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Michele D. Theriot

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- 1 The opening line of Joyce Carol Oates's frequently anthologized 1966 masterpiece of short fiction "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" immediately draws the reader into the past: "Her name was Connie" (25). Of course, the title of the work mentions the past also—"Where Have You Been?" Seemingly, then, the past, or at least some recognition of past actions, past times, past experiences will play a part in this story. Add to that the first part of the title "Where Are You Going" which calls to mind the future, and the reader can discern that perhaps the story will reveal a journey from past to future for this person who was named Connie. And certainly we do see that; many critics have pointed out the story of initiation pattern in this short work. As Christina Marsden Gillis notes:

Joyce Carol Oates's "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" is a story about beginnings and passage points; and it is a story about endings: the end of childhood, the end of innocence. The account of fifteen-year-old Connie's encounter with a mysterious stranger named Arnold Friend, a man who leads his victim not to a promising new world, but, rather, to a violent sexual assault, is a tale of initiation depicted in grotesque relief. (133)

- 2 However, what is most interesting about Connie's story is that although the title makes reference to the future and past, although the story's verb tense emphasizes the past and the story of initiation framework that organizes the plot relies on a move from a past "self" to a future "self," Connie herself has no sense of the past or future. For almost the entire duration of her story, Connie is locked in the present, a present that has no sense of the past, a present that is wholly uninformed.
- 3 In the story's title, the present is conspicuously missing, yet this is the only state of mind and state of existence with which Connie appears to be in touch; it is the only part of the human condition and human experience that she understands. The story, despite its use of past tense, reveals to us where Connie is. Connie is always in the moment with no

regard for what got her there or where the moment will lead. For her, the past is blurry, and the future is of no consequence. Certainly, though, Connie, "a typical American teenager of her time and place" is not alone in this attitude (Showalter, Introduction 9). How many adolescents necessarily plan very far into the future; how many young people use past experience as a guide for future decisions? To many of them, as in the case of Connie, it is only the here and now that matter. Though, from what we learn in the story, being mired in an "eternal present" carries with it dangerous and devastating consequences. Thus, the title then becomes a kind of urgent warning, a signal to look beyond the space of "now" or else be forced, perhaps by very violent means as in Connie's case, to confront a future of "vast sunlit reaches of land [ . . . ] never seen before" (Oates, "Where" 48).

- 4 The title also marks a biblical allusion. The "source" is revealed in the "secret code" painted on the side of Arnold Friend's car: "He read off the numbers 33, 19, 17 and raised his eyebrows at her to see what she thought of that, but she didn't think much of it" (Oates, "Where" 33). Mark Robson explains:

The title of Oates's story is taken almost directly from Judges 19:17. The translations differ only slightly, but the essence of the passage is the same: Where are you going, where have you been? One of the closest translations to the title of the story is *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* [ . . . ] which reads: "When he raised his eyes he got to see the man, the traveler, in the public square of the city. So the old man said: 'Where are you going, and where do you come from?'"

The significance of the passage, apart from giving the story's title, is that Judges is the 33<sup>rd</sup> book from the end of the Old Testament, the chapter is the 19<sup>th</sup>, and the verse is the 17<sup>th</sup>. Thus the numbers "33, 19, 17" refer to this passage. (60)

- 5 Connie probably "didn't think much of" this reference because she possibly does not know the bible as none of her family "bothered with church" and because Old Testament contains "stories" of the past, a part of history that is incomprehensible to her.
- 6 Connie loses her innocence through a possible violent rape and murder at the hands of Arnold Friend, but it seems that she is not the only one who is initiated into a new reality. Readers can only assume that her parents and sister will lose a bit of innocence as a result of losing a daughter and sister to a mysterious and violent stranger. Elaine Showalter points out that "[Connie's] coming-of-age story also anticipates the coming-of-age of American society, its emergence from the hazy dreams and social innocence of the 1950s into the harsher realities of random violence, war, and crime" (Introduction 7). Like Connie, the adults in this world that Oates fictionalizes do not seem ready for what is to come; they, too, are stuck in an eternal present, or, at least, they encourage such a state. Joyce M. Wegs notes:

Because [Connie's father] does not "bother talking much" to his family, he can hardly ask the crucial parental questions, "Where are you going?" or "Where have you been?" The moral indifference of the entire adult society is underscored by Oates's parallel description of the father of Connie's friend, who also "never . . . [bothers] to ask" what they did when he picked up the pair at the end of one of their evenings out. (101)

