

"where are you going,
where have you
been?" by joyce carol
oates



There are always two sides to every story and Connie's circumstances are no different. The growing teen has two sides to herself; one when she is at home with her family and one when she is out with her friends. When she is around her family she is childish and comfortable. However, when she goes out she tries to act like an adult by changing her clothes, and the way she talks. She believes she is old enough to make her decisions but the antagonist, Arnold Friend, pushes on her insecurities. "Where are you going, where have you been?" by Joyce Carol Oates uses symbolism to portray youths' desire for independence, but overall gullibility to life's illusions.

The car itself symbolizes being truly free to go and do as you wish. During this time, it was common notion that men drive and women are passengers. When Arnold Friend offers to take Connie for a ride, "he is seeking to gain control over her and her movements" (Quirk 413). Arnold's car is reminiscent of what true freedom looks like. Arnold Friend claims he can show Connie what true freedom feels like but that is all a lie. Both Arnold's disguise and the camouflage of the car giveaway hidden intentions. Arnold goes on to say "I know your name and all about you" (Oates 198) and at this point Connie begins to sense something is off.

Most of the story takes place with Connie standing in the doorway of her house: "first she stands on the porch steps, then she retreats back inside when Arnold Friend becomes aggressive, yet she remains intrigued by the door, refusing to move further into the house" (Tierce 219). Connie's home symbolizes a more traditional way of life, while her position in the doorway shows that she wants to branch out into the world. "Nothing can protect her from the outside threat of Arnold Friend, who can't go into Connie's home," <https://assignbuster.com/where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been-by-joyce-carol-oates/>

only lure Connie from the safety of it" (Coulthard 508). Connie ultimately has the power to decide whether she leaves the safety of her house or retreats within it. Her desire to rebel against what is tradition is what ultimately lures her from the house.

When Connie is under Arnold's gaze she feels connected and is drawn to him. She feels like he gives her purpose as a woman. When Arnold first arrives at Connie's home he is wearing sunglasses that don't let her see his eyes. " Connie is looked at for most of the story, an object to be desired by men or envied by women" (Urbanski 200). The mirrored reflections are symbolic of the need to evaluate oneself from the inside and not on the outside. No one can tell what Arnold is feeling because he is hiding behind the mirrored glass and the same can be said about Connie. She puts on the persona of being outgoing, confident, and perfect but on the inside, she lacks it all. She believes she is ready to be treated like an adult but when Arnold Friend comes and treats her like one she is scared.

Rock-and-Roll was popular music for teens during the time this story takes place. Many people in Connie's parents' generation felt threatened by rock music and condemned it as overly sexual and supporting ideas that had negative effects on young people. Music in itself is a type of freedom that Connie longs to have. " Song lyrics, movies, and other forms of mass entertainment enable Connie to form her opinions on behavior, especially love" (Gillis 65). Connie believes that she already understands the workings of love and she wants to test it. When she is at the restaurant she relaxed and joyful and she believes it is the " the music that made everything so good"(Oates 195). While walking with Eddie to his car, Connie sighs deeply, <https://assignbuster.com/where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been-by-joyce-carol-oates/>

happy to be alive. The joy she feels has " nothing to do with Eddie or even this place; it might have been the music" (Oates 196). Connie longs to live a life depicted in the songs she hears. She wants to be free and not be seen as a child anymore. Connie and Arnold both have an enjoyment for music and can relate to each other. They talk about Bobby King; the DJ both of them are listening to. As they continue to converse Connie says Arnold Friend speaks " as if he were reciting the words to a song"(Oates 200). He acts out and almost dances to the music which draws in Connie even further. The last words Arnold says to Connie are spoken " in a half-sung sigh" (Oates 202) reminiscent of a song lyric pointing to the symbolism of music. The same music that makes Connie long for freedom is what ultimately leads her to meet Arnold Friend. Ironically it is the search for freedom that traps Connie and makes her give up all freedom.

The flies that appear when Connie is in the crowd allude to the rotting souls of some people. " Flies have been used throughout history in religious art as representatives of the devil, of the evil sins he plagues us with, and as reminders of our own mortality" (Urbanski 200). Connie " pretended to fidget, chasing flies away from the door"(Oates 199). Connie swatting at the flies allude to her naivety of death. This is another one of her childish notions that she will live forever. She does not truly understand death and aging yet and so pushes away the thought that Arnold Friend is trouble. She also does not see the wrong in her actions at all. Connie chooses not to realize that her actions have consequences and that is why Arnold Friend is there.

Arnold friend himself is symbolic of the evil that lurks hidden with the world.

