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Grand Larceny

good context

Unlike armed robbery, which carries a legal consequence, crimes of the heart are answerable only to the degree and duration of suffering felt by the victim. Often that punishment is more severe than incarceration, as Joyce Carol Oates artfully illustrates in her story "Theft." And the drama that unfolds indeed focuses on thievery of the worst kind.

yes - we get a sense here

Although the conflict, revealed through the eyes of an omniscient narrator, is between Marya Knauer and Imogene Skillman, the reader gets the immediate impression that it is, in reality, Marya's story. The opening line states, "Marya became acquainted with Imogene Skillman," thus showing the narrator's first-name familiarity with only Marya. It remains that way throughout the semester at college (Port Oriskany) where they meet, begin a friendship, but eventually sever their ties with their fists. Even in the epilogue it is "Marya" who "kept the earrings" and "Marya" whose "record remained perfect"; but it is "Imogene Skillman" who "never approached her again."

Since it is Marya's story, she is, not surprisingly, the one around whom all the thefts are centered. And here Ms. Oates is at her best. She paints a vivid portrait of a complex character who, in some ways, is the innocent, sympathetic victim, but, in other ways, is the cold, calculating perpetrator. We can feel sorry for Marya when she discovers "with a sickening pang" that her room (as well as her

privacy and security) has been robbed. Besides money, she loses "a prize of her own, a handsome black Parker pen," which, the narrator opines, "she could never replace." But Marya could certainly try. When she argues with the professor who threatens to rob her of her straight-A average (with a B+), she not only lies, through a "dark loathing stare," about her mother's being sick, she leaves the man's office "with pulses beating hot in triumph." She has her "A," the professor's apology, and his "expensive...Parker, with a squarish blunt nub." The pen may be mightier than the sword, but it also fits easily into a coat pocket.

do more with this?
So - the theft is symbolic of what?

However, the most significant thefts are those involving Marya and Imogene. And except for the earrings (the ultimate cause for the violent end to their friendship), what Marya and Imogene steal from each other is intangible; the reader nevertheless shares the pain and bitterness they feel over their failed relationship. Marya, the brilliant, misanthropic scholar and Imogene, the beautiful, promiscuous actress--what could they possibly possess for each other to covet? Perhaps it is the perverse desire, in many of us, to be what we cannot. For Marya it is Imogene's beauty, her "smooth clear creamy skin, china-blue mocking eyes, a flawless nose, mouth..." that first draws Marya's attention to Imogene. Later, Marya accepts Imogene's "handsome camel's hair coat" as a gift and then tries it on, "studying herself critically in Imogene's full-length mirror." One can easily see the word "image" in place of "mirror." For Imogene it is "Marya Knauer's brilliance, Marya Knauer's knowledge and wit." In fact, Imogene is so enamored of Marya that when she plays the role of Hedda Gabler, Imogene purposely uses some of Marya's mannerisms ("had she

I like the way you use quotes

good insights

pilfered that from Marya?") on stage. Unfortunately, for both, they soon realize that their relationship, too, is nothing more than play-acting, and the curtain closes on the show's final run.

a little weak
 It is, then, a superb, albeit depressing picture Joyce Carol Oates renders. Like other contemporary stories, "Theft" focuses on the difficulty (and eventual hopelessness) of maintaining meaningful friendship when the crazy, hectic world demands us to forget other's needs and concentrate on our own. Concerning Imogene, Marya ultimately thinks, "You'll be all right...someone will always take care of you." But there is no real concern at this point; both go on with their lives, and there is no reason to believe either one would ever try to make contact with the other. Marya and Imogene, (as characters,) grow and eventually change, not from what they gain, but from what they lose during their relationship. They are both guilty of theft in the first degree. / ☺

yes -
 a review
 should
 place the
 story in
 a wider
 context

? you mean Imogene is insincere? maybe state it this way

AI -
 why not try
 publishing some
 reviews. This is
 great -
 A