

Kelly Chang

December 1, 2019

Draft #3

AP English Literature, Period 7

### Music as a Motif: Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?

In her short story, “Where are you going, Where have you been?” Joyce Carol Oates employs the use of direct references to music as well as musical imagery to show the protagonist, Connie’s inner feelings as a conflicted teenage girl. Oates’ musical imagery is littered throughout the story such as voices that sound as if they’re reciting lyrics from a song informing the readers that music is a core part of Connie’s life. Also, Connie’s interest in music deepens her perceptions of what love means to her. Love to Connie is flirting with boys, riding around with them in their cars, and listening to music. In the end, however, Connie is confronted with reality and her naivety and fantasies of love ultimately lead to her loss of innocence. In a sense, music as a motif is used to convey Connie’s conflicting inner feelings about love.

Music shapes Connie’s beliefs and values of love. In a way, it forms her spiritual identity and is her substitute for religion. (Healy, Wegs). When alone at home, Connie would “...listen[ed ]to the music that made everything so good: the music was always in the background like music at a church service; it was something to depend upon.” Music playing in the background when she’s at a burger joint is compared to music at a church service, a religious context that alludes readers to believe that the music motif could also represent

Connie's spiritual faith. Instead of going to church on Sunday, "...She sat on the edge of her bed, barefoot, and listened for an hour and half to a radio program called XYZ Sunday Jamboree, record after record of hard, fast, shrieking songs she sang along..." Sunday is the day of worship and gathering for many religious families, yet Connie doesn't find herself or solace in worshipping God or attending church. Rather, Connie spends her Sundays to tune into radio program, XYZ Sunday Jamboree, as if it's her personal ritual in lieu of attending church. In the story, Oates even emphasizes that Connie is not religious herself. Yet, listening to music is her form of worship (Tierce, Crafton). Connie would listen to the radio for an hour and a half, singing along with hard, fast, shrieking songs. Because she is familiar with lyrics of these songs, it forms part of Connie's identity. Music is Connie's religion, so the values and beliefs of love that are reflected in these lyrics become her values as well (Healy). One's spiritual identity is grounded in their beliefs, values, and being part of something greater than themselves. For Connie, music shapes her ideals of love. Music plays a primary role in Connie's life, and as a result, it is the only thing she thinks about as it is always playing in the background or inside her head.

Oates' use of music in the background also serves as a motif of Connie indulging in her fantasies of idealized love. Connie's ideas about love are primarily from movies and songs. Because Connie's faith in love is so ingrained in music, she is always fantasizing about love from movies and songs. "Connie sat with her eyes closed in the sun dreaming and dazed with the warmth about her as if this were a kind of love, the caresses of love, and her mind slipped over onto thoughts of the boy she had been with the night before ... how sweet it always was ... sweet, gentle, the way it was in movies and promised in songs." Connie believes in this fantasy love because she is an impressionable, young teen.

The line, "...the way it was in movies and promised in songs," illustrates that Connie is easily influenced by the notion of idealized love in song lyrics and movies. The lyrics from the pop and rock music and dates she has with boys, perpetuates a false fantasy of what love is to her. Music not only represented Connie's inner feelings of love but also her notions on love. Connie spends so much time fantasizing about love that it makes her both feel at ease while at the same time, entralls her. "And Connie paid close attention herself, bathed in a glow of slow-pulsed joy that seemed to rise mysteriously out of the music itself..." This image describes how Connie is enthralled with music as it mesmerizes her. It shows that she finds spritual or deep connection to music that constantly makes her feel hopeful about love.

Music also shapes the protagonist, Arnold Friend's sinister persona. Oates employs music as a motif for Arnold to appear relatable to Connie and to have her feel comfortable conversing with him. The various dialogue in the story between Arnold and Connie show how Arnold takes special interest in Connie by knowing all about her and by relating to her through music. "...Ellie's got a radio, see...and now Connie began to hear the music. It was the same program that was playing inside the house." The radio playing from Arnold's friend, Ellie's transistor radio is the music that Connie listens to all the time, and Arnold mentions it to her so that he can connect with Connie.

