

Research paper devil in joyce carol oates works



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" The greatest trick the devil pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist" -Verbal Kint " The spirit that I have seen may be a Devil, and the Devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape [...] as he is very potent with such spirits, abuses me to damn me" (William Shakespeare). The Devil has been a theme in writings for decades; authors have played with the symbolism of the Devil in their characters to add depth to their writing. Joyce Carol Oates, an accredited short story writer, has received numerous awards for her works. Her writing style is captivating; grabbing the reader's undying attention as they enter her world; a world including violence, rape, murder, and the good ol' Devil in disguise. In her writing, the appearance of the Devil plays a very important role in the telling of her works. The bible tells the tale of the Devil as being an Angel that went his separate way and was exiled by God for his immorality. He is characterized as a supernatural being able to take any shape or form. He has strong powers of deception and uses them to tempt his victims. He is a sinful creature who longs for lust and will steal, kill, and destroy for pride. He is the fountain of evil and the source of all sins. Heat, a short story by Oates, tells of twin girls, essentially the same in every aspect almost as if they were one person, getting murdered by a boy slightly older than them. At first glance the antagonist of the story seems to be the boy, Roger Whipple, obviously as the murderer he must represent evil and in turn the Devil. However, after closer examinations it is obvious that the girls are the Devil himself and force Roger's action. From the beginning, there is much satanic symbolism surrounding the twins that necessitate their evil. Oates' story begins by saying " They'd stolen six dollars from their own grandmother who loved them. (High Lonesome 543)" Underneath the fact that stealing from their grandmother doesn't shed good light on them there <https://assignbuster.com/research-paper-devil-in-joyce-carol-oates-works/>

is a slight satanic reference with what they stole. The fact that Oates chose six as the amount they stole over any other number is not a coincidence; this number is closely associated with the Devil. It is also shown that the girls like to steal things, however, if caught they would immediately return them, sort of like a game. This is a characteristic of the Devil as he is a type of character that enjoys toying and playing vindictive games. The girls like to do " nice things," they tend to give their friends candy bars, nail polish, key chains, and other trinkets they take from " somewhere." This attribute of luring people into a materialistic way of life, tempting them with the " nice things" is another deceiving tactic of the Devil. In one instance the two girls made one of their friends strip off all of her clothing and climb under a veranda. They told their friend, " This is to show our power over you." Then there is Roger Whipple. He was described to be a strong boy with a big face and a mouth that looked like it always wanted to smile, and who'd " never be the kind to hurt even an animal (545)" He appeared to be the incarnation of good, a gentle giant. His family oppressed him and treated him like an animal. It would be illogical for this character to represent the Devil; the Devil would not stand to be that quiet and gentle a person. There is much evidence that proves that the girls were the Devil but the most intriguing begins with the fact that Roger kept and collected bible cards and hid them under his mattress. Then on the day of the girls' murder Roger asked the girls if they wanted to see his secret things that he hid under his mattress. One of the girls agreed and under the condition that only one of them can go at a time the other stayed behind and waited impatiently. After not being able to wait anymore the girl that was left behind decided to go upstairs and see what had happened to her sister. As she climbed the stairs leading to

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Roger's room she began to feel frantic and worried. When she opened the door Roger was standing right in front of her, she asked where her sister was, he replied She'd gone home, he said, and Rhoda said right away that Rhea wouldn't go home without her and Roger Whipple came toward her saying, Yes she did, yes she did, as if he was getting angry she wouldn't believe him. (555) It seems that something occurred with the bible cards he kept under his bed because that is clearly the " something" he wanted to show them. And in saying that the girl went " home" means that he knew that she went back to Hell. " He died there, in the state psychiatric hospital, years later, and was brought back home to be buried - the body of him, I mean. His earthly remains. (544)" The fact that Oates wants to make it clear to the reader that only his body was buried hints to the fact that his soul was gone or possibly taken. His soul was probably taken in the fight against the girls. In another one of Oates' short stories, The Knife, a woman, Harriet was robbed and raped. The description of one of the robbers, the one who actually raped her, stated that he had long faded red hair and jutting ears. The red color and jutting ears symbolically portrays the laymen view of what the Devil looks like. Right before raping Harriet, the robber willingly gives her the knife after she calmly stated that it was making her uncomfortable. Later when Harriet was recalling the events in her head, she wondered whether what actually happened was rape. She began to think this because he had given her the knife, and she hadn't used it, she wondered whether she let herself get raped or maybe even wanted it to happen. This is one of the main tricks that the Devil uses. He makes his victims believe they want to do something rather than him forcing them to." Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you."(Book of James ch. 4, v. 7) This basically states that the Devil can

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not physically make a person do anything, they have to be willing, if a person resists the Devil will have failed and will be forced to give up and leave. Perhaps the greatest appearance of the Devil in Oates' stories is in *Where are you Going, Where Have you Been?* To begin with, the character that represents the Devil is Arnold Friend, which after removing the "Rs" in his name spells out "An old Fiend." From the start this name foreshadows an evil persona, especially since it is hidden behind the guise of a friendly name. In this story Arnold Friend, a random man that appears and tries to get Connie to come with him for a ride. Connie notices that as Arnold walks around, he walks in a very weird and peculiar way. One of his boots was at a strange angle, as if his foot wasn't in it. It pointed out to the left, bent at the ankle [...] he had to bend and adjust his boots. Evidently his feet did not go all the way down; the boots must have been stuffed with something so that he would seem taller. The common visual interpretation of the Devil as depicted in many artistic works identifies a "middle aged, sharp featured man who walks on the haunches of a goat (Martinez)." It is more than obvious that Oates is referring to Arnold's feet to add to the connection to the hooves on the Devil's feet. Arnold owns a gold colored convertible that Connie finds attractive. This is a tactic, to attract and lure a victim in, used by the Devil time and time again. In the Garden of Eden, Eve was seduced by the snake using the shiny red apple as the bait to create sin. Also on the car is a mysterious code adding allure to the car which Arnold identifies but Connie doesn't think too much of, but that might have a subconscious effect. The code is three numbers "33-19-17" (255), after summing these numbers up, "it is a clear and silent advertisement for sex (Martinez)." The desire for sex and obtaining the prize is what drives Arnold Friend. He is the true

embodiment of Satan in all his ways of deception, temptation, lust, and pride. Oates exemplifies evil in her stories the best possible way. After all, what better way to depict evil; then to use the prince of darkness himself. These stories illustrate how the Devil will deceive, tempt, and ruin the lives of his victims. The devil is a true symbol of all evil and is accurately represented by the characters within the stories. The use of the Devil creates a new level for the reader to focus on and sympathize with the victims. An important thing to remember; " Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. (Book of Peter ch. V, v. 8) Bibliography Oates, Joyce Carol. " Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" High Lonesome. Ed. Kate Nichols. The Ontario Review Inc. 2006. 249-266 ---, " The Knife" High Lonesome. Ed. Kate Nichols. The Ontario Review Inc. 2006. 557-572 ---, " Heat" High Lonesome. Ed. Kate Nichols. The Ontario Review Inc. 2006. 543-556 " Characteristics of Satan's kingdom" <http://www.porn-free.org/> http://www.porn-free.org/satan's_kingdom.htm. 2006. " Satan" Wikipidia