Title: Joyce Carol Oates
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American Novelist (1938 -)
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Full Text:

American novelist, short story writer, poet, dramatist, essayist, critic, and editor.

- ## The Life and Times of Joyce Carol Oates (1938-)

- **At the time of Oates's birth:**
- H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* was broadcast over CBS radio stations
- Taylor Caldwell published *Dynasty of Death*
- *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) erupted in Germany
- Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn starred in *Bringing Up Baby*
- Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) began to regulate U.S. aviation industry
- **The times:**
- 1930-1960: Modernist period in American literature
- 1939-1945: World War II
- 1950-1953: Korean War
- 1957-1975: Vietnam War
- 1960-present Postmodernist period in American literature
- 1983: American invasion of Grenada
- 1991: Persian Gulf War
- 1992-1996: Civil war in Bosnia
- **Oates's contemporaries:**
- Colin Powell (1937-) U.S. Army general
- Thomas Pynchon (1937-) American writer
- Robert Redford (1937-) American actor
- Judy Blume (1938-) American writer
- Stephen Breyer (1938-) U.S. Supreme Court justice
- Wolfman Jack (1938-1995) American radio personality
- Seamus Heaney (1939-) Irish poet
- **Selected world events:**
- 1938: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was the first full-length animated cartoon feature
- 1941: Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor
- 1948: Babe Ruth died of cancer in New York City
- 1958: First U.S. satellite was launched
- 1961: Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* was published
- 1970: TV and radio cigarette ads were banned in the United States
- 1987: Nearly 50,000 AIDS cases were reported in the United States
- 1990: Nelson Mandela was released from prison in South Africa

One of the United States's most prolific and versatile contemporary writers, Joyce Carol Oates (born 1938) focuses upon the spiritual, sexual, and intellectual decline of modern American society.

Oates was born into a working-class Catholic family outside Lockport, New York, and was raised amid a rural setting on her maternal grandparents' farm. She attended a one-room schoolhouse in Erie County, a parallel community to her fictitious Eden County where many of her works are set, and displayed an early interest in storytelling by drawing picture-tales before she could write. Oates has said that her childhood "was dull, ordinary, nothing people would be interested in," but has admitted that "a great deal frightened me." In 1953 at age fifteen, Oates wrote her first novel, though it was rejected by publishers who found its subject matter, which concerned the rehabilitation of a drug dealer, exceedingly depressing for adolescent audiences.

Oates began her academic career at Syracuse University and graduated from there as class valedictorian in 1960. In 1961 she received a Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Wisconsin, where she met and married

Raymond Joseph Smith, an English educator. The following year, after beginning work on her doctorate in English, Oates inadvertently encountered one of her own stories in Margaret Foley's anthology *Best American Short Stories*. This discovery prompted Oates to write professionally, and in 1963 she published her first volume of short stories, *By the North Gate* (1963). Oates taught at the University of Detroit between 1961 and 1967. In 1967 she and her husband moved to Canada to teach at the University of Windsor, where together they founded the *Ontario Review*. Since leaving the University of Windsor in 1977, Oates has been writer-in-residence at Princeton University in New Jersey.

Oates's first novel, *With Shuddering Fall* (1964), foreshadows her preoccupation with evil and violence in the story of a destructive romance between a teenage girl and a thirty-year-old stock car driver that ends with his death in an accident. Oates's best-known and critically acclaimed early novels form a trilogy exploring three distinct segments of American society. Critics attribute the naturalistic ambience of these works to the influence of such twentieth-century authors as William Faulkner, Theodore Dreiser, and James T. Farrell. Oates's first installment, *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (1967), is set in rural Eden County and chronicles the life of the daughter of a migrant worker who marries a wealthy farmer in order to provide for her illegitimate son. The woman's idyllic existence is destroyed, however, when the boy murders his stepfather and kills himself. In *Expensive People* (1967), the second work in the series, Oates exposes the superficial world of suburbanites whose preoccupation with material comforts reveals their spiritual poverty. The final volume in the trilogy, *them* (1969), which won the National Book Award for fiction, depicts the violence and degradation endured by three generations of an urban Detroit family. Critics acknowledge that Oates's experiences as a teacher in Detroit during the early 1960s contributed to her accurate rendering of the city and its social problems. Betty DeRamus stated: "Her days in Detroit did more for Joyce Carol Oates than bring her together with new people--it gave her a tradition to write from, the so-called American Gothic tradition of exaggerated horror and gloom and mysterious and violent incidents."

