

**Prompt:** Both stories this week have clearly defined protagonists and antagonists (see pg. 15 and glossary definitions in the back of our text). Superficially, protagonists and antagonists are always opposed, always adversarial, like Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf. But in these two stories, it is probably inadequate to say that the antagonists are simple adversaries.

For this discussion assignment, please choose ONE of the two stories. Then, in at least one full paragraph, see if you can point out how the story's antagonist is both strange and familiar, both adversarial and allied. How does this complexity expand the role of the antagonist in the story?

### **The Roles of Protagonist and Antagonist in "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been"**

In Joyce Carol Oates's short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" the character Arnold Friend is very clearly defined as the antagonist. His actions toward the main character Connie are domineering, putting her in a state of vulnerability and danger that is frighteningly unfamiliar to the teenage girl. While she is at home alone, Arnold Friend coerces Connie to leave with him by subjecting her to his extraordinarily powerful will, being all the more effective in the task because he embodies every quality which encompasses the girl's infatuation with boys: tough looks, cool talk, driving a fancy set of wheels. Even from his initial appearance, where he wags his finger at Connie in the parking lot of the drive-in restaurant and says "Gonna get you, baby" (382), Arnold Friend is immediately established as Connie's predator.

While there can be no mistaking that Arnold Friend is the "bad guy" in this story, his character is importantly augmented by Connie. Connie is in all ways portrayed as a stereotypical teenage girl, with her decisions reflecting careless and impulsive immaturity: "Everything about her had two sides to it, one for home and one for anywhere that was not home: her walk that 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 smirking most of the time, but bright and pink on these evenings out, her laugh which was cynical and drawling at home—'Ha, ha, very funny'—but high-pitched and nervous anywhere else, like the jingling of the charms on her bracelet" (381). It might seem natural to view Connie as the protagonist, but closer readings reveal that her role as the victim of Arnold Friend is the only thing that lends this attribution. Never in the story does Connie make any positive or careful decisions, nor does she do any good for herself or for anyone else. The only way in which Connie can be perceived as the "good guy" is when her actions are compared to those of the menacing Arnold Friend, whom is consistently but subtly described as being the devil himself: "he had shaggy, shabby black hair that looked crazy as a wig and he was grinning at her" (384).

Regarding the roles of protagonist and antagonist in this story, a claim could be made that Connie—despite being the main character—is actually a second antagonist, or a second "bad guy". Arnold Friend is so clearly evil that it makes Connie's unconscious contributions to her predicament almost invisible. Never does the author Oates provide the reader with a side of Connie that suggests she is capable of avoiding the peril she has found. Arnold Friend is no less terrible because of this, but it confirms that he and Connie are similar in an important way: they are both responsible for the events that unfolded.

**Re: The Roles of Protagonist and Antagonist in "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been" (by Natalie Gordon)**

*First paragraph: I think you summed up the story very well. You hit all the key points right off the bat. You mention vulnerability and danger as frighteningly unfamiliar to a teenage girl, and I am in total agreement with your opinion. The average teenage girl would not know what to do if they were put in Connie's situation. Even though Eddie is mentioned first as the first boy to come in contact with Connie, you say that Arnold's actions immediately establish him as her predator.*

*Second paragraph: You mention that although Connie is a typical teenage girl, she is her own worst enemy. I wrote about that as well. If it weren't for Arnold, she would be both the protagonist and antagonist. You clearly identified that in your response and I am surprised, you being a man that you were able to see this so vividly. It's almost like she is setting herself up to be a victim with her behavior at the drive in. She's asking for attention. I agree with your view about she doesn't make any positive decisions for herself or anyone else. But, she did think about her family when he was threatening to off them if she didn't do what he said. And, showed concern for her neighbor when he mentions she was dead. So, she wasn't all that horrible of a person.*

*Third paragraph: Well said. The only thing I don't agree with you on is that Arnold is a bad man, no matter what Connie did, he would have singled out a girl like her and would have went after her the same way in which he did. Makes you wonder if she was the first victim or if there were others. What were his intentions, to just threaten her and have a good time or to rape her, kill her? He knew what he was doing and made sure that she was trapped, even went as far as to bring along a friend, just in case he was needed. Since most girls like Connie are at the age of being at a crossroads with their sexuality, they truly think nothing bad could ever happen to them. They want to look attractive to men and don't realize the vibes they put out to bad men. Does that mean that they are asking for it? I don't believe so. Did she deserve it? No, she didn't. In this case I disagree with your last sentence, "they are both responsible for the events that unfolded." I think he took advantage of her and preyed upon her. He is more to blame than anyone. She might not be totally innocent, but certainly wasn't equally to blame.*

**Re: The Roles of Protagonist and Antagonist in "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been"**

*I agree with your view about she doesn't make any positive decisions for herself or anyone else. But, she did think about her family when he was threatening to off them if she didn't do what he said. And, showed concern for her neighbor when he mentions she was dead. So, she wasn't all that horrible of a person.*

You're right that she wasn't a horrible person. She was just carefree (and careless) and didn't have any scruples. Sort of like a teenager on auto-pilot all the time.

