

“Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” and Cold War Hermeneutics

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JOYCE CAROL OATES’S “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” (1966) begins as a fairly simple tale of initiation: fifteen-year-old Connie awkwardly inches toward adulthood, as she tries to maneuver her way around the obstacles and roadblocks mother has thrown in her path. Connie, in mother’s eyes, suffers from excess—too much gawking, too much hair spray, too much daydreaming—though, truth be told, she is not the least bit excessive in either habit or practice. In fact she seems so like other teenagers that her absent surname only underscores her typicality. But something goes terribly wrong with this story: the simple and familiar of its depiction give way to the complex and twisted, a change that follows the second coming of Arnold in the narrative. Under his spell, Connie descends into a nightmarish patch of mid-century America, which, in its exclusion of balance and fairness, allows for the disproportion between punishment and crime (whatever the latter may be). Connie accordingly can never materialize into the good initiate, the one who can twitch her mantle, pick herself up—sobered by understanding—and get on with life; instead she staggers out her screen door, zombie-like, as a character who could just as easily be dead, despite the locomotion that tells us she is not. At the very end of the story, when she sees “so much land” that she “had never seen before,” her own sense of earned ignorance has become so complete that it melts into a landscape that is as unrecognizable for her as her once-simple story has become for its readers.¹

Though frequently anthologized, Oates’s story is first and foremost a product of its age: a literary child of the 1960s, a scion of Cold War politics, and both a near and distant cousin of works such as Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). It bears, in addition, at least partial witness to R. W. B. Lewis’s characterization of mid-century America: “ours is an age of containment,” he writes, “we huddle together and shore up defenses; both our literature and our public conduct suggest that exposure to experience is certain to be fatal.”² But for an apolitical fifteen-year-old, containment, as Lewis knows it or as others used this term during the

Cold War, would mean absolutely nothing. The last thing Connie wants is containment—for her it would be akin to the indignity of a grounding. But as the cultural boundaries of American life shifted away from Pat Boone and the bobby socks of the 1950s and were redefined around atomic brinkmanship, the threat of mutually assured self-destruction, and the paranoia-conspiracy nexus of the 1960s, neat discriminations between the adolescent and adult ceased to matter. Once the mushroom clouds began ascending into the heavens, all would be victims. Whether she wants to or not, Connie experiences the shock waves of political containment without feeling the initial heat of its blast.

The Cold War, as I am proposing, haunts Oates's strange tale of initiation; more than that, it helps to articulate why everything goes so terribly wrong for Connie. As a series of cultural and political encodings, the Cold War resisted decipherment; it worked best by stirring up clouds of confusion and conspiracy, which meant, in the end, that the ideal citizen was one swept away by Cold War rhetoric who ultimately abided in ignorance. Alan Nadel characterizes this problem in *Containment Culture* (1995) as the prevalence "of a relatively small set of narratives by a relatively large portion of the population" and demonstrates the tenacity of this containment paradigm over a broad range of postwar texts.³ But neither he nor any of the other major voices in the culture of postwar America, including Thomas Hill Schaub, Mark Fenster, and Timothy Melley, have included Oates in their circle of Cold War writers.⁴ Of greater relevance is that all of these commentators enjoy the luxury of the backward glance and historical distance, Fenster and Melley especially.

These two writers have provocatively advanced the minority viewpoint of those rendered the paranoid and conspiracy-minded victims of postwar America, who, in their isolation or eccentricity, cry out for enfranchisement in the face of mass social estrangement. But the luxury of the backward glance and historical distance is not Connie's to enjoy; she battles the confusion. My broad concern in this essay, therefore, is to reconstruct the operations of what I term Cold War hermeneutics, that political instrument which dissolved the borders of reality and fantasy, wakefulness and sleep, the literal and metaphorical, indeed, fact and fiction. My purpose, I should stress, in employing this hermeneutics is not to unveil the perplexing mysteries of Oates's story or to solve once and for all the interpretive riddles that vex it; it is only to make these mysteries and riddles more acute. Oates's story, I would contend, undertakes a politically specific form of initiation, the containment initiation. This fraught union of the literary and political yields no happy

resolution or predictable outcome, but because of that, Oates's tormented initiation story registers with striking clarity her condemnation of containment, as well as all that Cold War hermeneutics stood for. My first order of business, however, is to establish "Where Are You Going" as a Cold War story, so I shall proceed with that in the only way possible—obliquely.

