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Tanya Tromble

- 1 As a young author, Joyce Carol Oates elaborated an understanding of short fiction that she has largely maintained throughout her career. In a 1966 essay, she writes that "quality stories usually refine action onto a psychological level. There is 'action'—movement—but it takes place in a person's mind or in a conversation" (12). In 1971,

The short story is a dream verbalized, arranged in space and presented to the world, imagined as a sympathetic audience (and not, as the world really is, a busy and indifferent crowd): the dream is said to be some kind of manifestation of desire, so the short story must also represent a desire, perhaps only partly expressed, but the most interesting thing about it is its mystery. (214)

- 2 This conception of the short story as fiction that conveys the psychological realm and speaks to the unconscious has resulted in a body of stories that illustrate the existence of a fluctuating liminal realm between unconscious and conscious experiences. This interest in differing mental realities is paralleled by a similar pendulum-like swing in subject matter which the author explains as follows:

My interest swings between a realism which is actually very exciting if you are writing about a dense realistic political social world. That's actually very engrossing and then the world that's more dream-like and surreal and you kind of go back and cross between the two. (Interview with Susana Araújo, 101)

- 3 Through the back-and-forth movement of her interests and the various mental realities of her frequently haunted characters, a psychologically realistic portrait of her characters emerges. As the family is "the deepest mystery," according to one early Oates character (Oates, "You" 329), and as it is also the system through which identity is formed, both genetically and through the formation of one's personality, Oates's characters often have identity problems explicitly associated with mystery or loss of familial origins. More specifically, when faced with a major, misunderstood loss of a

close family member, Oates's characters are often haunted, taking on a spectral quality revealing a disconnection with their present. After first outlining the critical framework, this article will examine cases of haunting in two Oates short stories. In "The Haunting," disturbing cries emanating from empty rabbit cages in the cellar embody the trauma of a father's loss. In "Anniversary," a recently-widowed woman longs for an apparition of her deceased husband while at the same time expressing surprise upon discovering that her inmate students all believe in ghosts.

Textualizing Liminality

- 4 The fragmented way in which Oates depicts her characters' existences calls to mind Marc Guillaume and Jean Baudrillard's psychoanalytical notion of spectrality. In the chapter entitled "La spectralité comme élimination de l'autre" (Spectrality as elision of the other), Guillaume discusses the ellipse of the other and how it affects the way in which we approach and understand otherness. Guillaume uses Georg Simmel's early twentieth century analysis of the stranger as background to introduce his concept of artificial strangeness. Simmel analyzes the stranger as someone who is at once both close and distant (distant not in a geographical sense, rather in the sense of being on the other side of a cultural barrier). The stranger's social distance allows him to be an impartial judge and observer in conflict situations because they do not directly concern him:

Therefore, this distance allows him a certain proximity, allowing him to be called on to judge and, even more frequently, to occupy the position of confessor. One confides more easily in a stranger than in one's family and friends. It is therefore an especially unique relationship because the more distant is also the closest. (21, my translation)

- 5 Guillaume observes that our contemporary urban societies have multiplied instances of what he calls "artificial strangeness," an operation that is performed through an elision of the other. Changing social sensibilities have thus led to the generalization of a new mode of being and communicating that he qualifies as spectral (23). Guillaume opposes the notions of traditional communication and mediatized, spectral communication, explaining that the latter occurs when the actors can dispense with the traditionally requisite procedures of control and identification such as the establishment of a veritable identity. Technological advancements in mediatized forms of communication have encouraged the recourse to anonymity in response to the daily challenge of reconciling the exterior, social world with the interior, intimate world:

It is the challenge of every individual to understand these two worlds, though this is an impossible task because these two worlds are incommensurable. They are not only far removed from each other, they are completely unrelated. This is a daily challenge that we have developed the habit of avoiding rather than facing. (31, my translation)

