

The 87-year-old author humiliating 'uncultured' Elon Musk on his own platform

American writer Joyce Carol Oates branded the tech boss 'totally uneducated' in a damning post on X

It's keyboards at dawn. [Elon Musk](#) has been comprehensively trolled on his own social media platform, and if that irony wasn't delicious enough, his online nemesis isn't some Fortnite-playing 12-year-old boy but an octogenarian literary icon. American author [Joyce Carol Oates](#) branded the tech boss "totally uneducated" and "uncultured" in a damning post on X which has evidently got under Musk's skin.

The spat began when Musk bullishly defended his proposed [trillion-dollar Tesla pay package](#). That inspired Oates, 87, to post a savage indictment on X on November 8: "So curious that such a wealthy man never posts anything that indicates that he enjoys or is even aware of what virtually everyone appreciates", such as "praise for a movie, music, a book (but doubt that he reads)".

Oates ended her attack: "In fact he seems totally uneducated, uncultured. The poorest persons on Twitter may have access to more beauty & meaning in life than the 'most wealthy person in the world.'" The fact that she referred to the platform by its original name, Twitter, rather than [Musk's attempted rebrand, X](#), was the icing on the cake.

Oates has published 58 novels, as well as plays, short stories, poems and diaries Credit: Leonardo Cendamo/Getty

It's a fairly extraordinary takedown considering that Oates is far from a digital native. The wildly prolific author has published 58 novels, as well as plays, short stories, poems and diaries. She has experimented with a range of literary styles, but often returns to themes such as women's inner

lives (such as that of Marilyn Monroe in *Blonde*), alongside the horrifying evil lurking within humanity. Now she is bringing that boundless energy and confrontational approach to social media.

Her recent post about Musk has gone viral, with 5.5 million views, plus 11,000 retweets and 89,000 likes – and the subject of her stinging rebuke has not taken it well. In a series of erratic posts, Musk first went on the counter-attack, writing on X the following day: “Everything she says in her post about me can be shown to be demonstrably false with a simple search. Oates is a lazy liar and ... an abuser of semicolons!” He followed that up with the cattier post: “Eating a bag of sawdust would be vastly more enjoyable than reading the laboriously pretentious drivel of Oates.” However, Musk appeared to take Oates’s words to heart. Amusingly, right after the veteran author accused him of being culturally inert, Musk took great pains to demonstrate his bona fides. He shared such profound film insights as “*Man on Fire* is great”, *Edge of Tomorrow* is a “great movie”, and “*Fifth Element* has great style”. Top tip for Musk: perhaps try using a second adjective when you’re feuding with a four-time Pulitzer finalist. So curious that such a wealthy man never posts anything that indicates that he enjoys or is even aware of what virtually everyone appreciates— scenes from nature, pet dog or cat, praise for a movie, music, a book (but doubt that he reads); pride in a friend's or relative's... <https://t.co/xMxQGSVqEt>

—Joyce Carol Oates (@JoyceCarolOates) November 8, 2025

In an astonishing coincidence, X then promoted an ad from the book app Blinkist claiming that “Elon reads a lot” and sharing his nine non-fiction recommendations. Musk also advised his followers to listen to an audiobook of Homer’s *Iliad* at 1.25 speed, but linked to *Homer’s Odyssey* instead; he has since deleted the post.

However, if Musk hoped that this burst of cultural engagement would silence Oates, he was sadly mistaken. The author landed another right hook on X on November 11, replying to a post about Musk always wanting to leave a place by saying: “That’s because when he gets there, he has brought his own self along; & whatever club he’s invited to join has been

devalued by the invitation.” Oates also said of Musk’s estranged transgender daughter Vivian Wilson: “A normal parent would be very proud.”

Oates’s spat with Musk began when he bullishly defended his proposed trillion-dollar Tesla pay package Credit: ANGELA WEISS/AFP via Getty Images

Musk clearly didn’t know who he was messing with. This particular literary lion simply loves to sharpen her claws on social media, and Oates has proved to be oddly well-suited to the medium thanks to her combination of intellectual acuity and unapologetically blistering, often outrage-sparking, opinions.

While many high-profile figures worry about being cancelled for their views, Oates seems to take great pride in sticking her head above the parapet. She seemingly critiqued Islam in 2013, posting on X: “Where 99.3% of women report having been sexually harassed & rape is epidemic – Egypt – natural to inquire: what’s the predominant religion?” The following year she lambasted the Asian diet by writing: “‘Cat food’ in China actually is”.

After a video showing women being catcalled in New York went viral in 2014, Oates pushed back on the implication that this was a widespread problem and suggested that it depended which neighbourhood you were in, writing: “Would be very surprised if women walking alone were harassed in affluent midtown NYC (Fifth Ave, Park Ave), Washington Square Park etc.”

Oates also pondered how Islamic State had become so popular, questioning on X in 2015: “All we hear of ISIS is puritanical & punitive; is there nothing celebratory & joyous?” She experienced a backlash with all of these posts, but it hasn’t stopped her from speaking her mind, even on taboo culture wars topics.

All we hear of ISIS is puritanical & punitive; is there nothing celebratory & joyous? Or is query naive?

—Joyce Carol Oates (@JoyceCarolOates) [November 22, 2015](#)

The novelist has no qualms about wading into incendiary cultural debates either. In 2014 she wrote that although [Woody Allen](#) has been “much denounced”, many of his denouncers likely “admire Nabokov’s *Lolita*”, and in 2022 she claimed that a literary agent friend had told her “he cannot even get editors to read first novels by young white male writers, no matter how good”.

In 2015, Oates bizarrely commented on a picture of Steven Spielberg with a dinosaur on the set of Jurassic Park: “So barbaric that this should still be allowed... No conservation laws in effect wherever this is?” As she subsequently explained to Newsweek, “Many of my tweets are meant to be funny; but I guess that is not always a good idea.”

In another quirky post, in 2024 Oates pondered the philosophical “trolley problem” through the lens of catnip inebriation – accompanied by a photo of her blissed-out cat. It’s undeniably eccentric posting, but by including a cat picture she was at least in tune with the internet’s feverish obsessions.

With a long and impressive career, Oates does not feel pressure to remain likeable to all Credit: Rosdiana Ciaravolo/Getty

There are plenty of serious posts alongside the whimsy and sheer provocation. Oates is a long-time critic of Donald Trump, and this week she wrote on X that the US president might as well carry around a mannequin of his wife Melania rather than expecting “an adult woman to perform for him as his ‘mate’ – some sort of visible token of his virility”.

Unlike Musk, President Trump has not fired back at Oates. His platform of choice is [Truth Social](#), rather than X, but he may also have realised what his former ally failed to grasp: Oates is a fearless and, therefore, formidable opponent.

As a grandee author who has already had an impressive career, won prizes and cemented her legacy, Oates has no need to fret about being likeable. Quite the contrary: she seems to delight in riling people up. Posting on X last week, in response to another user claiming they had faced

repercussions for speaking out against Musk, she mused that it is “wonderful how irrepressible people are. Told not to do or say something, that’s exactly what they do. Have to love the Imp of the Perverse”.

Musk has learnt the hard way that showing an internet troll they are getting to you, even if said troll is a woman nearing her 90th birthday, only encourages them to double-down on the torment. The Tesla boss might soon be a trillionaire, but no amount of money will prevent Oates from gleefully besting Musk on his very own platform.