1

Not a bit of evidence turns up in "Where Are You Going" to help readers identify whether the story occurs in, say, June of 1959, August of 1965, or for that matter any other summer month-year combination we can conceive. Nor do we learn whether events play themselves out in California or Arizona, Georgia or New Jersey. Time and place remain doggedly fuzzy, yet impart to the story a strange kind of familiarity. Main Street, if it exists at all, already has its share of abandoned shops—the mall has seen to that; on the other side of the highway, the solitary loadstone of a hamburger joint magnetizes hormonal youth; cars are "big," the hot-rod or jalopy "bigger" still; pregnant teens will live that ignominy all their days, while the latest hits blare from transistor radios tuned to the top-forty station. Wherever she is, Connie knows no other place. For those of us who know others, but find ourselves in hers, we know her environment only as she knows it: as a severely limiting place. In this contracted universe her father can pore over the newspaper at the dinner table, but that is his business; the same will never be said of the daughter, either at breakfast, lunch, or dinner. The truth is that Connie lacks interest in what either lies outside her orbit or does not bear directly upon the urgencies of her life, which means, for the rest of us, not even a glimpse of dinner-table newspaper headlines or the barest whisper about the world beyond Connie's pale.

But the awkward gaps and adolescent silences of an apolitical teenager dissipate in 1970 when Oates reissues "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" in *The Wheel of Love and Other Stories* (1970). In this collection, Oates contextualizes "Where Are You Going" by giving it a home in a neighborhood of thematically similar narratives that form her collection. The collection itself recounts tales of buried lives, sifts through the ashes of human intercourse, and studies the remains of an already dead "future of love," which in one of the stories, "I Was in Love," Oates figures as "a skeleton of quivering skin . . . twitching in fear."⁵ Language and images of this sort recur throughout and take hold

of *Wheel*. Their effect makes the individual tales themselves seem like exercises in oblivion-making, as story after story obsessively tolls out the inevitability all share of going nowhere and connecting with nothing. In fact, for one early reader of these tales, Walter Sullivan, the ubiquity of death is so thick and insistent in *Wheel* that he has actually counted the forms that death assumes, supplying what amounts to a body count.⁶ Despite the grimness of this narrative spectacle, I would argue that Oates does not play out some morbid fascination with death in *Wheel*; rather she uses death to take the pulse of an America that teeters on destruction.

No story in the collection better serves this end than “The Wheel of Love.” By using this story to entitle her collection, Oates signals the kind of thematic centrality she attaches to a particular story. But “Wheel” is central in other less apparent ways and, as I would argue, serves as the historical and political compass of “Where Are You Going.” At the most basic level, “Wheel” answers the first question addressed to Connie about her future: “where are you going?” And that answer is that she will, if she survives, leave her youth behind and become an adult, even though the differences between the two states are sometimes negligible. The complementary relationship of the two stories becomes even stronger once we recognize that both share a number of correspondences and echoes—both verbal and thematic—that fuse them together: “Wheel” functions in this sense to articulate what the adolescent viewpoint of “Where Are You Going” never properly could.

But while textual similarities are important, differences are equally important, as the latter establish the benchmark of cultural fluency and engagement against which maturity is measured. As it turns out, both Connie and Dr. David Hutter, the main character of “Wheel,” listen to the radio, to voices from the “outside.” While this act links them, it also distinguishes them. Connie listens to legitimize the urgencies and inefable sensations that make up her teenage existence; while David Hutter listens not to stroke his existence, but to confirm its precariousness. “Wheel” accordingly tunes out the rock-n-roll music of “Where Are You Going,” which is endemic, and tunes in the news of a tense world on the brink of a hot-button nuclear war. This ubiquitous presence in “Wheel” not only creates the rhythm of David’s life and its spiritual negation but also sounds, without fanfare, the failure of initiation in “Where Are You Going” and the fatalism that stalks Connie to her end.

