

A gap of sky essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

How do you discover your own identity and the purpose of your existence in a society, where the meaning is not clear, and where life at times seems chaotic and labyrinthine? This search for existential answers is an essential and recurring theme in Anna Hope's short story *A Gap of Sky* from 2008, which takes place in the middle of a busy metropolis. Through postmodernist use of language and narrative technique Anna Hope conveys these themes of individualism and existentialism.

The short story is narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator whose point of view is limited to Ellie. The story is written with a narrative technique, which gives the reader a profound insight into the mind of the confused teenage protagonist Ellie: "Monday. It is Monday. Essay there is an essay due, important, due for Tuesday morning." (P. 1 L. 14). This passage is a perfect example of the stream of consciousness technique, since it portrays Ellie's point of view through her thoughts. Thus, this passage becomes a written equivalent of Ellie's thoughts. This choice of narrative technique entails that the language reflects the associations of the mind with its disjointed syntax. In this way Ellie's language is naturally characterized by onomatopoeia such as "Blaaaaargh" (P1 L. 10), slang and digressions. This use of language intensifies the realism of the story and it also gives the reader a thorough insight into Ellie's personality and state of mind. Ellie is under pressure, since she has an essay due for the following day on Virginia Woolf, who was one of the founders of the modernist stream of consciousness technique. In that way Anna Hope uses an intertextual reference, which is typical of postmodern literature.

“ She remembers the letter, the stomach-lurching letter: “ If this lack of application continues we will have no choice but to reconsider your place on the course.”” (P. 2 L. 38). This passage indicates that the essay is her last chance to gain control of her own life and thereby escaping her drug abuse. The printer ink that she needs can be seen as a catalyst for the changes she needs to undergo, since it is the sole reason for her to go outside and do something productive. Throughout her quest for the ink she encounters several distractions, which she sees as symbols. The first one is a glove: “ a black leather glove... its middle finger raised up to the sky in glorious salute...She touches the middle finger.... Life seems, suddenly, filled with possibility” (P. 2 L. 61-63). Initially the reader might see the glove as a symbol of Ellie’s desire to ‘ fuck it all’ and disregard her parents and her school, but in the short story it is Ellie, who interprets the glove as being a sign of her right to do whatever she wants. Thus, the glove functions as an eye-opener, since she realizes that she is independent and becomes aware of the fact that the world is full of possibilities.

Herein lies one of the central themes of the short story, namely individualism. Subsequently, Ellie impulsively enters the British Museum in which she sees a description on the wall: “‘ Living and Dying’ reads the plague on the wall...Ellie’s not sure she’s ready to cope with death...She really feels as though she might die.” (P. 3 L. 80-84). The phrase “ Living and Dying” makes her realize that she is far from ready to die and that she needs to seize the day and get the most out of her seemingly pitiful existence. Right after this self-acknowledgement she eyes a gap in the sky, which catches Ellie’s attention: “ there is a gap of sky to her right, an emptiness, a

vacancy that she doesn't remember seeing before" (P. 3 L. 91-92). In a figurative sense the gap of sky can be seen as an opening for new possibilities and a greater understanding of life. Consequently, the symbols that she has encountered throughout her wandering have led her to the gap of sky and a deeper insight into her life.

The stone that Ellie fortuitously discovers in a random shop reminds her of a stone her mother gave to her: " It was to give her protection or something daft like that" (P. 3 L. 108). This exact passage indicates that the mother cared for her and wanted her to be safe. At first Ellie just shoves the stone away, but then she starts picturing her mother and their mutual love.

Therefore the stone is another example of how Ellie tends to turn a relatively insignificant thing into something of greater meaning. Ellie's development and growing self-insight can be said to follow her location in the cityscape, since she reaches some sort of self-knowledge whenever she reaches a new place. In her interpretation the museum is connected with death, the streets a symbol of her freedom, while the stone brings forth positive memories of the relationship with her mother. While Ellie is speculating she is making her way through the traffic of London, which is described as being: " the arteries nearing the heart of the city". By this description Anna Hope compares the big city to a living organism, where Ellie finds herself a social misfit clotting the blood in the city's veins.

In that way Ellie is aware of her unhealthy way of living, but she just keeps procrastinating doing something about it. In that way the big city functions as a precondition of Ellie's discovery of self-insight. The achieved insight becomes clear to the reader due to the fact that the language becomes more

coherent towards the end of the story, and this is another example of how the language reflects Ellie's workings of the mind. " She wants to receive this night and its great dark pulsing, this beauty, this moment" (P. 4 L. 128). This exact passage is in its language far more consistent than the language usage at the beginning of the story with its fragmented syntax.

The change in the narrative technique towards the open ending might suggest that Ellie has finally found the purpose of her existence through self-acknowledgement and insight. Thereby Anna Hope's use of language and narrative technique becomes of great importance in relation to the essential themes of the short story. As mentioned in the introduction Anna Hope treats themes such as existential questions and the meaning of one's subsistence in a short story, whose narrative technique thematizes this complex of problems. The labyrinthine nature of the big city also reflects the existential search for answers that are characteristic of our time.

References:

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