An Album of Retellings

THE MODERN MONSTER

JOYCE CAROL OATES (1938-)

Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?

For Bob Dylan

Her name was Connie. She was fifteen and 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. Her mother, who noticed everything and knew everything and who hadn't much reason any longer to look at her own face, always scolded Connie about it. "Stop gawking at yourself, what are you? You think you're so pretty?" she would say. Connie would raise her eyebrows at the familiar complaints and look right through her mother, into a shadowy version of herself as she was right at that moment: she knew she was pretty and that her mother had been pretty once too, if you could believe those old snapshots in the album. But now her looks were gone and that was why she was always after Connie.

"Why don't you keep your room clean like your sister? How've you got your hair fixed—what’s the hell sticks? Hair spray? You don’t see you sister using that junk."

Her sister June was twenty-four and still lived at home. She was a secretary in the high school Connie attended, and if that wasn't bad enough—with her in the same building—she was so plain and chunky and steady that Connie had to hear her praised all the time by her mother and her mother's sisters. June did this, June did that, she saved money and helped clean the house and cooked and Connie couldn't do a thing. Her mind was all filled with splashy daydreams. Their father was away at work most of the time and when he came home he wanted supper and he read the newspaper at supper and after supper he went to bed. He didn't bother talking much, but around his bent head Connie's mother kept picking at her until Connie wished her mother was dead and she herself was dead and it was all over. "She makes me want to throw up sometimes," she complained to her friends. She had a high, breathless, amused voice which made everything she said sound a little forced, whether it was sincere or not.

There was one good thing June went places with girl friends of hers, girls who were just as plain and steady as she, and so when Connie wanted to do that her mother had no objections. The father of Connie's best girl friend drove the girls the three miles to town and left them off at a shopping plaza, so that they could walk through the stores or go to a movie, and when she came to pick them up again at eleven she never bothered to ask what they had done.

They must have been familiar sights, walking around that shopping plaza in their shorts and flat ballet slippers that always scuffed the sidewalk, with charm bracelets jingling on their thin wrists; they would lean together to whisper and laugh secretly if someone passed by who amused or interested them. Connie had long dark blond hair that drew anyone's eye to it, and she wore part of it pulled up in her head and pulled out and the rest of it flat down her back. She wore a pale pastel jersey blouse that looked one way when she was at home and another way when she was away from home. Everything about her had two sides to it, one for home and one for anywhere that was not home; her walk could be childlike and bobbing, or languid enough to make anyone think she was hearing music in her head, her mouth which was pale and smiling most of the time, but bright and pink on those evenings out her laugh which was cynical and drawing at home—"Hi, ha, very funny!"—but high-pitched and nervous anywhere else, like the jingling of the charms on her bracelet.

Sometimes they did go shopping or to a movie, but sometimes they went across the highway, dawdling fast across the busy road, to a drive-in restaurant where older kids hung out. The restaurant was shaped like a big bottle, though squat, and on its cap was a revolving figure of a grinning boy who held a hamburger aloft. One night in mid-summer they ran across, breathless with daring, and right away, someone leaned out a car window and invited them over; but it was just a boy from high school they didn't like. It made them feel good to be able to ignore him. They went up through the maze of parked and cruising cars to the bright-lit, fly-in restaurant, their faces pleased and expectant as if they were entering a sacred building that was out of the night to give them what haven and what blessing they needed for. They sat at the counter and crossed their legs at the ankles, their thin shoulders rigid with excitement, and listened to the music that made everything so good: the music was always in the background, like music at a church service, it was something to depend upon.

Table: A boy named Eddie came in to talk with them. He sat backwards on his stool, turning himself jerkily around in semi-circles and then stopping and turning again, and laughter while he asked Connie if she would like something to eat. She said she did and she ordered a hamburger, and she added that she wanted some of her friend's arm on her. Her friend pulled her face up into a brave droll look—and Connie said she would meet her at eleven, across the way, just in case to leave her like that. Connie said earnestly, but the boy said that she wouldn't be alone for long. So they went out to his car and on the way Connie couldn't help but let her eyes wander over the windshields and faces all around her, her face gleaming with a joy that had nothing to do with Eddie or even; this place; it might have been the music. She drew her shoulders up and sucked in her breath with the pure pleasure of being alive, and just at that moment she happened to glance at a face just a few feet from hers. It was a boy with big, slanty, black eyes in a convertible jalopy-embossed gold. He stared at her and then his lips widened into a grin. Connie slid her eyes away and turned away, but she couldn't help glancing back and there he was still watching her. He wagged a finger and laughed and said, "Gonna see you, baby?" and Connie turned away again without Eddie noticing anything.