The rhythm of the Cold War, however, is not the first thing that strikes us about David Hutter’s occupied world. He is already an established man who enjoys some stature: a university professor of English and an

apparently memorable lecturer on Keats, the poet who died an early death. But as we read on we learn that his stability as a professional veils other instabilities he struggles with as a man and a lover. These two instabilities coalesce with the introduction of the Cold War, as he listens to his radio, "sweating, to the urgent details of crisis in China, Berlin, Cuba, and then to details of crisis in Washington," while he awaits the arrival of Nadia, a woman he is to marry.⁷ The Cold War, to be sure, often remains in the background for David during the story, yet on another level it has poisoned everything within the wheel of his existence. As we learn, he can await Nadia's arrival only in time past because she is already dead from suicide on the first page of the story. On the day before her death, a Sunday, as she drives toward her mother's home, David "didn't like the way she passed everyone, as if she really wanted *to get where they were going*" (my emphasis; 198). Literally they never do, nor together will they live beyond the next day. On another level, however, Nadia, the reckless driver, gets exactly where she wants to go, only a day late.

At the end of the story, the radio is still on, but this time only producing "a vague sputtering, some static" (207), as if a memento mori of its broadcast hours. But the noise is enough to rouse David from his sleep and for him to hear his yet alive Nadia ask one of those sleepy questions not important enough to be told. While news from Berlin and Cuba is left for the sobering reportage of daytime hours, in the middle of the night it is enough for David to sense "the opaque secret of life—huddling together, embracing, loving, thwarted only at having at last to come apart and be two people again" (208).

"Huddling together" in "Wheel" is itself only fleeting—not the permanent condition R. W. B. Lewis proposes—but when it comes, it is already too late in a story that is colored with fatalism and begins with suicide. From the Stanley Kunitz epigraph Oates uses for her story, we learn that "*Some must break / Upon the wheel of love, but not the strange, / The secret lords, whom only death can change*" (190). The fatality of that culture, the Cold War rush to embrace death itself, also defines David, who counts himself among its zombies, its living-dead: "he was not mourning Nadia's death, but his own" (198), this his most opaque secret. As the suffering victim and sometime afterthought of Nadia's unfaithfulness and betrayal, he fails to see in himself that he too has been a stand-in dispenser of death—a mature Arnold Friend—who bears no responsibility in encouraging a relationship that began in inequality with a former student, developed into a marriage, and amounted to an accusation: "Because of the way we came together, you can never re-

spect me,' she was saying" (199). Not even the seemingly good relationship in the story, the one between Jerry, David's conflicted student, and Betty, Jerry's wife ("blond and tanned, not the type David would have guessed for Jerry's kind of quibbling good nature, with a heavy gold bracelet weighing down one wrist" [194]), stands a chance at survival because it mimics the relationship David had with Nadia. In this story, as in "Where Are You Going," the ubiquity of death brings about "change" even when the radio produces only static. The terror of the Cold War could not be measured in what was known but by what was feared. At the center of this emptiness was a hermeneutics that dispensed paradox, uncertainty, or paranoia, all and any of which define what can be known about "Where Are You Going."

2

At least initially, Connie bears no real resemblance to Nadia or to David, for among other things Connie has set the dial of their news radio to a top-forty station, the beat of which stays with her even when she is beyond earshot. Connie is, it would seem, just another girl-woman of an age who tries to balance an awkward adolescence: "everything about her had two sides to it, one for home and one for anywhere that was not home" (36). Because of the latter, as well as Connie's propensity to dream about boys, her mother is forever "dragging her back to the daylight" (38) and away from her dichotomous existence. What some may read as ageless generational strife in this relationship, however, does not escape the culture that shrouds it and the hermeneutics that defines it. Fear and a final yielding to it embalm the relationship between mother and daughter in this story. When Connie, not unlike Nadia looking at David, looks at her mother, who ticks off yet another laundry list of complaints, she "looked right through her . . . into a shadowy vision of herself" (34). And when the next volley comes, "Connie wished her mother was dead and she herself was dead and it was all over" (35). "It" has no antecedent, just as the relationship between mother and daughter here borders on nothing, on the threat of the Cold War made real. The spirit of that message was with Oates in 1970 when she accepted the National Book Award and told of her interests with the "obsessions of mid-century Americans . . . [central among them,] a demonic urge . . . to violence as the answer to all problems, an urge to self-annihilation, suicide, the ultimate experience and the ultimate surrender" that only "language" could combat.⁸