There are many allusions between Arnold and the devil himself. He has the <https://assignbuster.com/where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been-by-joyce-carol-oates/>

ability to change voice tones, a power that Satan is known to have. The continuous repetition of Connie pointing out the flaws in Arnold's flaws alludes to its importance. Connie is trapped and can't elude Arnold once he marked her with his "X". Connie's recent life style change has led her down this sinful path. Arnold Friend knows "who [Connie] was with last night" (Oates 199). He marks her every time she performs a sinful act. Arnold Friend says to Connie "I'm gonna get you, baby" (Oates 200). This is Arnold's way of letting her know that once she chooses the path of sin, he will be there to get her. Arnold Friend also has the ability to see things that are happening everywhere. He "knows everybody" (Oates 199) and knows exactly what they are doing. He knows things that he shouldn't and that power is wicked. Arnold's ability to charm Connie and manipulate her is that of the devil as well. She has no control when he is around and that is another allusion to his wicked powers. "When he speaks and she listens to his demands, such as not calling the police and stepping outside, it is showing his direct power over her despite her wanting to fight" (Gillis 65). Also, Arnold has difficulty saying the word "Christ," (Oates 201) a problem one would expect the devil to have. Connie says it "sounds forced" (Oates 201). Arnold naturally wants to fit in around Connie to gain her trust, so he mocks religion. The symbolic gesture is that everyone chooses which path to follow and must face the consequences of that choice.

Connie's conflicts with her family, and her provocative dress represent her search for independence. As a teenager, she is dependent on others for everyday things in her life. Connie doesn't like having to rely on others and prefers to become independent. She is driven around, told to do chores, and is

at the bottom of the totem pole. These tie back to the notion that cars symbolize freedom. Although she believes her life is complicated she has never really known anything different. She has essentially been shielded from the outside world and believes she can handle it. " Her experiments with creating a sexually attractive appearance and enticing boys in the local diner serve as her attempt to explore new worlds as well as a new side of herself" (Tierce 219). However, until Arnold Friend arrives, her acting out has gone on without consequence. " She may go into an alley with a boy for a few hours, but no matter what happens there, she will eventually be driven back home to the familiarity of her family" (Quirk 413). As a child she has never faced the consequences for her actions and so she lacks the knowledge of consequences that follow. Connie's journey to find independence ends abruptly. When Arnold Friend arrives and treats her like the mature woman she has pretended to be, he throws her firmly into the adult world from which everyone takes care of themselves. The way Arnold speaks to Connie shows the lack of respect he actually has. For example, he says, " I'm your lover. You don't know what that is but you will" and " The place where you came from ain't there anymore, and where you had in mind to go is cancelled out" (Oates 203). He knows what she wants from the world and he is there to show her what it truly entails.

Arnold embodies all the confusions, insecurities, and doubts that are associated with any child's search for independence. Under Connie's circumstances, she comes to find the dark truth about adult hood. She has finally become aware of her true self but it is too late. She believed independence and freedom was what she truly desired but in reality, it is

scarier than she imagined. Connie, along with all youth, will all have to walk the uncertain path that is adulthood.

Works Cited

- Coulthard, A. R. "Joyce Carol Oates's 'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?' As Pure Realism." *Studies in Short Fiction*, vol. 26, no. 4, Fall 1989, pp. 505-510. *EBSCOhost*, search. ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=7135813&site=ehost-live.
- Gillis, Christina Marsden. "'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?': Seduction, Space, and a Fictional Mode." *Studies in Short Fiction*, vol. 18, no. 1, Winter 1981, p. 65. *EBSCOhost*, search. ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=8648456&site=ehost-live.
- Oates, Joyce Carol. "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" Eds. Elizabeth McMahan, Robert Funk, Susan X. Day, and Linda Coleman. *Literature and the writing process*. 11th ed. Pearson 2012. P. 193-209. Print.
- Quirk, Tom. "A Source for 'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?'" *Studies in Short Fiction*, vol. 18, no. 4, Fall 1981, p. 413. *EBSCOhost*, search. ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=7133354&site=ehost-live.
- Tierce, Mike, and John Michael Crafton. "Connie's Tambourine Man: A New Reading of Arnold Friend." *Studies in Short Fiction*, vol. 22, no. 2, Spring 1985, p. 219. *EBSCOhost*, search. ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=8935198&site=ehost-live.

- Urbanski, Marie Mitchell Olesen. " Existential Allegory: Joyce Carol Oates's ' Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?'" *Studies in Short Fiction* , vol. 15, no. 2, Spring 1978, p. 200. *EBSCOhost* , search. [ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=7126284&site=ehost-live](https://www.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=7126284&site=ehost-live).

Outline

Thesis: " Where are you going, where have you been?" by Joyce Carol Oates uses symbolism to portray youths' desire for independence but overall gullibility to life's illusions.

I. In American culture and literature, the car has long been a symbol of freedom and independence

A. A car lets you go wherever you want

B. Connie ultimately wants to go wherever she wants and be considered an adult

C. Arnold Friend has a car and uses it to pull her in

II. The story's major action occurs in and around the doorway of Connie's home

A. House symbolizes tradition and safety

B. Connie is ultimately drawn out of house in search of freedom

III. When Connie is under Arnold's gaze, when she meets him for the first time in the restaurant parking lot, she can't help looking at him.

<https://assignbuster.com/where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been-by-joyce-carol-oates/>

A. Connie ultimately wants to be like Arnold and have freedom and confidence.

B. Arnold hides beneath his disguise to hide his true intentions.

III. Arnold friend himself is symbolic of the evil that lurks hidden with the world.

A. Has knowledge of things that he shouldn't which implies evil force.

B. Walks weird with his boots implying he has hooves.

C. Is able to lure Connie out of her house and ultimately brings her to death.