

Joyce carol oates and  
sowing wild oats:  
context for "where  
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The life and times of Joyce Carol Oates dynamically impact the short story, "Where You Are Going; Where Have You Been" in which music, myth and mores shape the social text corresponding with the 1960s. The 1965 rock song, "It's All Over Now Baby Blue" lyrically and historically harmonizes in Oates' short story, "Where are you going; Where have you been." First of all, the eerie antagonist of the story, Arnold Friend, a serial killer-rapist, represents a fictionalised version of Charles Schmid who because of the Tucson murders of 1966 caught Oates' attention as the character base for her story.

Oates herself has confessed the inspiration and impact that "It's All Over Now Baby Blue" has on this particular narrative. "In 'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?' Oates makes an ordinary tale extraordinary by juxtaposing two powerful legends: the modern rock hero (the story is dedicated to activist-song writer Bob Dylan), and the ancient demon lover" (Bender). The lines of the song's first stanza read, "Yonder stands your orphan with his gun, crying like a fire in the sun." The bereft and dangerous child alludes to none other than Arnold Friend/Charles Schmid. Schmid grew up a parentless life - he came from parents who rejected him and was then adopted into a foster family which offered no guidance. The child/adult image evokes a juxtaposed image of innocence and danger, purity and corruption. As a predator of teenage girls, Schmid matches this double figure of childishness merged with dangerous aggression. In the novel, his unfortunate victim mirrors his double personality since Connie herself has a double faceted character. She is both woman and girl, experienced and naïve. After brutally raping Connie, Friend calls her "my sweet little blue-

eyed girl." This epithet is an obvious reference to the title of Bob Dylan's 1965 song "It's All Over Now Baby Blue." Friend has an obsession over blue-eyed girls and the woman in the song is affectionately called "Baby Blue." The fact that 'it's all over now' signifies that a conclusive tragedy at the end. The haunting chorus 'It's All Over Now Baby Blue' pervades the song reminding the ill-fated character of an imminent fall.

The second stanza of Dylan's "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," draws reference to "The empty-handed painter from your streets; Is drawing crazy patterns on your sheets." These lines again point to Charles Schmid as a psychopath with the merger of the demented, threatening adult and the troubled child. Schmid had some psychological challenges of his own for he boasted having a special sixth sense with special clairvoyance, hallucinations, and psychic faculties. These abilities, he believed, placed him above his colleagues. This demented tendency singles out Schmid as one who was on the verge of committing an antisocial transgression, provoking a horror similar to an adult's act of scribbling on bed sheets.

Dylan's third stanza mentions a magic travelling carpet: "the carpet too is moving under you; And it's all over now, Baby Blue." This indication of enchantment and forced capture links Connie's kidnap by Arnold Friend and parallels Charles Schmid and the violated Tucson girls. Dizziness, mental cloudiness, and powerlessness overwhelm Connie as she realizes her impending destruction. The magic carpet originated in Eastern myth which tells of a legendary carpet conveying its riders to exciting faraway lands. The irony is that the faraway land that Friend promises Connie, as she rides on his magic carpet - his golden automobile - is death. After Friend has ravaged <https://assignbuster.com/joyce-carol-oates-and-sowing-wild-oats-context-for-where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been/>

Connie and orders her outside to get in the car, Oates likens his command to an “incantation” which connotes an unbreakable magical spell which bewitches the victim. In 1965, Charles Schmid transported his victims to a distant Arizona desert where, after raping them, buried the girls’ corpses in shallow graves. In the last stanza of “It’s All Over Baby Blue”, the last four lines of the song further connects the real-life experiences of Charles Schmid and the fictional Arnold Friend painting them as the vagabonds who mirrors their victims in dress and behavior to trap and exploit them. The vagabond who’s rapping at your door; Is standing in the clothes that you once wore; Strike another match, go start a new; And it’s all over now, Baby Blue.

