

Many directors have tried to do the impossible and change a well-known novel or story into a movie. Whether it's *Lord of the Rings*, *Twilight*, or *The Chronicles of Narnia*, most people will agree that the book was much better than the film. Some will also say that the director changed or took out key parts of the book when the movie was made. Has Joyce Chopra done the same with Joyce Carol Oates's short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" In her film *Smooth Talk*, Chopra adds a few scenes with Connie, the main character; the short story, however, only summarizes her lifestyle in a few sentences. However, these aren't the only changes. The most significant differences are Chopra's changing the ending and her changing the mother's attitude toward Connie. Even with these changes, however, the character of Connie and her creepy stalker Arnold Friend remain the same.

Though the ending of Oates's short story is ambiguous, it suggests a sad conclusion, but Chopra has changed it to make it seem that there is hope for Connie's future. Most people might be upset to see something they have worked so hard on changed by someone else, but Oates's opinion is quite the opposite. In her film review, Oates states that she "would fiercely defend the placement of a semicolon in one of" (6) her novels, but that she probably would have let Chopra have her way with the end. Instead of ending with Connie's simply walking out of the house toward Arnold Friend, the film ends with reconciliation between Connie and her family. She and her mother, who constantly fight in the short story and film, are finally happy to be together; her sister, June, is able to sit down with her and have a loving talk about what has happened. Most likely this change is due to what Oates states at the end of her review: the final scene in the short story is "a conclusion impossible to transfigure into film" (6).

Although one can understand the changes made to the end of the short story, the mother's attitude toward Connie is a key element in the short story that, if changed, can undermine the plot of the story. In Oates's short story, the mother seems not to care about Connie because she is jealous of Connie's good looks. In the film, there is a sense that though Connie's mother does care, Connie continually pushes her away. This difference is part of what makes the film differ from the short story. Even Oates says in the film review that *Smooth Talk* is about Connie and her mother instead of just about Connie. She also declares in parentheses that Connie's mother doesn't have the same jealousy as she does in the short story (5). Another key change from short story to film is the conversation about the Pettinger girl. In the short story, Connie simply says, "Oh, her. That dope" (Oates 1226) and moves along. After this, the reader learns that Connie's mother is very simple and asks few questions (Oates 1226). However, in the film, this scene involves the mother continually interrogating Connie until Connie lashes back and is met with a sharp strike on the cheek from her mother. Perhaps, Chopra changes this aspect of the mother's character so her ending the film with reconciliation would make more sense.

Even with these changes, the characters of Connie and Arnold Friend remain the same. Connie's carefree and careless attitude in the short story is clear throughout the film until the final scene which is the reconciliation scene. Most of the fun times that she has are summarized quickly in the sixth paragraph of Oates's short story. Chopra actually shows these scenes in the film and makes them more significant. Most of Connie's dialogue with Arnold Friend in *Smooth Talk* is straight from the short story. These aspects Chopra has not changed, but she has changed a few small parts. For instance, Oates's short story doesn't reveal how Arnold learns so much about Connie, but Chopra's film adds a scene in which one of Connie's friends describes a man who was asking questions about Connie. Although Connie's character differs slightly in the film,

Arnold's character remains the same in the film. Oates and Chopra both portray Arnold as a creepy man who is trying to seduce younger girls. His ultimatum is unclear, but he uses the same words and same tone in the short story and in the film to capture Connie's heart and lead her to his arms.

Both the film and the short story are excellent works of art and together present the same theme, but when compared to each other, it's clear that Chopra has changed two of the key elements. This change, in turn, changes the way the characters behave near the end of the film. Is it even possible to recreate this short story, or any story, with a film without changing key elements? The theme presented by both is the same, but how they are presented is different. Oates's short story ends with no ultimate conclusion, but she still uses Arnold Friend as a representation of the culture Connie lives in. This culture ends up being her own demise as it lures her away from her house and into the unknown. Chopra's film ends with Connie's rejecting her culture because of the trouble she finds herself in when Arnold Friend shows up. The title of the short story is the question that Connie could be asking herself as she is walking out to Arnold's car: "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"