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JOYCE CAROL OATES

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R O B E R T A T W A N

S E R I E S E D I T O R

The Best
AMERICAN
ESSAYS
1991

Edited and with an Introduction
by JOYCE CAROL OATES

ROBERT ATWAN,
Series Editor

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Foreword

IT'S BEEN over two hundred years since one of our first important essayists — an English-educated Frenchman who went by the name of J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur — asked, “What is an American?” His question reverberated through American literature, as many of our major writers proposed a wide variety of answers. Emerson tackles this central question, as do many others — Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, Saul Bellow, and especially James Baldwin, for whom the problem of American identity is a dominant issue.

Crèvecoeur's image of a “melting pot” no longer possesses the influence it once had for generations of Americans, but his picture of an ethnically and culturally diverse nation is of particular relevance today. This sixth edition of *The Best American Essays* shows how many talented contemporary writers are still attracted to the theme of America's diversity. For many of them the topic is closely tied to the personal essay, as they explore in autobiography and memoir the complicated interrelations of heritage, background, and individual identity. The essay, as Montaigne proved long ago, is the perfect vehicle for experiments in self-discovery.

This year's collection ranges over a wide territory of cultural realms and geographical regions, of voices and tones: the Puerto Rican barrio of Paterson, New Jersey (my own hometown); the uncompromising streets of New York City; the Pine Ridge Sioux Reservation in South Dakota; a San Francisco homosexual community; a Palestinian-American household in Texas; a Japanese-American family in Oahu, Hawaii; the Italian-American neigh-

borhood of Bensonhurst; the Buffalo Bill Museum in Cody, Wyoming; a spot in the Grand Canyon appropriately known as the Great Unconformity. In this year's volume you will also find the sounds and accents of many languages, even — as the paired essays of Margaret Atwood and John Updike reveal — the subtle language of the female body. There are, as Amy Tan puts it, many “different Englishes.”

The volume ranges, too, over an exciting diversity of essay forms. Here are reflections and meditations, philosophical fragments, personal narratives and anecdotes, cultural critiques and impassioned arguments — a few of these on what Woody Allen would call “touchy subjects.” Today's essay assumes many shapes, though some of the genre's most venerable traditions are still visible despite new twists and turns. In calling his essay “Mosaic on Walking,” Mark Rudman at once reminds readers of the long tradition of “walking” essays and gives that tradition a contemporary spin.

We “relish diversity,” says Stephen Jay Gould, speaking as an evolutionary biologist in “Counters and Cable Cars,” an essay that in many ways captures the spirit of this volume. Biologists, of course, have their own scientific definitions of diversity. Gould is writing, however, not about his usual subjects — biology, natural history, or paleontology — but about the special joys of a San Francisco breakfast counter and an early morning cable-car ride. “I therefore tend to revel most,” Gould writes, “in the distinctive diversity of geographical regions when I contemplate the aesthetic pleasure of difference.” For Gould, regional and cultural diversity seems to satisfy a fundamental human need — the need for authenticity.

The essays in this volume, though they represent — as Joyce Carol Oates notes in her introduction — a “diversity of voices,” are united in their quest for authenticity, their demand for real feeling and genuine experience. The personal essay in our time, as both Joyce Carol Oates and Stephen Jay Gould recognize, stays alive because it dares to be unique and because it strenuously resists the encroachments of standardization, whether social, cultural, or academic. Essayists have a sharp eye for the local and for the wonderful variety of life that can be found in any authentic place. Take Julian's, for instance, the famous New York City

pool hall where Frank Conroy learned not only how to play but to talk a good game. He learned there, too, another one of our many different “Englishes” — the kind you apply to a cue ball.

The Best American Essays features a selection of the year’s outstanding essays, essays of literary achievement that show an awareness of craft and a forcefulness of thought. Roughly 300 essays are gathered from a wide variety of regional and national publications. These essays are then screened and turned over to a distinguished guest editor, who may add a few personal favorites to the list and who makes the final selections.