But even if dichotomies as cut-and-dry as the two-sided Connie prove not so simple, the dichotomy itself was one of the critical components of Cold War hermeneutics. As Alan Nadel points out, this dichotomy infiltrated and even defined normative sexuality, which is of the utmost urgency to Connie the fifteen-year-old initiate, for whom the very notion of containment lies in the balance. Women especially, Nadel remarks, bore this "responsibility for containment," for it was their role "to resist and channel the 'natural' sexual energies of men," which "support[ed] the monolithic goals of Cold War America through the practice of duplicity: the woman had to attract and stimulate male sexual drives but not gratify them."⁹ He goes on to illustrate with an examination of Disney's *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), the title of which refers not just to the two principal dogs in the film but also to the two roles available to Cold War women.¹⁰

Connie, predictably, can go either way: lady or tramp. The distinctions themselves are not of her making; even so, she is not likely ever to forget them, at least as long as mother is around. The work, indeed the occupation, of a Cold War mother and tutelary genius of domestic containment was to remain ever vigilant to the enemy within and without. "'What's this about the Pettinger girl?'" mother demands. "And Connie would say nervously, 'Oh, her. That dope.' She always drew thick clear lines between herself and such girls, and her mother was simple and kind enough to believe it" (38). The exchange itself demonstrates that Connie has absorbed enough of her culture so that she can deflect her mother's question by putting distance between herself and her "unlady"-like acquaintance.

It is not, however, that we must or ought to take at face value a narrator who tells us that Connie's mother is "kind enough to believe" her daughter. At least as compelling is the fact that Connie's mother *wants* to believe her daughter; after all, a "safe" ladylike daughter reflects favorably upon a mother who can transmit and "contain" culturally prescribed sexual behavior for the next generation, even though her own fidelity to containment has not brought a drop of happiness or satisfaction to either her marital or domestic life. That her daughter exhibits signs of sexuality necessitates that she go on high alert; for were Connie unable to bottle up her sexuality and act in ways unbecoming a lady, then the "belief systems" or "spatial limitations" that define a "containment culture," with its masculinized, aggressive exterior, would shake the very foundation of domestic tranquility itself.¹¹ In light of mother's behavior, it would miss the mark to say that she is merely jittery about the welfare of her daughter; rather, she has become obsessed with, even

paranoid about, surveillance and whether her efforts can safeguard Connie against self-destruction.

But vigilance of this kind cannot undo the damage that Connie has already experienced at home. Unlike Dr. David Hutter who listens for news from Cuba and Berlin, Connie tunes in to Bobby King. Yet even this preference has not preserved her from the damage that the Cold War has already inflicted. In her midst walk the living-dead, her shell-shocked father and fatally wounded older sister June. When at home the father utters not a single word, and the eminently “safe” and thoroughly “contained” June speaks only once, through indirect discourse, totally deceived by her younger sister’s deception about actually going to the movies. Nine years of experience beyond Connie’s fifteen have not been enough to get June out of high school, where she is employed, let alone her fire-proof “asbestos ‘ranch house,’” where she still lives (39). Ruling over this kingdom in pieces sits Connie’s mother, whose practiced and patent duplicity replays itself in telephone conversations she has with her sisters, bad-mouthing one, click, and then the other, click. All the more insidious is her failed matriarchy in a household of juxtaposed relationships and pairings without discernible connections.

The larger point is this: Even though Connie lacks “the capacity to define herself” actively or consciously, she certainly has the ability to react to the containment and lifelessness she witnesses at home.¹² That she refuses to look up to June as a model to imitate; risks crossing the street to get to the burger joint; and is determined enough not to go to the family barbecue signals her repudiation of containment as she knows it. Although still a sexual innocent, Connie has already experienced the demands placed on her life as a young “mid-century” woman. But a woman’s “duplicity,” as the period role stipulates, may simply marry a woman to a lifetime of duplicity, to which her mother’s life testifies. In the meantime, the hamburger joint is still across the street, with its sweaty waxed cups of Coke and all its floating images of Eddie and Pat Boone; but in the dichotomous world of Cold War hermeneutics, racked by fearfulness over enemy invasions of one sort or another, Connie’s initiation into more mature ways of knowing and experiencing life tolerates no middle ground, though she herself is neither child nor woman. Her sexual nature and the curiosity she has about it are quite normal in fact, as I believe the story makes abundantly clear. But the world of Cold War containment into which she is ushered is itself so perverse and twisted that when a mother’s surveillance flags at home, the daughter becomes, as if by political necessity, vulnerable to enemies domestic and strange.