Oates's novels of the 1970s explore characters involved with various American professional and cultural institutions while interweaving elements of human malevolence and tragedy. *Wonderland* (1971), for example, depicts a brilliant surgeon who is unable to build a satisfying home life, resulting in estrangement from his wife, children, and society. *Do with Me What You Will* (1973) focuses upon a young attorney who is lauded by his peers for his devotion to liberal causes. *The Assassins: A Book of Hours* (1975) is a psychological tale which dramatizes the effects of the murder of a conservative politician on his wife and two brothers. *Son of the Morning* (1978) documents the rise and fall from grace of Nathan Vickery, an evangelist whose spirituality is alternately challenged and affirmed by various events in his life. *Unholy Loves* (1979) revolves around the lives of several faculty members of a small New York college. Considered the least emotionally disturbing of Oates's novels, *Unholy Loves* was praised for its indirect humor and gentle satire.

During the early 1980s, Oates published several novels that parody works by such nineteenth-century authors as Louisa May Alcott, Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, and Charlotte and Emily Brontë. *Bellefleur* (1980) follows the prescribed formula for a Gothic multigenerational saga, utilizing supernatural occurrences while tracing the lineage of an exploitative American family. Oates included explicit violence in this work; for example, a man deliberately crashes his plane into the Bellefleur mansion, killing himself and his family. *A Bloodsmoor Romance* (1982) displays such elements of Gothic romance as mysterious kidnappings and psychic phenomena in the story of five maiden sisters living in rural Pennsylvania in the late 1800s. In *Mysteries of Winterthurn* (1984), Oates borrowed heavily from the works of Poe as she explored the conventions of the nineteenth-century mystery novel. The protagonist of this work is a brilliant young detective who models his career after the exploits of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional sleuth, Sherlock Holmes. While some critics viewed these works as whimsical, others, citing Oates's accomplished depiction of evil, maintained that they are significant literary achievements.

Oates's novels of the mid-1980s explore the nature and ramifications of obsession. *Solstice* (1985) revolves around a relationship between a young divorcee and an older woman that evolves into an emotional power struggle. In *Marya: A Life* (1986), a successful writer and academician attempts to locate her alcoholic mother, who had abused and later abandoned her as a child. *Lives of the Twins* (1987), which Oates wrote under the pseudonym of Rosamond Smith, presents a tale of love and erotic infatuation involving a woman, her lover, and her lover's twin brother. With *You Must Remember This* (1987), Oates returned to a naturalistic portrait of families under emotional and moral distress. Suicide attempts, violent beatings, disfiguring accidents, and incest figure prominently in this novel, which centers on an intense love affair between a former boxer and his adolescent niece. Set in Eden County and containing references to such historical events as Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist campaign, the executions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for conspiracy to commit espionage, and the Korean War, *You Must Remember This* earned high praise for its evocation of American life during the early 1950s. John Updike stated that this work "rallies all [of Oates's] strengths and is exceedingly fine--a storm of experience whose reality we cannot doubt, a fusion of fact and feeling, vision and circumstance which holds together, and holds us to it, through our terror and dismay."

In *Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart,* Oates returned to the familiar themes of race and violence. The story tells of a bond shared between Jinx Fairchild, a black sixteen-year-old living in the small industrial town of Hammond, New York, and Iris Courtney, a fourteen-year-old white girl who seeks help from Jinx when a town bully begins harassing her. During a scuffle, Jinx inadvertently kills the boy, and the story follows Jinx and Iris as their lives are guided by the consequences of this event. Encompassing the years 1956 to 1963, the book explores the issues of

racial segregation and downward mobility as the two characters struggle to overcome their past by escaping from the confines of their hometown.