- 7 Likewise, it is revealed that "June went places with girl friends of hers [...] [so] when Connie wanted to do that her mother had no objections" (Oates, "Where" 26). Connie's mother does not pester Connie to reveal her plans or her past whereabouts; instead, she is satisfied with knowing where Connie is at the moment. Past and future are of no consequence. June is the only one who seems interested in inquiring about where Connie has been. Occasionally she will ask about the movie Connie was supposed to see, marking

some responsibility for a past act, but Connie can quickly slough off the past by lying about her actions and dismissing June's inquiry with a tepid "So-so" (Oates, "Where" 29). June does not press for further details, so the matter closes, and Connie is able to move on with no regard for the past acts, real or invented.

- 8 While this title does carry such significance in illustrating the state of Connie's consciousness, Oates's first choice for a title must be considered also when analyzing her protagonist's character. The influence of Charles Schmid's exploits on the creation of the story is well documented, but "The Pied Piper of Tucson" was just one of the elements that inspired this work. In *Invisible Writer: A Biography of Joyce Carol Oates*, Greg Johnson reports, "With [Oates's] usual impulse toward blending realism and allegory, she connected Schmid's exploits to mythic legends and folk songs about 'Death and the Maiden'" (135). Oates herself acknowledges this inspiration and elaborates:

An early draft of my short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" [...] had the too explicit title "Death and the Maiden." [...] Like the medieval German engraving from which my title was taken, the story was minutely detailed yet clearly an allegory of the fatal attractions of death (or the devil). An innocent young girl is seduced by way of her own vanity; she mistakes death for erotic romance of a particularly American/trashy sort. ("Short" 148-49)

- 9 Oates did not specify in this aforementioned article exactly to which artist's engraving she is referring, but a study of the various interpretations of the "Death and the Maiden" theme by German artists of the late Medieval period and early Renaissance reveals a clear connection: both Connie and the Maiden of the engravings and paintings are vulnerable to Death because they are permanently fixed in the present.
- 10 Oates mentions that she is struck by the allegorical nature of the German engraving of *Death and the Maiden*, and for that reason, perhaps this engraving that she was so affected by is actually from the early Renaissance period rather than the medieval period. The reason for this is that the gender of Death underwent changes with the ushering in of Renaissance philosophy and art; depictions of Death became inextricably linked to Christian iconography, particularly renderings of Adam and Eve (Guthke 95-96). Karl S. Guthke explains:

When in the Middle Ages Eve was blamed for, and death was accordingly personified as a woman, this death figure could on occasion be cast in the role of the seductress to sensual pleasure (*luxuria*); but when, as was more frequently the case, Death was modelled on Adam as the guilty party, the corresponding male death figure was not normally seen as the seducer. It is only in the Renaissance, in its literary and pictorial articulation of the "Death and the Maiden" motif, that the roles are reversed: death as the incorporation of the erotic, even of lust, now makes his entry as a man—the "boneman" becomes the seducer, suitor, lover [...]. (96)

- 11 In looking at works such as Albrecht Durer's 1503 engraving *Coat of Arms of Death*, which utilizes the "Death and the Maiden" motif, Hans Schwarz's 1520 woodcarving titled *Death and the Maiden*, Niklaus-Manuel Deutsch's *Death and the Maiden* (1517) and Hans Baldung Grien's various versions of "Death and the Maiden," (some works are titled *Death and the Maiden*, but in following this theme he also has *Death and Woman* (1518-20), and *Girl and Death* (1517) to name a few) one can readily recognize the figure of Death as a "gentleman caller," and certainly the erotic nature of each work cannot be denied<sup>1</sup>. The maiden—in many cases, she is nearly completely naked, with only a scarf as a covering—in all of these works is young and beautiful. And due to her youth, she lacks the insight to look anywhere but forward, but not forward to the future, just forward in stasis, like Connie.

Furthermore, characteristically, all of the Renaissance depictions of "Death and the Maiden" show Death approaching from behind, and the maiden is unaware of this fate because she is or has been looking forward (Guthke 95-104). Again, this forward stare is not a glimpse into the future because, as the Greeks believed, the future is behind us. Bernard Knox explains: "the Greek word *opiso*, which means literally 'behind' or 'back,' refers not to the past but to the future. The early Greek imagination envisaged the past and the present as in front of us—we can see them. The future, invisible, is behind us"(11). The maidens cannot see their future fate, Death, because they are locked in the moment. Hans Baldung Grien's 1510 oil painting titled *Death and the Maiden* perhaps most vividly depicts the horrors and consequences of being "locked in the moment," and the connection to Connie's tale is striking.

