**Trojan Sofa**

**Critical Essay**

*Choose a* ***novel or short story*** *which features a relationship between two characters which is confrontational or corrosive.*

*Describe how the relationship is portrayed and discuss to what extent the nature of the relationship influences your understanding of the text as a whole.*

PLAN

* Relationship - manipulation
* Lonely – no other influences
* Niall – views himself
* Niall – desensitised

Bernard MacLaverty’s short story ‘Trojan Sofa’ tells of a young boy named Niall and his father. As the story develops we see their relationship not to be one of loving and tenderness but a corrosive one which strips Niall of his innocence and forces him into compromising positions trapping him in his father’s bigoted, racist views. This clearly conveys the key theme of loss of innocence. MacLaverty cleverly uses literary techniques to provoke a range of feelings from abhorrence to sympathy allowing the reader to connect with, and understand, the text as a whole.

Niall’s father has very strong views on the English. He believes ‘the wrong done to this country [Ireland] was so great we can do anything in retaliation! This shows the concentration of his utter hatred towards the English and that their influence was so detrimental to Ireland that there is no limit to the torture the Irish should inflict on them. More disturbingly, however, it becomes apparent to the reader that Niall is quoting his father word for word. This shows his utter respect and admiration for his father but also that his racist, disgusting views are rubbing off on Niall and becoming an integral part of his being. This shows the corrosive nature of the relationship as Niall’s innocence is being replaced by his father’s poisoned views. This leaves the audience feeling disgusted as they realise Niall is being tainted and ultimately trapped by this dysfunctional relationship as it corrodes his being and replaces it with a cynical, horrible attitude.

The father then uses these racist views and patriotism to manipulate his son. It is evident that Niall doesn’t enjoy being placed in the sofa and stealing from the English, however his father manipulates him and the admiration Niall has of his father sees him completing the task anyway. Niall’s father sayd:

“I wouldn’t force this upon anyone – never mind one of my own. But I must say it is for Ireland.”

The father uses not only Niall’s patriotism to convince him to partake but also uses the fact they are related to convince his son to complete his tasks. Ultimately this gives a great insight into the theme as Niall loses his innocence and naivety in place of views forced upon him but also, shockingly to the reader, the destructive nature of Niall and his ‘Da’s’ relationship as the father clearly uses Niall for his own means, trapping the oblivious young boy who is devoted to his father in a world of crime and one sided ignorant views.

This relationship, manipulation and regime have a profoundly negative influence on Niall. He begins to view himself as a pawn in the regime, losing all form of self-worth and making him feel inferior/insecure. He refers to himself as “a mouse”. This again shows he feels he is insignificant, unseen and just a part of some larger organisation. This highlights how Niall’s father and the relationship has destroyed Niall’s feelings of self-worth and any small sense of being something else leaving the reader feeling sympathetic towards him as they realised how trapped he has become by both the regime and his father.

The father’s relationship also corrodes how Niall feels about others, conveying the key theme of loss of innocence. Niall loses all sense of compassion for others and sympathy at how they are feeling and how his actions affect them. This is due to his father repeatedly enforcing that they are the enemy and dehumanising others. This makes the audience engage with the text, feeling both anger at the father’s actions and heart-break for Niall’s situation. On viewing the death of the English Niall states:

“They got killed. Boohoo, lend me a hanky”

The sarcastic tone here emphasises Niall as being devoid of sympathy and how his father’s manipulation, control and corrosive relationship have affected Niall so profoundly he now is desensitised towards these people and is ultimately trapped by his father’s views.

Overall, MacLaverty uses emotive techniques to involve the reader in this tragic story, fully developing their understanding of the text as a whole. The key theme of loss of innocence runs throughout the story warning the reader of the dangers of corrosive relationships and how they can consume individuals and break down their being into something evil to benefit another. Finally showing us we must be careful who we trust because eventually can betray us.

**Notes**

**Clearly focuses on the task and uses key examples to back up your points.**

**Focus more on how this impacts on our emotions and what we learn about prejudice etc.**

**17/20**