

Mythic and fairy

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



The feeling of impending danger as the story progresses is created for the reader in Joyce Carol Oates' short story, *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*, through employing mythical elements to describe what is happening in the plot. Throughout the story, she uses several descriptions associated with the devil to serve as metaphors for the male character and what happens to Connie as also symbolic of the power of evil to tempt, conquer, and destroy the individual.

Connie is the symbol of innocence. A young girl of fifteen, she is at the time of adolescence when young women begin to explore beyond their childhood lives and have a taste of how it is like to be a grown-up. She is also pretty, obsessed with mirrors and fussing with her looks. She is very unlike her plain older sister. Like most pretty girls her age who want excitement and not be "plain and steady" like the sister, Connie is giggly and eager for new things, unaware that danger lurks ready to exploit the fantasies of girls like her. She is like innocent Red Riding Hood who thinks the woods are nice, cozy places to travel through unaware of the wolf that lives within.

After describing Connie and her family, the author introduces the technique of incorporating mythic element in the story by describing the drive-in restaurant as a "sacred building that loomed up out of the night to give them what haven and blessings they yearned for...the music was...like music at a church service..." The restaurant is a wholesome place for young people to meet and enjoy each other's company. However, once Connie gets out of the restaurant towards the parking lot, she is not safe anymore.

The devil lurks just outside sacred places, ready to tempt anyone who gets out of the temple and who is willing to do something naughty and fun. It is outside where Connie sees Arnold Friend for the first time although they would not be introduced to each other then as Connie is with Eddie, a wholesome boy her age whom she meets in the “ sacred” restaurant.

Right after that first meeting, the story begins its creepy quality as the author focuses on Arnold Friend and uses mythological and cultural associations with the devil to describe him. One association is how Arnold Friend comes into the picture and how he looks like. His approach is announced by the “ glow of slow-pulsed joy that seemed to rise mysteriously out of the music” which Connie was listening to at the time her parents and sister went to a barbecue party at her aunt’s one weekend, leaving her alone in the house. Rock and roll music, songs that are fast and hard, is associated with rebellious teenagers.

Arnold Friend appears to her with a rock song in the background and looking like a rock star himself, just like the men in Connie’s fantasy. He had “ fair brown hair...sideburns (that) gave him a fierce, embarrassed look...wore sunglasses...tight faded jeans stuffed into black, scuffed boots, a belt that pulled his waist in and showed how lean he was...the jaw and chin and cheeks slightly darkened because he hadn’t shaved...and the nose long and hawklike.” His features are sharp, his attire scruffy, and his bearing is very manly. He appeals to her fantasy to look appealing to her, thus making it easier to achieve his purpose.

However, the skin around his eyes, which she notices when he takes off his glasses, was “ like holes that were not in shadow but instead in light.” The eyes themselves were “ like chips of broken glass that light in an amiable way.” They were devilish eyes, bright and unlike normal human eyes. When he speaks, it is in “ a simple lilting voice, exactly as if he were reciting the words to a song.” He constantly smiles, too.

His name is Arnold Friend, an obvious pun on “ fiend”. He is obviously a bad guy with bad intentions but one who disguises them well. No other name is more trustworthy than one who has “ Friend” for a family name.

Arnold rides a golden jalopy. The shiny car symbolizes how the temptations of evil always come in a dazzling and attractive package. Connie herself is amused and fascinated with the car. He uses signals and secret codes. When the car comes to a stop by the front door, “ the horn sounded four taps.” Beside Arnold Friend’s car are more codes: the numbers 33, 19, and 17. He also tells Connie at one point during their conversation that he has a sign, the letter X. Superstition, with its preoccupation with codes, signs and numbers, is connected with the dark side.

Another association is the suggestion that Arnold Friend knows everything about Connie and is even telepathic. When he calls Connie by name, she is surprised since she never introduced herself at any time before he drives into their doorstep. He knows the names of her family members, all her friends from school, and tells her that he can see what is happening at Aunt Tillie’s barbecue party at the very moment that he is talking to her.

Connie, of course, realizes the danger she is in although it takes some time to sink in because at first she thinks she can just waive Arnold off and he would simply leave her alone. She knows the clues to the kind of brewing trouble she is facing with Arnold when she recognizes “ that sleepy dreamy smile that all the boys used to get across ideas they didn’t want to put into words...and the singsong way he talked, slightly mocking, kidding, but serious...” She knows the game of temptation and she tries to resist as hard as she could.

Later on in the conversation, however, when Connie continues to resist and especially when she threatens him with calling the police, Arnold slowly takes off the mask he has put on to seduce her with sweetness and becomes forceful. Evil cannot keep on its sweet face when it realizes how it is on the verge of defeat. When it cannot get its way through sweet talk and wheedling, it would resort to the use of force and violence. Connie also recognizes the shift and she feels real panic and fear. Arnold makes it clear to her when he says, “ the place where you came from ain’t there any more, and where you had in mind to go is cancelled out.” Of course, Connie could have called her parents or the police and it could have frightened Arnold off and leave her.

After all, she is inside the house while he is locked outside. He cannot go in and it would have taken him some time to break the door, long enough for Connie to make the call. But like the devil, he plays with her weakness, confusion and fear at the moment. Arnold controls himself, knowing that it would work better if Connie comes out of her own will. He continues to

seduce her with promises of a pleasurable experience. He promises to bring her “ to a nice field, out in the country here” where Arnold will “ have (his) arms tight around (her).” He tries to convince her that she is better than any of her family members and only he can understand her and her needs best.

Towards the end of the story, Arnold keeps coaxing until Connie feels she is not herself anymore. The author describes it as an incantation. She is lured and hypnotized by his words. She has become an observer watching herself “ put out her hand against the screen...push the door slowly open...moving out into the sunlight where Arnold Fiend waited.” She has given up herself to the devil. She has fallen from grace. She will never be the same again.

Using descriptive elements associated with the mythical creature called the devil proves to be an effective technique in developing the story because it adds that extra element of scariness in the reading. The reader associate what is happening in the story with the extra imageries and it intensifies the suspense and anticipation of the obviously tragic ending of the female character. The ending is not only about Connie giving herself up to Arnold. It is also about how evil has tempted innocence, wins over her, and leads her to a terrible end.

Work Cited

Oates, Joyce Carol. *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*