"Iris and Jinx are linked by a powerful bond of secrecy, guilt and, ultimately, a kind of fateful love, which makes for a ... compelling ... story about the tragedy of American racism," summarized Howard Frank Mosher in the *Washington Post Book World*. Jinx wins a scholarship to a university as the high school's basketball star and Iris wins one as the result of her studious bookishness. She is welcomed into the college's intellectual circle and becomes engaged to her art history professor's son even as she continues to tell herself that she must forget the past. Drawn to the comfort and camaraderie of her unofficial adoptive family, Iris watches them intently, "painstakingly learn[ing] the family's ease and stability like an actress mastering a role," commented Patricia Storace in the *New York Review of Books*.

In the character of Iris, with her hints of danger, madness, and her reconstructed past, "Oates ... doesn't mind creating bitter-hearted protagonists ... to repel our softer sentiments," wrote Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Her *modus operandi,* Gates further noted, seems to be "Find just where it hurts--then press." Mosher praised *Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart* for its "uncompromised vision of the violence [Oates's] characters visit upon one another and themselves." Furthermore, he stated, the novel is "wrought from an era of hatred and violence and despair ... the best and truest book so far by one of America's finest realistic novelists." In terms of style, Gates applauded the minutiae of detail with which Oates endows her characters. "Oates gives minor characters carefully limned personalities and histories where an impressionistic blur might have sufficed. The effect is wasteful and rich, akin to the photographic technique of `deep focus.'" Other critics appreciated the way in which Oates presents the issue of racism. "With chilling dispassion," wrote Ellen Pall in Chicago *Tribune Books,* "Oates details the explicit and implicit ways race-awareness is taught to children, the development of prejudice and the hypocrisy that imperfectly hides it in both blacks and whites."

Oates again explored life among the upper-middle class in *American Appetites* and finds it just as turbulent and destructive beneath the surface as the overtly violent lives of her poorer, urban characters. Ian and Glynnis McCullough live the illusion of a satisfying life in a sprawling suburban house made of glass, surrounded by a full social life and Glynnis's gourmet cooking. When Glynnis discovers her husband's cancelled check to a young woman they once befriended, however, the cracks in their carefully constructed lifestyle are revealed and lead to a fatal incident for Glynnis. *American Appetites* is a departure for Oates in that it is told in large part as a courtroom drama, but critics seem not as impressed by Oates's attempt at conveying the pretentiousness of this group of people as with her grittier tales of poverty and racism.

Hermione Lee, writing in the London *Observer,* conceded that the theme of Greek tragedy and its "enquiry into the human soul's control over its destiny ... ought to be interesting, but it feels too ponderous, too insistent." Likewise, Robert Towers of the *New York Times Book Review* applauded Oates's "cast of varied characters whom she makes interesting,... places them in scrupulously observed settings, and involves them in a complex action that is expertly sustained," but somehow they produce an effect opposite of the one intended: "We're lulled into a dreamy observation of the often dire events and passions that it records," Towers concluded. Conversely, Paul Gray of *Time* wrote that "if the purpose of art is to provide a comprehensible context ... for human activity, then Oates certainly falls short.... These people have not earned and do not deserve their fate." The title belies the flaws of the characters, remarked Mae Briskin in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. "There is no real hunger--Oates seems to say--for a transcendent being." The characters are so consumed with maintaining the appearances of their lives that "they have neither the imagination nor passion to seize their strength and change these less-than-satisfying lives," Briskin continued. Bruce Bawer in a *Washington Post Book World* review found the device of conveying ideas "through intrusive remarks by the narrator and *dramatis personae*" ineffective and "contrived." However, Bawer conceded that although *American Appetites* conveys "no sense of tragedy ... or of the importance of individual moral responsibility," it does "capture something of the small quiet terror of daily existence, the ever-present sense of the possibility of chaos."

Oates reconstructed a familiar scenario in *Black Water,* an account of a tragic encounter between a powerful U.S. senator and a young woman he meets at a party. While driving to a motel, the drunken senator steers the car off a bridge into the dark water of an east-coast river, and although he is able to escape, he leaves the young woman to drown. The events parallel those of Senator Edward Kennedy's fatal plunge at Chappaquiddick in 1969, which left a young campaign worker dead, but Oates's version takes place at least twenty years later. Told from the point of view of the drowning woman, Kelly, the story "portrays an individual fate, born out of the protagonist's character and driven forward by the force of events" that is similar to a Greek tragedy, according to Richard Bausch in the *New York Times Book Review*. A tale that explores the sexual power inherent in politics, *Black Water* is not only concerned with the historical event it recalls, but also with the sexual-political power dynamics that erupted over Clarence Thomas's nomination for Supreme Court Justice in the early 1990s: It is a fusion of "the instincts of political and erotic conquest" wrote Richard Eder in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*.