- 6 To this end we have multiplied instances of "strangers" in our lives, enabling the illusion that the difficulties of life are being confronted, whereas in reality the subject is only being more and more dispersed. In other words, we elide the other through contemporary forms of communication that enable us to remain anonymously masked behind a technological screen, a computer for example. This is the situation Guillaume refers to as artificial strangeness, a situation characterized by spectral communication.
- 7 The concept of spectrality as outlined by Marc Guillaume comprises both the meaning of ghost or spectre, the fading away of one's corporeal presence, and the meaning of

spectrum of light, composed as it is of different dispersed components. Thus, according to Guillaume, “to be spectral is to have several faces and to engage only one at a time in any given communicational interface.” The consequence in terms of identity is that “the attribution of a single identity is to a certain extent avoided and eventually moved aside” (34, my translation). Guillaume concludes that “spectrality is neither the destruction nor the disappearance of the subject, rather it is its dispersal” (36, my translation). Guillaume develops his theory of spectrality in relation to contemporary interactions with new media. However, the notion of the dispersed subject is equally useful in a discussion of Oates’s characters as her formal techniques do much to emphasize the multi-faceted nature of their personalities. The trope of haunting in Oates’s work can be considered a sub-set within a larger framework of strategies emphasizing spectrality and adds complexity to the understanding of Guillaume’s concept by showing that psychological dispersal can come about through other means. In the stories to be discussed, the spectral quality of the characters is emphasized through a temporal phenomenon of haunting that renders the characters less “present.” Indeed, their hauntings are the direct result of their spectrality, that is to say their inability to reconcile exterior and interior worlds.

- 8 Specifically, one of the facets of the dispersed subject as manifested in Oates’s fiction has to do with lingering enigmatic aspects of the past and the corresponding inability to project oneself satisfactorily into the future. In his “Théorie de la hantise” (Theory of Haunting), Jean-Jacques Lecercle defines *le spectre* in terms of its opposition to a related concept, *la hantise*. The *spectre* is a ghost, something from the past that haunts the subject in the present. The *hantise* is a much more difficult term to translate into English, even, it turns out, to conceptualize in French where the tendency is to use it in only a few specific expressions. The dictionary definition “obsessive fear” is unsatisfactory to Lecercle who understands *hantise* as a process rather than an object. *Spectre* and *hantise*¹ are thus opposed not only by their semantic definitions, but also by their opposite modes of existence; one is an object, the other a process:

The *spectre* exists in space as well as in time which is normal given its status as object. The *hantise*, however, as is normal for a process, exists only in time. But the two do not share the same time periods. The *spectre* belongs to the past, whereas the *hantise* belongs to the future. (7, my translation)

- 9 When the present is intruded upon by either *spectre* or *hantise*, it is as if a fold in time has occurred. The standard chronological progression is no longer operative. As Marc Amfreville explains, “the past is no longer the past when it haunts us. It becomes the double of the present, sliding in to occupy the space between the cracks” (149, my translation). The process concerning the future works differently, however, it, too, alters chronological temporality by halting the progression altogether. By privileging the space of past memory, one can attempt to hide from the future. Thus, though the two are distinctly different phenomena, as Lecercle aptly illustrates, they often work together, creating a subject who is trapped in a confused present where past, present and future merge, obscuring the path that could lead to an effective resolution of the subject’s trauma. Amfreville distinguishes between “reminiscence” and “trauma,” explaining that the former is the activity of voluntary memory, whereas the latter is the space of memory that has been erased by the violence of an emotional shock (145). However, there is a third domain of memory, the space of memory that has not been erased but that is called up involuntarily through present allusions to a subject’s past. This third manifestation of memory is that of the *spectre*.

- 10 The confusion of Oates's subjects is quite frequently associated with past family issues. Unresolved feelings upon the loss of a loved one or problematic understanding of identity due to lingering family secrets are almost always at the root of the characters' malaise. "The Haunting" and "Anniversary" present two different examples of ways in which Oates's characters can be haunted by loss. Though the losses are the results of quite different processes, the patterns they provoke are very similar. In each case, the loss creates a void in the character's interior world. The character is plunged into a diminished state of dispersed spectrality. No longer whole, they are pulled towards death, becoming more and more liminal. Haunting is thus the trope that allows the author to textually represent the characters' psychological void.

