the reader keeps asking him/herself, whether and how the protagonist will resolve this disastrous situation and whether he can explain himself when he is confronted with the police. In this context, the reader also becomes curious of what actually happened to the girl. From the information given it can be argued that she has been raped, but further information is obscured. The reader only learns that the girl is afraid of

her parents and in her panic mistakes Jess for a further perpetrator. The story reaches its climax shortly before the abrupt ending, when it is revealed what the only solution left for Jess, is which is shortly and soberly portrayed by Oates: "In his hand was a chunk of concrete. He lifted it, and he struck with it, and he felt the child-skull crack. The child-skull was composed of soft bones that could not withstand an adult's blows. Blood rushed from a wound of the girl's scalp [...]"(237). From now on it is clear for the reader that Jess became her final perpetrator, even though he had just the best intentions from the very beginning. The empathy for the protagonist lowers and the reader is left with a morally ambiguous feeling as well as several questions concerning the outcome: was this an inevitable act? Why had he not taken the opportunity to explain himself in the very end, as he had actually planned to do? Was it in some kind of way an act of self-defence? In the end it is certain, after all the blood that was grouted in all three cases of child-molestation, it is Jess who has to bleed in the end for a crime that probably could have been avoided. Furthermore, it is ironic that without intending it he proves his parents' deep doubts correct, after all these years. Here the use of long clauses and the interplay between the actual situation as well as the protagonist's raised fears creates a suspenseful reading experience. However, in this story, Oates partly fails to trigger empathy with the protagonist.

7 Conclusion

This diploma thesis provided an analysis of Joyce Carol Oates's use of mystery and suspense in six selected stories: "Fossil Figures", "Death Cup", "The Museum of Dr. Moses", "A Hole in the Head", "Beersheba" and "Bleed". One reason why I chose exactly these short stories is that they are part of collections in which Oates explicitly deals with strange events and mysterious characters. A further reason is that major quality news papers, critics and publishers responded to most of the story collections these narratives are part of, with praise, especially highlighting that these stories are suspenseful. According to *The Telegraph* on October 23, 2008: "Each tale in Joyce Carol Oates's superb collection of short stories is an exploration of human weakness and power, and in each the suspense is maintained to the final moment", which was one reaction to the collection *The Museum of Dr. Moses* (2008). A similar response

is provided by the publisher Barnes&Noble to the collection *A Corn Maiden and Other Nightmares* (2008): “The powerful stories in this extraordinary collection further enhance Joyce Carol Oates’s standing as one of the world’s greatest writers of suspense” (<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-corn-maiden-and-other-nightmares-joyce-carol-oates/1104469888>).

Moreover, I was also interested in how Oates herself understands her creation of tension which results in suspense: “It isn’t ‘words’ or ‘style’ that make a scene, but the context behind the words, and the increase of tension as characters come into conflict with one another” (qtd. in Creighton 25). Indeed, most of the stories that were analysed focus on conflicts between characters, whereat it is essential that Oates opposes these characters which results in the fact that the reader feels empathy with the morally good character. Furthermore, these conflicts are played out until the very last passage and therefore no relaxation in the feeling of suspense is possible. Concerning character empathy and antipathy it emerged that those protagonists who are described in more detail as it is the case in “Fossil Figures”, “Death Cup” and “The Museum of Dr. Moses” do trigger a stronger effect in the reader’s feeling of suspense than those who are superficially depicted. This proves, that the more the reader knows about the opposed characters, the easier he/she understands the actions and intentions and therefore anticipation concerning the outcome is more intense.

Finally it can be argued that Joyce Carol Oates manages to create suspense in all stories, but it differs in intensity: in the first three stories to be analysed she creates two morally opposed characters. This keeps the reader’s mind on a stretch and the suspense is not released until the very last passages. Concerning the reader’s empathy the other three stories are less effective, since the main protagonists turn out to be murderers in case of “A Hole in the Head” and “Bleed” and a careless womanizer in case of “Beersheba”. However, conflicts are still provided which she plays out by the instalment of mysterious events, through which the protagonist is also put into danger and the reader follows the course of events to find out how the situation finally unfolds. On the formal level, Oates uses different methods in every story, however there is one element every short story has in common: *italics*. In this context it has

been proved that in the stories where Oates uses a third person omniscient narrator, this formal device enables the reader to get additional information about the protagonist's own thoughts. This method partly triggers suspense, since the character's actual intentions are communicated, which heightens the reader's anticipation. In the story "Death Cup" for example, the morally good portrayed brother interposes the following thought: "*I will kill my brother Alastor after all, after all these years*" (Oates 211). Such an intimate revelation signals the reader that the protagonist may attempt to put his thoughts into action. Another example for the suspenseful effect of the use of italics can be identified in the story "Bleed", when the main protagonist is attacked by the girl he intends to rescue: "*That will leave a mark on the window that will be evidence, unless I wipe it away*" (Oates 232). Such thoughts make the reader aware of the fact that the protagonist is in a dangerous situation and is eager to find out how this situation will finally resolve. Furthermore, in every story, Oates provides long clauses. Here it can be argued that Oates uses extensive clause which partly spread over more than eleven lines to intensify the reader's attention and in such sentences she often provides accurate descriptions of the characters' attitudes to life, hopes, fears and experiences which is important in order to catch the reader's commitment. However, also the stating of questions by the omniscient narrator or the protagonist him/herself motivates the reader to move on since he/she wants to find out whether these question may be answered or not. Another useful formal device is the use of direct speech, as in "Beersheba", where both the protagonist and the reader are left in uncertainty who this person is. In the case of "A Hole in the Head" Oates's heavy use of em-dashes does not only visualize the main character's insecurity, but also supports the reader's engagement since this method hinders a fluent reading experience.

