**Trojan Sofa**

**Critical Essay**

*Choose a* ***novel or short story*** *in which a central character’s failure to understand the reality of his or her situation is an important feature of the text.*

*Explain how the writer makes you aware of this failure and show how it is important to your appreciation of the text as a whole.*

PLAN

Dad’s manipulation of son.

1. All advice from dad
2. Appealing to patriotism – son has little friends his own age
3. Son now like his dad – doesn’t like Brits
4. Son feels as if there are sides

Bernard MacLaverty’s short story ‘Trojan Sofa’ shows how the character Niall fails to see he is being manipulated by his dad. Niall – who is a young boy – has been forced into becoming like his dad, hence meaning he is very anti-British. MacLaverty shows the reader, through his clever use of characterisation, just how severe the consequences of corruption of innocence and hate can be.

Firstly, the reader is shown that the father plays a huge role in Niall’s life. This is shown when Niall tells the reader “the only advice I ever heard was my Da’s”. This demonstrates how Niall’s dad plays a massive role in his life. This, however, means that he is the only person who tells Niall right from wrong. Hence, the fact that the father thinks it’s right to hate the British, means that the ideology is likely to be instilled in Niall as there is no-one else to tell Niall this is wrong. Niall is obviously not aware he isn’t really being fair by hating the British, but as no-one tells him this is wrong, he believes it is the right thing to do. This clearly shows the reader that hating other people – prejudice - is wrong. Also, MacLaverty’s idea of corruption of the innocent is made clear as Niall, a young boy, has been almost forced into hating others.

Secondly, we are shown how Niall’s dad often manipulates his son. This is often shown when the father takes advantage of Niall’s patriotism telling him to “do it for Ireland”. This demonstrates how the father is exploiting the patriotism he installed in Niall in order to get Niall to do what he wants. Niall has been brought up in a very patriotic household, so his country means a lot to him. So, if Niall feels he is doing something for the benefit of Ireland, he will be more likely to act immorally. This shows the reader just how cruel the father is being, completely manipulating his young son to take part in very dangerous tasks (e.g. robbing a house). Niall is, however, completely unaware his dad is doing this and most likely feels as if it is the right thing to do. This clearly shows the reader how it is not fair to manipulate the young, forcing them to partake in immoral tasks. Just like with Niall, they don’t know what is happening and are likely to believe they are behaving acceptably, when clearly they are not.

Clearly, Niall has been corrupted by his father to the point he hates Brits. This is shown when Niall states, “If it is done against the Brits then it’s OK”. This shows how Niall no longer can see right from wrong. His father has instilled this hatred into his son towards the Brits to the point Niall believes it’s alright to do anything towards them. Niall is completely unaware this isn’t right, as he has been brought up from a young age being told all Brits are evil. This clearly shows the reader how the father’s manipulation of Niall has completely tainted his morals. Niall now has no clue that his behaviour is wrong, hence meaning he is likely to follow his father’s hatred of the Brits. MacLaverty’s idea of the corruption of innocence is again key, as Niall has been brought up to hate meaning he knows nothing but to hate. This clearly shows the reader that children should be brought up accepting of others, or it could lead to them becoming very tainted individuals as they grow up.

It is also clearly shown that Niall believes that he is on a side fighting the British. This is demonstrated when he states “if it’s on the Antrim Road he’ll be one of ours”. This demonstrates how a young boy believes he is on a side fighting the British. It seems as if he believes he is fighting in a war at 11 years old. This clearly shows the divisions Niall has been brought up with. His father has obviously brought him up believing he is fighting a war against the British. This shocks the reader as it is very violent bringing up an 11 year old boy believing he is fighting a war against the enemy of the British. Again, Niall is shown to have been completely morphed by his dad to become a very anti-British individual. It shows the reader how unfair it is that such a young boy has been brought up with so much hate and intolerance he now sees certain groups of people as the enemy. Obviously children should not be brought up like this, as then they can have no idea that they are behaving unacceptably, hence causing them to be individuals filled with hate.

Niall is shown to have all-out hate for the Brits at many times. This is shown when Niall shouts out “fuck you major, fuck the Brits” after escaping capture from a British man while trying to rob him. Niall has no idea what he has been doing is completely wrong. The fact Niall knows no tolerance has led to him becoming a hate-filled individual (who can’t see that it is wrong to rob Brits) believing he can do whatever he wants to the British. This intolerance shows the reader how Niall has been manipulated by his father to hate, hence completely corrupting Niall’s innocence as a child.

Throughout Bernard MacLaverty’s short story ‘Trojan Sofa’ it is made clear that Niall’s father’s manipulation of Niall has led to Niall becoming a hate-filled person. Niall has been encouraged through his life to hate Brits, to the point he can no longer see past this with Niall’s childhood innocence being lost. The reader is clearly shown how devastating this corruption has been to Niall, and how children should be brought up with tolerance to avoid becoming hate-filled.

**Notes**

**Clearly focuses on the task and explains what we learn from Niall’s failure to understand**

**Would benefit from more textual evidence to help build/strengthen points**

**17/20**