

## Inspiration Clones literature: Tracing the imprints of Bob Dylan's Song on Joyce Carol Oates's Story

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### Abstract

*Drawn by the dedication of Joyce Carol Oates's story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" to Bob Dylan and motivated by her later admission regarding the inspiration of Dylan's song "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" to write the story, the study examines how the song has transmitted its imprints on the story. Inspiration is the theoretical framework for the study, which has been diversely explained by various theorists incorporating its elusive nature. However, they have a common understanding of its role as a necessary condition for creativity. This inquiry synthesizes the literature associated with the song and the story, analyzes the theories related to creative inspiration, and scrutinizes the reiteration of evidence from the seminal song in the story. The reiteration of context, character, and imagery of the song in the story infers the whole story as literary cloning of the song. Ultimately, the study contributes to understanding how a form of art facilitates the audience not only offering joy but also inspiring them for their further creative process and how the seminal work reappears as metamorphosis.*

**Keywords:** inspiration, creativity, creative inspiration, literary cloning, metamorphosis

### Introduction

The first thing I noticed while reading the widely anthologized short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (hereinafter referred to as "Where") was the words for dedication. The author, Joyce Carol Oates had dedicated the story to contemporary balladeer Bob Dylan. Today, Dylan is a Nobel laureate in literature. However, in the 1960s, pop culture was considered as a counter-culture, and there was a debate about the positioning of pop music in mainstream literature (Lloyd, 2014, p.58). In such a situation, the author of mainstream literature, Oates not only accepted the music as literature but also acknowledged it by dedicating her story to pop singer Dylan. When she was asked later about the reason, she admitted that she was inspired by the evocative song of Dylan "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" (hereinafter, "Baby Blue") to write the story.

Although much academic analysis has done on this story focusing the existential allegory, Biblical references, sexuality, seduction, pure realism, impure realism, feminism, etc. to reveal the embedded potential meanings of the story, there lacks a comparative study, which could justify that the song "Baby Blue" has inspired the Oates's creativity by exposing the structural and thematic evidence. She had admitted only the reason behind the dedication whereas this paper focuses on the comparative reading of both texts, which probes the detailed inspirational imprints of the song on the story. Creating the inevitable ground for inspiration in creativity, Metcalfe (1999) asserts that no writing is possible without convertible vibes experienced by writers as inspiration, communions, muse, ghosts, rupture, ecstasy, etc. (p. 217). Here, Oates has experienced such vibes listening to the music and reiterated converting into a story.

To examine the creative inspiration, the study mainly assesses how Connie appears as the reincarnation of Baby Blue and Dylan and the vagabond come again as Arnold with some behavioral changes including several contextual, artistic, and aesthetic uniformities. In this qualitative study, I have accomplished the objective by analyzing the published academic

literature about the song and the story, applying the theories related to inspiration, and examining the textual evidence from the song and the story. The study helps to understand how art motivates the audience in their creative process and how it reappears as a metamorphosis.

### **Understanding Inspiration**

As the study aims to seek the inspirational imprint of “Baby Blue” in “Where”, it demands a clear picture of inspiration first. Therefore, I have synthesized the concepts related to the basic understanding of inspiration, some research studies on it, and its relation to the creative process, which would be the theoretical insights for my study. The common understanding of inspiration as an elusive subject and the culture of repelling it as a purely supernatural or divine subject have enlarged a kind of disinterestedness among researchers for the desirable numbers of studies in the field of inspiration.

Most of us have experience with inspiration, which is generally understood as the act of motivation upon the creativeness, vision, intelligence, and feeling. Similarly, Vassilion (1951) points out the function of inspiration as to explain, “How a particular individual is motivated to create in an artistic medium and why his product is what it is” (p. 468). In this sense, the whole existence of the art in a particular form and the manner of motivation is affected by the inspiration. Explaining a muse as a metaphor for inspiration to leave subliminal influence in artistic creation Jeffrey says, “creativity is an inspiration, which has historically been referred to as the ‘muse’ whose influence is often primary subliminal” (p. I). Thus, the muse works as a flash in creative inspiration.