3

The agent provocateur dead set against domestic tranquillity and the containment household arrives at Connie's doorstep in the person of Arnold Friend, who pulls into Connie's driveway shortly after everyone, other than Connie, has packed the car and headed to a family barbecue; Connie will have none of that and actually gets her way without a whiff of deception. It is to Arnold's advantage, as it turns out, that he shows up when he does. Nothing about him recalls "soda pop and boys." As a James Dean knock-off or wannabe, who wears the right kind of clothes and drives the right kind of car, this rebel without a cause is the last thing a mother would want knocking at the screen door. Yet for the fifteen-year-old Connie who approaches rebellion on the sly, someone so openly defiant as Arnold embodies the forbidden and taboo.¹³

Connie's driveway, it turns out, is not the first meeting ground for the two. Earlier in the summer she had seen him in the parking lot of the burger joint just as she was leaving to dally with Eddie. On that occasion, when Arnold half-threatens her, she immediately "turned away . . . but couldn't help glancing back" (37). This simple act does not transform her into a pillar of salt, even though she treads unholy ground, but curiosity explains why she looks back in the first place.

The unspoken question behind this glance is central to Cold War hermeneutics. Connie asks with her eyes: who is this guy? Critics of the story have asked and responded to the same question. And for all of them the answer invariably is that Arnold, a figure of mystery, is not what he seems. In more specific incarnations he is a fiend or devil, Satan himself, a satyr, even Bob Dylan, though Oates herself apparently based his character on an Arizona murderer.¹⁴ With these readings Arnold loses his identity as Arnold Friend and, depending on the case, gains either a metaphysical, mythological, or counterculture replacement. The numbers on his car, "33, 19, 17," have produced a like result. Arnold, not otherwise known for truthfulness, remarks that this series constitutes a secret code. As it turns out, they do and refer, in individual decryptings, to either sexual matters or scriptural.¹⁵ Even the sidekick Ellie is not as he appears—seems that he is a diminutive Elvis Presley.¹⁶ Obviously, if we think hard enough, we could come up with dozens of other such allegorical substitutions, but all of them return finally to the same exegetical formula: $a = b$. Connie makes the same mistake, initially and later. Her first utterance to Arnold is such a question: "'Who the hell do you think you are?'" (40). She wants Arnold to identify himself, but his answer skirts the question. Later, as her disorientation and

terror grow, she asks a similarly designed question: ““Hey, how old are you?”” (47). The confirmation she wants for her suspicions—that he is at least thirty—does not come, as Arnold refuses to be pinned down.

What Connie and the critics want from Arnold is precision—or enough of it so that she and we can pin him down. To identify this dispenser of secrecy accordingly is to unlock the elusive coherence and enigmatic meaning that the story so carefully hides. But Arnold militates against disclosure by ducking precision, in the same way that Cold War hermeneutics does. Connie’s political education has nothing at all to do with “this equals that” and is complete once she masters a way of seeing that allows her to know nothing about what she sees. Sadly, that mastery includes herself, as she is forever inclined to gawk at her pretty image in mirrors, a habit that rankles her now middle-aged and formerly attractive mother and produces predictable censurings. Well before Connie sees Arnold for the first time, however, the Cold War has already victimized her, just as it has her mother, because she is female. After her family leaves for the barbecue and shortly before Arnold invades her containment household, she enjoys an interlude of freedom and independence by dozing on a lounge chair. Yet all that she can do with her time alone is to dream about boys. And once in the house, she needs the radio on “to drown out the quiet” (39). As much as Connie may welcome male companionship to fill the boring void of herself, she is ill-prepared for Arnold even though her gendered existence and the demands of containment have prepared the way for him.