"The Haunting"

- 11 "The Haunting"² is the story of a six-year-old girl's struggle with loss: the loss of her father and the loss of bearings now that her mother has moved the family. On top of this, Marybeth experiences confusion generated by the conspiring world of adults. "*There's nothing! You hear nothing. It's the wind. It's your dream.*" This remembered admonition by Marybeth's mother begins the story. Coming directly after the title, it introduces the nature of "the haunting": a child is disturbed by a sound in the night. The sound is quickly revealed to be that of "rabbits crying in the cellar in their cages begging to be freed" (95). As the story continues, we learn that though there are old rabbit hutches in the cellar and back yard of the family's newly rented row house, they are no longer in use. A passage in which Marybeth describes finding the hutches full of suffering rabbits, cuts holes in the wire mesh of the cage doors, and leaves the outside door open so that they might escape, is revealed in the morning to have been a dream when Marybeth discovers "The door to the outside is shut tight. Shut and covered in cobwebs like before" (109).
- 12 The rabbit cries are revealed to be a metaphorical representation of entrapment and suffering. The story of Marybeth's father's death runs parallel to that of Marybeth's haunting and serves as an explanation for the latter phenomenon. Following her father's death, Marybeth has moved with her ten-year-old brother, Calvin, and her mother to a new house in a big city where her mother hopes no one will know them. The deceased father, violent and abusive in life, continues in death to exert a sinister control over his family. The mother, who seems to have murdered her husband in revenge for a severe beating received at his hand, begins to take up his habits. She plays his old music that she used to hate, drinks his brand of whisky, takes up his guitar, and starts to frighten her children with her newfound unpredictability. The son reproduces the same pattern of behavior as his father and is sometimes verbally and physically abusive towards his sister. Marybeth, due to her young age, is shielded from the horrible circumstances of her father's death. This gap creates a "phantom" that haunts her in the form of distressed rabbit cries. Marybeth's experience can be understood in terms of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's notion of the "phantom" as a phenomenon which objectifies

the gap that the concealment of some part of a loved one's life produced in us. The phantom is, therefore, also a metapsychological fact. Consequently, what haunts is not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others. (Hoeveler 366)

- 13 The complex *spectre* haunting Marybeth is generated by two related but distinct sources. Loss and loneliness, on the one hand. The terror of horrible suffering, on the other. At her young age, Marybeth struggles to comprehend the notion of death: “At first I was worried: how would Daddy know where we were if he wanted to come back to us?” This confusion regarding the epistemological status of her absent father leads Marybeth to wonder whether her father might not be the source of the disturbing sounds: “I ask Calvin is it Daddy? Is it Daddy wanting to come back?” (96). A second aspect of Marybeth’s haunting is related to the nature of her father’s death. It is unclear to the reader how much Marybeth knows at the various timeframes throughout the story. We do know that adults tried to keep the circumstances of her father’s death from her. We also know she eventually finds out as she reports in the final pages that he was “burned alive in his bed” (109). However, this knowledge seems more likely associated with the adult narrator Marybeth. In any event, these two elements coalesce in Marybeth’s unconscious to create the process of *hantise* through the rabbit cries:

The cellar! Wish I didn’t think about it so much. In the night when the rabbits cry for help, it’s because they are trapped in the cages and it’s like they know I can hear them; I am the only one to hear them. *Help us! Help us we don’t want to die!* (100)

- 14 The metaphorical nature of the cages is confirmed by the closing paragraph of the story in which Marybeth confesses to continuing to hear the sound even once the cages have been removed from the property. Indeed, Marybeth informs us that the sound will continue to haunt her throughout her life.
- 15 Not only do the rabbit cries follow Marybeth, they also begin to physically inhabit her. Marybeth loses sleep and has difficulty concentrating at school. She undergoes physical changes that serve as indicators of her dispersed mental state. When Marybeth’s teacher asks her if everything is okay at home, Marybeth thinks: “My teacher can’t bring herself to say *Every morning you look so haunted*, for this is not anything you would say to a little girl whose father has gone to hell to dwell with his own cruel kin.” The teacher chooses instead to describe her as “hollow-eyed” and leads her to the infirmary so she can sleep. With this incident, the haunting comes full circle as Marybeth imagines herself to be one of the caged rabbits in a simile that identifies her with the symbolic *spectre* rather than as a young schoolgirl engaged in the educational process: “I’m so cold. I hold myself tight against sleep like one of the rabbits hunched in his cage” (104).
- 16 In addition to Marybeth’s “spectral” quality, mentally dispersed between past and present, the description of a young girl permanently on the margins calls to mind the theory of borderline personality disorders put forward by some psychoanalysts in which family issues are blamed for the subject’s mental distress. Judith Feher-Gurewich explains how the psychic disorder “borderline” developed out of the theory of *self* psychology that came to prominence in the United States in the 1970s. A comparison of the terms “subject” and “self” makes clearer what they exactly mean:
- On the French side of the Atlantic it is the subject—understood as the subject of the unconscious—that defines the field of psychoanalysis, whereas on the other side of the ocean it is the *self*—perceived as a conglomerate of both conscious and unconscious—that dominates the different tendencies of contemporary American psychoanalysis. (10, my translation)
- 17 In addition to the importance of both the conscious and the unconscious, another important basic concept of this self psychology is the notion that the self is created

