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Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? : Analytical Summary Essay

“Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” is a short story written by Joyce Carol Oates in 1966. In the passage, Arnold Friend tries to lure Connie out of the house with the imagination of sharing a bright future with her. Connie is forced to follow his sugary whispering by her ear because she knows that she has no chance of escaping from him. Oates conveys her message of the struggle between appearances versus reality by utilizing different symbolism and themes, such as independence, the evil representation of Arnold Friend, and pop music, which depict the larger idea of the work.

In the story, Connie is constantly searching for independence from her family through adolescent’s naive actions. Oates starts with describing Connie, the main character of the story, as a girl who “looked one way when she was at home and another way when she was away from home” (Oates p. 1). Oates demonstrates that Connie is torn between the fantasy and reality aspects of her life. Outside of her house, she puts on a façade and pretends that she is someone she appears to be. Everything she does outside her home is not something that she genuinely wants, which we will see in the story later on and will eventually bring her to despair. Additionally, we see that Connie has completely given up on the struggle and fell into the abyss of desire for popularity and appearance. Arnold Friend, a boy who appears outside of Connie's house, said to Connie, “my sweet little blue-eyed girl,” which “had nothing to do with her brown eyes” (Oates p.12). “Blue eye” has always been a symbol of beauty. Arnold, being the figure

symbolizing desire, is trying to hypnotize Connie into believing that she has become what she has always wanted to be.

Symbolism is the main technique that Oates has employed in her short story, emphasizing the malevolent side of desire that Arnold Friend portrays. Arnold came to Connie's house before he formally introduces himself. He resembles almost every other guy Connie has dated before, making his presence even more odd and nonrealistic. Not long after Connie's family left for the barbeque, Arnold arrives at Connie's with his golden, flashy car, and "up at the front fender was an expression that was familiar – MAN THE FLYING SAUCERS. It was an expression kids had used the year before but did not use this year" (Oates p. 6). The outdated phrase and the oddly colored car are subtle warning signs that Connie has taken note of but quickly brushes off her mind because she yearns to keep the appealing side of herself to the public. Similarly, with Arnold, he is also withholding a different personality inside him, the only difference being that he embodies a wicked, predatory inner self. After he warned of the consequences of calling the police, he stood outside of the screen door of Connie's house with "one of his boots was at a strange angle, as if his foot wasn't in it" (Oates p. 9). Oates renders Arnold as a gentleman with a mask, a different persona from the initial impression suggests. Meanwhile, June has an entirely opposite style of life from Connie. Oates characterizes her as a mature adult living in reality. As a result, June is safe from evil like Arnold.

Oates successfully exemplifies a pretentious teenager's two distinctive lifestyles and the danger through the manipulation of music. After the conversation between Connie and Arnold had gone on for a while, Arnold introduces Ellie Oscar to her, and Connie sees the radio he is holding in his arm. "Connie began to hear the music. It was the same program that was playing inside the house" (Oates p. 4). Connie hears music when she is hanging out with her friends,

meeting boys, or somewhere free from her family's boundaries, especially her mother. Connie's relationship with her mother is distant because her mother always favors June and envies Connie's beauty and youth. The music stopped when Connie thought the family had come back, and it starts again when Connie let down of her guards in front of Arnold. In the end, Connie gives up the struggle against Arnold and decides to walk out obediently; Arnold told Ellie to put the radio away with a distasteful tone. However, Connie describes, "His words were not angry but only part of an incantation. The incantation was kindly" (Oates p. 12). Oates illustrates Arnold's tone as if it is also a piece of music, and Connie has completely lost herself in her world of fantasy, as well as the trap Arnold has set up for her.

In conclusion, I believe the purpose of this metaphorical short story is to warn people to beware of the pitfall of appearance. Appearance and desire have always been a controversial topic long before Oates has written "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" While external factors of a person are important to the degree that people should present themselves cleanly and respectfully to others. However, I think the story is intended to warn people not to be preoccupied with the desire and fooled by others' outward appearance.

Works Cited

Oates, Joyce Carol. *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* Difusión, 2015.

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