As a child of Cold War containment, Connie has been insulated from the political realities that stalk her.¹⁷ No one, it seems, has taught her how to fend for herself, just as she has never learned how to live for herself. Womanhood for Connie is always a glass half-empty, not as a conscious determination but as an unformed notion to act upon. Appropriately, she sets the stage for Arnold while still on the lounge chair dreaming of boys; there she shakes “her head *as if* to get awake” (my emphasis; 39). Near the end of the story, when she is leaving her house to go with Arnold, she “watched herself push the door slowly open *as if* she were back safe somewhere in the other doorway” (my emphasis; 54). Between alpha and omega, advent and deposition, so many of these “as ifs” pop up like unnumbered dots that await connecting. Connecting them, however, yields nothing discernible, neither outline nor sketch, only the “thick black lines” that lead from one “as if” to the next. But when Arnold croons to Connie at the very end, as they walk off together into the sunlight, ““My sweet little blue-eyed girl”” (54), he says all that he needs to: the facts be damned. Connie’s eyes, we know, are brown, but that is utterly irrelevant.

Connie perhaps could have avoided the fate Arnold leads her towards, if she had only waited him out. He promises her and she believes him when he tells her, "I ain't coming in that house after you," to which she replies, "You better not: I'm going to call the police if you—if you don't—" (48). Connie may be merely confused or has possibly been cut off from finishing her conditional clause, but the words themselves do not help resolve this matter. Even more disturbing is that she subsequently picks up the telephone, the one act, Arnold claims, that will void his promise about not coming into the house. But here too whether he actually does what he says is impossible to tell: "She was sitting on the floor with her wet back against the wall," while Arnold "was saying from the door, 'That's a good girl'" (52). Barbecues last only so long, and parents eventually do return home. The bleaker reading, of course, is that Connie wishes it "all over": longs for death and aches for its commission.

But a reading with that degree of certainty is finally at odds with Cold War hermeneutics. Connie's second encounter with Arnold has stripped away whatever "objective" existence he may have had for her. When he turns into her driveway, he is immediately less palpable than he was at the drive-in. Even though she recognizes "most things about him," she does not recognize all (45). And the longer he stays, the less she recognizes. When he talks about sex explicitly, for example, he terrifies her because his language is not "sweet [and] gentle" (39), the way she knows "it" from movies and songs—the way it is supposed to be for Connie. Or when he refers to dead neighbors, ticks off the names of Connie's friends, and secretly peers miles down the road to report on the goings-on at the barbecue, he seems not of this world, but something like an alien invader. In other ways he becomes equally unrecognizable. He wears a wig, Connie thinks, and slathers his face with makeup. Eventually she notices that he cannot even stand in his boots without wobbling—why? She sees, but cannot explain what she sees, which is as it should be according to Cold War hermeneutics. Moreover, Arnold refuses to help. In every way possible, he suspends the laws of cause and effect as Connie knows these laws. For us, the longer Arnold stays the clearer it becomes that the nimbleness, defiance, and teenage vitality that have made Connie, Connie, peel away—as personality, sentience, perhaps even cognition itself evaporate. And by the end she is left with nothing, a creature who cannot answer the question of where she is going. If Connie, therefore, has an undisclosed motive in picking up the phone that "brings" Arnold into the house, then that motive holds out hope that sense is yet to be made of Connie or that she still functions in an explicable, ordered world. But if Cold War hermeneutics means anything, it may be better not to trust to that hope or that possibility.

4

As events escalate beyond her control and the narrative hastens to its filmy end, Connie clings to survival. For the first time, she turns to the interior of her house—to the kitchen. With other family members gone, the kitchen is just an empty room, without warmth or invitation—for Connie, “like a place she had never seen before.” She tries to “huddle,” but no one is left to huddle with. Then, as if she were herself a mid-century housewife, she becomes critical of what she sees, yet we know that she can do nothing to alter what she can only see: “the kitchen window had never had a curtain . . . there were dishes in the sink for her to do . . . if you ran your hand across the table you’d probably find something sticky there” (48). But even as Arnold hovers nearby, he is not entirely to blame for what unfolds. Connie has reacted in this way once before, in the world before Arnold’s second coming. When she “opened her eyes” on the lounge chair, “she hardly knew where she was The asbestos ‘ranch house’ that was now three years old startled her” (39). In her unraveling, neither home nor house nor hearth can protect Connie. Out of desperation, she threatens Arnold with the return of her father. He in turn doesn’t flinch or wobble. When he doesn’t, the kitchen practically unmoors itself from the foundation of the house—or might as well in the eyes of the dazed and unmoored Connie: “her eyes darted everywhere in the kitchen. She could not remember what it was, this room” (50).