The protagonist of *Black Water* is similar to many of Oates's previous characters. A bright but emotionally insecure and naive college graduate, Kelly wrote her senior thesis on the senator who later abandons her in the sinking car. Flattered immensely by his overtures toward her at the party, she represses her hesitancy by telling herself that "I've made you want me, now I can't refuse you." Thus, the intention of the book is to establish empathy for the victim,

according to Andrew Vachss in a Chicago *Tribune Books* review, but not political persuasion. "It is the story the girl never got to tell, rising up out of the water," wrote Susan Dooley in the *Washington Post Book World,* "offering itself to a public that once listened in shock to the stumbling, confused explanations of the driver." Oates states in the *New York Times Book Review* that she became interested in writing the story shortly after the Chappaquiddick incident but delayed it until other incidents, like the rape trial against William Smith, Edward Kennedy's nephew, resulted in "a climate particularly inhospitable to women," Susannah Hunnewell quoted in the *New York Times Book Review*. Like many of Oates's other novels, her goal was broader than to dissect one incident: "I wanted the story to be somewhat mythical, the almost archetypal experience of a young woman who trusts an older man and whose trust is violated," she told Hunnewell. Bausch called her effort "taut, powerfully imagined and beautifully written.... [I]t continues to haunt us."

Oates's next novel, *Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang,* recounts in retrospect the destructive sisterhood of a group of teenage girls in the 1950s. The story is pieced together from former Foxfire gang member Maddy Wirtz's memories and journal and once again takes place in the industrial New York town of Hammond. The gang, led by the very charismatic and very angry Legs Sadovsky, chooses their enemy--men--the force that Legs perceives as responsible for the degradation and ruin of their mothers and friends. The girls celebrate their bond to one another by branding each others' shoulders with tattoos. But as they lash out with sex and violence against teachers and father figures they "become demons themselves--violent and conniving and exuberant in their victories over the opposite sex," wrote Cynthia Kadohata in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. Although Oates acknowledged to Lynn Karpen in the *New York Times Book Review* that *Foxfire* is her most overtly feminist book, she wanted to show that though "the bond of sisterhood can be very deep and emotionally gratifying" it is a fleeting, fragile bond.

In portraying the destructive escapades of these 1950s teenagers, Oates is "articulating the fantasies of a whole generation," said Lorna Sage in the *Times Literary Supplement,* "putting words to what they didn't quite do." Likening the book to a myth, Oates told Karpen that *Foxfire* "is supposed to be a kind of dialectic between romance and realism." Provoking fights, car chases, and acts of vandalism, the Foxfire gang leaves their mark on the gray town--antics that get Legs sent to reform school, "where she learns that women are sometimes the enemy, too," notes Kadohata. John Crowley of the *New York Times Book Review* likened the novel to a Romantic myth whose hero is more compelling than most of the teen-angst figures of the 1950s; Legs is "wholly convincing, racing for her tragic consummation impelled by a finer sensibility and a more thoughtful daring than is usually granted to the tragic male outlaws we love and need."

Oates's works in other genres also address darker aspects of the human condition. Most critics contend that Oates's short fiction, for which she has twice received the O. Henry Special Award for Continuing Achievement, is best suited for evoking the urgency and emotional power of her principal themes. Such collections as *By the North Gate ;Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?: Stories of Young America* (1974); *The Lamb of Abyssalia* (1980); and *Raven's Wing* (1986) contain pieces that focus upon violent and abusive relationships between the sexes. One widely anthologized story, "*Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?,*" a tale of female adolescence and sexual awakening, is considered a classic of modern short fiction and was adapted for film.

