

Opgaveinstruks:

Write an analytical essay (900-1200 words) in which you analyze and interpret Kate Smalley Ellis' short story "Are We Nearly There?"

Part of your essay must focus on the structure of the story. In addition, your essay must include an analysis of the style of writing in lines 86-110.

In your essay you must include references to the short story.

Material: Kate Smalley Ellis, Are We Nearly There?, 2015

Elevbesvarelse:

Analysis of the short story "Are We Nearly There?"

Life is like a car ride with your family. It contains lots of screaming, lots of laughter and a lot of times where the GPS fails, and you have to find your own way to the destination. The short story "Are We Nearly There" from 2015, written by Kate Smalley Ellis, contains a humorous and entertaining tone because of the surprising word choices and everyday language. It deals with the uncertainties that can occur when finding your own path and making the right decisions as a young adult.

The story takes place in a car with Jen, a young girl, behind the wheel. She is the main character and the narrator of the story. The story contains a composition that shifts between the family's dialog in the car and Jen's inner monolog, which contains flashbacks to her night before. The crossing is extremely smooth. In one of her inner dialogues she expresses, "*I felt OK.*"¹ after which her mother instantly follows up with the sentence, "*OK, you know these roads, don't you?*"² This is an example of how smooth the transition between the inner monolog and the outer dialog is. The two dialogues are also sometimes directly linked to one another. For example when Jen compares Simon's genitals to a roundabout. Her mom expresses, "*The roundabout will come up unexpectedly*"³ after which Jen thinks to herself, "*Like Simon's cock*"⁴ In this quote she compares Simon's penis to a roundabout and is implying that things were moving too fast the night before. The structure and comparisons, in this case, create a deeper meaning behind the dialogs and the first person point of view gives a glimpse of the main character's frustrations and feelings. The quotes also illustrate how the story shifts from the car to Jen's thoughts in a very graceful way. However, the atmosphere in the car is anything but graceful.

There is a nauseating and stressed atmosphere in the car, which is partly caused by the cake her mother brought with her in the car. Jen expresses how, "*The car smells of the cake Mum has made for tea, gooey chocolate with the icing that clings to your tongue like peanut butter*"⁵ The texture of the cake is compared to the texture of sticky and viscous peanut butter. This description might not seem very negative or nauseating. However, Jen

¹ p. 5 l. 110

² p. 5 l. 111

³ p. 4 l. 106

⁴ p. 5 l. 107

⁵ p. 4 ll. 93-93

is extremely hung over and the idea of eating a dense cake while suffering from a massive hangover seems horrible. This is what creates a nauseating, sweet and locked up atmosphere in the car. The stressed atmosphere is, among other things, caused by a personification of the cars surrounding them. It is described how the, "*Cars overtake on both sides*"⁶ which emphasizes how the roads are filled with cars that aggressively shift lanes, making Jen panic and therefor creating a tense mood. To sum up: the atmosphere in the car is very tense, which could be a symbol of Jen's confused and pressurized, inner self.

Another thing that contributes to a stressed setting in the car is the use of exclamation marks that creates a loud effect similar to onomatopoeia. This can be seen when Jen's sister expresses, "*Jen's gonna cra-ash*"⁷ which instantly creates a strong sound inside the reader's mind and an image of a little sassy girl teasing Jen while making funny facial expressions. Another thing that contributes to a very entertaining and dramatic text is the excessive use of exclamation marks combined with capital letters such as, "*Brakes! Slip lane. NOW*"⁸. This can be seen each time someone yells at Jen in the car. It is a characteristic of the informal style of language and results in a very vivid and intense dialog. However, the exclamation marks are not the most remarkable punctuation. The frequent use of multiple periods is very noticeable in some paragraphs. For instance when Jen's mom expresses, "*Jen. I thought you were ready for this...*"⁹ The multiple periods illustrate an unfinished thought and the sentence could be a reference to the night before and symbolize that Jen wasn't ready to lose her virginity. The dialog contains a lot of these references to Jen's night before such as, "*Take it nice and slow*"¹⁰ which could be a metaphor that indicates that Jen should have taken it slow last night, which she didn't do. These dialogs that refer to Jen or her night before give a better understanding of Jen's mind and confusing feeling without a direct explanation being present.

It is not only Jen's feelings that are confusing and a bit chaotic. The structure of the story appears a bit disconnected, namely in the style of writing from line 86-110. This paragraph is mostly dominated by paratactic structure as a result of the informal writing. It can be seen when Jen is trying to change lanes, "*I flick my head back and forth from the side mirror to the front and see flashes of car and road and Mum but no information, never any space*".¹¹ The paratactic structure can be seen in this quote because none of the sentences are linked, beside the use of the compound word "and". Because of this, the reader must interpret the meaning behind Jen's tense behavior. The paratactic structure results in very choppy and detached sentences, which is particularly visible in the quote, "*The left one taps the indicator. They manoeuvre the car into the slow lane. We don't hit*

⁶ p. 3 l. 92

⁷ p. 4 l. 104

⁸ p. 3 ll. 102-103

⁹ p. 4 l. 90

¹⁰ p. 5 ll. 111-112

¹¹ p. 3 ll. 86-87

anything".¹² This quote consists mostly of fact and the readers must therefore make the conclusion themselves that Jen's mom has taken the wheel and helped her get into the slow lane. These are examples of how the informal and paratactic style of writing lets the reader interpret and make sense of the relations between clauses that seem a bit puzzling at first.

Another effect, which the informal language creates, is a humorous tone and an insight into the characters by using words restricted to the British English dialect. When Jen is driving, she mentions a lorry that wobbles in front. The family's origin is established through the language since lorry is a word for a big truck that derives from British English. Other English words include "mum" instead of "mom". Some of the words also contain an improper connotation that emphasize Jen's childish mind. This can be seen in her inner monolog where she refers to Simon's genital organ as "cock" which is an obscene term for penis. It has an improper connotation, which is often used by teenagers. The connotation and the shocking choice of words give the reader a glimpse into a teenage mind. It creates a surprising effect that contributes to a humorous and amusing tone throughout the story.

The story contains a very everyday and lively atmosphere because of the informal language, which makes it easy and entertaining to read. It deals with the mind of a teenage girl, which can seem like a confusing rollercoaster filled with bewildering feelings. The story deals with themes such as regret, uncertainty and the road to adulthood. The inquiring title implies that the road to adulthood can be prolonged and filled with difficult questions that will make you scream, "Are we nearly there?" However, the story secures that you will always reach your destination in some way or another.

¹² p. 31. 96-97