through the relationship that exists between the individual, the *self*, and society, the other. In the theory of self psychology,

the healthy *self* is an intersubjective structure molded by the loving gaze of the other. It is the recognition and the confirmation of the other which allows the subject's creative potential to blossom. [...] Modern alienation is simply the result of an emotionally deficient parental environment. (21-22, my translation)

18 As shown above, an emotionally deficient parental environment is directly linked to Marybeth's experiences in "The Haunting."

19 As for the symptoms, this deficient family background creates in the individual, Fehergurewich explains

This tragic being is far from professionally incompetent or socially inept. [...] But behind his normal or sometimes very sophisticated exterior, the "borderline" patient suffers from uncontrollable rage, feelings of emptiness, lack of self-esteem and is quite often incapable of creating lasting emotional relationships. (29-30, my translation)

20 All of these symptoms are connected to the unstable self-image of the borderline personality:

The analysis of "borderline" patients reveals a childhood marked by a lack of gratifying responses and the paucity of useful ideals. Their aspirations and needs were ignored by a parental gaze which was indifferent or even cruel. As a result, they are incapable of interiorizing a sufficiently stable image of themselves that would allow them to make a commitment to their existence. (30, my translation)

21 This description corresponds well with the remarks that have been made about Marybeth.

22 The cure for borderline patients lies in reestablishing the social ties that were broken by the individual's deficient upbringing. These social ties can only be restored "if the empathy the subject lacked during its formative years can be restored" (21-22, my translation). The nature of the short story form which presents only a short episode of Marybeth's life prevents the lengthy development needed to show whether or not Marybeth is able to fully work through her borderline state to restore empathetic social ties that allow her to engage in meaningful exchanges with others. However, the fact that the story closes on her confession to being haunted in adulthood by the sound from her girlhood suggests that she still exists at the margins of past and present. Marybeth's story is another example of Oates fiction that clearly identifies the family as a source of affective personality disorder in the individual and points to the importance of borderline identity disorders in the author's aesthetic of the enigmatic. Such disorders generate a certain type of individual loss, the psychological ramifications of which Oates has often chosen to render through haunting phenomena. Deficient upbringings are not the only causes for spectral disorders amongst Oates's characters. "Anniversary" reveals another recurrent theme, the loss of a cherished spouse.

"Anniversary"

23 "Anniversary"³ is the story of a recently widowed professor's first teaching experience as a prison volunteer. This thirty-page story has a grounded, practical side to it: it offers a glimpse into prison life and the conditions involving various actors—prisoners, guards and volunteers. Oates experienced prison volunteering firsthand when she taught writing workshops at San Quentin Maximum Security Facility for Men in

California in the Spring of 2011. A series of work published since this time—the stories “San Quentin,” “Anniversary” and “High”; the novel *Carthage*; and the edited story collection of fiction by inmates *Prison Noir*—combine to create testimonies to prison life in the United States and raise questions about the nature of the incarceration system. An equally important facet of the story, however, and the one which concerns us here, has to do with the fragile mental state of the protagonist, Vivianne, which is dealt with through the thematic of haunting in an appropriately gothic decor.