- 12 Grien's painting shows a young woman totally oblivious to the world around her. She is holding a mirror and is quite enraptured by her own reflection; she is touching her hair, so it seems that her hair is of great importance as she is inspecting her image in the mirror. The problem here is that she is so captivated by the way she looks at that moment that she cannot see Death behind her, the sands of time running out above her head, the past and youth (if, in fact, that is what the baby at her feet represents) in front of her, or a guardian—perhaps an older woman—to the left of her. This guardian lifts one arm against Death as if to delay him, and her other hand is on the back of the mirror, either holding it up or attempting to move it away so the maiden can break free. Nevertheless, the maiden's fate is not so hard to determine—Death has come for her, and he will not be denied. Death is her future—it is where the maiden is going; it will be her "present" soon. If she were not so vain, not so focused on that one moment, she would be prepared for whatever she is meant to face.
- 13 It is not too difficult to see how this relates to Connie. Like the maiden, Connie is vain and self-centered. Oates herself admits that Connie is "shallow, vain, silly, hopeful, doomed" ("Short" 149). She "had a quick, nervous giggling habit of craning her neck to glance into mirrors or checking other people's faces to make sure her own was all right" (Oates, "Where" 25). But Connie's glances do not seem to be occasional, for her mother sees fit to tell her, "Stop gawking at yourself" (Oates, "Where" 25). Although Connie may not always be staring into a mirror, she is preoccupied with imagining her present image: she could "look right through her mother, into a shadowy vision of herself as she was right at that moment" (Oates, "Where" 25). And looks certainly do seem to be important to her: "she knew she was pretty and that was everything" (Oates, "Where" 25). Later, she is even worried about how her hair looks when a strange car pulls into her driveway. She does not worry much about who is there; rather, her concern is with the present state of her hair.
- 14 Connie does not value the past; she cannot recognize a past. For instance, she doubts the validity of the old photographs that show her mother as a once-beautiful young woman. To Connie, her mother, "scuffling around the old house in old bedroom slippers," is someone "who hadn't much reason any longer to look at her own face" (Oates, "Where" 29, 25). She does not esteem the link to the past, the valuable feminine family heritage that her mother provides or represents. Instead, her mother "makes [her] want to throw up sometimes" and "Connie wished her mother were dead" (Oates, "Where" 26). Furthermore, although Connie's mother attempts to talk to her about the mistakes other young girls are making so maybe she will base her future decisions on those past examples, Connie dismisses her just as she dismisses June:

Connie's mother kept dragging her back to the daylight by finding things for her to do or saying suddenly, "What's this I hear about the Pettinger girl?"

And Connie would say nervously, "Oh, her. That dope." She always drew thick clear lines between herself and such girls, and her mother was simple enough to believe it. (Oates, "Where" 29)

