

Joyce carol oates



Joyce Carol Oates' book *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* is a story for a moral choice in this modern time. Evil in the book is symbolized through Arnold Friend. He is an ambiguous figure who can be either a demon or a human being. Friend is shown to have strong neck muscles, with eyes of black glass and explaining to Connie about some numbers and says "now these numbers are a secret code honey" (p. 33). He makes a grand entrance to Connie's place and he looks strange enough to make an impression that he is not human. His hair is described as being world as to suggest that he wears a wig, he has a translucent skin, when he walks he wobbles as to suggest that he has hooves instead of normal feet. But this strange character has a gentle coaxing calm voice as he convinces Connie to come outside. He is appealing to Connie in 'a dangerous way'. Connie says that he is very different from his family members or any other boys she knows. He claims to know many things about Connie's family or her neighbors and this call for humanness of his character into further scrutiny.

Connie, the main protagonist, faces the end of her shallow when she is approached by an evil in a human being. She is a 15 year old girl who seems to be preoccupied with teenage concerns: her appearance and current popular music. She wrangles with her mother and has a laugh of her 'plain' older sister June. She loves hanging out with her friends in movie theaters, shopping malls and restaurants. Connie is shown to reject the role of a 'nice girl' but goes on to cultivate her sexual persona. During summertime social venture Connie and her friends try to get attention of older high school boys. One day while on a date she noticed a boy, Arnold Friend, with black hair and a gold 'jalopy' staring at her. Friend tempts Connie to ride in his car. Oates

describes Friend as a boy with shaggy, black hair. One Sunday she refuses to accompany her family for a barbecue but stays behind to make her hair. While sitting in the backyard waiting for her hair to dry, she thinks of the boy she was with the previous night. She later hears a car coming into the driveway and she discovers it is the gold jalopy. She recognizes the driver, Friend, who is accompanied by his friend Ellie, and he seems to know many things about Connie. Although he tells Connie that he is a teenager, she realizes that although he wears the right clothes and talks like he was a teenager, he seems to be old and out of place, his hair appears to be a wig while his face looks like it has makeup. She suspects that he is at least 30 years old and Ellie is a 40 year old baby. Connie realizes that something is wrong and tries to tell them to go away but they refuse to go without her. Arnold overpowers her and in the moments of terror, she calls out for her mother and proves to be childlike.

The theme of this story is fantasy versus reality. The line between reality and fantasy is blurred to Connie. Connie tries hard to present herself as a mature woman who has a good experience with men, but her encounter with Arnold proves her to be a child. Connie confuses the ability to command attention from boys and the ability to have boys pursue her in a sexual way. She seems not to understand who Arnold is; his appearance makes him seem both human and unhuman. Is he a devil, a nightmare or simply a strange human being? But the effect of Arnold's experience with Connie changes her view of the world.