- 24 The short three-line opening paragraph is set apart typographically as its own section. It reads like classic advice for a character in a horror story: “Never be alone in the facility—even in the ‘safety zone.’ Always be in the company of at least one other person.’ *Never be alone*. This was wise advice” (241). As a literary device, this cautionary passage sets an ominous tone and alerts the reader to events to come: the teaching duo will inevitably separate and something unfortunate will happen. As early as the second page, a descriptive passage of the facility sets up the prison as a gothic structure in a traditional gothic decor that calls to mind the scenery of such classic texts as Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. “The weatherworn prison wall topped with cruel-glinting razor-wire” of the “Hudson Fork Maximum Security Correctional Facility for Men” (242) is firmly anchored in another era, “originally built in 1891.” The adjective “old” is repeatedly used in its description, as well as “fossilized” (243).
- 25 Not surprisingly, given the gothic context of the passage and its persistent references to the past, the story’s first mention of ghosts occurs when the teachers’ guide mentions prisoner talk of the subject. That Vivianne is particularly susceptible to suggestions regarding the spirit realm is introduced two paragraphs later when “Vivianne was surprised to see an older man, in his sixties at least, wispy-bearded as a figure out of mythology, walking with a cane” (243). Later, Vivianne describes her proximity to inmates who ignore her as “eerie” (245). And when they are finally escorted to their classroom, the volunteers are met with “a smell of something, dark, melancholy like the stirring of rotted leaves” (251). The past is thus tangibly present and the scene is set for the eventuality of ontological boundary crossing.
- 26 The story is narrated in the third-person with Vivianne as focalizer. The language employed in conjunction with Vivianne indicates from early on that she occupies a liminal realm described as “this late phase of her life,” “what time in her life it had become” (244), “a season in her life” (245), “the ‘twilight’ of her career” (252). Previously, in the midst of the gothic description of the site, we had learned that Vivianne recently experienced a loss when reference was made to “her old, lost life,” a phrase repeated verbatim at least three times throughout the text, becoming a sort of refrain conveying both self-pity and detachment from the present (243, 249, 262). After nearly twenty pages, it will be revealed that Vivianne has lost her husband (258). He has been gone for two years and the very day with which the story is concerned would have been their fiftieth anniversary (264). It is the presence of his absence that haunts Vivianne and ties her to a liminal dimension. As with a handful of other widow characters depicted by Oates since the loss of her own husband (see Tromble), Vivianne suffers from survivor’s guilt, from the feeling that it is somehow wrong to continue living normally when her husband cannot: “she saw herself as arrogant, indifferent to her husband’s memory. She was making her way in the world as if he had not died—as if he had not lived” (264). The story’s title highlights the temporal dispersal from which Vivianne suffers as the word “anniversary” simultaneously evokes past celebrations

with a living spouse (*spectre*) and the recurrent nature of dates that continue to occur regardless of life changes (*hantise*).