Another Bob Dylan song released in 1965, Mr. Tambourine Man, also elicits a Pied Piper following. The chorus echoes, Hey! Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me; I’m not sleepy; and there is no place I’m going to ; Hey ! Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me In the jingle jangle morning I’ll come followin’ you. The intoxicating music inevitably poisons the mind of the tambourine player’s audience and they tag along after him who was like the Pied Piper.

The article which Oates read in 1966 which pushed her to write this short story was titled, “The Pied Piper of Tucson,” authored by Don Moser on March 4, 1966. Filled with irony, this news headline actually announced the murders of a few teenage girls brutally murdered by Charles Schmid. Most kids know the nursery rhyme/ story of The Pied Piper of Hamelin who lured unsuspecting mice from the towns through his skillful renditions on the flute. In the end, he led the vermin to a river where they drowned and died.

However, a grimmer history underwrites this story of The Pied Piper. After <https://assignbuster.com/joyce-carol-oates-and-sowing-wild-oats-context-for-where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been/>

being refused compensation for his services, the piper enticed the towns' children by his magical music and they supposedly disappear without a trace. The Pied Piper wore attractive, colorful clothes and befriended the children by his enthralling music. Likewise, Charles Schmid was a child predator who disguised himself as an adolescent in order to captivate teenage girls. Usually, he deflowered girls before killing them. He dressed as Elvis Presley, an American pop-rock icon, who was the rave in the 1960's and would alter his image. Charles Schmid went after teenage girls who could not resist his innate attractiveness: he possessed a fine car, dyed his hair jet-black, and filled his shoes to look taller. In the short story,

Arnold Friend also stuffs his boots to improve his relatively short height. Connie observes that when Friend approaches her, his gait is unsteady, since the boots seemed to be stuffed with something. Oates notes that " It was a repressed time...Sexual harassment, sexual politics of all kinds, sex crimes didn't exist as a category" (Birbaum). The general sexual ignorance and the taboo of sex facilitated the work of pedophile predators like Schmid and Friend for the girls were mostly innocent in the true sense of the word. When the Tucson murder case opened in Tucson, Arizona, it shook all of America. American parents were now more sensitized to sexual crimes and the vulnerability of their children. Arnold Friend and Charles Schmid have the peculiar taste for underaged nubile girls and take advantage of them. " Charles Schmid on 11 November, 1965 was arrested for marrying an under aged fifteen-year old girl on 24 October 1965. As if not coincidentally, Connie, Arnold Friend's victim, is fifteen years old when she is raped and killed by him. Although Schmid did not kill Diane Lynch, he did rape and

murder the Wendy Fritz (thirteen years old), Gretchen Fritz (seventeen years old), and Alleen Rowe (fifteen years old). In the short story, "Where Are You Going; Where Have You Been" the launching lines begin with "Her name was Connie - She was fifteen." In the story, Friend's victim was fifteen-year old Connie and in reality, Schmid's first murder victim was fifteen-year old Alleen Rowe. Both Friend and Schmid, as pedophile predators, choose adolescent girls because of their attractiveness, naïveté, and easy susceptibility. Like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, Arnold Friend ensured that he came equipped with all the fixtures necessary to wheedle the young girls into his car: the automobile's attractive exterior, his fashion statement, talk, and his name. "It was an open jalopy, painted a bright gold that caught the sunlight." As soon as Connie saw the brilliant car parked outside with the driver honking, she rushes outside. Like a moth to a flame which attracts and endangers it, a fascinated Connie is drawn to the car, curious and expectant to see a good-looking guy. It is well known that many sexual predators use an attractive car as a ploy in order to ensnare girls and women.