The notion of mystery can be applied to all six stories, since every text evolves around a mysterious character or event: In "Fossil Figures" and "Death Cup", the mysterious results of sibling-conflicts are in focus. In "The Museum of Dr. Moses" the dark secret of an honourable doctor is revealed by a brave heroine. the strange operation to relieve a patient from bad memories and thoughts, the unknown caller who turns out to be a revengeful character from the past and the sudden appearance of an obviously violated child. Oates who is well known for her Gothic works, also uses Gothic elements in most of the stories. It is the

Gothic notion of the double in “Fossil Figures” and “Death Cup”, the gruesome and deadly results of one psychopathic doctor in “The Museum of Dr. Moses” and an insecure and high-spirited doctor who performs an operation that exceeds his skills in “A Hole in the Head”. The last two stories, “Beersheba” and “Bleed” focus on violence and revenge. Such Gothic elements are a useful support in order to create a feeling of suspense, since they convey that most of the characters carry a dark secret that needs to be resolved.

In “Fossil Figures”, abjection occurs, when the deformed brother is described. “The Museum of Dr. Moses” is essentially Gothic with the mysteries around a mad scientist and the role allocation between the tyrannical husband, his obedient wife and the brave heroine, who discovers the doctor’s secret and saves her mother. Furthermore, abjection is also part of the story, when the female protagonist is confronted with the scientist’s bizarre collection of human body-parts. In “A Hole in the Head” another doctor is in the centre of attention, who becomes a murderer as he attempts to do trepanning. In the story “Beersheba”, the final revenge takes place in an old and long forgotten cemetery by moonlight, which can be interpreted as a traditional gothic setting. The most effective story in terms of mystery and suspense is “The Museum of Dr. Moses” since it highlights Oates’s devotion to the Gothic tradition as well as her understanding of realistic conflicts between two generations of women: the passive housewife and her independent, academic daughter. In addition her use of first person narration provides a more personal access to the fears and worries of the characters. However, all stories have their individual charm and are marked by the lively imagination of an experienced author who is always devoted to interpersonal conflicts and indeed according to Joanne V. Creighton “[...] emotionally charged familial relationships are at the heart of her fiction” (16).

Concerning Oates’s use of the short form it can be argued that she does not agree with the early theorist’s dictum of brevity, since most of the stories are very long up to fifty pages. However, one can recognize that she agrees with the concept of presenting one single issue and therefore provides one single effect in the very end. This does not take place in one setting or on one day, but the basic idea to portray a single event in the life of one or two people is still

played out by Oates. Furthermore it can be stated that Oates has a similar view on short fiction as Flannery O'Connor, who argues: "A story is a complete dramatic action – and in good stories, the characters are shown through the action and the action is controlled through the characters, and the result of this is meaning that derives from the whole presented experience. [...] A story always involves in a dramatic way, the mystery of personality" (qtd. in Ahrends 30).

Indeed, what can be more mysterious and suspenseful than the human character?

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10 Appendix

Summary in German:

Das Thema dieser Diplomarbeit ist die Analyse der Anwendung von suspense und mystery und ihren Effekten auf den Leser in neueren Kurzgeschichten der zeitgenössischen amerikanischen Autorin Joyce Carol Oates. Um eine akkurate Auseinandersetzung mit diesen fiktionalen Elementen zu erreichen ist es notwendig die zentralen Themen im umfangreichen Schaffen der Autorin, wie auch ihre literarischen Einflüsse und ihre persönliche Auffassung von Literatur zu dokumentieren. In einem weiteren Schritt soll auf diverse Theorien der amerikanischen Kurzgeschichte eingegangen werden, die mit Edgar Allan Poe ihren Anfang nahmen. Ein weiteres Kapitel beschäftigt sich mit verschiedenen Definitionen von suspense und dessen Anwendung und Wirkung in literarischen Texten. Im nächsten Kapitel wird mystery im Zusammenhang mit gothic elements erläutert, was folgende Punkte beinhaltet: Die gothic tradition und ihre Ursprünge in England, American Gothic, der Doppelgänger, weibliche und männliche Charaktere in Gothic Fiction und Abjection. Hier werden bereits erste Verweise auf das Vorkommen dieser Elemente in den Kurzgeschichten von Oates gezeigt. Dieses Kapitel schließt den theoretischen Teil dieser Diplomarbeit ab.

Der analytische Teil dieser Arbeit besteht darin in sechs ausgewählten Kurzgeschichten die Anwendung und Effekte von mystery und suspense zu untersuchen. Dabei besteht jedes einzelne Kapitel aus den zwei folgenden Punkten: Mystery and suspense in Bezug auf Inhalt und Charaktere; und der Erzeugung von Spannung mittels der Sprache und anhand der Struktur der Kurzgeschichte. Ein kompaktes Resümee der Untersuchungen in den Texten schließt diese Arbeit ab.

Folgende sechs Geschichten aus drei verschiedenen Kurzgeschichtensammlungen von Joyce Carol Oates werden analysiert: „Fossil Figures“, „Death Cup“, „Beersheba“ und „A Hole in the Head“ aus *The Corn Maiden and Other Nightmares* (2011); „The Museum of Dr. Moses“ aus *The Museum of Dr. Moses* (2008) und abschließend „Bleed“ aus *Give Me Your Heart: Tales of Mystery and Suspense* (2011).

CURRICULUM VITAE

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