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Literary Analysis

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### What Drives Youths into Danger?

Why are adolescents always a problem for their parents? Being a teenage child, probably a lot of people would have experienced themselves regarded as troublesome. As youths navigate the tumultuous waters of growing up, they are often found making defective decisions that might put their wellbeing in jeopardy. Adults try to manage their growing youths by binding them tightly in their nest, but coping with children with deficient comprehension and communication only triggers them to slip out of the grasp and interference of their parents. Joyce Carol Oates' short story, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" explores a teenage girl, Connie, who diverges from her parental guide and undergoes a horrifying experience. **Through Connie's narrative, the author displays how vulnerability of adolescence, when combined with inadequate parental relationships and appreciation of children, can expose youths to a greater level of risk.**

**The plot and characters of the narrative reveal how Connie's vulnerability as an adolescent is initially shown through incorrect parental supervision.** Joyce Carol Oates' "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" is set in the summer of 1960s in an unnamed town and centers around a teenage girl named Connie. With a linear storyline, the exposition begins with the introduction of Connie and her relationship with her family members, mainly focusing on her mother. Connie, the protagonist, is a developed character who is obsessed about her looks, disobedient, and constantly tries to spend her time away from her family. These behaviors are mostly due to her mother's attitude toward her, being critical and nagging, comparing her unfavorably to her older sister June who is gentle and

obedient. Connie's mother, also a developed character, is portrayed as an authority figure who imposes her own values and expectations on her daughter rather than understanding and supporting her. Her attitude causes Connie to act two-faced, an innocent and modest girl at home and putting on maturity anywhere outside of home, leading to the rising action of the story where she catches the eye of an attractive boy named Arnold Friend. Arnold Friend, remembering Connie, later visits her house in a car when her family is away and attempts to allure Connie. He threatens and pressures Connie to leave with him, creating tension and conflict that continues to the climax where Connie tries to reach out to her family for help through telephone but fails to make a call. The falling action begins after Connie give up resisting and steps out of the house, leading to the resolution where the narrative concludes with her following Arnold to his car. The narrative is delivered through a third person limited omniscient point of view, staying closely aligned to Connie's viewpoint, highlighting her thoughts and emotions. This approach allows the readers to empathize with Connie and understand that the conflict might have arisen from her mother's unsuitable behavior toward her. In Connie's perspective, her mother consistently suppresses her, communicating with her in a way that only suits her own outlook and frame of mind, without taking Connie's feelings or perspectives into account. As a result, Connie pretends to be decent at home but behaves unruly outside, which create a blind spot that eventually prevents her parents from properly supervising her. Ultimately, this wrong parental control results in vulnerable Connie falling into a greater risk.

**Evidence that Connie was under deficient parental relationship can also be found from the symbol of music in the story.** Music is referenced frequently throughout the story, also mentioned with the terms such as "song" and "radio." The first time music appears, Connie is away from her family and spending time with her friend at a drive-in restaurant where she can be deviant. There she experiences a sense of freedom that is reinforced by the

presence of music “that made everything so good” and was “something to depend upon” for Connie. When they drove off in parents’ car from the restaurant and the fancy shopping plaza, the place where they are free from the overseeing adults, music also fades away. Music, then appears a second time from the radio when Connie is at home alone enjoying her leisure time, free from her family again. Listening to it, Connie again feels herself in a gentle, rhythmic happiness that seemed to emanate from the music. These explanations of the story emphasize the role of music as a hideout, an escape hatch for Connie who always is chafed at her family’s interference. Moreover, the presence of music also signifies danger, as demonstrated by Arnold Friend’s use of it to seduce Connie. When Arnold, a demon like character, seduces Connie, he shows and plays the radio for her to come over to his car, speaks in a singsong way, “as if reciting the words to a song,” and further, speaks in the voice of the man on the radio. There, music, or song, acts as the principal medium to entice Connie into danger. Thus, the symbol of music indicates both Connie’s desire to escape her stifling home life and the potential risks, such as falling into unhealthy allurements, associated with such desire to escape from parents. Overall, it is suggested that Connie’s relationship with her parents was deficient, leading her to turn to music as a means of escape, which in consequence puts Connie, a vulnerable girl, at risk for adolescent dangers.

**Along with the symbol of music, the symbol of telephone and irony of how Connie perceives her family demonstrate the problematic connection and communication between Connie and her parents.** As Arnold threatens and menaces Connie more severely and harshly to force her leave with him in the climax, Connie runs for the telephone in the kitchen to call her parents for help. Unfortunately, however, she is unable to make a call because of loud noises roaring from the phone and the telephone being very clammy and heavy. While this failure can be simply regarded as a magical interruption of Arnold to hinder Connie of getting help, a mere device to give tension to the story, it can be

interpreted in an expanded perspective. The failure to communicate effectively through the telephone could indicate a larger failure in communication between Connie and her parents. That is, even when children, who may have become aware of their own vulnerability, try to reach out and connect with their parents, a lack of proper communication skills between parents and children may lead to a failure in addressing potential dangers. Meanwhile, Connie holds an ironic attitude toward her family – although she craved her family and their help during the conflict with Arnold, she also wishes to hide her indecent and deviant actions from them. Her concern of being caught engaging in indecent activities is displayed when she warns Arnold and expresses anxiety about being discovered by her father. Similar concern is also identifiable from Connie's two-faced characteristic, where she behaves as a "nice" girl in front of her parents while acting differently outside, especially around her peers, for example, deceiving her parents that she has watched a movie while in fact she spent time with a boy. The irony that stems from such concerns, family being the first point of contact for assistance in dangerous situations while they are also the first people whom Connie seeks to conceal her "not nice" self, is also indicative of inadequacy of connection and dialogue between parents and children. Parents, or adults, easily shame and blame the adolescents for their natural curiosities or being vulnerable to mistakes, for instance, in terms of sexual and romantic pursuits. Such wrong parental bearing is exemplified when Connie's mother shows disdain for the Pettinger girl, asking "What's this about the Pettinger girl?", and Connie keeps herself aloof from such girls replying "Oh, her. That dope" although she frequently hangs out with her. This parental attitude leads to adolescents hiding their issues and unwilling to seek help, linking back to the malfunctioning of the telephone that implied failure of communication, failure of children reaching out to their parents. In brief, both the symbol of telephone and irony explains the difficulty for vulnerable youths to obtain support from parents due to failure of adequate connection and communication.

With the literary devices mentioned above, Joyce Carol Oates' "Where Are You Going, Where Have you Been?" highlights the vulnerability of adolescents along with the importance of parental relationships and communication. The theme is emphasized through the symbols of music and telephone, in addition to the irony of Connie's relationship with her parents. The visual and auditory imagery also help the readers to immerse into Connie and understand better the vulnerability of youths. Through these devices, the readers get a nudge of how adults should connect with and support the children of confusing and vulnerable adolescence stage, that it is vital to understand that the wellbeing of adolescents relies on the quality of their parental relationships and communication. Provision of appropriate guidance and the opportunity for open communication will bring about healthy development of young adults to navigate the difficult process of growing up.

(1505 words)