

Where are you going, where have you been

Literature



June 4, Literary Analysis: “ Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”

The short story en d “ Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” written by Joyce Carol Oates is a literary discourse that focused on the main character, Connie, a fifteen year old girl who apparently exuded physical characteristics and traits that differed from those exhibited by members of her family. As the protagonist, Connie symbolized a perfect epitome of traditional adolescent in free spirited behavior for preferences in spending time with peers and exploring endeavors that are fun, innovative, and fad in their time. Likewise, at the onset, her demeanor of self-interest and apparent obsession to her looks evidently confirmed traits normally exhibited by teenagers. The current discourse hereby aims to present an analysis of this literary work in terms of the symbolisms used; as well as in displaying literary elements that focus on allegory. Aside from Connie symbolizing the embodiment of a typical adolescent, she was also noted to have a keen and innate attraction to music, which lured her to various places and eventually enticed her to make a decision that seemed to be antithetical to the expected norm. Music, therefore, is another symbol for a reverberating and persistently consuming medium that influences teenagers to share a common and unifying bond. As asserted, “ music is everywhere in this story, blaring out of radios in restaurants, cars, and homes. It's so omnipresent, in fact, that it seems to have worked its way into the very way characters think, act, and feel” (Oates: Music 1). Despite Connie’s initial reaction that recognizes alleged maturity in taking precautions regarding talking to strangers, through sharing similarities in music, she was led into exhibiting irresponsible confidence to Arnold Friend. This was corroborated by Mitchell and Urbanski who contended that “ the recurring music then, while

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ostensibly innocuous realistic detail, is in fact, the vehicle of Connie's seduction and because of its intangibility, not immediately recognizable as such" (1). Music was therefore an image of both sharing inspirational bond between teen-agers; yet, serving as a vehicle to unsuspectingly trust an obviously devious stranger. The author likewise used other symbols through the story, such as the car and the home, to represent power and mobility (car), as well as refuge and security (home). The use of the car being driven by Friend signified assuming an authoritative stance over Connie. It was revealed that " cars are a form of mobility, freedom, and empowerment in the story that women don't get to enjoy" (Oates, *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?: Cars* 1). Friend used the car initially, as an enticing tool to attract the attention of Connie and to serve as the vehicle to invite her out from her reclusive home. As such, Connie's home initially symbolized her medium of protection; a haven for safety. Especially when Friend was on the verge of approaching Connie, who seemed to have confirmed and sensed some form of danger from Friend's persistent sexual intent, her home served as the barrier or boundary that kept Friend from reaching out to force her into submission. Accordingly, " in the story, a careful orchestration of scenes through windows, on thresholds, in doorways, against walls, builds up to Connie's final step into the beyond at the end of the story" (Oates, *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?: The Home* 1). Only when Connie finally and voluntarily acknowledged submission did she decide to step beyond the safety of her home to affirm the decision to go to a place or an experience that would change her life forever. The story was also evidently replete with allegory, as a literary element. As disclosed, " the major characters represent two distinct personifications in the dual levels of <https://assignbuster.com/where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been/>

the allegory. It is apparent that Friend represents the devil who tempts the chaste yet morally vacuous girl-victim" (Mitchell and Urbanski 3). Despite's Connie's exhibiting typical adolescent traits of being curious, adventurous, and explorative through the fun activities and friends that she was willing to go with; Connie was obviously still a virgin, as evidenced from her initial reaction of disgust and dismay for having heard an ostentatious remark from Friend, to wit: " She put her hands up against her ears as if she'd heard something terrible, something not meant for her" (Oates, *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been* 6). On the contrary, Friend was obviously intent on his invitation to lure Connie into sexual submission as he persistent in using diverse techniques, ranging from using music, soft and convincing arguments, and even threats that aptly personify him as the devil. Likewise, his apparent all-knowing stance of having apparently known Connie's family members, their whereabouts, her interests and friends, as well as her neighbor, also confirmed a demonic presence and character to Friend's demeanor that finally led Connie to succumb to his desires.

Works Cited
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