Table: She spent her Thursdays with him, at the restaurant where they ate hamburgers and drinks. Cola. It was always sweet, and then down an alley a mile or
to a program called X.Y.Z. Sunday Jamboree, record after record of hard, fast, shrilling songs she sang along with, interspersed by exclamations from "Bobby King"; "An' look here you girls at Napoleon's—Son and Charley want you to pay real close attention to this song coming up!"

And Connie paid close attention herself, bathed in a glow of slow-pulsed joy that seemed to rise mysteriously out of the music itself and lay languidly about the store's little room, breathed in and breathed out with each gentle rise and fall of her chest. After a while she heard a car coming up the drive. She sat up at once, startled, because it couldn't be her father so soon. The gravel kept crunching all the way in from the road—the driveway was long—and Connie ran to the window. It was a car she didn't know. It was an open jalopy, painted a bright gold; that caught the sunlight. Her heart began to pound and her fingers snapped at her hair, checking it, and she whispered "Christ, Christ," wondering how bad she looked. The car came to a stop, at the side door and the horn sounded four short taps as if this were a signal she knew.

She went into the kitchen and approached the door slowly, then hung out the screen door, her bare toes curling down off the step. There were two boys in the car and now she recognized the driver: he had shaggy, shabby blue hair that looked crazy as a wig and he was grinning at her.

"I ain't, am I?" he said.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" Connie said.

"Toldja I'd be out, didn't I?"

"I don't even know who you are."

She spoke sullenly, careful to show no interest or pleasure, and he spoke in a fast, bright monotone. Connie looked past him to the other boy, taking her time. He had fair brown hair, with a lock that fell onto his forehead. His sideburns gave him a fierce, embossed look, but so far he hadn't even bothered to glance at her. Both boys wore sunglasses. The driver's glasses were metallic and mirrored everything in miniature.

"You wanna come for a ride?" he said.

"Connie smirked and let her hair fall loose over one shoulder."

"Don'tcha like my car? New paint job," he said. "Hey?"

"What?"

"You're cute."

She pretended to fidget, chasing flies away from the door."

"Don'tcha believe me, or what?" he said.

"Look, I don't even know who you are," Connie said in disgust.

"Hey, Ellie's got a radio, see. Mine's broke down." He lifted his friend's arm and showed her the little transistor the boy was holding, and now Connie began to hear the music. It was the same program that was playing inside the house."

"Bobby King," she said.

"I listen to him all the time. I think he's great."

"He's kind of great," Connie said reluctantly.

"Listen, that guy's great. He knows where the action is!"

Connie blushed a little, because the glasses made it impossible for her to see just what this boy was looking at. She couldn't decide if she liked him or if he was just a jerk, and so she dwelled in the doorway and wouldn't come down or go back inside. She said, "What's all that stuff painted on your car?"
"Can'tcha read it?" He opened the door very carefully, as if he was afraid it might fall off. He did out just as carefully, planting his feet firmly on the ground, the tiny metallic world in his glasses falling down like gelatin hardening and in the midst of it Connie's bright green blouse. "This here is my name; to begin with." he said. ARNOLD FRIEND was written in tattle black letters on the side, with a drawing of a round grinning face that reminded Connie of a pumpkin, except it were sunglasses. "I want to introduce myself, I'm Arnold Friend and that's my real name and I'm gonna be your friend, honey, and inside the car—Ellie, Oscar, he's kinda shy." Ellie brought his transistor radio up to his shoulder and balanced it there. "Now these numbers are a secret code, honey," Arnold Friend explained. He read off the numbers 33, 19, 17 and raised his eyebrows as he saw what she thought of that, but she didn't think much of it. The left rear fender had been smashed and around it was written, on the gleaming gold background: DONE BY CRAZY WOMAN DRIVER. Connie had laugh at that. Arnold Friend was pleased as he laughed and looked up at her around the other side's a lot more—you want come and see them?

