

"Let's go to the videotape"

Analytical essay

Grief is an entity most people struggle with during their life. One might feel fragmented and remorseful to a point where coping with one's feelings of grief seems intolerable. Here, one might turn to alternative ways of filling the gap of sorrow rather than coming to terms with it. In Fiona Maazel's short story, "Let's go the videotape", the reader encounters a father who tries to deal with the tragic loss of his wife and the mother to his son. Nevertheless, the age of social media presents the father with a new therapeutic way of dealing with his feelings of grief.

When interpreting the short story "Let's go to the videotape", written by the author Fiona Maazel, it is crucial to consider the main characters. Here, we are introduced to the father Nick Slocombe and his son Gus. The story is narrated by a limited third-person narrator, who mainly focuses on Nick. Nick is aware that their relationship has been severely affected by the death of his wife. "(...) Gus was five and not so much depressed as departed from faith that the universe doled out her favors equitably. He was in his way (...) hard to parent". (p. 1 ll. 3-5) Gus has been marked by the tragedy of his mother's death, which, according to Nick, has made him lose faith in the world, which has made him hard to parent. Accordingly, Nick is receptive to the fact that his son has developed physical problems due to the accident: "(...) Gus had developed a speech impediment" (p. 2 l. 46) Hence, it is always visible to Nick that his son has suffered, which indirectly reminds him of the accident himself. Additionally, Nick is in utmost denial about coming to terms with his feelings of grief and despair: "After she died, Nick had shied away from joining any support groups because they contrived relationships among people whose only shared interest was grief." (p. 2 ll. 65-66) Thus, Nick chooses to distance himself from the company of others who have dealt with similar experiences of grief to refrain from dealing with his emotions. "After she was gone, he found himself unwilling to entrust his hurt to anyone but her" (ll. 66-67) Fundamentally, Nick chooses to channel his attention towards his son Gus, which enhances his feelings towards him: "He could not possibly love this boy any more than he did already" (ll. 99-100) He begins sharing videos of his son online. As a result of this, he gains immense attention, which works as his remedy of bereavement.

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Moving on, the title of the short story further informs us about the father-son relationship present in the story. "Let's go to the videotape" is a direct and literal reference to the videos Nick makes of his son: "Who doesn't film his kid experiencing a threshold moment?" (p. 1 l. 7) Nevertheless, the title also carries symbolic weight. The famous sports anchor, Warner Wolf, regularly used the catchphrase "Let's go to the videotape!" as a cue for the program to switch to video footage of the sports game, which he was reporting on. Symbolically, this reflects the way that Nick draws joy from using his son's private experiences as entertainment and seeing him grow. Here, Nick's extensive use of social media works as a coping method for him to deal with the loss of his wife. Nevertheless, this coping method creates an emotional gap between him and Gus: "There was, also, a hint of the disconnect that afflicts people who are filming an event instead of participating in (...) Nick beheld this spectacle at a distance and continued to film" (p. 1 ll. 15-20). Nick distracts himself by "going to the videotape", which ultimately disconnects him from reality as he continues to rewatch his videos to entertain himself. Conclusively, Nick becomes too preoccupied with coping with his feelings of sorrow to consider the impact that the videos have on Gus.

In relation to the emotions of the main characters, the style of writing in lines 102-113 also plays a prominent role. The third-person narrator is mostly limited to Nick's thought process. Here, a complex sentence structure is present, which features longer and grammatically correct sentences: "Nick (...) had thought it wonderful that his son showed an interest in something age-appropriate because such things were telltale of a boy whose psyche was generally untrammelled by the grief galloping through their lives." (p. 3 ll. 104-106) Here, the extended vocabulary, which features words such as "age-appropriate", "psyche" and "untrammelled" makes it clear that Nick is rather pensively competent. The formal language present in regards to Nick's thoughts makes him seem utterly intelligent. In contrast to this, the narrator never directly deciphers the thoughts of Gus, whom we only get to know through his father and direct speech. His spoken language is heavily dominated by childlike linguistics such as "Okay, lemme get my stuff" (p. 3 l. 102) and "Vroom! Vroom!" (p. 3 l. 102). The sentences are extremely simple due to the use of colloquial expressions and the onomatopoeia "Vroom!", which represents the sound of a car. The language of Gus is extremely informal, which is a clear reflection of his age. Nevertheless, it is evident that he also gives thought to the death of his mother: "And that's how my mom died." (p. 3 l. 112) Hence, the style of writing works as a symbolic element. The contrast between the language of the father and

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the son lets the reader know that even though Gus is a little child, who does not possess the same emotionally reflective skills as his father, he still deals with thoughts of grief.

In relation to Gus' feelings of grief, the ending makes it clear that Nick has forgotten to consider his son. Here, a video is shared by his son's elementary school, where Gus addresses his mother's death: "I don't remember much except I wasn't feeling well so Mom had to sit in the back with me and now she's dead and I'm not" (p. 3 ll. 116-117) It becomes clear to Nick that he has completely neglected his son's feelings of survivor's guilt and grief in order to deal with his own. As he realizes this, he makes sure to acknowledge Gus by finally addressing that he is not alone: "It's how you feel. You're sad about Mom, I am, too." (p. 3 ll. 127-128) Thus, Nick understands that the optimal way for them both to deal with grief is to share the experience with each other and the world: "How about we post this to my page?" (p. 4 ll. 145-146)

Dealing with grief and guilt is hard whether you are a child or an adult. But a parent who involves himself too much into dealing with his own grief might forget to take his child's into consideration. In Fiona Maazel's short story, "Let's go the videotape", the reader encounters the father Nick, who learns that using social media to share the emotional trauma of his son and himself is the most powerful way for them to collectively deal with the feelings of grief and guilt.