

APPENDICES

BIOGRAPHY

JOYCE CAROL OATES

Life and Career

Joyce Carol Oates was born in Lockport, New York. She grew up on her parents' farm, outside the town, and went to the same one-room schoolhouse her mother had attended. This rural area of upstate New York, straddling Niagara and Erie Counties, had been hit hard by the Great Depression. The few industries the area enjoyed suffered frequent closures and layoffs. Farm families worked desperately hard to sustain meager subsistence. But young Joyce enjoyed the natural environment of farm country, and displayed a precocious interest in books and writing. Although her parents had little education, they encouraged her ambitions. When, at age 14, her grandmother gave her first typewriter, she began consciously preparing herself, "writing novel after novel" throughout high school and college.

When she transferred to the high school in Lockport, she quickly distinguished herself. An excellent student, she contributed to her high school newspaper and won a scholarship to attend Syracuse University, where she majored in English. When she was only 19, she won the "college short story" contest sponsored by *Mademoiselle* magazine. Joyce Carol Oates was valedictorian of her graduating class. After receiving her BA degree, she earned her Master's in a single year at the University of Wisconsin. While studying in Wisconsin she met Raymond Smith. The two were married after a three-month courtship.

In 1962, the couple settled in Detroit, Michigan. Joyce taught at the University of Detroit and had a front-row seat for the social turmoil engulfing America's cities in the 1960s. These violent realities informed much of her early fiction. Her first novel, *With Shuddering Fall*, was published when she was 28. Her novel *them* received the National Book Award.

In 1968, Joyce took a job at the University of Windsor, and the couple moved across the Detroit River to Windsor, in the Canadian province of Ontario. In the ten years that followed, Joyce Carol Oates published new books at the extraordinary rate of two or three per year, while teaching full-time. Many of her novels sold well; her short stories and critical essays solidified her reputation. Despite some critical grumbling about her phenomenal productivity, Oates had become one of the most respected and honored writers in the United States though only in her thirties.

While still in Canada, Oates and her husband started a small press and began to publish a literary magazine, *The Ontario Review*. They continued these

activities after 1978, when they moved to Princeton, New Jersey. Since 1978, Joyce Carol Oates has taught in the creative writing program at Princeton University. Her literary work continued unabated.

In the early 1980s, Oates surprised critics and readers with a series of novels, beginning with *Bellefleur*, in which she reinvented the conventions of Gothic fiction, using them to reimagine whole stretches of American history. Just as suddenly, she returned, at the end of the decade, to her familiar realistic ground with a series of ambitious family chronicles, including *You Must Remember This*, and *Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart*. The novels *Solstice* and *Marya: A Life* also date from this period, and use the materials of her family and childhood to create moving studies of the female experience. In addition to her literary fiction, she has written a series of experimental suspense novels under the pseudonym Rosamond Smith.



As of this writing, Joyce Carol Oates has written 56 novels, over 30 collections of short stories, eight volumes of poetry, plays, innumerable essays and book reviews, as well as longer nonfiction works on literary subjects ranging from the poetry of Emily Dickinson and the fiction of Dostoyevsky and James Joyce, to studies of the gothic and horror genres, and on such non-literary subjects as the painter George Bellows and the boxer Mike Tyson. In 1996, Oates received the PEN/Malamud Award for "a lifetime of literary achievement."

Her husband, R.aymond Smith, died in 2008, shortly before the publication of her 32nd collection of short stories, *Dear Husband*. Today, Joyce Carol Oates continues to live and write in Princeton, New Jersey, where she is Distinguished Professor of Humanities at Princeton University.