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Joyce Carol Oates , Barry Moser (Illustrator) , Erhan Sunar (Translator)

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Josie S- has come with her mother Delia to live in her great-aunt Esther Burkhardt's house in upstate New York. Also living there is Josie's cousin, Jared, Jr., on leave from the Presbyterian seminary. Preoccupied with his studies, impeccably dressed in his starched white shirts, distant and mysterious, Jared, Jr. is an intriguing figure to Josie's curious and impressionable young mind. One summer afternoon, when Josie encounters Jared, Jr. at the riverbank behind the Burkhardt house, dark secrets are shared between them as an unnatural love blooms. A moody sense of foreboding grips the reader from page one as religion, whispers of dark family secrets, violations of trust and virginity, bad blood, and a hint of incest all haunt the landscape of this startling tale of divided family loyalties, psychological manipulation, and the tangled strands of love and fear in the mind of a young girl groping for her way in one fractured American family.

First Love: A Gothic Tale Details

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Author : Joyce Carol Oates , Barry Moser (Illustrator) , Erhan Sunar (Translator)

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From Reader Review First Love: A Gothic Tale for online ebook

Allison Floyd says

Once again JCO defies the GoodReads rating system.

If reading *Zombie* is like playing in a biohazard bag, then *First Love* is like playing in a velvet pouch. Lined with wolverines.

Seriously warped, beautifully written and illustrated.

It rang a little hollow for me this time around--I'm not sure why. Maybe because it's hard to believe that the narrator seems relatively unscathed at the end. Because there's a whole of scathing going on in this story.

Shannon Kay says

A deeply strange and disturbing little novel. This story follows a deeply religious man using his twisted religious beliefs in order to justify abuse and pedophilia. This is a distressing read, as the story centers on a young girl who becomes a victim of this abuse. I have a hard time rating this book. I think the author was in a bit in over her head with this heavy topic.

While some of the writing was beautifully done, and I found the religious aspects and symbolism interesting, the plot was severely lacking. I did not feel that the plot justified or made up for all the deeply disturbing content in this story. The only redeeming thing about the plot is that it does a good job of describing the effect the man's abuse has on his young victim, and you can see the emotional struggle of a brainwashed and emotionally manipulated victim trying to break free and defy a predator. Overall, I can not in my right mind recommend this book to others. The content may be highly distressing to some readers and I don't feel like the story is worth it or makes up for it at all.

John Pistelli says

This 1996 novella makes for a curious little book. The hardcover's title is lettered on the dust jacket in a shiny purple foil blackletter typeface, and the narrative is pointedly labelled "A Gothic Tale" on the title page. Barry Moser's cover and inside illustrations—stark black-and-white engravings—hark back to a nineteenth-century style. Given this packaging, all postmodern pastiche with a nudge-and-a-wink from the shiny purple decoration, one would not necessarily expect such grim subject matter as the protracted molestation of an eleven-year-old girl by her seminarian cousin, and yet that is what *First Love* is about.

In the novella, our narrator, young Josie, has been taken by her absconding mother to live with her great-great-aunt in a decaying old house in upstate New York. There, neglected by her aged aunt and abandoned by her mother (who is out working and looking for a new man), Josie falls victim to the predations of her cousin, Jared, Jr., on leave—for his mental health—from the Presbyterian seminary where he is studying.

Though its title is largely ironic, *First Love* does suggest that her cousin's sexual trespasses are a partially-desired opening to the adult world of feeling for Josie. I am aware that this does not meet present political standards for the representation of such subject matter; I am only reporting on what I believe Oates to be communicating in the tale, as in this passage, also reprinted on the back cover, whose mingled fear and desire, given in fragmentary clauses, characterize the novella's prose style as a whole:

Shutting my eyes sometimes to the point of dizziness, vertigo. To the point of an almost unbearable excitement and dread. And I see him, my cousin, Jared, Jr., so many years later. I see him as an upright flame, a figure and not a person. If I try to summon back his face, the sound of his voice, and the sensation in my stomach like a key turning in a lock when he touched me, I lose everything.