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why should I?"

"Don't want she's what on the car? Don't want go for a ride?"

"I don't know."

"Why not?"

"I got things to do." "Like what?"

"Things."

He laughed as if she said something funny. He slapped his thighs. He was standing in a strange way leaning back against the car as if he were balancing himself. He wasn't tall; only an inch or so taller than she would be if she came down to him. Connie liked the way he was dressed, which was the way all of them dressed: tight faded jeans stuffed into black, scuffed boots, a belt that pulled his waist in and showed how lean he was, and a white pull-over shirt that was a little soiled and showed the hard small muscles of his arms and shoulders. He looked as if he probably did hard work, lifting and carrying things. Even his neck looked muscular. And his face was a familiar face, somehow: the jaw and chin and cheeks slightly darkened, because he hadn't shaved for a day or two, and the nose long and hawk-like, sniffing as if he were a treat he was going to gobble up and it was all a joke.

"Connie, you ain't telling the truth. This is your day set aside for a ride with me and you know it," he said, still laughing. The way he straightened and recovered from his fit of laughter showed that it had been all fake.

"How do you know what my name is?" she said suspiciously.

"It's Connie."

"Maybe and maybe not."

"I know my Connie," he said, wagging his finger. Now she remembered him even better, back at the restaurant, and her cheeks warmed at the thought of how she sucked in her breath just at the moment she passed him—how she must have looked to him. And she had remembered her. "Elle and I come out here especially for you," he said. "Elle can drive back. How about it?"

"Where?"

"Where we going?"

He looked at her. He took off the sunglasses and she saw how pale the skin around his eyes was, like holes that were not in shadow but instead in light. His eyes were chips of broken glass that catch the light in an amiable way. He smiled. It was as if the idea of going for a ride somewhere, to some place, was a new idea to him.

"Just for a ride, Connie sweetheart."

"I never said my name was Connie," she said.

"But I know what it is. I know your name and all about you. Lots of things," Arnold Friend said. He had not moved but stood still leaning back against the side of his jalopy. "I took a special interest in you, such a pretty girl, and found out all about you like I know your parents and sister are gone somewheres and I know where and how long they're going to be gone, and I know who you were with last night, and your best girl friend's name is Betty. Right?"

He spoke in a simple lilting voice, exactly as if he were reciting the words to a song. His smile assured her that everything was fine. In the car Elle tuned up the volume on his radio and did not bother to look around at them.

"Ellie can sit in the back seat," Arnold Friend said. He indicated his friend with a casual jerk of his chin, as if Elle did not count and she should not bother with him.

"How'd you find out all that stuff?" Connie asked.

"Listen, Betty Schulz and Tony Fitch and Jimmy Pettigrew and Nancy Pettigrew, he said, in a chant. "Raymond Stanley and Bob Hutter."

"Do you know all those kids?"

"I know everybody."

"Look, you're kidding. You're not from around here."

"Sure."

"But—how come we never saw you before?"

"Sure you saw me before," he said. He looked down at his boots, as if he were a little offended. "You just don't remember."

"I guess I'll remember you," Connie said.

"Yeah."

He looked up at this, leaning. He was pleased. He began to mark time with the music from Elle's radio, tapping his fists lightly together. Connie looked away from him to the car, which was painted so bright it almost hurt her eyes to look at it. She looked at that name, ARNOLD FRIEND. And up at the front fender was an expression that was familiar—MATERIAL-SOLDIER. It was an expression kids had used the year before, but didn't use this year. She looked at it for a while as if the words meant something to her, that she did not yet know.

"What you thinking about? Huh?" Arnold Friend demanded, "Not worried about your hair blowing around in the car, are you?"

"No!"

"Think I maybe can't drive good?"

"How do I know?"

"How you a hard girl to handle. How come?" he said. "Don't you know I'm your friend? Didn't you see me put my sign in the air when you walked by?"

"What sign?"

"My sign."