Gotz (1998) values the preexisting knowledge of the inspired person in the creative process saying, “inspiration may be a necessary condition of true art, but it alone is not sufficient” (p. 512). He has emphasized how preexisting knowledge and influencing ideas of the seminal work jointly work in the creative process. In everyday life, that inspiration happens suddenly when it gets natural context that “authentic inspiration experiences usually are not the result of a deliberate effort” (Thrash et al., 2014, p. 506) for a better understanding of any art, the motivational and inspirational dimensions could never be excluded. It clears that inspiration is unintentional and unplanned as Rothenberg defines it as “an intrinsically dramatic experience” (173). It is dramatic in the sense that there is a breakthrough in the deep consciousness rather than day-to-day, surface understanding.

There is an inspiration when one encounters enthusiasm and realizes the whisper of the mentor as psychologists Thrash and Elliot reckon that one can be inspired when “a mentor or role model reveals new possibilities that we would not have recognized on our own” (871). Such inspiration taps on one’s mind and heart. It guides us to the important goal rather than scheduled activities that exist in everyone’s mind all the time and the heights of human motivation, which leaps with the attractiveness and honesty, which lead us and rouse us to superior potentialities (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, p. 887). These possibilities might already exist there but that was never realized or seen before. They open new avenues with excitement and a sense of necessity collaborating with the existing information and knowledge. The inspiration alone is not sufficient in the creative process.

From the ideas of some philosophers, theorists, and researchers in the relationship between inspiration and creativity, it could be inferred that there would be no creation without any form of inspiration: the inspiration performs as a necessary condition; not a sufficient

condition for creativity. It works as a springboard for the creative process. On this basis, there might be the contribution of Dylan's "Baby Blue" on Oates's "Where". However, it demands discussion of the textual evidence from both texts together to indicate how inspiration clones literature.

### **Discussing the Traces of the Song on the Story**

Music has a broader significance in the story. The protagonist Connie and antagonist Arnold both are great listeners. The protagonist, Connie, considers music as her deep belief and takes ownership of its morals as "music is Connie's religion; its values are hers also" (Wegs, 1975, p. 68). The musical program of 'Bobby King' is being listened to by Connie and Arnold when they meet at Connie's house. Listening to music serves as a single unifying force for them. As a teenager growing up in small-town Minnesota, Lloyd (2014) finds Dylan spending a grand agreement of time listening to the radio (p. 61) which is regularly heard by Connie and Arnold. If it is not a coincidence, certainly it is the influence of Bob Dylan to name the DJ in the story; 'Bobby King' that Dylan has multiple masks or poetic identities as a prophet, and trickster, a man of sorrow to the audience (Lebold, 2007, p. 57). His music signifies mainly youthfulness and pop culture. His clothing and hairstyle are burrowed by Oates and passed on to Arnold. That the dedication of the story to recent balladeer Dylan, "this story in a sense represents Oates' updated prose version of a ballad in which a demon lover carries away his helpless victim" (Wegs, 1975, p. 71). Conversely, Arnold is also serving as Dylan to outline the growth of Connie with consciousness about the ills of the world and to stimulate spirituality introducing her to her soul.

The story "Where" was originally entitled "Death and the Maiden" using pretentious German myth related to the renaissance (Widmayer, 2004, p. 1), nevertheless, after listening to the song "Baby Blue" by Dylan, she changed that into this. In comparison to the first harsh and challenging, the existing title is soft in tone and rich in music. Thus, the influence of the song could be realized from the very beginning. The title is also serving as a refrain that comes in the climax of the story with a simple modification. There, though Connie has brown eyes Arnold addresses her saying "my sweet little blue-eyed girl" (Oates, 2005, p. 388) which is identical to the title of the song. In the story, Arnold uses 'honey' dozens of time to address Connie and the word 'baby' is also used to address each other by them but the sudden shift to 'my sweet little blue-eyed girl' at last is just because of the influence of listening to the music which works from the very title of the story.

Here the inspiration is working to make the overall characters musical and solve the significant problem regarding the selection of the title as Metcalfe (1999) shares his experience that inspiration helps him to settle few things from countless things that could be written first (p. 234). The song starts with "You must leave now" (Dylan, 1965, track 11). This obligatory line suggests the necessity and the importance of leaving for Baby Blue as Arnold threatens and lures Connie to leave her house as soon as possible exclaiming "the hell with this house" (Oates, 2005, p. 387)! Both song and story talk about leaving the existing position but the destination is not unspecified either as the lines of the song go:

You must leave now, take what you need, you think will last.  
But whatever you wish to keep, you better grab it fast.  
Yonder stands your orphan with his gun.  
Crying like a fire in the sun.

