

Chae Young Park

Writing 1

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Obsession with Appearance: Deteriorations of Sincere Relationships

Would a girl, who is so obsessed with appearance be able to build genuine relationship with people who truly loves her? Connie, the main protagonist of the story “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been” by Joyce Carol Oates, is a girl who regard her pretty appearance as the most important value in her life. As a result, Connie not only devaluates people, such as her sister, June, with their appearances but even attributes the cause of her family’s hatred toward her to their poor appearances. Moreover, Connie constantly has casual relationships with men who approach her because of her pretty look and enjoys their attention. As the consequence with her attitudes, the story is about Connie, a girl who had not been getting along well with her family, drawing attention of Arnold Friend, the main antagonist of the story, and being threatened to go on a drive with him. Miserable ending of Connie leaving her house with Arnold raised a question: Why did Connie, while the relationship with the family members being strained, ended up being threatened by Arnold Friend as she hang out with strange men outside the house? **Considering Connie’s reluctant relationships with her family, casual relationships with unspecified men, and unilateral relationship with Arnold Friend, the story implies through various literary devices that the obsession with the appearance could be the main factor preventing one from developing a deep and sincere relationship with others.**

Undeveloped characters construct superficial and disconnected relationships within the major and minor characters that emphasizes the negative effect of Connie’s obsession with the appearance on the relationships. The fifteen-year-old Connie, the

protagonist of the story, has a habit of looking into mirrors to check her pretty appearance. She often gets scolded by her mother as her twenty-four-year-old sister June's behavior was more exemplary than Connie. However, Connie finds the cause of the scold only in her sister and mother's inferiority of their appearances, therefore relationships between her and her family does not improve. Consequently, Connie shows two opposite sides of her, which is one for the house that is "cynical and drawling" and the other for outside the house that is livelier, reinforcing the disconnection with her family. However, her relationships with men outside the house are also not profound but superficial, because their relationships are one-off and less sincere; each other's inner self is not valued in the relationship. As Connie exploits her attractive appearance to draw attention from men, Arnold also finds interest in Connie. Arnold Friend, the antagonist of the story, is a man covered in lies. He hides his real age, height, and even his violent inner side behind his smiles that makes him look like wearing a "mask." He enforces Connie to love him and obey, therefore relationship between him and Connie is unilateral, enforced, and the most disconnected. As such, three main relationships in the story: Connie with her family, Connie with random men outside the house, and Connie with Arnold Friend all are unable to establish true and deep relationships with mutual respect, because Connie prioritized the appearance over other values. Furthermore, as characters are undeveloped, the superficial and disconnected relationships result in miserable ending to Connie without any resolution or improvements.

The limited omniscient third person point of view depicts the surroundings of Connie with the perspective focused on her in chronological order, describing the process by which a disconnection within the family leads to a one-sided relationship with Arnold. Set in modern America in the 20th century, the plot takes place in two main settings: Connie's home and outside her home where a drive-in restaurant is the main place. The story begins with the narrator's introduction of Connie and her habit of hanging out with

her friends at a town where she could enjoy casual relationships with men who admire her appearances as she did not harmonize well with her family. The main incident of the story develops as Connie first encounters Arnold on one night at the drive-in restaurant, located near a shopping plaza in the town, when she was spending time with a boy whom she first met, which is the rising action. As the plot follows the chronological order, time passed and on one Sunday of July, Connie was alone in her house listening to a music as she had not followed her family to a barbeque at Aunt Tillie's, when Arnold visits her with his friend, Ellie, to offer her a drive as if he had made a promise with her. However, Connie, barely remembering the first encounter with him, had not expected Arnold to visit her, and therefore continued to delay answering to his offer. However, Connie grew suspicious as Arnold already knew her and people's names around her although she had not told him. Conflict arises when she determines to firmly refuse Arnold as she realizes with shock that Arnold and Ellie are much older than her age. After her refusal, Arnold revealed his true character of violence and forcefully demanded Connie to come out of the house and horrified her by describing as if he could see what her family was doing in real time. As a result, Connie tried to stop him by saying she would call police, however only stimulated Arnold to threaten her that he would break into her house if she does, which is the crisis. Climax occurs when Connie, after hearing the threat to her family, runs into the back room to call her mother in a great panic and fear. However, the story implies that her mother did not receive her call, which leads to the falling action that Connie gives up on seeking for help. For the resolution, Connie opens the screen door which had been blocking the way between her and Arnold and leaves the house without knowing where she was going.

Imageries of the external elements of the main characters implies the existence of “two sides,” which embodies by the symbolisms of pull-over jersey blouse, gold paint, and sunglasses as the means to hide the essence behind the fancy appearance. One main

character, Connie, is described with the imagery of her appearance outside her home. Dressed up with casual outfits, adorned with accessory, and fixed hair of Connie all describes her being much livelier and attractive compared to her other side at home. Pull-over jersey blouse changes its looks depending on her location, disguising Connie's sarcastic personality from men she meets. Therefore, pull-over jersey blouse symbolizes her obsession with the appearance which disconnects the relationship with her family by Connie wearing the blouse in one form and attracts random men to build superficial relationship by her wearing it in another form. Another main character, Arnold Friend, is described with the imagery of his appearance when he visits Connie to offer her a drive. Along with unruly hair that gave her the impression of wig, his outfits of jeans with belt, boots, and white shirt which all showed his lean and muscular body won Connie's favor. As with the eyes are the windows of one's mind, sunglasses Arnold wore could be interpreted as the symbol of disguising his violent intention to take Connie away from home. Therefore, his one side that makes a favorable impression to Connie delayed her to recognize the other side of violence hidden behind the sunglasses. Gold painting on the car is another symbol that implies disguised other side of Arnold. Gold painting catches Connie's sight as gold is a fancy color, which also allows Arnold to hide his true character, considering that the true color of the car is covered from the sight. Namely, detailed description of the exterior elements of the main characters not only implies Connie's obsession with appearance by revealing how concerned with her look shown to others and how oversusceptible she is by the other's appearances, but also implies that the obsession with appearance allows to disguise the essence of the characters which restricts Connie from building sincere relationships.

In modern society of America, spread of the media had provoked serious social problem of the obsession with the appearance. Immature teenagers such as Connie are sensitive to gaze of the others and are easily influenced by the media. Through the miserable

ending of Connie, settings, imageries, and symbolisms of the story emphasizes that her obsession with the appearance to meet the standard of beauty to attract others hinders the establishment of a true relationship, with the implicature of the “two sides” of fancy appearance and disguised essence. As a result, putting the value of appearance of the most importance not only makes one to lose the essence of the self, but also disables one to grasp the essence of others. The story accentuates to prevent oneself from constructing disconnected relationships that enforces one to open the door to the miserable ending. (word count: 1473 words)