To qualify for selection, the essays must be works of respectable literary quality, intended as fully developed, independent essays (not excerpts or reviews) on subjects of general interest (not specialized scholarship), originally written in English (or translated by the author) for first appearance in an American periodical during the calendar year. (Readers may notice that the British magazine *Granta* is now on our list. With its U.S. editorial offices and its receptivity to American writers, *Granta* has become an important part of our literary scene.) Publications that want to make sure their contributors will be considered each year should include the series on their subscription list (Robert Atwan, *The Best American Essays*, P.O. Box 416, Maplewood, New Jersey 07040).

I’d like to thank two good friends, George Dardess and Peggy Rosenthal, for all the suggestions and support they’ve given me since I started the series in 1985. I’m grateful to Michael McSpedon for his help with all the paperwork that went into this year’s edition. As always, I appreciate the assistance I receive annually from the fine public libraries in South Orange, Maplewood, and Millburn. And I’d like to thank Joyce Carol Oates, whose creative range is truly astonishing. A novelist, short story writer, poet, and essayist, she proves in this volume that the essay is not a distant relative of imaginative literature but a member of the immediate family.

Introduction

Why does authenticity . . . exert such a hold upon us?

— Stephen Jay Gould

Be it life or death, we crave only reality.

— Henry David Thoreau

AS A CHILD I seem to have made the distinction, without examining much evidence, that “reading” (as in “reading material”) was of two types: for children, and for adults. Reading for children was simple-minded in its vocabulary, grammar, and content; it was always about unreal or improbable or unconditionally fantastic situations, like Disney films and cartoons, and comic books. It might be amusing, it might even be instructive, but it was not *real*. Reality was the province of adults, and, though I was surrounded by adults (I was an only child for five years, and those five years seem, in retrospect, to have shaped my life), it was not a province I could enter, or even envision, from the outside. To explore *reality*, I read books.

Or tried. Very hard. As if — but why did I imagine this? — my life depended upon it.

One definition of the “imaginative” personality is that it makes much of things. To some observers’ eyes, too much. The motive for metaphor — the passionate motive for writing, thus recording, and supposedly making permanent what is ephemeral — remains a mystery. Most writers will say that they write in order to understand, but out of what impatience with things-as-they-are does the motive to understand spring? Writing is a form of

sympathy, but there are other forms of sympathy, less circuitous and vulnerable to misinterpretation.

One of the earliest adult books I read, or tried to read, was a book from a shelf at school, an aged *Treasury of American Literature* that had probably been published before World War I. Mixed with writers long since forgotten (James Whitcomb Riley, Eugene Field, Helen Hunt Jackson) were our New England classics — though I was certainly too young, at nine or ten, to know that Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, et al. were “classics” or even to comprehend that they belonged to and spoke out of an America that no longer existed and had never existed for my family. I took it for granted that these writers were in the full possession of *reality*. That their *reality* was in no way contiguous with my own did not discredit it, nor even qualify it, but confirmed it: adult writing was a form of wisdom and power (the two, in my imagination, inextricably bound), difficult to understand, in fact frequently impossible to understand (what *was* “Ralph Waldo Emerson” saying?), but unassailable. These were no children’s easy-reading fantasies but the real thing, voices of adult authenticity. Engrossed in tortuous, finely printed prose on yellowed, dog-eared pages (this too was a measure of authenticity — the very agedness, brittleness, of the book), I was capable of reading for long minutes at a time, retaining very little but utterly captivated by another’s voice sounding in my ears. (What a rich fund of words for my “vocabulary list”! There would never be an end to the words I didn’t know, thus never an end to the excitement of learning them. So, today, four decades later, my heart leaps when I encounter an unfamiliar word — something for the “vocabulary list.”)

Our school in rural Niagara County, on the Tonawanda Creek near Millersport, New York, approximately twenty-five miles north of Buffalo, was an old wood-frame one-room schoolhouse in which eight quite disparate grades were taught, and taught very capably, by a heroic woman named Mrs. Dietz. For decades my memory of my first teacher was that of a child’s-eye view of a giantess, or a deity: could Mrs. Dietz really have been as tall as I remembered? — so full-bodied, muscular, stoic? When, a few years ago, my parents unearthed an old photograph of Mrs. Dietz and some of her pupils, taken in the schoolhouse, circa 1948, I saw that, yes, Mrs. Dietz had been of above-average height and girth. But