There is, no doubt, a presently unwelcome nuance in the portrait of female—and perhaps more broadly, childhood—desire, which I think is authentically Gothic in its forbidden suggestion of what society—Christian society especially, portrayed by Oates as noxiously hypocritical—represses.

The novella begins with Josie's being drawn into nature, where a black snake (who either represents or supernaturally *is* Jared, Jr., just as she will later see him as a black hawk) crosses her path. It ends when she refuses to participate in Jared's desire to make her his accomplice in preying on the poor children of their town for the purposes of child pornography, rape, and murder. While Josie's mother, Delia, is the novel's most interesting character, a witty pragmatist and nihilist, she is too flighty and selfish to help her daughter resist evil. Josie wins on her own, through an innate moral sense perhaps grown, Wordsworth-style, out of her childlike love for nature, nature unspoiled by man's phallic and predatory intrusion as snake or hawk. I am reminded of Toni Morrison's recent *God Help the Child* by this novella's intimations of childhood victimization by universal adult corruption. On finding Jared's stash of child pornography, Josie takes it as evidence that children are excluded from the social/religious compact: "For the *Covenant* would not be with children, would it?"

The novella ends with Josie alone in the house—Jared, Jr., having realized she was incorruptible, has returned to the seminary; her mother is away again, presumably with a man; and her aunt is confined to her room by a stroke. Josie has refused to perpetuate her family's evil; her soul returns to goodness as the earth awakens in spring, free of social corruption:

Late April, yet it's the first real day of spring. A blue-windy, brilliant day, eagerly you open your heart to the vast sky tracked by long diaphanous clouds stretching for what appear to be hundreds of miles, you hear birds, songbirds, newly returned from the south after the long winter, their exquisite sweet spring cries.

Goodness and beauty, like evil and ugliness, are also repressed, and they also return. This is a comprehensive and holistic vision, aware of Marx/Nietzsche/Freud, but circumscribing them too. To place such a vision in "A Gothic Tale" is to validate the intelligence of fiction, also implicitly of women (primary authors/audiences of the Gothic for three hundred years)—though not uncritically, as most of the women in this story uphold repressive society for their own reasons and advantages. But a Gothic heroine, however tempted to the dark side ("Feel yourself drawn!" is the novel's refrain), may at least resist in a Gothic narrative. What this novella—and perhaps its genre—does not offer is any vision of fulfilling adult love. Its counsel is limited to its other refrain, "Fear will save your life," and Josie, even at the end, has "not the courage to contemplate" the "deep pit of fathomless time yawning beneath" her great-aunt's house, which pit we may take to be both the unconscious and history. She has attained her individual freedom, but the house still stands, and she is still in it.

I know I need to read a long novel by Joyce Carol Oates—this is my second short one, after the similarly-themed *Beasts*—but the novellas in an oeuvre so vast can be irresistible. So far I admire Oates's stylistic intensity, her witty play with literary history and form, and her moral complexity and irony. Her politics come out in the fiction a bit bluntly and not without patronizing cliché—is religion as one-dimensional as she claims here? and are the poor only victims of the rich? But these are appealingly old-fashioned flaws, and I look forward to going on in Oates's work, to see what else she makes of our Gothic inheritance and our twisted desire.

Selin Seçen says

Çocuklu?u, hastal?kl? bir yeti?kin taraf?ndan derinden ve kökünden yaralanan küçük bir k?z çocu?unun; muhte?em kapa??, melankolik ba?lang?c? nedeniyle geli?i hiç hissedilmeyen sars?c? hikayesini anlat?yor. İlk A?k. Kötülü?ün dini kisveyle vücut bulmu? hali Jared'in önce yok sayarak ilgisini çekti?i, sonra da can?n? yakmaktan hiç çekinmedi?i, bizim de haberlerden s?kça a?ına oldu?umuz k?z çocuklar?ndan sadece biri Josie.

