

Karen joy fowler's  
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we ...



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The best works of realistic fiction create believable characters and illustrate real-life situations. This is certainly true in Karen Joy Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*. Karen Joy Fowler is able to use unique narrative techniques to allow the reader to fully understand the narrator's feelings.

*We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* begins in medias res and the structure of the timeline allows the author to simulate the recollection of memory. The story jumps around through different significant parts of her life. The choppy structure of the plot could also be representative of trauma as she struggles with reciting her memories. The way Rosemary remembers her life provides an insight on her feelings. One's most vivid memories often say a lot about his or her character. Rosemary's life story greatly involves Fern. This means Fern is a significant part of her sense of self. With the reader being exposed to Rosemary's memories, the reader can be able to understand her identity and how she defines herself.

Karen Joy Fowler uses anthropomorphism to help the reader recognize how Rosemary feels about Fern. For example, It is only on page seventy-seven when we learn that Fern is a chimpanzee. Up to that point, Fern is just Rosemary and Lowell's sister as well as the daughter of two loving parents. This style allows the reader to see Fern through the eyes of Rosemary before revealing Fern's true nature. Fern isn't a pet to Rosemary. Fern was her "twin," her "fun-house mirror," her "whirlwind other half." Not her chimp. Karen Joy a Fowler wanted to make Rosemary's feelings for Fern clear and she did.

The diary-style format of the story constantly has the reader wondering how the the protagonist gets from one place to another due to the need of filling plot holes. Immediately on the first page, the author has the reader asking questions. " So the middle of my story comes in the winter of 1996...ten years had passed since I'd seen my brother, seventeen since my sister disappeared." What happened between her and her siblings? Naturally, the narrator in this case would be biased because she knows the end before she tells the beginning. This makes the narrator somewhat unreliable as she can leave out details either by choice or by a lack of memory. For example, she herself refrains from revealing Fern's true nature. Not only that she was a chimp but a violent one at that. That violence is what eventually leads to Fern's exile which is something we only learn at the end of the story from her parents. Regardless of this unreliability, readers are compelled to read on to answer questions they have.

By keying in on one character, the reader is given extensive information to be able to gauge the protagonist's emotions. If this story were to be written in third person, the story would have not as been as powerful because it would be difficult to go into detail on the emotions of multiple characters. The author wanted the reader to sympathize with the protagonist by going into depth on her feelings. Seeing that we live in an " I" world, the first person adds an extra sense of comfort in the reader.

Karen Joy Fowler's writing style in *We are all Completely Beside Ourselves* successfully compels the reader to form a connection with Rosemary by using an unconventional style of narrative structure as well as an intimate first person point of view. Rosemary's thoughts and feelings are fully fleshed

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out as a result and anyone reading *We are all Completely Beside Ourselves* is sure to feel the effect of Fowler's writing and be able to receive the message the author is trying to send with this story through the account of Rosemary, that message being that animal experiments of this nature can be detrimental to a family.