then she would have to have been, for not only was it this woman's task to lead eight grades, in turn, through their lessons every school day, but to keep discipline in the classroom, where certain of the overgrown farm boys, attending school only reluctantly, had to be kept from pummeling one another or bullying the girls and younger children; it was her responsibility too to keep the ancient wood-burning stove, the building's single source of heat, going on winter mornings when the temperature might hover at zero degrees Fahrenheit and the windows would be covered, inside, in frost and even rivulets of ice. Studying this old photograph, I feel an identification not with the ten-year-old girl who is, or was, myself, but with Mrs. Dietz — what a paragon of patience she must have been, how overworked and surely underpaid! I remember Mrs. Dietz's emphasis upon such time-honored pedagogical exercises as penmanship, memorization, sentence diagramming, spelling (you stand beside your desk and pronounce your word; then, enunciating carefully, you spell out your word; then you pronounce your word again; then sit down). I remember her deep seriousness, her zeal in her calling — her very *teacherliness*.

The *Treasury of American Literature* was one of probably fewer than a dozen books of its sort kept in a bookshelf for use during study time, a reward for having finished classwork early. I tackled it as I might tackle a tree difficult to climb. The poetry — which was called “verse” — I immediately discounted as both too hard and “not real”; even if you could make sense of rhyming lines, they were not, somehow, required to be truthful as prose was. I must have felt challenged by those lengthy, near-impentrate paragraphs of prose so unlike the brief, simple paragraphs of our readers, the typeface itself small, fussy as lace. The writers, of course, were mere names, words. “Washington Irving,” “Benjamin Franklin,” “Nathaniel Hawthorne,” “Herman Melville,” “Ralph Waldo Emerson,” “Henry David Thoreau,” “Edgar Allan Poe,” “Samuel Clemens,” and numerous others: I did not think of these as actual men, human beings who might have lived and breathed like the adults of my world; the writing attributed to them *was* them, autonomous, self-generated, inviolable, and immortal. If I could not always make sense of what I read, I at least knew it was true.

The first “essay-voice” of my experience was Henry David

Thoreau. Admirers of the essay form invariably speak of Thoreau with reverence, for no one has stated the case for a first-person accounting of oneself so succinctly as Thoreau: *I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew so well.* My early reading or attempted reading of Thoreau has long since been layered over by subsequent readings of *Walden*, "Civil Disobedience," and other works, but I must have been struck by this writer's vivid, direct, precise language, both "poetic" and colloquial, above all different from the abstract, preacherly, obdurate style of Emerson — a wonderful essayist, as adults know, but of limited appeal to a child.

It was the first-person voice, the (seemingly) unmediated voice, that struck me as *truth-telling*. The difference between the plain-speaking "I" of Henry David Thoreau and the plain-speaking "I" of Samuel Clemens is after all a subtle one. The difference between the "I" of Emerson and the "I" of Hawthorne and of Poe is a subtle one. I no longer remember what the earliest prose pieces by Clemens/Twain were that I read, but I'm sure I read them unquestioningly, as *real* — "The Story of the Old Ram" from *Roughing It*, for instance, or "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." I do remember struggling with Poe's "The Gold Bug," which seemed to me an authentic account of an exotic and rather tedious but not improbable adventure, and I still have to think twice to recall whether "The Imp of the Perverse" is an essay — as, so reasonably, it seems to set itself up to be — or one of the *Tales of the Grotesque*. Poe was a master of, among other things, the literary *trompe l'oeil*, in which speculative musings upon human psychology shift into fantastic narratives while retaining the same first-person voice. The artful blurring of boundaries between what we call "history" and what we call, simply, "story" has been a characteristic of literature, as of art generally, from the very beginning of our recorded human enterprise.

Why is it that the earliest, most "primitive" forms of art seem to have been fabulist, legendary, and surreal, populated not by mortal men but by gods, giants, and monsters? Why was realism so slow to evolve? It is as if, looking into a mirror, humankind wished to see not its own self-evident face but something very other — exotic, terrifying, comforting, idealistic, or delu-

sional — but distinctly *other*. The seemingly direct, confessional, self-abrading manner of Montaigne strikes the ear as radical, even astounding, for its time and place. For even Rabelais, rubbing mankind's collective nose in the comical filth of the physical life, was an artist of the fabulist and the surreal.