Look out the saints are comin' through  
 And it's all over now, Baby Blue. (Dylan, 1965, track 11)

As Dylan sings in the third and fourth lines, it comes in the story as a threat to break the door and to set fire if she calls to police by Arnold standing at the door. Gremore (2008) has connected this threatening situation to the imagery of the civil rights movement which is the common setting of the two pieces of literature and claims that “the ‘gun’ can be an instrument by which an orphan becomes an orphan” (p. 104). The orphan may not have any concern about others as no one gives any concern to him. Consequently, it would be dangerous to have a gun with him. Such people might misuse their strength in the form of a vagabond in the song and as Arnold at the door of Connie in the story who does not have any personal details similar to the orphan. In the fifth line, Baby Blue is suggested to come out of the world of illusion to observe or interact with the saint- the spiritual being in the same way in the story, Widmayer (2004) observes Arnold as purely the supernatural figure (p. 2) that he leaves Connie untouched. It is assumed that he asks Connie to come out in the world of maturity from the world of innocence, adolescence, and ignorance only. At last in the story, Connie is shown as a “fully breathing human being, one who has... developed the spiritual life lacking in her former existence” (Sлимп, 1999, p. 181) as perpetually suggested by Dylan in the song.

Kaufman (2011) identifies that “inspiration is best thought of as a surprising interaction between your current knowledge and the information you receive from the world” (Para 8). Correspondingly, Oates already had specific ideas and information related to the issue when there is an encounter of that to the seminal song of Dylan, both contribute to the logical foundation of creativity as a good story.

Ambiguity is another feature that is shared by the song and the story, which could be sensed in the first two lines of the second verse of “Baby Blue”. The intangible vocal technique of Dylan also nurtures the ambiguity; that could be realized and enjoyed through listening than just reading. Dylan (1965) writes and sings:

The highway is for gamblers, better use your sense.  
 Take what you have gathered from coincidence.  
 The empty-handed painter from your streets  
 Is drawing crazy patterns on your sheets.  
 This sky, too, is folding under you  
 And it's all over now, Baby Blue. (Track 11)

As suggested by Christopher Ricks in the oral free verse that the pronunciation of ‘better use your sense’ could be heard as ‘better use your cents’ and ‘gathered from coincidence’ coherently sounds similar to ‘cent’ of the of earlier use (cited in Lebold, 2007, p. 62). The meaning of the initial four alphabets of ‘coincidence’ also strengthens the logic related to plural meanings. After being influenced by such listening, Oates creates ambiguous characters like Connie and her mother. About her double standards of Connie at the house and outside the home the narrator of the story notices that “she wore a pull-over jersey blouse that looked one way when she was at home and another way when she was away from home” (Oates, 2005, p. 374). Mother theoretically preaches her daughter all the time to be moral and practical in life. However, she acts differently as she talks to her sisters on a telephone. The mother has multiple faces that “over the telephone to one sister about the other, then the other called up

and the two of them complained about the third one” (Oates, 2005, p. 376). There lies the irony that could be similar in the case of that orphan who stills holds a gun without realizing the cause of his tragedy. Empty-handed painter, drawing crazy pattern, and using a better sense for gambling from the song are the signs of uncertainty, insecurity pessimism, and helplessness which have a strong influence in Oates writing to establish the character agnate to Connie who is inefficient to take quick decision using own discretion like calling the police or doing defense and without being the slave of coincidence corresponding to gamblers.

The imageries of the crazy pattern drawn by the empty-handed painter and the folding of the sky under her from the fourth and fifth lines of the second verse talk about the meaninglessness of today and the urgency to decide for newness leaving present. These are presented as the reasons for taking immediate decisions forgetting the present. In the story, also Connie is indulging in the present. The sky is folding under Baby Blue but “Connie felt the linoleum under her feet; it was cool” (Oates, 2005, p. 388). The eternal presence of Connie is shown as a primary cause of the whole tragedy that she has to tolerate.