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Again, you're absolutely right. Compared to the amount of blame due to Arnold Friend she has almost none (which was what I was trying to get at with the word "invisible" in one of my sentences). I guess I should have said that Arnold is 95% to blame for being the devil and Connie 5% to blame for being a stupid teenager.

Thank you for the thoughtful reply.

## **Re: A good man is hard to find (by Ricardo Caballero)**

*Indeed later the Misfit approaches the family with respect and apparently with an intent to aid them in their predicament.*

Hmmm... I'm not so sure about this. They were all toting guns when they got out of the car. At the very least they were going to detain them, but I'm not so sure. They would have had many other things on their minds and helping strangers out of a bind was probably not one of them.

*It is not understandable however why one would have to kill people to get away, or why one would stop when it is entirely too likely that they will recognize him, unless it was to get their stuff no matter what. I suppose it is logical to assume they would have been robbed even if they hadn't recognized them. So perhaps the antagonist really is just a bad unethical man.*

Here's a subtle little detail I just remembered: the Grandmother was talking about how the Misfit was down in Florida, but they discovered him in Georgia. He could not have let the family go because he was on the run *and* had people fooled to think he was somewhere he wasn't (which means things were working out pretty well so far). Even if the silly Grandmother didn't identify him and they were allowed to leave then the family would have eventually commented to somebody that they found three strange looking fellows with guns in the hills of Georgia (or even without guns, it still would have made an interesting story). Another possibility is that they would have seen pictures of the escaped convicts in the newspaper and, being worry-free, would have reported these guys to the authorities. It wouldn't take very long for people to start putting things together.

Anyway, that's a bit of an aside. The way I read the story I'm convinced that they were dead as dirt as soon as they rolled that car.

*These considerations, and the amount of detail that is given to this mans logic make this antagonist endearing and alienating all at once, because while we understand that he has perhaps had injustice meted out on him, he is meting it out just the same to others, nullifying any overall sympathy for the character. Overall, the antagonists role seems to be expanded and made somewhat ambiguous even at some points. But really in the end, the complex development in such a short time makes the story and antagonist poignant enough to become the focus in the end, not the protagonists.*

I think that the only glimmer of good behavior we got in the entire story came from the Misfit in his conversation with the Grandmother. He already knew he was going to have to kill the people who had an accident near his hideout; authorities and service trucks would have had to go out there to clean up after the mess, ask questions, etc. It was a bad twist of fate for the family, and the Misfit character was (in a very strange way) consoling the Grandmother for what had to happen. Gunshots in the woods only confirmed what was about to happen to her and, in a final act of desperation, ended up crossing the line with him by calling him her son. Then it was BANG! BANG! BANG!: he had had enough.

On a sidenote: everybody in the family behaved obnoxiously (except for maybe the Father and the Mother), but not a single one of them did anything "good" the entire story. I would argue that the only form of kindness that ever appears comes from the escaped convict.

**Re: "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (by Roxann Piche)**

*At the beginning of the story, Friend seemed harmless and playful at the hamburger joint, when he told Connie "Gonna get you, baby" (453).*

I didn't get the impression that he was harmless and playful at the beginning. It seemed like it was a strange and scary thing to have happen, especially to a younger person. Connie didn't really seem to react to it, but I know that for me it stood out almost as a bad omen for where the story would go next.

*The antagonist tried to be nice to Connie, and it worked until she was hesitant to leave with a stranger. However, Arnold Friend was able to get to Connie through fear.*

Good point. He definitely overpowered her. The amazing thing is that he didn't need to do anything except talk to her. No physical force was used at all. There were even hints that he was incapable of physical force: "...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 boots must have been stuffed with something so that he would seem taller" (398).

*Connie was no longer the self-absorbed teenager; she was a scared young woman. Arnold Friend becomes a vital character in the story because he has changed Connie from a girl to a woman in a violent manner.*

I completely agree with these observations of yours. Whether Arnold Friend is real or not is really irrelevant. He represents a man and experience that Connie was almost certainly going to encounter at some point in her youth.