Whether Arnold subsequently assaults and rapes her in fantasy or fact is impossible to tell because the story reverts once more to “as if”: “she felt her breath start jerking back and forth in her lungs *as if* it were something Arnold Friend was stabbing her with again and again with no tenderness” (my emphasis; 52). What does matter is the impact of this experience upon Connie. She stands before him “hollow with what had been fear but what was now just an emptiness” (52). At what point was her hollowness merely fear? Five minutes or five years ago? The story does not say. Nor, under Cold War hermeneutics, is she or are we to know. The important bit is that she is finally and completely hollowed out—we can see that—alienated from both self and certainty: “that it was nothing that was hers, that belonged to her, but just a pounding, living thing inside this body that wasn’t really hers either”—thus finally and completely the ideal citizen of a mass Cold War society (53).

The fatality of experience in Cold War America brings closure to the story of Connie, but it is a closure that offers neither resolution nor certainty. We cannot begin to explain why Connie must suffer as she

does or to fit her punishment to a crime that eludes us. All we can do is watch and wonder whether our forms of surveillance have been adequate. But as we watch in sorrow we remain helpless, watching Connie as she watches herself walk out her kitchen door to Arnold. She goes and stays behind—perhaps like Dr. David Hutter, as “two people again,” or perhaps like a “shadowy vision” that awaits the only certainty Arnold has prophesied and the story delivers: that Connie’s family can never return.

If, as Oates indicated in accepting the National Book Award, “the use of language is all we have to pit against death and silence,” it may also be true of Cold War America that there were at least those moments when it seemed that the pen could only record the damage of the sword, not undo it. As a narrative, “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” is an often bleak and sobering tale about the power of “death and silence” and the powers that inform these twin horrors. But as a “use of language,” this somber tale becomes a vehicle through which Oates speaks with unmistakable clarity and unequivocal certainty: that the problem of containment is best solved, not by more containment, but no containment.

NOTES

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1. Joyce Carol Oates, “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” in *The Wheel of Love and Other Stories by Joyce Carol Oates* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1970), 54. All subsequent citations are to this edition and will appear parenthetically.

2. R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 196. More recent, though in some ways more narrowly conceived, is Thomas Hill Schaub’s *American Fiction in the Cold War*, in the series *History of American Thought and Culture*, ed. Paul S. Boyer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991). Schaub has little to say directly about the Cold War but measures its effect through the endurance of “the new liberalism[, which] tended to attribute to the ‘old’ qualities and aspirations—moral crusading, tyrannical idealism, absolutism, sentimentality, naive rationalism—that few would espouse at any time” (14). Through a detailed examination of the conflicting demands of intellectual schools and artistic practices—roughly, social history and aesthetics—Schaub in closing determines that early examples of metafiction or postmodern narrative, which mark an apparent departure in the “contained” narrative, cannot be divorced “from the politics of paralysis in the postwar period” (190). In his *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*, in *New Americanists Series*, ed. Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), Alan Nadel opens up the dialogue about the Cold War in every conceivable way; in fact, essential to his thesis is that postmodernism blows the lid off of “containment.”

3. Nadel, *Containment Culture*, 4.

4. For Nadel and Schaub, see note 2; Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); and Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Post-war America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). Although Fenster refers to a number of literary texts, he is primarily interested in the subcultures of paranoia and conspiracy: that is, his is a work of cultural exploration and history; the foundational premise of his analysis disputes the meanings attached to legitimate dissent and populism, as Richard Hofstadter and others advanced these concepts. Melley examines a number of nonliterary texts in order to inform his reading of literary texts. Underlying his examination is his notion of “agency panic,” which he defines as an “intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy, the conviction that one’s actions are being controlled by someone else or that one has been ‘constructed’ by powerful, external agents” (vii).