Oates returned to her Gothic leanings with *Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque*. As the title suggests, many of the stories concern Oates's fascination with the horrific events of everyday life; in "*Thanksgiving,*" a father and his daughter stroll through the aisles of a decaying grocery store in search of items for their holiday meal. Another story, "*Martyrdom,*" "may contain the most gruesome passage Ms. Oates has ever written, offering ample ammunition to anyone wanting to call her on her fascination with all things violent and degrading," wrote Michael Upchurch in the *New York Times Book Review*. Other stories include element of the supernatural, such as "*Accursed Inhabitants of the House of Bly,*" a variation on Henry James's "Turn of the Screw" that portrays the ghosts as sympathetic protagonists. With such an eclectic gamut of horror and suspense stories, Upchurch declares that "even the most farfetched are closer to `ordinary life' than most of us like to think."

Throughout her writing career Oates has distributed her energies among several projects at once, simultaneously producing novels, stories, and essays, among other writings. Her foray into sports philosophy resulted in the book-length essay *On Boxing,* which led to at least one television appearance as a commentator for the sport. Around the same time, Oates submitted a mystery novel to a publisher under a pseudonym and had the thrill of having it accepted before word leaked out that it was Oates's creation. Inspired by her husband's name, Oates published the novel *Lives of the Twins* under the name Rosamond Smith. "I wanted a fresh reading; I wanted to escape from my own identity," Linda Wolfe quoted Oates as saying in the *New York Times Book Review*. Though she used the pseudonym again for *Soul/Mate,* a story about a love-sick psychokiller, *Snake Eyes,* a tale of a tattooed psychopathic artist, and *Nemesis,* another mystery concerning aberrational academics, she told *Contemporary Authors (CA),* "I don't think I'll ever publish secretly again." Thus, Oates resumed using her name with the publication of *My Heart Laid Bare*. Following her early historical Gothic novels, Oates explored the relationship between deception and morality during the 1920s.

In discussing her writing process in a *CA* interview, Oates explained how her somewhat conventional lifestyle affects her writing: "Flaubert ... said that you should live like a bourgeois so that you can be wild and original in your writing.

It's not that I follow that dictum in any conscious way, but I think our lives settle into the patterns that accommodate what we do." In addressing critics who are overly concerned with the morality of a particular author's work and further responding to allegations that her novels are overly violent, Oates states that "as Flannery O'Connor--another writer frequently attacked for the 'darkness and violence' of her work--has said, No writer is a pessimist; the very act of writing is an optimistic act. I think of it primarily as a gesture of sympathy."

In the tradition of nineteenth-century novelists like Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, and Anthony Trollope, Oates is both prolific and serious. "She recalls an old-fashioned idea of the novelist as one who does not occasionally unveil a carefully chiseled `work of art' but who conducts a continuous and risky exercise of the imagination through the act of writing," noted *New York Times Book Review* contributor Thomas R. Edwards. But while the Victorians were applauded for their productivity, unusually prolific modern novelists like Oates are more likely to arouse suspicion than praise. The reason, Susan Wood explained in the *Washington Post Book World,* is that Oates "goes against the prevailing impulse in contemporary fiction toward the private and personal.... [Oates] is what I would call a `social' novelist, interested in creating microcosms of the world that reflect the moral and philosophical questions encountered by man as he is in conflict with society, nature, God, history." According to Elaine Showalter of *Ms.,* "Some criticism is plainly envious; Oates herself has noted that `perhaps critics (mainly male) who charged me with writing too much are secretly afraid that someone will accuse them of having done too little with their lives.'"

In addition to the comments elicited by her tireless output, her depictions of the violence permeating society have also sparked criticism. Some have called hers a "distorted" vision of life, a view that Oates responds to in a *New York Times Book Review* essay: "The question is always ignorant.... Since it is commonly understood that 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, it is always an insulting question; and it is always sexist. The serious writer, after all, bears witness."