Writers of earlier centuries — Defoe, Fielding, Swift, to name only a few — presented their wildly imaginative work as *history*; in our time, writers whose essential subjects are themselves — Proust, Joyce, Lawrence, Wolfe, Hemingway, and numberless of our contemporaries — present autobiographical work as *fiction*. Norman Mailer and Philip Roth have invented personae — “Mailer” and “Philip” — as characters in works of fiction; the unnamed narrator of Milan Kundera's *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* frequently interrupts his fictional narrative to explain his authorial strategies and to editorialize on history, totalitarianism, the motives for his writing. In such texts, the “I” of the narrative voice so reasonably melds with the “I” of the authorial voice that it is natural to assume, though we understand that we should not, that the two are often one.

In any case, it seemed only reasonable to me as a child, and *I wanted it to be so*, that writing by adults, for adults, was “real” and to be trusted. With another part of my imagination I was captivated by works of obvious, irresistible fantasy — Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books above all. But those hefty blocks of prose by “Emerson,” “Thoreau,” “Poe,” those monuments to *hard reading* — their special value lay in their employment of the “I”-voice, conspicuously missing from elementary school readers. It was, and in some quarters still is, a seeming imprimatur of truth-telling.

Talking much about oneself may be a way of hiding oneself.

— Friedrich Nietzsche

How to define the essay as a genre, clear and distinct from all other genres?

Given that the title of this volume is *The Best American Essays 1991*, there should be some loci of defining (thus of exclusion), but, as a writer, I am strongly skeptical that there is, still more should be, a quintessential “essay” any more than there is, or should be, a quintessential “novel,” “short story,” “poem,” “play” — what

are these, despite the efforts of critics to taxonomize them, but experimental modes of writing, continuously shifting their borders, testing constraints? (Randall Jarrell once wittily said, in a parody of critical myopia, that the novel may be defined as a prose work of a certain length that has something wrong with it.) The essays selected for this volume might be described as prose works of certain lengths that have many more right things about them than wrong.

To my mind, the "essay" might be as brilliantly gemlike and condensed as the briefest of Pascal's *Pensées*, or the aphorism of Nietzsche's cited above. (Nietzsche believed that one should philosophize with a hammer. In his most characteristic practice, Nietzsche philosophized with a surgical scalpel.) Are not aphorisms and epigrams essays of a sort? — miniature, to be sure, but legitimately "essays"? (To "assay" — try, attempt, analyze, judge, "to prove up in an assay.") Indeed, set beside such fast-flying particles, the more conventional essays of a Carlyle or an Emerson lumber along like becalmed elephants.

Like rock strata, genres shift through time. Form and content always seem inevitable, yet the one is easily detached from the other, when purpose and intention alter. The earliest narratives were poems to be sung; the earliest essays were poems to be read — most famously Virgil's *Georgics*. Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* — which, like everyone else, I knew as *On the Nature of Things*, or *The Nature of the Universe* — was poetry with a messianic purpose: the spreading of the gospel of Epicurus's fundamentally materialist, unsuperstitious teachings in a world in which capricious gods still ruled. And there were those arduous essays of the English Renaissance, Samuel Daniel's "Musophilus," Sir John Davies's "Nosce Teitsum," Michael Drayton's geographical-minded "Polyolbion" — instruction and edification in the form in which our ancestors believed sugar-coated the pill of didacticism, poetry. (As a graduate student in English literature, I read such works with impatience, even dismay — didn't poets understand that poetry is too wonderful a medium to be wasted on such efforts?) In our time, didacticism in the form of poetry is rare; rarer still, outright instruction, edification. One might argue that such long works as L. E. Sissman's *Dying: An Introduction* and John Updike's *Midpoint* are autobiographical essays in poetic form, to name two

contemporary poems that idiosyncratically, and most effectively, subvert genre.

Yet, our efforts to define the elusive "essay" remain undiminished. In *Habitations of the Word*, William Gass, himself an essayist of bold and original notions, states that the genre is biblio-centric and -generated: "Born of books, nourished by books, a book for its body, the essay is more often than not a confluence of such little blocks and strips of text." This is true of some essays, perhaps, particularly certain English essays, but it is hardly true of most contemporary essays of interest; and hardly applicable to the *unpassive* mode of the essays in this volume, some of which possess a very nearly cinematic clarity and urgency.

