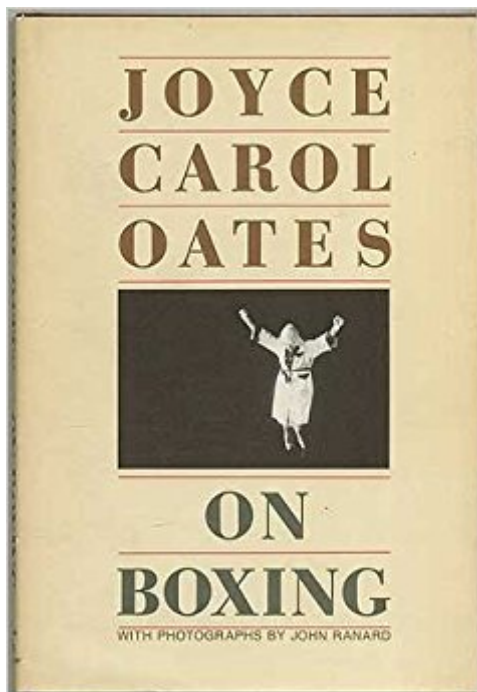


The book was found

On Boxing



Synopsis

"No other subject is, for the writer, so intensely personal as boxing. To write about boxing is to write about oneself--however elliptically, and unintentionally. And to write about boxing is to be forced to contemplate not only boxing, but the perimeters of civilization--what it is, or should be, to be 'human' . . . The sport seems in crisis, its best practitioners no less than its most dubious contaminate by association with fixed fights, manipulated judges, questionable referees. Demands for its abolition are made, indignation is aroused, well-argued editorials are printed, deals continue to be made, boxers continue to be , managed.' occasionally there is a boxing match that, in its demonstration of skill, courage, intelligence, hope, seems to redeem the sport--or almost. Perhaps boxing has always been in crisis a sport of crisis. Without doubt, it is our most dramatically 'masculine' sport, and our most dramatically 'self-destructive' sport. In this, for some for us, its abiding interest lies."--Joyce Carol Oates, from the Foreword --This text refers to the Print on Demand edition.

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Customer Reviews

The sport of Boxing, on the surface at least, does not automatically come to mind as obvious subject matter for the premier writing talents of Joyce Carol Oates; even though Ms. Oates certainly can get down and dirty with the best of them as in her "Man Crazy" or "Zombie." But as Oates explains in her 1987 collection of essays (revised in 1994), "On Boxing": "No one whose interest began as mine did in childhood--as an offshot of my father's interest is likely to think of boxing as something else, a metaphor...Life is like boxing, in many respects. But boxing is only like boxing." Oates is a boxing fan and a great writer and it was inevitable that these two facets of her life would converge. "On Boxing" is really 3 separate essays: "On Boxing," "On Mike Tyson" and "The

Cruellest Sport."The first essay is so crammed full of fascinating, revelatory statements about the nature and function and the social and psychological nature of boxing that it is hard to pick out only a few to quote here. But I will try: "To enter the ring near-naked and to risk one's life is to make of one's audience voyeurs of a kind: boxing is so intimate. It is to ease out of sanity's consciousness and into another, difficult to name. It is to risk, and sometimes to realize, the agony of which "agon" (Greek, "contest") is the root."In Oates view, the boxer brings more than his body to bear in the ring...he also brings his soul: "There are some boxers possessed of such remarkable intuition, such uncanny prescience, one would think they were somehow recalling their fights, not fighting them as we watch."On Boxing" the essay is also a boxing history lesson highlighting the careers of Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Muhammed Ali, Sugar Ray Leonard, Roberto Duran, etc.

Where the most eloquent writers display their best prose is through passion. And the seeds of passion thrive in sex, exploitation, and violence. The human condition, written about by every writer but only successfully by a minority, is dissected and shaved away and exposed layer by layer until one gets to the core of what the soul is, of what separates us from our basest instincts. To that end, boxing is the true display of the human condition and the greatest writers have recognized this and have poured forth their own souls to capture the brutality that occurs inside the squared circle. Joyce Carol Oates at first seems like an odd choice as an expert on the sport. A frail academic known for her moving stories of family interaction, she wouldn't at first strike you as a devotee to a sport that most academics abhor. But she is a lifelong fan. Her father was a fan and it seems that it runs in the blood. She's been going to matches and watching them on film since she was a young girl, and due to her thoughtful approach and extraordinary access she manages to coax the true spirit of the athletes from a myriad of interviews. Many spectacular authors have written about the sport. Jack London, Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer, and A.J. Liebling are a few that come to mind. None of those giants bring to the sport a cautious sensitivity that Oates does. Her prose are so rich that when reading this book, I had to frequently set it down and digest what I'd read. Like a rich chocolate, too much at one time would overload my senses, dulling me and causing me to miss nuance and ramble through the poetry. Her book is a treat, slowly and steadily read.

There is much to be appreciated about this book for those who wish to truly contemplate boxing fully. Oates's prose is beautiful, and she weaves a narrative which will keep the lover of literature and history stimulated as much as the lover of fighting. Sam Sheridan refers to Oates's On Boxing many times in his A Fighter's Heart. I am using Sheridan's text for the second time in

a writing course I am teaching at the college, and I finally broke down and bought the book this week. The first half was amazing, but the book is a collection of essays, was originally published in 1985-86, and it is, in many ways, a historical artifact that gives you a poetic vision of boxing up to that time, but does not age well in its insights into the contemporary heroes of the time, such as Tyson (his doc, which I have shown in part this week, sits on top of my worn copy of *A Fighter's Heart* next to me), though, again, they are interesting historically. Her writing on Muhammad Ali is excellent, however, and needs to be read. I cannot entirely praise this book as a complete work, however, for the problem with this being a collection of essays is that the passionate prose style of Oates can just become hyperbolic when the same phrases or theories (the atavistic urge, the warrior primitive man, the sacrificial victim and sacred rite of boxing, the oft-repeated assertion that boxing is "not the most dangerous sport" but seventh, etc.) are used over and over again. And, as a man who has fought all of his life, mostly in the streets, it is hard to read too much from someone who writes "about violence", but seems to have had no direct life-threatening experience of it herself.

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