

The Oxford Book of American Short Stories

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"How ironic," Joyce Carol Oates writes in her introduction to this marvelous collection, "that in our age of rapid mass-production and the easy proliferation of consumer products, the richness and diversity of the American literary imagination should be so misrepresented in most anthologies." Why, she asks, when writers such as Samuel Clemens, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Saul Bellow, and John Updike have among them written hundreds of short stories, do anthologists settle on the same two or three titles by each author again and again? "Isn't the implicit promise of an anthology that it will, or aspires to, present something different, unexpected?"

In *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories*, Joyce Carol Oates offers a sweeping survey of American short fiction, in a collection of fifty-six tales that combines classic works with many "different, unexpected" gems, and that invites readers to explore a wealth of important pieces by women and minority writers. Some selections simply can't be improved on, Oates admits, and she happily includes such time-honored works as Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," and Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." But alongside these classics, Oates introduces such little-known stories as Mark Twain's "Cannibalism in the Cars," a story that reveals a darker side to his humor ("That morning we had Morgan of Alabama for breakfast. He was one of the finest men I ever sat down to...a perfect gentleman, and singularly juicy"). From Melville come the juxtaposed tales "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," of which Oates says, "Only Melville could have fashioned out of 'real' events...such harrowing and dreamlike allegorical fiction." From Flannery O'Connor we find "A Late Encounter With the Enemy," and from John Cheever, "The Death of Justina," one of Cheever's own favorites, though rarely anthologized. The reader will also delight in the range of authors found here, from Charles W. Chesnutt, Jean Toomer, and Sarah Orne Jewett, to William Carlos Williams, Kate Chopin, and Zora Neale Hurston. Contemporary artists abound, including Bharati Mukherjee and Amy Tan, Alice Adams and David Leavitt, Bobbie Ann Mason and Tim O'Brien, Louise Erdrich and John Edgar Wideman. Oates provides fascinating introductions to each writer, blending biographical information with her own trenchant observations about their work, plus a long introductory essay, in which she offers the fruit of years of reflection on a genre in which she herself is a master.

This then is a book of surprises, a fascinating portrait of American short fiction, as filtered through the sensibility of a major modern writer.

Joyce Carol Oates

is one of America's preeminent writers. Since 1978, she has been on the faculty of Princeton University and is a co-editor of *The Ontario Review*.

"Provides a history of not only the evolution of the short story, but also of American culture....The collection is more than a survey of writing styles. It is a celebration of the diversity of American culture."--*Denver Post*

"Joyce Carol Oates has cast her net further and deeper, drawing from American literature's impressive past and substantial cultural wealth....Exceptional."--*Booklist*

"Readers who take an encompassing view of American literature and culture will love this book, which brilliantly captures the range and heft of the remarkable American contribution to the short story genre. With penetrating introductions by Joyce Carol Oates

to each writer, this is an anthology of the finest kind, a collection of stories dazzling in variety but unified by an editor of singular intelligence and vision."--Arnold Rampersad, Princeton University

"Oates' collection of stories is the finest anthology I've ever read in 33 years of teaching."--Robert L. Kelly, Alpena Senior High School

"I appreciate the comprehensive selection of authors, representing a variety of gender, ethnic and class perspectives, as well as complete chronological coverage."--Joel R. Brouwer, Michigan State University

"Joyce Carol Oates, a master fabulist who is also one of our finest critics, has given us a treasury that represents the astonishing range of the American short story. But instead of another showcase of 'greatest hits,' Oates ventures further afield, to uncover a series of neglected but refulgent gems. This is a collection with guts--and brains. Best of all, it's a collection that unfolds, as its editor promises, the larger story of American writing, in all its hues and timbres."--Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard University

"Whether for the classroom or the bedtable, The Oxford Book of American Short Stories is indispensable, the best fiction selected and introduced by one of America's finest writers. It's a treasure!"--Cathy N. Davidson, Duke University

"This is a splendid volume of short stories which reflect the wealth of brilliance built up over the years by a wide ranging field of American writers. Oates has done an outstanding job in making this selection....She does not always go for the well known stories by delights us with some that have remained somewhat obscure."--Yorkshire Gazette and Herald

"Ambitious and innovative....Only a novelist would ever think up such a project. Only a very good one could pull it off....Eclectic."--Observer (London)

"To a short story lover it is hard to think of a book that could give more pleasure."--Scotland on Sunday

Other Books

The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature. A breathtaking achievement, this Concise Companion is a suitable crown to the astonishing production in African American literature and criticism that has swept over American literary studies in the last two decades. It offers an enormous range of writers--from Sojourner Truth to Frederick Douglass, from Zora Neale Hurston to Ralph Ellison, and from Toni Morrison to August Wilson. It contains entries on major works (including synopses of novels), such as Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. It also incorporates information on literary characters such as Bigger Thomas, Coffin Ed Johnson, Kunta Kinte, Sula Peace, as well as on character types such as Aunt Jemima, Brer Rabbit, John Henry, Stackolee, and the trickster. Icons of black culture are addressed, including vivid details about the lives of

Muhammad Ali, John Coltrane, Marcus Garvey, Jackie Robinson, John Brown, and Harriet Tubman. Here, too, are general articles on poetry, fiction, and drama; on autobiography, slave narratives, Sunday School literature, and oratory; as well as on a wide spectrum of related topics. Compact yet thorough, this handy volume gathers works from a vast array of sources--from the black periodical press to women's clubs--making it one of the most substantial guides available on the growing, exciting world of African American literature.

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