- 27 Vivianne is further tied to a liminal in-between life-and-death state through the reductive nature of the language used to characterize her. She finds it a relief “that no one knew her here!” She is “no more and no less” than any other volunteer. She is living “a remnant of a life,” “or maybe not a life” at all (247), her life “had become ridiculous as a weathered old wind sock whipping in the wind” (248). “She’d become a quiet woman, a brooding woman, one who *half-listens*” (249). The frequent recourse to the past perfect tense further emphasizes the irreconcilable rupture that has occurred between her whole past self and present diminished one. Like Marybeth in “The Haunting,” loss plunges her into a state of dispersed spectrality in which she is no longer entirely “present” in the world.
- 28 Throughout the story, Vivianne struggles with two competing impulses: the rational impulse rooted in her lengthy career as university professor and administrator to dismiss her students’ talk of ghosts, and the competing impulse to believe in the beyond nurtured by profound feelings of loss. Passages interspersed throughout the text indicate that Vivianne is searching for someone: “This was a season in her life when often helplessly she glanced at strangers—felt a premonitory kick in her heart—and looked quickly away. / *Of course you won’t see him. How could you hope to see him*” (245). Revelations occur gradually, however, so that upon first reading, it is still possible to wonder whether the “he” of such passages that occur several times throughout the text is not an actual inmate she has been close to in some way (248, 254). Vivianne tries to react rationally to the irrational impulse to seek out her husband:
- Telling herself *You must stop. This is absurd. He will not . . . this is not . . .* / She understood: it was the logic of dreams. In a dream you have no comprehension of time, or plausibility; anything, all things, can happen in a dream. And you have no volition, you can’t save yourself from the folly of hopeless wishes. (256)
- 29 Yet, this attempt at rational self-correction ultimately fails. Indeed, perhaps inevitably so. The word “dream” is a lexical indication to the reader that boundaries are blurring. Frequently in Oates stories (see “Why Don’t You Come Live With Me It’s Time”), once dream states are evoked, it can be difficult to distinguish “real” events from “dream” ones in what follows.
- 30 The facility itself seems to play an active role in encouraging this pull towards the irrational by emotionally destabilizing the visitors: “yet in Hudson Fork Correctional Facility she seemed to have forgotten, or mislaid, her composure. / She could not determine why: she knew there was no danger to her, physically” (245). Vivianne’s young co-instructor, Cal Healy, is similarly affected. In this context, the advice to volunteers to “*never rely upon ‘common sense’ inside the prison*” takes on new meaning, opening up the possibility that the prison realm might make some other mode of connection possible: “Vivianne had lost all faith in her own judgment and she could not believe that ‘common sense’ had any relevance to the world she’d come to know” (250).
- 31 Vivianne’s confusion and disconnection from the physical activity of teaching with which she is engaged increases as the text continues, so much so that she “was distracted by a roaring in her ears” (265). This is one of Oates’s metaphors of predilection that reoccurs regularly throughout her fiction. A roaring sound experienced inside a character’s head generally coincides with states of confusion,

disconnection from the outside world and mental retreat inside one's head. Vivianne's roaring coincides with the moment of her misspeaking to the class, followed quickly by the classroom discussion of ghosts. When asked by the students about her motives for volunteering to teach their prison class, Vivianne had blurted out: "Today is my fiftieth wedding anniversary. My husband has been dead for two years—so anywhere I am, on this day, is like any other" (264). She is still ruminating about the gaff, through the roaring in her ears, when the discussion of ghosts begins:

What did you say! Oh what did you say! To strangers.

Somehow, the subject of ghosts came up. (265)

- 32 The proximity of these two one-line paragraphs serves to establish a clear link between Vivianne's misspeaking about her dead husband and ghosts. Her placating response to the believer students—"Vivianne said, with a strange little smile, 'On the subject of 'ghosts'—through the millennia—thousands of years—all the evidence is not yet in ...'" (267)—seems to indicate a desire on her part to believe.
- 33 This possibility is presented as uniquely tied to the place with the prison wall serving as the boundary between two ontological belief systems: "Outside the prison, you could speak dismissively of ghosts; in the prison, evidently, you had better take ghosts seriously. Vivianne understood" (266). Modal expressions of Vivianne's uncertainty communicated through the adverbs "maybe" and "possibly" pepper the text from this point on, leading up to the climactic assault which occurs when she is left alone in the facility:

"Ma'am! Howdy."

She turned. She felt a touch on her shoulder. Another touch, a lover's caress. A face loomed beside hers, pitying, with a look of sorrow, but revulsion too, disgust, for the woman had insulted his manhood with her condescension; with her ridiculous female vanity, that had taken root in grief; between his fingers the little razor was gripped tight, drawn against Vivianne's throat, beneath her chin, a quick slash, the blink of an eye, the intake of a breath, mercy—for here was the angel of mercy, clad in blue. (273)

- 34 This depiction of her own murder in the penultimate scene combines elements of both her husband and the prisoner-student Conor O'Hagan, as if her husband is being channeled through the living prisoner. On the previous page, there is mention of a "shift in Vivianne's brain" and a vision of herself in Hades. The murder scene is revealed to be a hallucination in the final scene in which we read of Vivianne and Cal driving away together after having been reprimanded by the Education Office coordinator for not following procedure. This final scene includes a description of Vivianne's physical state: "Vivianne's head pounded with pain. Her eyes stung with tears like acid, or blood. She was exhausted, wounded, like one who has been stricken, her throat slashed. She was finished, she'd bled out." This seems like an overreaction, unless we can read it as a metaphorical exorcism, the physical results of a mental process of working through guilt. In this case, Vivianne's closing words, "Next time. Yes" (274), indicate this change and the possibility that she will not relive the same experience at following classes. There is hope that she will now be free of the crippling survivor's guilt that haunted her for two years.

