



Analytical paper: Kate Smalley Ellis “Are We Nearly There?”

Name of class

Professor

University

City and State

Date



A short story authored titled “Are We Nearly There?” by Kate Smalley Ellis addresses the struggles of acknowledging one self’s and growing up. There are many things which involve growing up, and some include learning new things like how to drive, discovering one’s self, and experimentation. Teenage years are the most crucial, especially in the contemporary world. According to McNeely and Blanchard (2009, l. 61), teenagers experience significant brain transformation, are capable of reproducing, and acquire half of the adult weight of the body during adolescence. All these adjustments happen in the fast broadening social sphere context, which propels the shifts. Teenagers begin assuming adult duties like figuring how romantic relationships work, finding jobs and learning ways to be better friends (McNeely and Blanchard 2009, l. 61). The Child Trends Databank also adds that teens, throughout adolescence, become more involved in wider romantic experiences array, including sexual and romantic relationships (Yang 2016, l. 1). All these changes may be very challenging to balance, building up and leading in exceedingly adverse situations (Acton 2015, l. 7-13). The short story “Are We Nearly There?” explains the confusing situations young adults face.

This story mainly focuses on Jen, who is the protagonist in the narration. She explores her adulting life, attempting to balance her personal life and the expectations of her parents. We see how Jen, aged 17, first drives a car on a three-lane motorway (Ellis 2015, l. 1). She has a driver’s license, but she is not good at driving. She is also uncomfortable because Simon (her boyfriend) and she had been drinking the previous night. She had also encountered her first sexual experience the same night, making her not to focus on the road as her experience was still on her mind. In the car, she is accompanied by her family including her father, mother, and younger sister, Shelly. She is driving her family to her grandmother’s place, and all through her mind is preoccupied with the previous night happenings, drinking and sexual encounter with her



boyfriend. Among the themes in the short story are the rites of passage and control (Ellis 2015, l. 1-138).

As mentioned before, teens experience several rites of passage before becoming young adults. The rites of passage themes are portrayed in the text through Jen, using two different experiences; having sex for the first time and driving for the first time as well. Jen had had sexual intercourse the previous night, as well as drunk alcohol, circumstances which filled her mind when driving, “It’s not that it blew my mind. It didn’t. I don’t even think I came. He said he loved me and I said ‘oh’ and peeled my stomach away from his” (Ellis 2015, l. 9-10). It was also the first time she was driving, a driving test from her parents. It shows that she has been entrusted by her parents to become an adult. However, she has somehow betrayed her parents’ trust. Jen recalls her discussion with her boyfriend regarding driving while alcohol-intoxicated, but she accepts the driving test even though she knows it can lead to serious problems. She also places her life and that of her family at risk for driving while her mind is focused on the previous night “Well he shouldn’t trust me. Neither of them should. There’s no way I should be allowed on this three-lane motorway surrounded by lorries and motorbikes and people carriers” (Ellis 2015, l. 5-6).

Another theme is control, which is visible throughout the short story. In the text, we see Jen attempting to control the car, her focus being hindered by her night before. Also, she tells of how her mother has a controlling character and does not fully trust her on the issue of driving for the first time. She also seems to be bothered by her mother’s attitude, and we see a part where her mother shouts at her, asking if she is deaf. She also comments on her driving, using comments such as “clear your mind Jen” and “only a fool breaks the two-second rule” (Ellis 2015, l. 1, 50). At one point, her mother disrupts her flashbacks when she remembered her sexual



experience with Simon, and her mother shouts at her asking her to watch where she was going, “JEN!!...Watch where you are going! Slow lane, remember? Take. It. Easy” (Ellis 2015, l.77). Her father also criticizes her by saying she is very sensitive but she proves him wrong when she does not reply to Simon when he tells her he loves, rather she responds with an “oh” (Ellis 2015, l. 109). The short story has combined passages of narration with dialogue and direct speech and hence making the text more dynamic. The author has also utilized mental images of the actions of Jen and the setting. Imagery helps the readers to have a visual of the narration from the start to the end. For instance, the author provides readers with an image of a lorry in front of her while she drove (Ellis 2015, l. 14-15), as well as her flashbacks concerning sexual encounter (Ellis 2015, l. 77).

The author has also used metaphors to narrate the story, where she refers to a lorry as a moving sky scrapper where she writes “peeling my stomach away from his stomach”, meaning moving away from Simon after they had sex, and, “peel the keys from my fist” (Ellis 2015, l. 27, 137, 10). There is the use of symbols, including the dead cat which symbolizes Jen’s leaving behind her innocence after having sex with her boyfriend. There is also the use of similes which show the perspective of the narrator. Jen does not feel comfortable driving and describes the car moving “in and out of the grass like a beige snake” (Ellis 2015, l. 14). Switching from present time to flashback has been written nicely as well as Jen’s pattern of consciousness, including the following example. “I slow down and see a massive Land Rover getting bigger in the rear-view mirror. I see Simon’s wall moving closer and further away again. I see myself on top of him, surprised its really me in that position. I imagine I’m in Pretty Woman and we’re in a penthouse suite and he’s a millionaire and we have just eaten strawberries, not Wotsits” and then, “JEN!” “What?” “Watch where you’re going! Slow lane, remember?” (Ellis 2015, l. 77) Jen never



reaches her destination but is nearly there, proposing that she is not yet a grown-up until she accepts her sexual insecurities and overcomes the responsibility of driving.

The whole story is based on the theme of control and the rites of passage to adulthood. The author shows how Jen keeps having flashbacks of the previous night when she lost her virginity to Simon, flashbacks which tamper with her driving. She struggles to keep the car in control, at the same time taking in her mother's controlling attitude. Jen agreeing to take the test drive the day after she had alcoholic drinks with her boyfriend, as well as her mind, being pre-occupied, shows her being irresponsible as she knows her parents should not trust her to drive a long distance on a three-lane road. Jen's mother is correcting her every now and then, misbelieving Jen's driving skills. The narrator has used flashbacks from the previous night and switches to present time to narrate the story, as well as incorporating the use of metaphors, symbols, similes, direct speech and dialogue, all which help the reader visualize the entire text. The language used is simple and easy for readers to understand in one reading. The narrator has successfully shown the two themes; growing up (sex and driving) and control, with most of the references pointing to growing up (rites of passage) as the main theme.



References

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