Connie has no sense related to her past and future, which locks her in the present only. So she could not comprehend the message given by the title of the story as “urgent warning, a signal to look beyond the space of ‘now’ or else be forced, perhaps by very violent means as in Connie’s case” (Theriot, 2007, p. 2). The depression and the horrification of Baby Blue and Connie including the contextual post-war or the Cold War tension, torture, and trauma are also commonly captured by the song and the story. Death is not only hovering upon Baby Blue and Connie but upon everyone. While interpreting the perpetual wrong, which happens in Connie’s life using Cold War hermeneutic, Cruise (2005), says, “Once the mushroom clouds began to ascend 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” (p. 96). So there resembles tension in song and in the story which is dependent on the single press of a hot button of the nuclear war. Both Baby blue and Connie seem to be in adolescence and Gratz (1989) ascertains that “adolescence can be a traumatic and frightening time, and most of us at one time panicked at the thought of growing up” (p. 56). Equally, the nonsense drawing of the “crazy pattern” of the song influences Arnold’s behavior on one hand, and on the other, he observes the madness in Connie then shouts “Shut up! You’re crazy” (Oates, 2005, p. 383)!

The writing of Oates becomes significant in the sense that the inspired writer could identify the possibilities concretely and jump to implement them directly and rapidly (Thrash et al., 2014, p. 501). The horizon of Oates related to the issue assumes to be extended by the inspiration of that music and able to sharpen the thought in the form of a story effectively.

The fourth verse is all about the frustration and helplessness of Baby Blue. There is also the reflection of the social context that the listeners of the song have to detect how the literature is created and received with the contemporary sensation that guides the self and society to grasp the meaning of the song (Gremore, 1980, p. 107) since Dylan (1965) writes it as follows:

All your seasick sailors, they are rowing home.  
All your reindeer armies are all going home.  
The lover who just walked out your door  
Has taken all his blankets from the floor.

The carpet, too, is moving under you  
And it's all over now, Baby Blue. (Track 11)

Connie also faces the parallel to the above-mentioned lines, the condition of disability and vulnerability that she could neither call police nor cry for help. Arnold claims himself just as the lover of Connie saying, "I'm your lover, honey" (Oates, 2005, p. 383) repeatedly and moves around the door but paradoxically threatens her. Arnold leaves no ground for Connie to exist there in her own house since suggested in the ultimate three lines of the third stanza. Oates (2005) monitors, "She was sitting on the floor with her wet back against the wall" (p. 387). Arnold goes on instructing her to put the phone back. She kicks it away from her. Again using seductive language, he orders her to put the phone back right. She follows the command as a poppet. She becomes empty. Earlier, Oates (2005) observes, "She was hollow with what had been fear but what was now just an emptiness" (p. 387). The moving carpet from the song suggests the unhappy relation of Connie to her mother, uncertainty of life, and a mysterious encounter with Arnold.

The very nature of creative inspiration is applicable in the case that the story is neither resembling the unconscious plagiarism nor supposing the thematically divorced from the shaping idea. In this context of writing, Thrash et al. (2014) deem inspiration as an arbitrator performing between the ongoing creativity and the creativity of the seminal work (p. 501). The middle path is being the highway of creativity.

The most strikingly connected lines to the story are in the completely last verse. The verse mainly covers the lateral section of the story, which starts from the active entry of Arnold when Connie is alone at home. As Dylan (1965) sings the final verse:

Leave your stepping stones behind, something calls for you.  
Forget the dead you've left, they will not follow you.  
The vagabond who's rapping at your door  
Is standing in the clothes that you once wore.  
Strike another match, go start anew  
And it's all over now, Baby Blue. (Track 11)

Leaving stepping stones as leaving once highway behind and going somewhere playing the risky game is always challenging. Gremore (1980) rightly points out that Dylan asks Baby Blue to forget the dead socio-cultural baggage and participate in the new social revolt (p. 106). It suggests forgetting the timeless present for Connie that she has "inability to learn from the past and plan for the future ultimately condemns her to a violent confrontation with the future" (Theriot, 2007, p. 8). Observing the vulnerable conditions of Baby Blue directly and Connie indirectly, Dylan tries to save both from his lyrical exhortation.

The indeterminate destination and the absenteeism of the honest livelihood are the basic features of a vagabond and when such vagabond is at the door of Baby Blue wearing the clothes of a woman signifies that her condition also is identical to him. In the same token, there is another vagabond named Arnold at the door of Connie. Biologically they are different, but the spirit and the character seem to create the same degree of pathos in the song and story. Arnold is no one but the same vagabond of the "Baby Blue" and insists Connie go for a drive, which has an uncertain destination, and the terrible incident of Connie is nothing but another version of the tragic occurrence, which has already experienced by Baby Blue.