5. Oates, “I Was in Love,” in *The Wheel of Love*, 388.

6. Walter Sullivan (“The Artificial Demon: Joyce Carol Oates and the Dimensions of the Real,” *Hollins Critic* 9 [1972]: 1–12) inventories the violence in *The Wheel of Love*; he remarks that “a cursory count reveals ten cases of insanity or neurotic disability, three suicides, two attempted suicides, two murders, one death following criminal assault, and three violent ends which do not fit any of the above categories” (2).

7. Oates, “The Wheel of Love,” in *The Wheel of Love*; all subsequent citations are to this edition and will appear parenthetically.

8. Cited in Sister Mary Kathryn Grant, *The Tragic Vision of Joyce Carol Oates* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978), 164.

9. Nadel, *Containment Culture*, 117.

10. Nadel, *Containment Culture*, 117–26.

11. Respectively, Marilyn C. Wesley, *Refusal and Transgression in Joyce Carol Oates’ Fiction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 145; and Christina Marsden Gillis, “‘Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?’ Seduction, Space, and a Fictional Mode,” *Studies in Short Fiction* 18 (1981): 65.

12. Brenda Daly, “Sexual Politics in Two Collections of Joyce Carol Oates’s Short Fiction,” *Studies in Short Fiction* 32 (1995): 85.

13. Arnold bears comparison with Foucault’s “delinquent.” The latter remarks: “prison fabricated delinquents. . . . But it also fabricates them in the sense that it has introduced into the operation of the law and the offence, the judge and the offender, the condemned man and the executioner, the non-corporal entity of the delinquency that links them together. . . .”; see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 255. It is evident that, among other things, the Cold War depended upon a disciplinary regime that restricted how citizens apprehended and construed threats to American democracy.

14. For fiend/devil, see: Marie Mitchell Oleson Urbanski, “Existential Allegory: Joyce Carol Oates’s ‘Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?’” *Studies in Short Fiction* 15 (1978): 202 and Joan D. Winslow, “The Stranger Within: Two Stories by Oates and Hawthorne,” *Studies in Short Fiction* 17 (1980): 266–67; for Satan, see: Joyce M. Wegs, “‘Don’t You Know Who I Am?’ The Grotesque in Oates’s ‘Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?’” *Journal of Narrative Technique* 5 (1975), reprinted in *Critical Essays on Joyce Carol Oates*, ed. Linda W. Wagner (Boston: Hall, 1979), 91–92; for satyr, see: Joan Easterly, “The Shadow of a Satyr in Oates’s ‘Where

Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" *Studies in Short Fiction* 27 (1990): 537–42; for Bob Dylan, see: Mike Tierce and John Michael Crafton, "Connie's Tambourine Man: A New Reading of Arnold Friend," *Studies in Short Fiction* 22 (1985): 219–24; and for the Arizona murderer (Charles Schmid), see: Tom Quirk, "A Source for 'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 18 (1981): 413–19.

15. For these various interpretations, see: David J. Piwinski, "Oates's 'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?'" *Short Story Explicator* 49 (1991): 195–96; C. Harold Hurley, "Cracking the Secret Code in Oates's 'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 24 (1987): 62–66; and Mark Robson, "Oates's 'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?'" *Short Story Explicator* 40 (1982): 59–60. These works, which include biblical and sexual decodings, demonstrate the futility of certainty in Oates's story. Hurley, e.g., rejects Arnold's 33, 19, 17 as a biblical encoding, as he should, but then adds the numbers, which amount to 69, and concludes that Arnold is a sexual deviant who will rape and murder Connie in the unwritten postscript to the story. Hurley knows this to be true because Oates based her story on a real-life murderer (see Quirk, note 14).

16. Alice Hall Petry, "Who is Ellie? Oates' 'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 25 (1988): 155–57.

17. Melley (note 4), in referring to an Atwood novel, observes that "the stalker figure offers one way out of the dilemma I have been tracing through postwar culture: how to conserve a sense of individual agency, identity, and volition, while still accounting for the way institutions, discourses, and practices shape individual experience" (110). If we conceive of Arnold as a stalker, then this pathological condition could go a long way in explaining why this secretive character knows as much as he does, but only within the framework of a logical/rational universe. But as I read Oates's story, cause and effect explain very little. Nor do I see how being "stalked" does anything for Connie's identity other than render her paranoid.