The world to which Oates bears witness is described by Greg Johnson in *Understanding Joyce Carol Oates* as "a seething, vibrant `wonderland' in which individual lives are frequently subject to disorder, dislocation and extreme psychological turmoil." Her protagonists range from indigent migrant workers to affluent suburbanites, from urban slum dwellers to distinguished visiting poets, and from religious zealots to feminist scholars, but they all share a common frame of mind. "All her characters," in Johnson's words, "regardless of background, suffer intensely the conflicts and contradictions at the heart of our culture." Because these characters' afflictions are psychological, most of the violence is not of the explicit variety. "Oates is not concerned with the gory details," noted Michele Souda in the *Chicago Tribune Book World*. "That explicit sort of violence is kept at an amazing minimum, given her novels' various dark subjects. The violence of `Angel of Light,' of `them,' and of much of her work, is the violence *within*--the violence of that particularly furious, competitive tennis match, of superficial parties, of sex without love. Oates is not so much concerned with the violent *act* as with the violence that informs and distorts less apparently threatening acts, the ones that look clean, easy, legitimate."

Oates's personal life bears little resemblance to the stormy dramas of her fiction. Married since 1961 to Raymond Smith, Oates lives in suburban New Jersey and teaches at Princeton. Her husband, formerly a professor of English, runs the Ontario Review Press, a small publishing house that grew out of the *Ontario Review Journal* that the couple founded in 1974. While the particulars of Oates's life make her "sound like any successful woman executive of the 1980s ... she is most decidedly not like other people," says Showalter. "Oates often inserts remarks [into conversation] whose philosophical penetration makes the rest of us feel like amoebas in the company of a more highly evolved life form. She seems to be someone who is never blocked, whose unconscious is always available, who is most alive when she is writing and working. She has the uncanny personal power of genius."

Oates has maintained her output. Her novel *Blonde*, based on the life of Marilyn Monroe, was released in March of 2000 and was nominated for the National Book Award for fiction. *Middle Age: A Romance* followed in 2001 as did the short fiction collection *Faithless: Tales of Transgression*. *Getting to Know You*, a film based on Oates's 1992 short story collection *Heat* was released on June 28, 2000. Since 2001 she has published eight more novels as well as two other story collections.

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born June 16, 1938, in Lockport, New York, United States; daughter of Frederic James (a tool and die designer) and Caroline (Bush) Oates; married Raymond Joseph Smith, January 23, 1961. **Education:** Syracuse University, B.A., 1960; University of Wisconsin, M.A., 1961. **Memberships:** PEN, American Academy of Arts and Letters. **Addresses:** Office: Department of Creative Writing, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544.; Agent: John Hawkins, 71 W. 23rd St., New York, NY 10010; (for plays) Peter Franklin, c/o William Morris Agency, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019.

CAREER:

Writer. University of Detroit, Detroit, MI, instructor, c. 1961-65, assistant professor, 1965-67; University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada, member of English department faculty, 1967-78; Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, writer-in-residence, 1978-81, professor, 1987, Roger S. Berlind Distinguished Professor.

AWARDS:

Mademoiselle college fiction award, 1959, for "In the Old World"; National Endowment for the Arts grants, 1966, 1968; Guggenheim fellowship, 1967; O. Henry Award, 1967, for "In the Region of Ice," and 1973, for "The Dead," and 1983, for "My Warszawa"; Rosenthal Award, National Institute of Arts and Letters, 1968, for *A Garden of Earthly Delights*; National Book Award, 1970, for *them*; O. Henry Special Award for Continuing Achievement, 1970 and 1986; Lotos Club Award of Merit, 1975; Pushcart Prize, 1976; *Unholy Loves* was selected by the American Library Association as a notable book of 1979; St. Louis Literary Award, 1988; Rhea Award for the short story "Dungannon Foundation," 1990; Alan Swallow Award for fiction, 1990; co-winner, Heidemann Award for one-act plays, 1990; Bobst Award for Lifetime Achievement in Fiction, 1990; Bram Stoker Lifetime Achievement Award for horror fiction, 1994; Walt Whitman award, 1995; Bram Stoker Award for Horror, Horror Writers of America, and Fisk Fiction Prize, both 1996, both for *Zombie*; PEN/Malamud Award for Achievement in the Short Story,1996; F. Scott Fitzgerald Award for Outstanding Achievement in American Literature, 1998; Bram Stoker Lifetime Achievement Award in Horror Fiction, 1996; National Book Award, 1970; Common Wealth Award for Literature, 2003; Kenyon Review Award for Literature, 2003.

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