The vagabond is at door. He is at the threshold. He raps at her door. Gremore (1980) believes either in entering or calling someone out rather than staying in threshold (p. 105). Exactly Arnold during the time that a reincarnated form of that vagabond in a different outfit is rapping at the door and reminding his promise with a threat that entering the room is no significant job for him. He can even break the door simply. Arnold exclaims, "Anybody can break through a screen door and glass and wood and iron or anything else if he needs to, anybody at all" (Oates, 2005, p. 384). Different doors resembling threshold and transition for Baby Blue in the song and Connie are complicated to be surpassed because of being in a turmoil situation. So, vagabond and Arnold just stand in the door creating terror as the condition of the Cold War where there is neither peace nor war just the fear, doubt, dilemma, and complexities which is the common context of both song and the story.

The exhortation for striking another match and the call for starting new encourage forgetting to pass and taking risks assuming life as a game. Oates seems inspired by that and transmits the message through Arnold to Connie and she surrenders to Arnold as strategic decision-making. Breaking the silence and dilemma of the presence, she appears to lose something for the time being still she looks to win being matured in the final. The refrain and title of the song, "And it's All Over Now, Baby Blue" (Dylan, 1965, track 11), appears in the story explicitly twice with little modification. It indicates the structural as well as the thematic influence of the song on the story that Arnold lures Connie to come out of her room to him "it's all over for you here, so come on out" (Oates, 2005, p. 386). Again, it appears as "my sweet little blue-eyed girl" (Oates, 2005, p. 388) which Arnold utters in a half-sung sign.

This suggestion of Dylan to Baby Blue to do a systematic review applies to Connie much in comparison to "Baby Blue" that the situation is more concrete. The audiences of Baby Blue are not sure whether the suggestion given to her is implemented or not but if the same audiences are being readers of the story, and they will be happy that the exhortation is followed by Connie leaving the stepping stone however she is not sure where she is going. The question 'where she is going?' could only be answered after being sure whether she lives or not. Cruise (2005) points to the terror of the "cold war could not be measured in what was known but by what was feared" (p. 100). She fears and makes her future uncertain as to the environment of the Cold War.

The general claim that genius is one percent inspiration and 'ninety-nine percent perspiration', which does not give higher priority to inspiration in intellectuality and creativity. It sounds misleading for Metcalfe (1999) and he talks about the very nature of inspiration that it is not "just the intuitive flash, God's discrete gift of knowledge" (p. 230). Rather than considering inspiration as a specific starting point for creativity as a flash, Metcalfe (1999) thinks that it is an "ongoing ethics" (p. 230) that is maintained by Oates in the story while being inspired by the song with fearlessness upholding ethics.

### **Conclusion**

As a prophet and ethos of the young generation, Dylan arouses consciousness related to urgency within Baby Blue in the song. In the same way, in the story, Arnold encourages Connie to experience the problems of life discarding her indulgence to the present. Escaping the earlier psychoanalytical debate about whether Arnold is the reincarnation of Connie's unconscious, this study exposes that there is the reincarnation of a shared context of the Cold War of the 1960s, similar character of Baby Blue in form of Connie, and the identical imagery

of vagabond in form of Arnold as literary cloning. The analysis sanctions that most of the lines from “Baby Blue” are being omnipresent in “Where” and the listening to the song is perceived as ‘muse’ by Oates in creative inspiration.

The listeners of the song are not sure whether Baby Blue fulfills the suggestions given to her by Dylan. However, while going through the story, it would not be difficult for the audience to detect that all these suggestions given to Baby Blue by Dylan are surprisingly executed by Connie in the story: leaving her house even if there is no certainty about her direction, destination, and destiny. Furthermore, it could be inferred through the comparative analysis that the personal and political freedom and activism that are advocated by the song are further extended and transmitted to the story, which is being a tool to free Connie from psychological paralysis.

Here, the creative inspiration has played a supportive role for Oates in the story to interact between her preexisting thoughts and seminal ideas from which she looks inspired to expand her horizon overcoming ‘anxiety of influence’. The study eases to comprehend how art contributes to audiences not only offering joy but also stimulating them for creative inspiration. Moreover, it illuminates how the backgrounds, images, and characters from seminal writing reiterate as metamorphosis.

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