And he drew an X in the air, leaning out toward her. They were maybe ten feet apart. After his hand fell back to his side the X was still in the air,
almost visible. Connie let the screen door close and stood perfectly still inside it, listening to the music from her radio and the boy's blend together. She stared at Arnold Friend. He stood there so stiffly relaxed, pretending to be relaxed, with one hand idly on the door handle as if he were keeping himself up that way and had no intention of ever moving again. 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 the singing 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. But all these things did not come together.

She said suddenly, "Hey, how old are you?"

"His smile faded. She could see then that he wasn't a kid, he was much older—maybe thirty, maybe more. At this knowledge her heart began to pound faster.

"That's a crazy thing to ask. Can'tcha see I'm your own age?"

"Like hell you are."

"Or maybe a couple years older, I'm eighteen."

"Eighteen?" she said doubtfully.

He grinned to reassure her and jingled appeared at the corners of his mouth. His teeth were big and white. He grinned so broadly his eyes became slits and she saw how thick the lashes were, thick and black as if painted with a black tarlike material. Then he seemed to become embarrassed, abruptly, and looked over his shoulder at Ellie. "Hey, he's crazy," he said. " Ain't he a riot; he's a nut, a real character. Ellie was still listening to the music. His sunglasses told nothing about what he was thinking. He wore a bright orange shirt—unbuttoned halfway to show his chest, which was a pale, bluish chest and not muscular like Arnold Friend's. His shirt collar was turned up all around and the very tips of the collar pointed out past his chin as if they were protecting him. He was pressing the transistor radio up against his ear and sat there in a kind of daze, right in the sun.

"He's kinda strange," Connie said.

"Hey, she says you're kinda strange! Kinda strange!" Arnold Friend cried. He pounded on the car to get Ellie's attention. Ellie turned for the first time and Connie saw with shock that he wasn't a kid either—he had a fair, hairless face, cheeks reddened slightly as if the veins grew too close to the surface of his skin, the face of a forty-year-old baby. Connie felt a wave of dizziness rise in her throat and she stared at him, as if waiting for something to change—the shock of the moment, make it all right again. Ellie's lips kept shaking words, mumbling along, with the words blazing in his ear.

"Maybe you two better go away," Connie said faintly.

"What? How come?" Arnold Friend cried. "We come out here to take you for a ride. It's Sunday." He had the voice of the man on the radio now. It was the same voice, Connie thought. "Don'tcha know it's Sunday all day and honey, no matter who you are with last night today you're with Arnold Friend and don't you forget it—Maybe you better step out here," he said, and this last was in a different voice. It was a little flatter, as if the heat was finally getting to him.

"No, I got things to do."

"Hey."

"You two better leave."

"We ain't leaving until you come with us."

"Like hell I am."

"Connie, don't fool around with me. I mean, I mean, don't fool around," he said, shaking his head. He laughed incredulously. He placed his sunglasses on top of his head, carefully, as if he were indeed wearing a wig, and brought the stems down behind his ears. Connie stared at him, another wave of dizziness and fear rising in her so that for a moment he wasn't even in focus but was just a blur, standing there against his gold car, and she had the idea that he had driven up the driveway all night. But had come from nowhere, before that and belonged nowhere and that everything about him and even about the music that was so familiar to her was only half real.

"If my father comes and sees you—"

"He ain't coming. He's at the barbecue.

"How do you know that?"

"Aunt Tillie. Right now. They're uh—they're drinking. Sitting around," he said vaguely, squatting as if he were staring all the way to town and over to Aunt Tillie's backyard. Then the vision seemed to get clear and he nodded inexorably. "Yeah. Sitting around. There's your sister in a blue dress, huh? And high heels, the poor sad bitch—nothing like you, sweetie! And your mother's helping some fat woman with the corn; they're cleaning the corn—husking the corn—"

"What fat woman?" Connie cried.

"How do you know what fat woman. I don't know anything about the world!" Arnold Friend laughed.

"Oh, that's Mrs. Hornby... Who invited her?" Connie said. She felt a little light-headed. Her breath was coming quickly.

"Yeah, too fat. I don't like 'em fat. I like 'em the way you are, honey," he said, smiling roughly at her. They stared at each other for a while, through the screen doors. He said softly, "Now, what you're going to do is this. You're going to come out that door. You're going to sit up front with me and Ellie's going to sit in the back, she'll hell with Ellie, right? This isn't Ellie's date. You're my date. I'm your lover, honey."