- 15 In a way, she is like the maiden of Grien's painting ignoring her guardian's hand on the mirror; Connie's "guardian" is telling her to stop living for the moment, to stop "gawking" in mirrors and wake up to the fact that actions of the past, hers or another's, can be a major shaping force in future actions, but Connie just stays focused on now. This focus, or lack thereof, leads to Connie's downfall. Like the maiden, she is so in tuned to the present, she cannot see the future at her back.
- 16 Connie's future comes to her in the form of Arnold Friend, who actually does seem to sneak up on her from behind on that Sunday afternoon when she decides to stay home to avoid connecting with the past thorough her family at Aunt Tillie's barbecue. Instead, she stays home feeding her vanity by letting her freshly-washed hair "dry all day long in the sun" and reveling in the moment by listening to current pop music played on "a program called XYZ Sunday Jamboree [that consisted of] record after record of hard, fast, shrieking songs she sang along with" (Oates, "Where" 30, 31). And while Grien's maiden remained transfixed on that reflection on herself in the mirror, Connie's actions of this fateful Sunday indicate that Oates's maiden finds herself reflected in two media—mirrors and pop songs of the time. According to Wegs, "Since music is Connie's religion, its values are hers also. Oates does not include the lyrics to any popular songs here, for any observer of contemporary America could surely discern the obvious link between Connie's high esteem for romantic love and youthful beauty and the lyrics of scores of hit tunes" (101). Connie finds articulated in songs those ideas about life, love, and her place in both that mold her identity—they are her identity. Music is always in her head; it is "always in the background, [ . . . ]; it [is] something to depend upon" (Oates, "Where" 28). James Healy notes : "As a typical fifteen-year-old teenager, Connie faithfully listens to the radio, and it is through the lyrics to popular songs that she shapes her notions of love and relationships—'sweet, gentle, the way it was in movies and promised in songs' (39)" (item 5, pg. 1). Just as a mirror reflects the appearance of a person, the words of these popular songs reflect Connie and all that she knows, thinks, believes. And like the mirror's image, the music's reflection is superficial. But then again, much like a typical fifteen-year-old, Connie is superficial. After all, she does spend an hour and a half singing along with the songs, "worshipping" the music that she loves so much (Tierce and Crafton 221). But the problem with music is twofold; first, it keeps Connie preoccupied, and secondly, the music played on a show such as XYZ Jamboree is probably the latest music, songs that reflect current attitudes, concerns and ideas, thus, again keeping Connie planted in the present.
- 17 Given the description of these songs as "hard, fast, shrieking songs," one would not necessarily expect that she is listening to music by Bob Dylan, the man to whom the story is dedicated. Oates says of this dedication: "Written at a time when the author was intrigued by the music of Bob Dylan, particularly the hauntingly elegiac song 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue,' it was dedicated to Bob Dylan" ("Short" 149). Additionally, the story's title links it to Dylan's "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." Both of these songs are characteristically Dylanesque—folksy, ballad-like with simple guitar accompaniment, certainly not "hard, fast, shrieking." Perhaps listening to Dylan, particularly the two previously-mentioned songs, would have served Connie well—"A Hard Rain's A-Gonna

Fall" centers on the question "where have you been?" As Healy points out, the song "begins with the following question: "Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?" In each stanza of the song, the narrator tells through catalogs of images what he saw, what he heard, what and whom he met, and finally what he is going to do" (item 5, pg. 1). All of these questions would be lost on Connie; the boys she has met "[fall] back and [dissolve] into a single face that was not even a face but an idea," but the music is still there, "the urgent insistent pounding of the music" (Oates, "Where" 29). Furthermore, "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" could have alerted her to some future danger, given her possible answers to the question "where are you going." At the very least, the lyrics warn of changes, of instability, of the impossibility of stasis:

You must leave now, take what you need, you think will last.  
 But whatever you wish to keep, you better grab it fast.  
 [...]
 Take what you have gathered from coincidence.  
 [. . .]
 This sky, too, is folding under you  
 And it's all over now, baby blue.  
 Leave your stepping stones behind, something calls for you.  
 Forget the dead you've left, they will not follow you.  
 The vagabond who's rapping at your door  
 Is standing in the clothes that you once wore.  
 Strike another match, go start anew  
 And it's all over now, baby blue. (Dylan, "It's All Over Now Baby Blue")

- 18 Tom Quirk notes the influence of Dylan's music: "the history and effect of Bob Dylan's music had been to draw youth away from the romantic promises and frantic strains of a brand of music sung by Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, and others. It was Bob Dylan, after all, who told us that the 'times they are a changing'" (86). Times will change for Connie, but she does not know that yet. Had she heeded the warnings and been cognizant of the past, she may have been able to see change as a likely part of the future. And like the example of the Pettinger girl who apparently gets into some "trouble", these warnings or lessons delivered in the lyrics of Bob Dylan go largely ignored by Connie; she prefers to bask in those images of herself as reflected in mirrors, the faces of others, and those songs that would be played on XYZ Jamboree.
- 19 This music that keeps her so spellbound aids in disguising the evil that comes in the form of Arnold Friend. As mentioned earlier, Arnold, like the figure of Death in Grien's painting and numerous other works of the Renaissance, "sneaks up" on Connie. When she first hears the car in the drive way, she cannot see who is there, so she must make quite an effort to determine the identity of her visitor. Even though Arnold may not literally be placed behind Connie, he does represent that fate that Connie is yet unable to see. An image from Grien's painting is repeated in the scene with Arnold—the mirror. Both Arnold and Ellie wear metallic sunglasses that "mirrored everything in miniature" (Oates, "Where" 32). Also, Arnold's car is gold, suggesting another mirrored surface. Both surfaces reflect the situation at present—Connie can see what is right in front of her in Arnold's glasses, but she cannot see Arnold because although he is with her at that moment, he is not an important part of her present. Instead, he embodies Connie's future. Also, the sides of the car have been painted with current expressions, Arnold's name, and a mysterious code. Perhaps the most important element here is the music: "now Connie began to hear the music. It was the same program that was playing inside the house"