Yaz?n?n devam? için:

<http://www.benyazarsamolur.com/ilk-as...>

Scott says

This is a dense book with a short length. There is so much going on in "First Love," so much happening with the main character's psyche and those around her that it demands multiple reads. It's certainly not for all tastes as it is quite disturbing and troubling to sit through. Brilliantly crafted, though, beautiful in how it's put together.

The story begins with the main character, Josie, at 10 years old. She's moved to a relative's house with her mother leaving their father behind for reasons not disclosed. Josie's mother has an odd relationship with her daughter. She puts an emphasis on using fear and paranoia to both control her daughter and to set an example for how to survive.

Oates' careful structure of the narrative shows how this upbringing is shaping the Josie's developing personality. You can feel innocence being corrupted slightly... until we meet her cousin, Jared, who also lives at this house.

A 25 year-old seminary student, Jared is reclusive and mysterious. Josie's scared of him at first, but Jared quickly assumes her control and proceeds to severely corrupt her as the novella progresses.

I can't say any more, but just prepare yourself. The horror of the story is not in its explicitness, but rather in its implications. Watching a young and happy personality eventually mature into a degraded teenager is shocking.

Unforgettable, perfect for JCO fans and recommended to everyone else - provided you have a taste for dark psychology.

mark monday says

"'Bad blood!' --what does that mean?" I asked, revulsed by the thought, and Mother said, "'Bad feeling.' basically," and I said, "But why call it something so ugly-- 'bad blood'? Ugh." My throat choked up as if the smell was with us in the room. "One day," Mother said ominously, yet with satisfaction, "you'll know."

sweet Jesus, this was a disturbing novella.

SOME SPOILERS but nothing you won't find right on the back cover of the book

precocious 11-year old Josie and her intriguing but worthless mother flee their world to live with some distant relatives: Great-Aunt Esther Burkhardt and her sepulchral grandson, 25-year old Jared Jr - a seminary student now living at home again, due to a mysterious bout of 'nervous exhaustion' at the seminary. one balmy day in the dead heat of August, Josie comes across a shirtless and sweaty Jared, gazing into the river that lies behind their dilapidated manor. she is transfixed by that bare torso, *"the vertebrae of his spine prominent as tiny knuckles, a ripply impress of ribs through his translucent-pale skin"*. she has fallen in love; she is hypnotized like a little bird before a snake. Jared forcibly seduces her ('molest' is the appropriate word), and will soon do even more - physically torturing her body and psychologically ensnaring her mind, deeper and deeper, until she finally lashes back in her own small but effective fashion.

i usually give tales of child abuse and molestation a very wide berth. NOT INTERESTED. too grueling, and i am the sort who reads mainly for enjoyment, and not necessarily for edification on how low humans can go. and so i've had this on my shelf, unread, since it was first published in 1996. not sure why tonight was the night that i finally found the nerve to read it, but i'm glad i did. it is graphic, but not overly so. it is a cruel story, but it does not end in nihilism. and man it is beautifully written. gorgeous, really. Oates is a phenomenal writer and First Love shows off her skill at constructing a hypnotic narrative full of sinister imagery, multi-layered dialogue, compelling monsters, and a painfully real interior monologue. i want to re-emphasize "hypnotic". that is the perfect word for this grim tale.

so in the end, what did i get out of it? not a whole lot i suppose. Oates is a fantastic writer, check. Child Abuse = Horror, check. religious zealots often have hearts full of evil and perversion (and not the good kind of perversion)... the South is full of "eccentrics"... little kids can be little survivors: check, check, and check. Jesus has many faces so which is the real one - well, that's not a concept i encounter often, but it is a rather underdeveloped (although interesting) part of the novella. so the main take-away for me is that i still consider Oates to be one of my favorite authors and she surely does like to write about dark places. which is why i was attracted to her in the first place. maybe less child molestation in my next Oates read though.