Another powerful connection that binds Arnold Friend with the sinister Pied Piper is vernacular and music. Connie observes that Friend speaks in a "lilting voice," "a slight rhythmic lilt," and has a "singsong" manner of speaking which recalls to her mind a popular song of yesteryear. It is not by chance either that she sees a resemblance between his voice and a music disc jockey (DJ). He converses also with Connie about a favorite teenage topic, the popular teen music, throwing names at her like Bobby King. The entire scenario happens with a background of music blaring through the car's transistor radio. The exact radio program to which she is listening is

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playing in her victimizer's car. Friend mirrors teenagers, forging a like identity with them in order to gain trust and acceptance. Liltng is an animated, rhythmic type of music sung by the Celts of Ireland in the absence of instruments. Moreover, Friend ensures that he is abreast of the teenage dialect and mouths the up-to-the-minute phrases that the American youth would employ to communicate among one another. With ease, Friend talks to Commie like a peer; however, in a fit of anger, he blurts a succession of adolescent catch-phrases which he learned. As if in a trance of a fortune-teller or medium, Arnold Friend reveals to Connie where her family was, what they were doing, and who were there at the family barbeque. It seems like Friend had psychic ability to entrance his victims and to peer into the future and omniscient view of the present. " Right now, they're uh—they're drinking. Sitting around,' he said vaguely, squinting as if he were staring all the way to town and over to Aunt Tillie's back yard. Then the vision seemed to get clear and he nodded energetically."

To seduce the girls, Friend ascertains that his dress projects style, confidence, and masculine charm. Friend and his cohort both wear sunglasses (posing as a cool guy in the 1960s). Oates reports that, " Connie liked the way he was dressed, which was the way all of them dressed: tight faded jeans stuffed into black, scuffed boots, a belt that pulled his waist in and showed how lean he was." The trendy gear emphasized Friend's well-built physique in order to enchant the females into his car to their peril. Popular clothes made Friend an accepted, included element within the adolescent social circles and by extension; they give him some leverage among his girl victims. Another critic, Marie Mitchell Urbanski, suggests that

the story is in fact “ the framework of a religious allegory-the seduction of Eve” (Mitchell). Eve and Pandora in the theodicy myths stand as both the temptress and the seduced. They both throw the world into confusion because of their willingness to gratify their immediate pleasurable longings and who in the end, pay a high price for their corrupt proclivities. The snake entices Eve to partake of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and then coaxes her husband, Adam to eat of the fruit. As the Sacred Text goes, they both ultimately die as punishment for their transgression. This connection is fitting since it is through the woman’s temptation and seduction that a veritable Pandora’s Box is opened where chaos is unleashed into the world. Oates prefaces the book by showing how much Connie concerns herself with clothes and her appearance. So her predator, like a subtle snake, has to assume an attractive façade which would break down her defenses and open her to attack.

To create a false sense of security, Arnold adopts the last name “ Friend” in order to befriend his prey. When Connie hesitates to get into his car Friend asserts, “ Don’t you know I’m your friend?” His words eerily voice the theme of Death and the Maiden which bodes ill for Connie. “ Death and the Maiden” figures as a prominent theme in the short story since it is redolent with childhood predation. The legend is poeticized by Schubert which goes like this:

Give me your hand, you lovely, tender child I am your friend and bring no harm. Have courage. See, I am not wild. Now go to sleep upon my arm.



Connie, exemplified as the common damsel-in-distress, cries for help but no one hears her. She is brought to her knees, subjected to a twisted man who would overpower her to accomplish his own ends. Like a child, he tries to lull her with lies and false oaths. In the Tucson, Arizona serial murders in 1966, the girls who were killed were all friends and girlfriends of Charles Schmid. For the girls to let their guards down, both sexual predators attempt to foster an ambience of trust and friendship. Oates symbolizes Arnold Friend's sexual rapacity with his "long nose and hawk-like, sniffing as if she were a treat he was going to gobble up." Hawks are not only predatory birds but they are also omens of death, witchcraft, and evil - not an optimistic sign for Connie. Hawks have acute vision, just like an eagle. Its sight transcends the normal vision of an average animal. For maximum hunting success, the hawk has a binocular view which can descry a possible victim from a distance.

