

The psychological and social turmoil of america in the 1960s

Sociology



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Where are you going, where have you been? Joyce Carol Oates describes the psychological and social turmoil of adolescents that aroused during the 1960s in 'Where are you going, where have you been?' The story is demonstrated through the life of the central character Connie, a fifteen year old teenager, who leads a pleasant life with her family. As a cultural document of 1960s, the story exposes the deterioration of innocent America and it reveals the hard-edged, troublesome times. The story gives some relevant hints about the powerlessness and vulnerability of women trapped by their egotism.

During 1960s, America had witnessed number of social and political crisis like assassination of Kennedy, civil rights movement, sexual liberation, drug experimentation, anti-war protests, and revolutionary politics. Author discloses the illusory dreams of adolescence and their immature concepts about sexuality and romance. At this juncture, one can notice Connie, the central figure of the story is separated from her mother and relatives, and she breaks the walls of sexual maturity. Her fate reveals the crisis that affected American society during the 1960s. Oates and Showalter aptly observe it when they comment thus, " Her [Connie's] coming-of-age story also anticipates the coming of-age-of American society, its emergence from the hazy dreams and social innocence of 1950s into the harsher realities of random violence, war and crime" (Oates & Showalter 7). Similarly, victimization of women in our society has been exposed through the character of Connie in this book.

Author portrays Connie's first encounter with the evil Arnold Friend in a burger place, where she sees as a " sacred building" (Griffin). Connie gets

number of chances to get away from Arnold's trappings and time and again she reveals her consciousness. But Arnold's impressive and mischievous conversations lead her into a dangerous world. Douglas Griffin rightly comments; "... moral implications of this struggle are highlighted by Oates frequent introduction of religious undertones in this story" (Griffin). Arnold's character represents the concept of manipulative psychology and his thoughts and movements often reveal the nature of a killer. First, he tracked his prey then he identified it, disoriented it and finally prepared to kill his prey. Critics often mention that the influence of true crime serial killer named Charles Schmid is visible in Oates's story. Pied Piper of Tucson gives relevant news about the serial killer and Oates got inspiration through reading Pied Piper of Tucson. Oates designed the character of her villain Arnold having some strong characteristic features of Charles Schmind. Joyce Carol Oates has often revealed the inspiration that helped her to write the story from Bob Dylan's music " its all over now baby blue". Bob Dylan's music explores and foreshadows the social and cultural deterioration of American society in 1960s and 70s. His songs often reveal the danger which haunts teenagers. " Perhaps listening to Dylan, particularly the two previously-mentioned songs, would have served Connie well—" A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" centers on the question " where have you been?" (Theriot). Dylan's song always discusses the social, political and cultural transformation of American society. In addition, teenagers in 1950s and 60s received music as a part of their day to day life and Connie weaved her dreams through enjoying her favorite songs.

In the final assessment, it is evident that Joyce carol Oates's story, ' Where

are you going, where have you been?’ describes the social, cultural and psychological deterioration of the American youths. Oates’s story portrays the central character Connie as a victim of social, political milieu which happened during the time of 1960s. Oates explores the role of popular music in the life of teenagers and she got inspiration from Bob Dylan’s songs.

Works cited

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