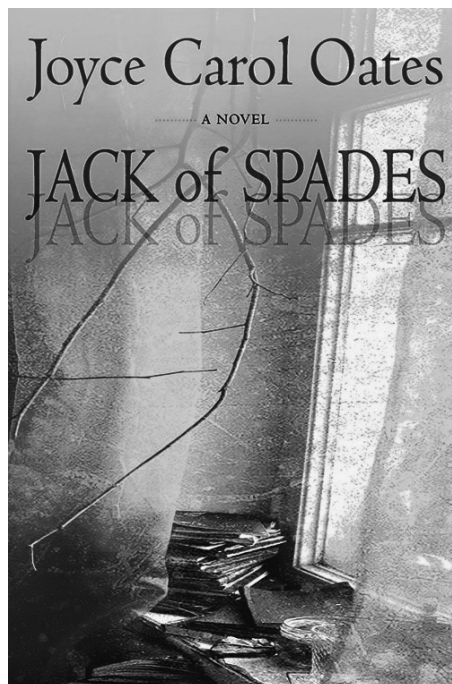


## Tekst 5

The following text is a part of the first chapter of *Jack of Spades*, by Joyce Carol Oates.

- 1 Not unlike Stephen King, who is said to have speculated that his extraordinary career might have been an accident of some kind, I have sometimes harbored doubts about my talent as a writer; I have felt guilt, that more talented individuals have had less luck than I've had, and might be justified in resenting me. About my devotion to my craft, my zeal and willingness to work, I have fewer doubts, for the simple truth is that *I love to write*, and am restless when I am not able to work at my desk at least ten hours a day. But sometimes when I wake, startled, in the night, for a moment not knowing where I am, or who is sleeping beside me, it seems to be utterly astonishing that I am a published writer at all — let alone the generally admired and well-to-do author of twenty-eight mystery-suspense novels.
- 2 These novels, published under my legal name, known to all — *Andrew J. Rush*.
- 3 There is another, curious similarity between Stephen King and me: as Stephen King experimented with a fictitious alter ego some years ago, namely *Richard Bachman*, so too I began to experiment with a fictitious alter ego in the late 1990s, when my career as *Andrew J. Rush* seemed to have stabilized, and did not require quite so much of my anxious energies as it had at the start. 14, *Jack of Spades* was born, out of my restlessness with the success of *Andrew J. Rush*.
- 4 Initially, I'd thought that I might write one, possibly two novels as the cruder, more visceral, more frankly horrific "Jack of Spades" — but then, ideas for a third, a fourth, eventually a fifth pseudonym novel came to me, often at odd hours of the night. Waking, to discover that I am grinding my back teeth — or, rather, *my back teeth are grinding of their own accord* — and shortly thereafter, an idea for a new "Jack of Spades" novel comes to me, not unlike the way in which a message or an icon arrives on your computer screen out of nowhere.
- 5 While Andrew J. Rush has a Manhattan literary agent, a Manhattan publisher and editor, and a Hollywood agent, with whom he has long been associated, so too "Jack of Spades" has a (less distinguished) Manhattan literary agent, a (less distinguished) Manhattan publisher and editor, and a (virtually unknown) Hollywood agent, with whom he has been associated for a shorter period of time; but while "Andy Rush" is known to his literary



associates, as to his neighbors and friends in Harbourton, New Jersey, no one has ever met "Jack of Spades" whose *noir* thrillers are transmitted electronically and whose contracts are negotiated in a similar impersonal fashion. Dust jacket photos of Andrew J. Rush show an affably smiling, crinkly-eyed man with a receding hairline against a background of book-crammed bookshelves, who more resembles a high school teacher than a bestselling mystery writer; no photos of "Jack of Spades" exist at all, it seems, and where you would expect to see an author photograph on the back cover of his books, there is startling (black) blankness.

6 Online, there are no photos of "Jack of Spades," only just reproductions of the writer's several (lurid, eye-catching) book covers, a scattering of reviews, and terse biographical speculation that makes me smile, it is so naïve, and persuasive — *"Jack of Spades" is said to be the pseudonym of a former convict who began his writing career while incarcerated in a maximum security prison in New Jersey on a charge of manslaughter. He is said to be currently on parole and working on a new novel.*

7 Alternatively, and equally persuasively, "Jack of Spades" has been identified as *a criminologist, a psychiatrist, a professor of forensic medicine, a (retired) homicide detective, a (retired) pathologist* who lives variously, in Montana, Maine, upstate New York and California as well as New Jersey. "Jack of Spades" has also been identified, most irresponsibly, as *a habitual criminal, possibly a serial killer, who has committed countless crimes since boyhood without being apprehended, or even identified. Invariably, his true name, like his whereabouts, is "unknown."* No one wants to think that "Jack of Spades" is *only a pseudonym*, indeed of a bestselling writer who is no criminal at all but a very responsible family man and civic-minded citizen. That is not romantic!

8 It has been increasingly difficult to 17, especially in a hyper-vigilant era of electronic spying, but through four novels by "Jack of Spades" and negotiations for the fifth I have managed to maintain a distance between Andrew J. Rush and "Jack of Spades."