With the aggressive modesty that makes an admirer wince, E. B. White perversely defined the essay, the very genre in which he excelled, as "second-rate" — to which my reply is, "There are no second-rate genres, only second-rate practitioners." Compare, for instance, Flannery O'Connor's essays in *Mystery and Manners* with the strongest of her short stories; Raymond Carver's essays, *Fires*, with the strongest of his. Compare the essays of Edward Hoagland and Peter Matthiessen with their best fiction, and essays by Annie Dillard, Oliver Sacks, Joan Didion, Francine du Plessix Gray, Richard Selzer, Elizabeth Hardwick, and other of our most acclaimed essayists (some of whom will be found in this volume) with the best work by any of our contemporaries. First-rate writers produce first-rate work, regardless of genre.

The critic and scholar William Howarth, who has written so lyrically, and informatively, on, among others, Thoreau, discusses in a recent essay ("Itinerant Passages: Recent American Essays," *Sewanee Review*, 1988) the "itinerancy" of the essay form; as if, along with transcribing a literal journey, the form constitutes a journey for both essayist and reader. Certainly this is true of many excellent essays (among them, in this volume, works as heterogeneous as those by Reg Saner, Mark Rudman, Stephen Jay Gould), but one can argue that the same is true for many — most? — works of fiction too. Sam Pickering appropriates the genre as congenial to relaxation, musing aloud, coming to no conclusions: "Instead of driving hard to make a point, the essay saunters. . . . Instead of reaching conclusions, the essay ruminates and wonders. . . . Instead of being serious, it is often light-

hearted" (from "Being Familiar," in *The Right Distance*, 1987). G. Douglas Atkins pushes this idea even further, declaring that essays *smile*: "Whether or not they make you smile in turn, essays can make you feel good, comfortable, at ease. They're familiar and personal. It's impossible to be with them and remain tight or glum. . . . The smile that creases the face of the gardener-essayist betokens love" (from "In Other Words: Gardening for Love — The Work of the Essayist," in *Kenyon Review*, Winter 1991).

Most of the essays in this volume, chosen, in part, to represent the diversity of voices that now constitute the American literary community, have been written out of a sense of urgency, both personal and cultural; there is no questioning their authenticity, thus their power. Of course, there is humor here — in, among others, Woody Allen's characteristically mordant little essay: how, in anything by Woody Allen, could there *not* be humor? — and there are moments of clarity, beauty, epiphany, transcendence; but the dominant mode is urgency. As I am not drawn to art that makes me feel good, comfortable, or at ease, so I am not drawn to essays that "smile," except in a context of larger, more complex ambitions.

Indeed, anger, grief, pity, moral outrage, characterize a number of these essays which, for all their stylistic polish, read like cries from the heart. Richard Rodriguez's elegiac (and controversial) "Late Victorians" has the emotional density of a novel in miniature; Judith Ortiz Cofer's "Silent Dancing" transforms the family memoir into a work of surpassing beauty, and irony: "The only thing [Father's] money could not buy us was a place to live away from the barrio — his greatest wish, Mother's greatest fear." Garrett Hongo's "Kubota," a memoir of his dispossessed grandfather, is almost too painful to be borne, as is, in its very different way, Dorien Ross's "Seeking Home," which begins with the tone of a breezy column in a glossy career-woman's magazine, and ends with a shocking revelation. Anger, bewilderment, and nostalgia are held in dramatic suspension in Marianna De Marco Torgovnick's "On Being White, Female, and Born in Bensonhurst," another essay with the emotional gravity of a work of fiction. And there are essays in which cultural criticism is transformed by personal experience from witnesses born outside the cultures in question — Jane Tompkins's "At the Buffalo Bill Museum" (where

adult shame and “an image of the heart’s desire” contend); Diana Hume George’s “Wounded Chevy at Wounded Knee,” a meditation upon the genocidal consequences of American policy toward Native Americans which is altogether different from the kind we are accustomed to reading or seeing on the screen. Gerald Early’s provocative “Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss America Pageant,” like most of his work, manages to be funny, and ironic, and self-effacing, and, not least, taunting: “It is impossible to escape that need to see the race uplifted, to thumb your nose at whites in a competition. . . . Perhaps this tainted desire . . . is the unity of feeling which is the only race pride blacks have ever had since they became Americans.”