(Oates, "Where" 32). Arnold further aids in keeping Connie focused on the present by aping the style of the time:

She recognized most things about him, the tight jeans that showed his thighs and buttocks and the greasy leather boots and the tight shirt, and even that slippery friendly smile of his, that sleepy dreamy smile that all the boys used to get across ideas they didn't want to put into words. She recognized all this and also the singsong way he talked, slightly mocking, kidding, but serious and a little melancholy, and she recognized the way he tapped one fist against the other in homage to the perpetual music behind him. (Oates, "Where" 37)

- 20 Connie can respond to Arnold because he personifies the values of her world. As Wegs notes, he is "the external embodiment of the teenage ideal celebrated in popular songs" (101). He reflects that superficial image that Connie finds so compelling. At first glance he looks handsome, he finds music important, he sounds like Bobby King, and he tells her the things she likes to hear. But when Arnold's carefully prepared image of the present starts to unravel, Connie cannot quite comprehend the significance of it all.
- 21 First, Connie notices the saying "MAN THE FLYING SAUCERS" painted on the side of Arnold's car. What strikes her is that "kids had used it the year before but didn't use [it] this year. She looked at it for a while as if the words meant something to her that she did not yet know" (Oates, "Where" 36). This phrase suggests some preparation for the future, and at this critical point, that should mean something to Connie, but she is unable to see how the past can help one prepare for the future. Connie does not understand this phrase because it is from the past; in a sense, it is old-fashioned, and this kind of vestige of the past and what it represents mean nothing to her. Additionally, when bits and pieces of both Arnold's and Ellie's image fall apart, Connie's confusion is heightened. She discovers that they are relics of the past merely costuming as figures of current culture. Arnold clearly illustrates that he is not the reflection of pop music ideals that Connie thought he was when he says,
- "Yes, I'm your lover. You don't know what that is but you will" [ . . . ] "I know that too. I know all about you. But look: it's real nice and you couldn't ask for nobody better than me, or more polite. I always keep my word. I'll tell you how it is, I'm always nice at first, the first time. I'll hold you so tight you won't think you have to try to get away or pretend anything because you'll know you can't. And I'll come inside you where it's all secret and you'll give in to me and you'll love me—." (Oates, "Where" 40)
- 22 Surely Connie had never before heard love described in these terms in any songs on XYZ Sunday Jamboree.
- 23 At this point, in a sense, the music stops and the mirror breaks; this maiden "looks behind her" and finally sees her future in Arnold's words. But now that unknown future becomes the known present. Connie may no longer be focused on her image in mirrors and music, but she does recognize that her "new" state will involve Arnold Friend. Arnold says to her, "The place where you came from ain't there any more, and where you had in mind to go is cancelled out," negating past and future and suggesting that what she knows now will be eternal, another eternal present state. And Connie's revelations at this point seem to reinforce that notion, for her kitchen looks like a place she has never seen before, and at the end, she steps out into "so much land that [she] had never seen before and did not recognize" though she had seen the same landscape earlier that same afternoon (Oates, "Where" 48).



- 24 Overall, Connie never sees the danger lurking because "too late, [she] comes to the realization that her future has been inexorably shaped by her past"—her sneaking away to the restaurant, her ambiguous first meeting with Arnold Friend, her lying to her mother, her staying home alone (Hurley 4). Instead, she stays focused on the moment and develops memories only of songs and not real experiences. She remains mired in an eternal present, one that is not informed by experience, but one that is marked by a series of events that pass with no need or desire for reflection. Connie's inability to learn from the past and plan for the future ultimately condemns her to a violent confrontation with the future, a future she is wholly unprepared for, and then this future, as with all time, becomes a part of her present, and given Arnold's intentions, we can only assume that Connie has no future to look forward to anyhow. In the end, in Oates's own words, "Death and Death's chariot (a funky souped-up convertible) have come for the Maiden" ("Short" 151).
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## NOTES

1. These works can be viewed in the following books: Schwarz's woodcarving is reproduced in Grossinger, Christa. *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997; all others are reproduced in Guthke's *The Gender of Death: A Cultural History in Art and Literature* .

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