analysis paper

by Joyce Oates

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A Text Analysis of "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"

Introduction

Joyce Carol Oates' short story "Where are you going, Where have you been?" shows her supreme creativity. Different readers may understand the story differently, and some may focus on the violence presented by the author. The authors' writings conspicuously denote the aspect of interpretations and criticisms when she expresses her ideas to her intended readers. Carols' writing gives a clear depiction of modern society's layout, especially on the lifestyle of a girl child. Additionally, the author presents moral lessons and advice to the young generation to identify their values in society and build a productive society for the future. It is evident that any writing must receive appreciation and criticism; therefore, this short story has been applauded by many through different interpretations. Also, numerous objections have been raised by different readers regarding the story. For instance, critics have been used in Connie's story as an analogy of a teenage girl who survives in a harsh environment and not the incident of rape and murder.

"Where are you going, Where have you been?" is a story about a 15-year-old girl called Connie, a teenager and a victim of rape (Oates 118). This story raised numerous debates and discussions from different reviewers, framed its meaning and significance. The author herself has been recognized when she describes the story as a factual image of society. However, after reading

this story, one must have questions about why the author placed Connie's story in this context. The story expresses the life of a girl going through puberty and the issue of rape in society. This raises a question mainly directed to the young women about their value other than being beautiful for men in society

The story has created profound arguments and discussions about a young and innocent woman who faces the harsh realities of life in the current societies (Kellman & Steven 4). The story conveys advice to young women from getting into drugs, promiscuousness, and a warning against “the rock and roll” culture. As the story begins, we are told that Connie is a shallow-minded, egocentric teenage girl who knew that "she was beautiful, and that was all" (Oates 119). Furthermore, Oates notes that Connie is using up her summer holidays, "dreaming about the boys that she encountered at the hamburger stand" (Oates 122). One day when she was all alone at home on a bright Sunday afternoon, a guy she had seen before pulled up in front of her house in a gold car. After exchanging pleasantries, she gradually becomes conscious that Friend is not the type of a boy she had previously imagined to be. In fact, Arnold Friend appears to be past his twenties and well into his thirties, coming with his accomplice to take the young girl "out for a ride" (Oates 126). The man tells Connie that he loves her and has to go with him. When Friend threatens Connie that if she fails to accompany him, he will harm her family, she immediately understands what he meant. As such, Connie naively understands that she must trade her body and her life to save her sister and parents.

Connie's awareness that she had an option of sacrificing herself for the sake of her family reflects the gradual comprehension of what most women face in the modern day. This is the recognition that the society is primarily patriarchal in many ways, mainly due to the violence directed at women (Wagner & Linda, 10). The rationale behind what makes Connie's story quite

interesting is that it presents the real-time readers with experiences that portray the reality of events as it slowly becomes clear what Arnold Friend wanted or what he was demanding from the young girl (Oates 136). Using this suspense, the author succeeds in asserting her point. Oates can unarguably transform a piece of unfortunate but all too common news into a factual spectacle through her writing, one that leaves the readers breathless when we understand the fate of the young girl at the hands of the man.

The main issue with searching or exploring the symbolic meanings in literature is that people occasionally fail to see the actual descriptions appearing just in front of their eyes. Oates may indeed have written the short story with apparent figurative meaning, but sometimes the story can utterly stand on its own. In this sense, it is accurate to say that "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" is precisely such a narrative. The entire allegorical analysis may leave the audience with unbelievable impacts, but they should not draw their attention away from the intended direct meaning (Wesley & Marilyn, 35). It is the literary translation of the text that can reveal the motive of the author, which is to highlight and deal with the serious issue of violence and rape against vulnerable women in contemporary society.

According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics report, women sustained more than three million physical assaults and more than half a million rapes in one year between 1992 and 1993. Many researchers believe that these figures are just underestimated and that the actual figures are much higher than imagined (Seltzer & Mark, 270). Furthermore, the “National Research Council” reports that about 12% and 20% of all the women in the nation encounter instances of rape and abuse throughout their lives (Crowell et al. 4). These figures are terrifying for both men and women, but for too long, the public discourse on the topic of rape has been ignored. Even though the feminist movements and societies have attempted to air this issue for many years, they have

not been successful in getting society to talk about rape. Therefore, it is clear that solutions will be challenging to find without proper and open discussion as a country.

The story's primary purpose is to reflect on what has been happening and still continues to happen in the country and encourage society to address the issue of rape by openly talking about it. Some critics may argue that the actual concepts expressed in "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" are exaggerated to make the books sell many copies in the country. However, the writer's depiction of Connie's situation is neither a fanciful interpretation nor an exaggeration, but rather a representation of events that have happened every day with some unreported events (Oates 149). A shortlist of such incidents should be enough to remind us how horrible they are. A good example is the story of Jacine Zielinski, a young teenager from Littleton, Colorado, who was recently raped and brutally assassinated (Wesley & Marilyn, 35). In addition, just the other day, CNN announced that an eight-year-old girl from California, Danielle Van Dam, had been raped and murdered in the same way. Hearing such horrific stories should serve as a wake-up call to take action against these vices, instead of blaming the naïve teenage girls for their fateful ends (Seltzer & Mark, 280).

Conclusion

Overall, Joyce Carol Oates, through her short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" uses her prowess in the literature to articulate her opinions for many reasons. Therefore, it is upon everyone to ensure that they are not carried away by scholarly interpretations of the story since it is the actual reality of what is happening to young girls in society today. Like Connie, it is not appropriate to say that she could have realized her value in life other than being beautiful for men. The story shows that the young girl was naïve and was only going through

puberty and maybe lacked the appropriate guidance on how to relate to the boys she met during the summer holidays. Rape is not something new in society as it has already existed in the earliest recorded history. Thus, Oates' main aim was to pass a message for the public to take action to prevent rape and see it for what it is, a crime. Instead of only reacting to the rape victims, people should proactively pursue the perpetrators, seek the primary reasons for the abuse and end this crime. Most of the victims remain silent, but the author has carefully crafted a narrative that has given the victim a voice to cry for help.

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