Stephen Jay Gould’s “Counters and Cable Cars” is, among other things, a lyrical tribute to the “moral and aesthetic value of diversity.” Amy Tan’s “Mother Tongue” is a movingly personal, intimate analysis of language strategies, ways of defining the private/public/ethnic/“American” self. One of the most unusual essays is Naomi Shihab Nye’s “Maintenance” — an abstract subject made memorable by a metaphor come to life; the most unabashedly nostalgic essay is Frank Conroy’s “Running the Table”: “Why the orderliness of pool, the Euclidean cleanness of it, so appealed to me.” The most ambitious essay in terms of its historic scope and political implications is Mario Vargas Llosa’s “Questions of Conquest.” And then there is Joy Williams’s “The Killing Game”: blunt, eloquent, defiantly polemical, as confrontational as a beaker of blood in the face.

In the tradition of our richest nature essays, from Henry David Thoreau to Annie Dillard and Barry Lopez, Reg Saner’s “The Ideal Particle and the Great Unconformity” and Gretel Erhlich’s “This Autumn Morning” are meticulously observed, instructive, written with enormous care and ambition. Each is a monument in language to what Saner calls “the littlest causes, their long continuance.” (“Nature” as subject and theme is probably the inspiration for most essays that are written; among these, in our era of ecological sensitivity, are the most consistently compelling.) The New York-inspired essays of Elizabeth Hardwick (“New York City: Crash Course”) and Mark Rudman (“Mosaic on Walking”) make a lively, informal pair — entirely different responses to an identical environment. The pairing of Margaret Atwood’s “The

Female Body" (a prose-poem crackling with the author's characteristic dry-ice wit) and John Updike's graceful response to Atwood (and through Atwood to the mystery of female/male mythologizing) should be explained: they were written by invitation for the special issue of *Michigan Quarterly Review*, "The Female Body."

These excellent essays, as I've indicated, seem to me linked by a common tone of urgency, even tension, however diverse their voices. Most of them provide news, facts, information — I am predisposed to the essay with knowledge to impart — but, unlike journalism, which exists primarily to present facts, the essays transcend their data, or transmute it into personal meaning. The memorable essay, unlike the article, is not place- or time-bound; it survives the occasion of its original composition. Indeed, in the most brilliant essays, language is not merely the medium of communication, it is communication.

Editors of such yearly anthologies as this one customarily explain their final choices in terms of "excellence" and "personal taste" — it's to be hoped the two are not incompatible — but it should be added, for the record, that editing any volume in which space is at a premium forces choices upon the editor that might not otherwise be made. Ideally, I could have included twice the number of essays I have included. But, after a year of sifting through photocopies of essays sent to me by the indefatigably capable and enthusiastic series editor, Robert Atwan, after decisions, indecisions, revisions, insomnia, and a mounting sense of frustration and loss at being required to leave out so much excellent work (the memoirs alone! — of fathers, families, mentors, famous elders!), I resigned myself to the fact that exclusions would have to be made, in many cases, on quite arbitrary grounds. (No more than a single essay by a writer — obviously. No more than one, or at the most two, essays on a single topic. No excerpts from diaries or journals. No reportage or opinion pieces, however well done. And no book reviews — even when the review is by Larry McMurtry and the subject is "How the West Was Won or Lost.") I was determined to include as many new and emerging writers as possible; at the same time, I was determined not to omit an important essay simply because its author happened to be well

known. I was determined to choose essays from a variety of magazines; at the same time, it seemed wrong to discriminate against *Harper's* and *The Georgia Review* simply because, of American magazines of our time, they happen to publish the most essays of quality, frequently several in a single issue.

As I neared the end of my editorship of this volume, a task that, for all its frustrations, I enjoyed very much, I began to consider how many theoretical volumes of approximately twenty essays I might assemble out of the approximately three hundred essays available to me, in various combinations. A physicist friend did the calculations — the number is 10^{31} . That's to say, ten thousand billion billion billion possible *The Best American Essays 1991*.

In the light of such a daunting statistic, it seems a bold, even a brash, act to present the volume you hold in your hand as, in fact, *the best*. But so it is — or seems so to me. I hope the claim will prove a reasonable one.

JOYCE CAROL OATES