



# Dark Eyes on America: The Novels of Joyce Carol Oates

*Gavin Cologne-Brookes*

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Joyce Carol Oates's unhesitating and prodigious exploration of genre, topic, and style has made her an inevitable but elusive subject for critics and scholars. Though Oates's national reputation has fluctuated since her first work appeared in the 1960s, one thing can be agreed: Oates is not just America's most extraordinary woman of letters but as significant an American writer as any of her contemporaries. In this comprehensive and accessible study, Gavin Cologne-Brookes traces in Oates's novels evidence of an evolving consciousness that ultimately forgoes abstract introspection and the philosophical pursuit of certainty in favor of a more practical approach to art as a tool for understanding personal and social problems and possibilities.

Drawing on the intellectual tradition of American Pragmatism, Cologne-Brookes emphasizes the social value of Oates's later work in particular. He shows how Oates's willingness to enter the minds of a vast array of protagonists points to her belief in the possibility of understanding diverse American realities. At the same time, her work recognizes an often mutually incomprehensible diversity as the actual state of affairs in American society.

Cologne-Brookes undertook extensive research for his study, including interviewing and corresponding with Oates. His close textual study of her novels and abundant references to her essays, stories, poetry, plays and letters result in a book that emphasizes Oates's clear-eyed analysis of human behavior, underscores her remarkable mastery of her craft, and reveals her uniquely dark vision to be finally melioristic and affirmative. *Dark Eyes on America* will be of enormous value for understanding this protean author who cannot be reduced to a rigid thesis.

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