

Princeton University

HONORS FACULTY MEMBERS
RECEIVING EMERITUS STATUS



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The biographical sketches were written by colleagues
in the departments of those honored.

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JOYCE CAROL OATES



Surely, one of the names most associated with Princeton University over the last four decades is that of Joyce Carol Oates, the Roger S. Berlind '52 Professor of the Humanities. Back before there was a Lewis Center for the Arts, she gave the University whatever profile it had as a place interested in nourishing artists and in teaching the making of art. She continues to be among our most visible, celebrated, and hard-working artists-teachers.

Growing up in a rural community in upstate New York, Joyce attended grade school in a one-room schoolhouse. While attending Syracuse University, she won the coveted *Mademoiselle* “college short story” contest. After graduating as valedictorian, she earned an M.A. in English at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she met and married Raymond J. Smith, her husband until his death in 2008. In 1962, the couple settled in Detroit, where she began teaching at the University of Detroit. In 1963, she published her first book, a short story collection titled *By the North Gate*. Between 1968 and 1978, Joyce taught at the University of Windsor in Canada, before moving to Princeton’s Program in Creative Writing in 1978 upon the invitation of Mike Keeley. During their years together in Princeton, she and Ray also operated a small press and published a literary magazine, *The Ontario Review*.

Joyce Carol Oates is one of the most prolific writers in American literary history. Unusually, she has worked in a wide variety of genres—novel, short story, children’s fiction, detective fiction, horror fiction, drama, poetry, literary criticism, nonfiction, diary, and memoir. If there’s a “Joyce Carol Oates” whose work you don’t like, you need only pick up another volume or two to find a “Joyce Carol Oates” you do. Our colleague Anthony Grafton once noted that Joyce “has produced an extraordinary body of work—one that rivals those of the 19th-century greats like Balzac and Dickens in its extent, and demands comparison with them in depth, range, and power.”

For most critics in most parts of the world, no canon of American literature would be complete without the inclusion of something by Joyce Carol Oates. Besides, it's very easy to get into a conversation with a stranger on a train, bus, or plane on the way anywhere by simply mentioning the title of her 1966 story, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"

The list of awards Joyce has received is almost as long as her bibliography. In 1970, she won the National Book Award for one of her masterpieces, *them*. (She's been nominated for this prize no less than five times!) In 1990, she received the Rea Award for the Short Story and, in 1996, the PEN/Malamud Award for Excellence in the Art of the Short Story. In 2002, she won the Carl Sandburg Award for Lifetime Achievement. The following year, she won the *Kenyon Review* Award for Literary Achievement. In 2007, she received the American Humanist Association's Humanist of the Year Award. In 2010, she received the National Book Critics Circle's Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2011, President Barack Obama presented her with the National Humanities Medal "for her contributions to American letters." And in 2012, Princeton University bestowed on her the Howard T. Behrman Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Humanities.

While producing "her own work" (and winning prizes for it), Joyce has fully engaged in the teaching mission of the University, regularly leading four creative writing workshops per year and advising untold numbers of senior theses—many of which soon found themselves in print. Some of you may have been at the interview Joyce did with her former student Jonathan Safran Foer, whose thesis, an early version of his celebrated novel *Everything is Illuminated*, she had advised. This wickedly funny and deeply public conversation was emblematic of the attention Joyce has always paid to her undergraduates and of the close ties she maintains with her former students. Jonathan remembered being amazed when "the professor" commented after a reading that she admired his "work"; this was well before he thought of himself as having "work." Like many of Joyce's comments on student writing over the years, it was one that made him take himself more seriously. Joyce herself never seems to think of herself as having what the rest of us refer

to as “a workload.” When a reporter labeled her a “workaholic,” she replied, “I am not conscious of working especially hard, or of ‘working’ at all. Writing and teaching have always been, for me, so richly rewarding that I don’t think of them as work in the usual sense of the word.”

Joyce’s richly rewarding journey continues. In 2009, she married Charles Gross, professor of psychology and the Princeton Neuroscience Institute, emeritus. And, for many autumns to come, the Lewis Center’s Program in Creative Writing looks forward to welcoming her return to Princeton to teach new generations of students just what it means to be a writer and teacher of substance.