Oate's use of music in the background as a motif was to show Connie's notions of idealized love being taken advantage by Arnold, who is exploiting music to lure her. At first, Connie is frightened at Arnold and Ellie showing up unannounced outside her house and repeatedly asks who they are, but when Arnold uses music to connect with her, she begins to become curious and responds to him as music brings their two unlikely worlds together. Although she's reluctant to respond to him, something about Arnold's character makes her interested in him. "Connie let the screen door close and stood perfectly still inside it, listening

to the music from her radio and the boy's blend together." Here, the music from Ellie's transistor radio collide with the radio playing from Connie's house. Arnold thus uses music to coax Connie to step outside of her home, which is her safe world as she begins to enter the unknown outside world. In this moment, Connie is torn between her safe world and the outside world. Arnold's use of music to coerce Connie conflicts with her indecisiveness as she is unable to think rationally about her future and what to do.

Even though Connie notices the familiar music played by Arnold, her reality collides with her fantasies of love perpetuated by all the songs she had heard on the radio. When Arnold coerces Connie into leaving her house, Arnold steps into the role of her "lover" which Connie longs for, as it is promised to her in songs and movies. But Arnold is a man that has an unknown background and ominous characteristics (Turrentine). This makes it hard for her to discern her fantasy from reality. "Part of those words were spoken with a slight rhythmic lilt, and Connie somehow recognized them — the echo of a song from last year, about a girl rushing into her boy friend's arms and coming home again..." This line shows a delusional Connie who is unable to think straight and face her reality when coerced by Arnold. Because the music builds upon Connie's ideals of love and her fantasies of love, this makes it difficult for her to judge her conflicting emotions and comprehend the reality of her situation. However, as Arnold's demeanor parallels the lyrics from pop and rock songs she is familiar with, it makes her feel comfortable.

Arnold's continuous demands make Connie finally submit to him. When she joins him, Arnold then sings in a half-sung sigh, "My Sweet little blue-eyed girl..." which had nothing to do with Connie's brown eyes. The significance of this line is that even though Connie finally decides to follow Arnold, he doesn't actually care about her feelings or even love her as he seems clueless as to whether Connie's eyes are blue or brown. Oates' seems to

imply that in Arnold's eyes, Connie could have been any young teenager. Furthermore, Oates' alludes to the Bob Dylan song, "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," (Dylan) whose lyrics mirror the situation Connie finds herself in. The lyrics in Bob Dylan's song foreshadows an unfortunate ending for a young woman.

In conclusion, Oates' short story sheds light on a very real and disturbing reality of predators who are able to deceive young teens. The chilling short story describes implications and consequences it has on a young girl named Connie, whose fantasy love is perpetuated by the music she hears on mainstream radio. Oates' use of music as a motif for Connie's conflicting feelings of love and for Arnold's sinister motives are the author's intent in showing that a young teen's development of self-identity could become vulnerable through unfortunate encounters such as in the case of Connie (Shiyanova).

## Works Cited

Oates, Carol Joyce. "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" *Selected Early Stories*.

1966. Pages 1-9.

[PDF Document]. Retrieved from HKIS Schoology site:

[https://www.cusd200.org/cms/lib/IL01001538/Centricity/Domain/361/oates\\_going.pdf](https://www.cusd200.org/cms/lib/IL01001538/Centricity/Domain/361/oates_going.pdf)

Dylan, Bob. "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue." *Bringing It All Back Home*. Columbia Records,

1965, track 11, Wikipedia.

Healy, James. "Pop Music and Joyce Carol Oates's 'Where Are You Going, Where Have

You

Been?'" *Notes on Modern American Literature* 7.1 (1983): Itm. 5.

Shiyanova, Anastasia, et al. "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? ." *Prezi*. 15

Mar.2013, [prezi.com/bol53oswlwon/where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been/](http://prezi.com/bol53oswlwon/where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been/).

Wegs, Joyce M. "'Don't You Know Who I Am?': The Grotesque in Oates's 'Where Are You

Going, Where Have You Been?'" Showalter, *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* 99-107.

Turrentine , Jacob, director. *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* . *Vimeo* , 17 Mar.

2017, [vimeo.com/208537521](http://vimeo.com/208537521).