First Love: A Gothic Tale (that's the full title) is a slim but complete package: written by Oates and 'illustrated & designed' by Barry Moser. he is a brilliant artist as well. his woodcuts are top-notch. gothic, creepy, perfect for the material. here's his portrait of that charmer Jared Jr:

as in the book... sweaty, with skin like a snake. ::shudders::

another interesting bit:

Mother said, her gaze on me calculating, impatient, of the silver glint of light reflected in swift-moving water, "There is no 'there', there is only 'here'. Just as there is no 'then', but only 'now'. America is founded upon such principles, and, as Americans, we must be, too."

Stephanie says

This is in reply to the current one other reviewer and to anyone who leans toward their same viewpoint on stories such as these:

This is one of Oates best. Stirring, evocative, emotional and haunting. The kind of story that at least on some level sears itself into ones memory.

Oates commonly writes about unconventional romantic relationships and romances that others find unsettling or disturbing. Its one of her trademarks.

If that bothers you, you should likely steer clear of much of her work as you probably wouldn't enjoy it.

Conor says

I grabbed this from my local Brooklyn library branch in a mania of acquisition, of which books have been the most recent target. I was halfway out the door when "author-I've-heard-of-but-haven't-read" and "thinness" and "at-reachable-shelf-level" conspired to add this to my stack.

Oates is a talented writer and this story was very evocative in the typical gothic ways. It's a short, entertaining read. If you spy it on your local library shelf, snatch it up!

Jackie says

A nasty little 80 page story.

belisa says

minik, garip bir öykü, yazar bir pencere açm?? ve manzaraya bak?p geçmi? sanki...

Aviendha says

Ça?da? dünyanın en a?r?l? sorunlar?ndan birine de?inmi? kitap. Masum küçük bir k?z?n henüz alg?layamad??? gerçekliklerin y?k?c? etkisi. Etraf?nda olan biten çirkinliklerden hangisi daha fazla can yak?c? karar vermek zor. Karanlı?k, insanî olmanın çok d???nda bir uzun öykü...

Laura says

Very weird book - creepy, in fact, and while it never directly addresses what is the overarching theme of the story (pedophilia), it is clear that Jared (the saintly boy, the seminary student) is a perverted predator. That Josie's mother can't see this, and the boy's grandmother refuses to acknowledge it is most disturbing part of the book. It is labeled a gothic tale, and while there are gothic elements, in my mind it is less a gothic tale than a tale of extreme perversion.

Jessie says

The content was highly disturbing. No reprieve except one thankfully or I would've thrown it in the garbage. I give it 3 stars because it is well written, the symbols used within the story are all clear but I wasn't able to find the right combination to find the story within the story. Probably because the content was freaking messed up.

Papatya ?ENOL says

"a?k" de?il asl?nda bu, ama gotik oldu?u kesin. hastal?kl? bir genç adam?n bir k?z çocu?uyla dengesiz ili?kisi ve etkileri anlat?l?yor bu küçük ama büyük kitapta. çok güzel, sade yaz?lm??. en ilgi çekici karakter ise bence çok fazla üzerinde durulmam?? olsa da yorumlar?, ç?k??lar? ve gizemli ya?am tarz?yla anne. s?radan kitaplar?n d???na ç?kmak isteyenlere öneririm.

Jolly Jenny says

Ce livre m'a laissée totalement perplexe. Je pense être complètement passée à côté.

Je n'avais encore jamais lu de roman de Joyce Carole Oates mais, celui-ci m'a un peu destabilisée. La narration est très particulière et change de point de vue fréquemment, certaines scènes semblent être des hallucinations de l'héroïne et laissent une impression assez étrange au lecteur.

L'auteur semble dénoncer la pédophilie et l'hypocrisie de certains croyants (par la pédophilie de certains prêtres) mais ce qui est dérangeant est le point de vue choisi. Celui de la petite fille amoureuse de ce cousin qui lui fait faire des choses sexuellement dérangeantes alors qu'elle n'a que 11 ans.

C'est un roman très perturbant.

Entre l'inceste, la pédophilie et cette petite fille qui n'a pas conscience que ce qu'on lui demande n'est pas normal, je me suis retrouvée assez mal à l'aise...

