

Occupation led to little but frustration and a feeling of impotence. “One could betray his brother, give up a friend to be deported to Germany, for a ration ticket or a kilo of potatoes.” Bâ was “this unknown man from the African forest who came to fight when the Whites had thrown down their arms and made peace with the enemy.”

Germaine knows little about Bâ’s past and can describe his many amorous adventures in the region only indirectly. She knows that he will not eat pork or drink alcohol during village festivities, and that he always rinses his mouth after eating. She also knows that rivalries within families may have been one cause of his betrayal to the Germans.

One incident stands out. Bâ tells Germaine to take a certain route on her way to the railway station to return to Paris, where she is a student. On this route, she meets a young man with “papers” proving that he is her brother. She realizes that he is Jewish and protects him. Once in Paris, she takes him to the mosque, where he is given refuge. (The work of the Paris mosque in protecting Jewish refugees has been the subject of a recent French film, *Les hommes libres*.)

Germaine tells her story to a relative from Guinea in 2003, when Bâ is posthumously made a hero of the Resistance, given a medal, and has a street named for him in the village. Tierno Monémbo has made a historical event into a novel, set in a village rather similar to an African village, to celebrate a Guinean only honored sixty years after his death.

Adele King  
Paris

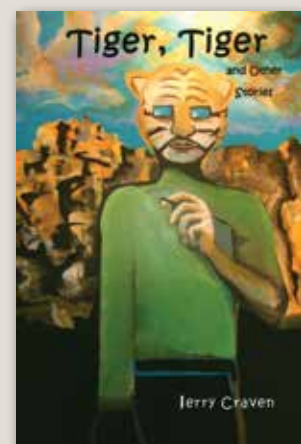
Joyce Carol Oates. *Mudwoman*. New York. Ecco / HarperCollins. 2012. ISBN 9780062095626

How seemingly easy it is to assess the latest works by authors who write slowly, who—one wants to believe—carefully measure and remeasure their words. Then there are writers such as Stephen King, Philip Roth, and, most dramatically, Joyce Carol Oates who embarrass us with their riches. We are embarrassed that we can’t keep up and may try to hide our embarrassment by suggesting that a given novel is hastily written, poorly edited, or unconvincingly plotted. Or we stand aside and admire, when we check in by reading someone like Oates, even if only to say she’s an “elemental force” in American fiction.

One notices that the biography accompanying this novel, the publisher and university websites, and her MySpace page don’t total Oates’s output during the past four-plus decades. “Dozens of titles” is as specific as it gets; in 2012 alone, if I counted right, she published no less than four fiction titles and edited one anthology, which doesn’t count the short pieces in journals and elsewhere that will eventually be bound. Given the variety of plots and characters, she is clearly realizing what she once called her “Balzacian ambition to get the whole world into a book.” Not “one book,” no *War and Peace*, but, like Balzac, a series of fictions, long and short, that encompass what could be called our American Comedy.

*Mudwoman* bridges three social levels: rural peasant, small-town middle class, and academic. The story begins in April 1965, when one Jewell Krack is thrown into a mudflat

## Nota Bene



Jerry Craven  
*Tiger, Tiger and Other Stories*  
Mongrel Empire Press

Jerry Craven populates his stories with a variety of believable and appealing characters, measuring the mix of humor and seriousness in balanced proportions. The tales range internationally in setting, from Malaysia to Afghanistan to Texas. Mongrel Empire has added another gem to its growing list of publications.



David Day  
*Nevermore: A Book of Hours:  
Meditations on Extinction*  
Fourfront Editions

A compilation of poetry, Audubon-like illustrations, and historical accounts create this poignant look into the world of forgotten animals. Providing commentary on a variety of extinct creatures, *Nevermore* is organized as a twenty-four-hour vigil. Day is best known for his books on Tolkien mythology.