- 35 Exploring the mystery of identity is a central concern of Oates's fiction. As a general rule, identity, as a complete commensurable entity, remains elusive, dispersed behind textual strategies that enhance the fragmented nature of her characters' personalities. In Oates's work, the question of identity is intimately linked to the existence of liminal realms such as dream-states which seem to afford the possibility of a glimpse into the unconscious realm. "What we dream of, that we are," Oates has written in an article about the city of her childhood ("Joyce Carol Oates Goes Home Again," 77). In another essay, she associates dreaming with madness, admonishing that we must learn to successfully mediate our behavior due to "how precarious our hold upon what we call *sanity* is" ("Nighthawk," 60). A pattern emerges in Oates stories involved with the treatment of loss. Loss creates a gap in the character's understanding of self, a gap that is inadequately filled by the haunting phenomenon. The character is pulled towards death, becomes liminal and temporally dispersed, for to be haunted is to turn away from one's own life.
- 36 An earlier story, "Haunted," turns the screw, creating a ghostly *mise-en-abyme*. The narrator, an older woman whose children are grown and whose husband has passed, fills a journal with a tale of loss from her childhood. She is haunted by the memory of her best childhood friend who was found murdered and by her own responsibility in this disappearance. Indeed, we are led to believe that it was the narrator who sent her friend to her death at the hands of an evil spirit.
- 37 For Oates, the short story represents a privileged medium for the treatment of the confusion of loss by allowing for a sustained unity of emotion over the relatively short space of the sketch. Within this framework, haunting is a trope that gives a more concrete form to emotional disorders of a spectral and borderline nature. There is no lengthy *dénouement* to reassure the reader of the character's well-being. Rather, the characters are left much in the frame of mind in which they were found and the images of their hauntings remain fixed in the reader's mind.

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NOTES

1. Due to the difficulty inherent in translating the concepts outlined by Lecercle into English and the risk of altering the meaning that could come with so doing, I have decided to retain the French words for my discussion.
2. The story originally appeared in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 2003. Reprinted in *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror*, 2004. It was later collected in *The Female of the Species: Tales of Mystery and Suspense*, 2005. In-text citations refer to the latter collection.
3. First published in *Boulevard* 28.1&2 (Fall 2012), collected in *Black Dahlia & White Rose*. In-text citations are to the latter collection.

ABSTRACTS

Au début de sa carrière, Joyce Carol Oates a élaboré une théorie de la nouvelle qu'elle a largement suivie par la suite. Pour elle, le genre de la nouvelle reproduit un univers psychologique et parle à l'inconscient comme l'illustre nombre de ses textes où se développent, dans des espaces liminaux

fluctuants, des expériences relatives à la conscience ou à l'inconscient. Cet article montre comment certaines théories psychanalytiques ou psychologiques autour de la spectralité ou des désordres affectifs limites peuvent expliquer l'utilisation que propose Oates de la hantise. Dans « The Haunting », les cris inquiétants émanant de cages à lapins dans un sous-sol représentent le traumatisme lié à la perte d'un père. Dans « Anniversary », une femme qui a récemment perdu son mari attend avec impatience l'apparition de son époux défunt et découvre à sa grande surprise que ses étudiants croient aux fantômes.

AUTHORS

TANYA TROMBLE

Tanya Tromble teaches at Aix-Marseille University. She defended a doctoral dissertation entitled *Interminable Enigma: Joyce Carol Oates's Reimagining of Detective Fiction* at the University of Provence in 2010. She has studied various aspects of Oates's fiction including crime fiction, the epistolary form, violence, the gothic, religion, and 9/11. She co-directed a volume on Oates for the Paris publisher Herne in 2017. She is a member of the editorial boards of several journals: *Bearing Witness: Joyce Carol Oates Studies*, *Résonances* and *Journal of the Short Story in English*.