Oates' biography and the narrative are inseparably interlaced with one another (Johnson). The neighborhood where Connie resides bears likeness to Oates' small town dwelling where she grew up as a girl. Oates experienced an average childhood growing up on her parent's ranch house in Lockport, a small rural New York town from 1938. "Where Are You Going" gives account that Connie lives in an asbestos-ridden ranch house, a place with which Oates would be familiar since she lived in a rural New York town to poor parents who struggled to survive. The passage also reveals that in order to go to the restaurant or movies that Connie has to be driven for miles to the closer and more modernized town.

Before Oates could talk she would tell stories through her drawings. As time progressed, storytelling became an intrinsic part of her life. In 1953, at the <https://assignbuster.com/joyce-carol-oates-and-sowing-wild-oats-context-for-where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been/>

age of fifteen, Oates composed her first novel. This significant age reflects Connie's. Her novel discussed the rehabilitation of a drug addict of Detroit. However, the book went unpublished because of the grim, unappealing theme for young audiences. Four years before the writing of this short story, Joyce Carol Oates and her husband Raymond Smith move to Detroit to live. The time that they spent there was very eventful where they have a magnified vision of inner city violence, cruelty, crime, and corruption. Oates says, " Moving to Detroit changed my life completely, enduring the extraordinary racial tensions of the city made me want to write directly about the serious social concerns for me" (Oates' XVI Expensive People). It is noted in history that Detroit had some tumultuous race riots during the 1960s. In this volatile period of change, Oates takes the opportunity to explore an explosive and forced change in the life of Connie, a teenager who is about to cross the threshold into adulthood. Connie's sexual promiscuity, parental defiance, and cultural preferences mirror not only a typical rebellion American teen but also the 1960's era. Development is not always a welcome aspect so in Detroit as in America, revolutionary waves are beginning to alter the social landscape of America - nascent modern feminism, the liberal hippie culture, and sexual liberation are aspects intertwined in the text and in the life and times of Joyce Carol Oates. Oates remained in Detroit for 6 years until 1968 when she decides to migrate to Canada to occupy a new position as a university professor. Although Connie and her family do not attend church she religiously tunes in to her favorite radio program named XYZ Sunday Jamboree. This allusion is knit with Detroit's WXYZ radio station operative in Detroit media broadcasting since 1948. The WXYZ TV media house is a subdivision of the parent company ABC <https://assignbuster.com/joyce-carol-oates-and-sowing-wild-oats-context-for-where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been/>

network which thrived in Detroit. The violence, delinquency, and crime which deeply scar Detroit shows up characteristically in Oates' works "How I Contemplated the World in the Detroit House of Correction" (1969) and demonstrates how influential the Detroit culture impacted Oates and her writings.

A former Catholic, Oates' has confessed secular, atheistic beliefs are also evident in the short story for Connie's family does not attend church neither do they claim a spiritual background (Oates' Humanism and Its Discontents). The story relates that the entire attack happened on a Sunday. Connie awakens at eleven on Sunday morning and "none of them bothered with church." When Connie swears she irreverently and repeatedly says, "Christ." God has no meaning in Oates' life or in Connie and her family's life. "About the spiritual condition of late twentieth century American Culture, which Oates believes has become a wasteland" (Sлимп). Like T. S. Eliot's ravaged "Wasteland," manifesting a spiritual decadence, Oates' story displays a woeful moral degradation of broken, distanced, and predatory relationships with isolated children and careless parents.

Joyce Carol Oates fabricates a masterpiece short story skillfully weaving in elements of her past, American society, culture, music, history, and myth to produce a heterogeneous literary sample of her best work. The tragic Tucson Arizona serial killer and Pied Piper, Charles Schmid, Bob Dylan's popular music, Detroit, mythology, and Oates' own biography incorporates more intrigue and allows the reader to penetrate into the mind of the fifteen-year old victim and the adult aggressor.

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