

Joyce Carol Oates's short story *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* addresses the evil that lies in even the most mundane facets of everyday life. The story of Connie's superficial and sheltered existence, followed by her encounter with Arnold Friend, presents America as a corrupting society that turns innocence into shallowness. Oates conveys the theme that society's superficiality leads to the death of innocence through the metaphor of popular music as a corrupting influence.

Music is initially used to convey Connie's superficiality. When Connie and her friends sneak into a dive bar in order to meet boys, they listen to "the music that made everything so good: the music was always in the background like music at a church service..." (822). Popular music is enticing and enjoyable to most teenagers, but Connie and her friends are seduced completely by the music playing, as it takes on a religious significance for them. Further, it is stated of Connie's family that "none of them bother with church" (823). Because Connie does not take part in actual religion, music becomes a false idol for her; this Biblical connotation contributes to the idea that popular music is an evil force. In the car on the way home from her night in the bar, Connie sees the shopping plaza she came from as "faded and ghostly," then notices that "she couldn't hear the music at this distance" (823). Without the music playing in the background, Connie is able to recognize that the attractions of the dive bar and the drive-in movie are not that appealing; however, when Connie can hear the music, it defeats her better judgment, leading her into potentially dangerous and morally questionable situations with men. Music is a driving force, therefore, in Connie's corruption by the slick emptiness of American society.

By the end of the short story, music becomes a metaphor not just for Connie's shallowness, or for American's culture's shallowness, but also for the culture's evil. Before Arnold Friend arrives at Connie's house, Connie listens to the radio, hearing "exclamations from Bobby King," a radio announcer (824). After Arnold Friend has begun to scare Connie with his insidious and frightening words, Connie realizes: "He had the voice of the man on the radio now. It was the same voice..." (827). Connie is able to make the connection between the sound of Arnold Friend's voice and the sound of Bobby Friend's; the reader then makes the connection that Arnold Friend will be as corrupting an influence on Connie as popular music. Arnold Friend's terrifying actions, when paralleled with the music Connie listens to, seem even more corrupt, while music seems more and more evil as Arnold continues to reveal his true nature. Oates draws further parallels between music and evil when Arnold Friend suggests that he may light Connie's house on fire. After he does so, he rhapsodizes about how Connie would "come runnin' out into my arms, right into my arms an' safe at home" if he did so; Connie hears in his word "the echo of a song from last year, about a girl rushing into her boyfriend's arms and coming home again" (829). Oates exposes the negative impact of a sentimental love song: the unrealistic view of love, so familiar to Connie because of music, is twisted into something horrifying and evil that Arnold uses to terrify her. Although there is little evil in a girl rushing into her boyfriend's arms, Arnold uses the shallow, sentimental image evilly, in an attempt to seduce Connie. The seductive power of music is again conveyed here, although at this point, even Connie is frightened by it. In spite of Connie's realization, it is now too late for her to save herself from the corruption of either the music or Arnold Friend.

In *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*, Joyce Carol Oates uses the metaphor of music as an agent of evil to convey the theme that American society is superficial and corrupt. Music initially is a false idol that Connie clings to, and a seductive force that endows the silly and meaningless with meaning. The corrupting influence that music has on Connie leaves her vulnerable to Arnold Friend's machinations; eventually, music and evil become inextricably linked, as Connie realizes that Arnold Friend, the essence of evil, has been present in the music she has been listening to all her life. Ultimately Oates conveys that the shallowness of American society, which she represents as music, leads to the downfall of innocence; innocence's metaphorical death is also represented by what is assumed to be Connie's literal death after leaving with Arnold Friend. Oates's use of music as a metaphor for evil makes Connie's horrifying tale a cautionary fable, telling the tragic consequences that can occur when the superficial takes over the soul.