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### 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 of a conflicted teenage girl. Oates’ musical imagery littered throughout the story such as voices that sound as if they’re reciting lyrics from a song informs the readers that music is core part of Connie’s teenage life. The music Connie listens to constructs her perceptions of what love represents. Her flirting with boys riding around with them in their cars and listening to music. However, when the antagonist Arnold Friend, takes a deep interest in her by using music as a means to exploit her, Connie is confronted with reality. Connie’s naivety and innocence is what ultimately leads to her downfall and falls into a trap created by Arnold Friend. Throughout the story, Oates’ use of music as a motif explains Connie’s conflicting feelings and her beliefs on love.

Connie’s split personality represents that when she’s at home with her family she’s naive and immature, but outside of home she is adventurous and promiscuous. “Everything about her had two sides to it, one for home and one for anywhere that was not home.” When Connie would go out with her sister June and her friends, she would go off sneakily with her friends to a drive-in restaurant where older kids would hang out. Here, Connie “...listened 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.” Oates emphasis of music in the story shows that Connie is dependent in music as her source of escape and also represents her inner feelings (Shiyanova). 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. Oates’ places more clues in the story by telling the readers that Connie is not religious herself. “One Sunday Connie got up at eleven— none of them bothered with church...” Yet, she tunes into music every Sunday, as if it’s her substitute for church/ religion. “She sat on the edge of her bed, barefoot, and listened for an hour and half to a program called XYZ Sunday Jamboree...” As a result, these songs shape her beliefs of love and relationships. Music forms her identity — like how spirituality can form one’s spiritual identity. Music shapes her decisions, beliefs, and values of love (Wegs, Healy). It means so much to her that it is the only thing she believes in. “All the boys fell back...dissolved into a single face...but an idea, a feeling, mixed up with the urgent insistent pounding of the music and the humid night air of July.” This tells the reader about Connie’s sense of character, that although she liked superficial things such as looking pretty and flirting with boys, music was impetus to her happiness as it made everything for her seem so good.

Oates’ use of music in the background also serves as a motif of Connie indulging in her own fantasy of idealized love. The lyrics of the pop/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 mislead her notions of romance. Connie would listen to music so often that thoughts of boys became pervasive. “...Thoughts of the boy she had been with the night before and how nice he had been, how sweet it always was...the way it was in

movies and promised in songs...” Oates uses music to show the pop culture of the 60s. In the 60s, Rock music was mainstream of American Culture and so it gives readers insight of how music played a major role in teenagers’ lives in the 60s (Turrentine).

When readers are introduced to the protagonist Arnold Friend, who seems to be a human incarnation of “the devil,” Oates employs the use of music as a vehicle for Arnold to verbally coerce and tempt Connie into going with him. The dialogue shows how Arnold takes a special interest in Connie by knowing all about her and relating to her through music and slang used by her friends last year. “...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 Ellie’s transistor radio is the music that Connie listens to all the time, and Arnold refers to this point to her so that he can connect with Connie. 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. Oate’s uses music in the background as a motif to show Connie’s notions of idealized love being confronted by this man that is exploiting music to lure her. There are moments where Connie recognizes the many things that seem to be “off” with Arnold, such as his age, and the way he would talk to Ellie. To her, “...all these things did not come together.” Throughout the dialogue of the story, Connie seriously doubts Arnold Friend, but ironically, he seems everything that is familiar to her. He dresses like the boys she goes on dates with, he listens to music she loves, has a gold painted car with written

slogans. "...she had the idea that he had driven up the driveway...but had come from nowhere before that and belonged nowhere and that everything about him and even about the music that was so familiar to her was only half real." Connie noticed the familiar music but her reality was colliding with her fantasies of love perpetuated by all the songs she had heard on the radio. "...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..." Because the pop and rock songs that Connie listened to are the only thing she knows, her naivety constricts reality: that an adult male is luring her and ultimately going to take advantage of her. These songs build upon her ideals of romance and relationships, which makes it difficult for Connie to judge her conflicting emotions and to comprehend the reality of her situation.

At this point of the story, the two sides of Connie are confronted at her house. There is vulnerability within herself that Arnold exploits because he knows everything about her. When Arnold Friend threatened her to come out of her house, she used the phone to call out for her mom. "She began to scream into the phone, into the roaring. She cried out, she cried for her mother..." No matter how much Connie may appear to be promiscuous and in control outside of her home, due to Arnold Friend, an adult male who is interested in her, (Shiyanova) Connie appears child-like and helpless. But, Arnolds' cotinuous demands is what makes Connie finally submit to him. When she joins him, Arnold then sings in a half-sung sigh, "My Sweet little blue-eyed girl...that had nothing to do with her brown eyes..." The significance of this line is that Connie decides to go with Arnold, but that Arnold also doesn't actually care about her feelings and her at all, by saying that her eyes are blue.

In conclusion, Oates' short story sheds light on a very real and disturbing reality of predators who are able to decieve young teens. The chilling short story shows the

implications and consequences it has on a young girl named Connie whose ignorance of real love is perpetuated by the music she hears on mainstream radio. Oates' use of music as both a vehicle for Connie's conflicting feelings and for Arnold's coercion is the author's intent in showing that one's development of self-identity could become vulnerable through unfortunate encounters such as in the case of Connie (Shiyanova).

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