"What you're crazy—"

"Yes, I'm your lover. You don't know what that is but you will," he said. "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—"

"Shut up! You're crazy!" Connie said. She backed away from the door. She put her hands against her ears as if she heard something terrible, something not meant for her. "People don't talk like that, you're crazy," she muttered. Her heart was almost too big, now for her chest and its pumping made sweat break out all over her. She looked out to see Arnold Friend pass and then take a step toward the porch lurkings. He almost fell. But, like a clever drunken man, he managed to catch his balance. He wobbled in his high boots and grabbed hold of one of the porch posts. "Honey?" he said. "You still listening?"

"Get the hell out of here!"

"Be nice, honey. Listen!"

"I'm going to call the police—"
He wobbled again and out of the side of his mouth came a fast spurt of air, as if he had not meant for her to hear. But even this “Christ!” sounded forced. Then he began to smile again. She watched this smile come, as if he were smiling from inside a mask. His whole face was a mask, she thought, wildly tanner down onto his throat and then running out as if he had plastered makeup on his face but had forgotten about his throat.

"Howard! Listen, here’s how it is. I always tell the truth and I promise you this: I ain’t coming in that house after you."

"You better not! I’m going to call the police if you—if you don’t—"

"Honey," he said, talking right through her voice, "honey, I’m not coming in there but you are coming out here. You know why?"

She was panting. The kitchen looked like a place she had never seen before, some room she had run inside but which wasn’t good enough, wasn’t going to help her. The kitchen window hid-never had a curtain, after three years, and there were dishes in the sink for her to do—probably—and if you run your hand across the table you’d probably feel something sticky there.

"You listening, honey? Hey?"

"—going to call the police—"

"See as you touch the phone I don’t need to keep my promise and can come in here. You won’t want that."

She rushed forward and tried to lock the door. Her fingers were shaking. "But why lock it?" Arnold Friend said gently, talking right into her face. "It’s just a screen door. It’s just nothing." One of his boots was at a strange angle, as if his foot wasn’t in it. It pointed out to the left, bent at the ankle. "I mean, anybody can break through a screen door and glass and wood and iron or anything else. If he needs to, anybody at all and specially Arnold Friend. If the girl’s got it up with a fire horse you’d come running out into my arms, right into my arms and save at home—like you know I was your lover and stopped fooling around. I don’t mind a nice shy girl but I don’t like no foolish around.

Part of those words were spoken with a slight, rhythmic lilt, and Connie somehow recognized them—the echo of a song from last year about a girl rushing into her boyfriend’s arms and coming home again.

"Connie stood barefoot on the linoleum floor, staring at him. "What are you whispering?"

"I want you," he said.

"What?"

"See you that night and thought: that’s the one, yes sir. I never needed to look any more."

"But my father’s coming back. He’s coming to get me. I had to wash my hair first—" she spoke in a dry, rapid voice, hardly raising it for him to hear. "No, your daddy is not coming and yes, you had to wash your hair and you washed it for me. It’s nice and shining and all for me, I thank you, sweet heart," he said with a mock bow, but again he almost lost his balance. He had to bend and adjust his boots. Evidently his feet did not go all the way down; the boot must have been stuffed with something so that he would seem taller. Connie stared out at him and behind him. "I was in the car, who seemed to be looking off toward Connie’s right, into nothing. This was said, pulling the words out of the air one after another as if he were just discovering them, ‘You want me to pull out the phone?’"
"What are you going to do?"

"Just two things, or maybe three," Arnold Friend said. "But I promise it won't last long and you'll like me in that way you get to like people you're close to. You will.

She turned and bumped against a chair or something, hurting her leg, but she ran into the back room and picked up the telephone. Something roared in her ear, a tiny roaring, and she was so sick with fear that she could do nothing but listen to it—

"The telephone was clammy and heavy and her fingers groped down to the dial but were too weak to touch it. She began to scream into the phone, into the roaring. She cried out, she cried for her mother; she felt her breath start jerking back and forth in her lungs as if it were something Arnold Friend was stabbining her with again and again with no tenderness. A noisy, sorrowful whining rose all about her and she was locked inside it in the way she was locked inside the house.

After a while she could hear again. She was sitting on the floor with her wet back against the wall.

"Arnold Friend was saying from the door, "That's a good girl. Put the phone back.

She kicked the phone away from her.

"No, honey. Pick it up. Put it back right."

She picked it up and put it back. The dial tone stopped.

"That's a good girl. Now come outside."

She was hollow with what had been fear, but what was now just an emptiness. All that screaming had blazed it out of her. She sat, one leg cramped under her, and deep inside her brain was something like a pinpoint of light that kept going and would not let her relax. She thought, I'm not going to see my mother again. She thought, I'm not going to sleep in my bed again. Her bright green lights were on, and the place where you came from isn't there anymore, and where you had in mind to go, is cancelled out. This place you are now—inside your daddy's house—is nothing but a cardboard box. I can knock down any time. You know that and always did know it. You hear me?"

She thought, I have to think. I have to know what to do.

"We'll go out to a nice field, out in the country here where it smells so nice and it's sunny," Arnold Friend said. "I'll have my arms around you so you won't need to try to get away and I'll show you what love is like, what it does. The hell with this house! It looks solid all right," he said. "He ran a fingernail down the screen and the noise did not make Connie shiver, as it would have the day before. "Now put your hand on your heart, honey. Feel that? That feels solid too but we know better, be nice to me, be sweet like you can because what else is there for a girl like you but to be sweet and pretty and give in—and get away before her people come back?"

She felt her pounding heart. Her hand seemed to enclose it. She thought for the first time in her life that it was nothing that was hers, that belonged to her, but just a pounding, living thing inside this body that wasn't really her either.

"You don't want them to get hurt," Arnold Friend went on. "Now get up, honey. Get up all by yourself."

She stood up.

"Now turn this way. That's right. Come over here to me—Ellie—put that away, didn't I tell you? You dope. You miserable creepy dope," Arnold Friend said. His words were not angry but only part of an incantation. The incantation was kindly. "Now come out through the kitchen to me honey and let's see a smile. Try it, you're a brave little girl and now they're eating corn and hotdogs cooked to bursting over an outdoor fire, and they don't know one thing about you and never did and honey you're better than them because not one of them would have done this for you."

Connie felt the linoleum under her feet was cool. She brushed her hair back out of her eyes. Arnold Friend let go of the post tentatively and opened his arms for her, his elbows pointing in toward each other and his wrists limp, to show that this was an embarrassed embrace and a little mocking, he didn't want to make her self-conscious.

She put out her hand against the screen. She watched herself push the door slowly open as if she were safe back somewhere in the other doorway watching this body say this head of long hair moving out into the sunlight where Arnold Friend waited.

"My sweet little blue-eyed girl," he said in a half-sung sigh that had nothing to do with her brown eyes but was taken up just the same by the vast sunlight-reaching of the land behind him and on all sides of him, so much that Connie had never seen before and did not recognize except to know that she was going to it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. Arnold Friend is, of course, at the heart of the story's mystery. How would you characterize Friend? How do the descriptions of his physical appearance, his language, and his behavior toward Connie and her friends and toward his own friends guide your reading of his character and function in the story? How do you account for and respond to his knowledge about Connie's family, friends, and neighbors? How much of a monster is Arnold Friend?

2. Connie is clearly attracted to Arnold Friend. Given what you know about Connie's background, personality, and behavior and about Arnold Friend's, why does she find him so appealing, even seductive?

3. When she decides to go with Arnold Friend, Connie seems to be responding to his suggestion that she will be saving her family. How do you respond to her decision and motivation? Is Connie heroic?

4. Although Connie's family fades into the background of the story, they are nevertheless in many ways central to its plot and Connie's character. How do the family dynamics and Connie's attitudes toward her family affect our understanding of who Connie is and what she wants to be? To what extent do her attitudes toward her parents and her sister shift throughout the story?

5. What is the significance of the story's title? If we are meant to see it as a reflection of Connie's past and future, how would you answer the title's question?

6. Oates's story ends with Connie leaving her home, but we don't know what happens after she goes off with Arnold Friend. If you were to write a sequel to the story, what would happen next? Why does Oates choose to leave the ending ambiguous?