

Reflection of short story mercy



Hunter Hendricks Mercy Essay Professor Malloy 17 October 2012 Steel-Toeless In Pinckney Benedict's 2008 short story " Mercy," the narrator and his father both take pride in their family's ranch. The narrator works hard for his father each day, taking breaks only to sneak treats to the miniature horses being kept on the neighbor's ranch nearby. The narrator's father; however, does not show the same compassion for the animals as his son. He is adamant about keeping the horses off of his land and warns his son that he will shoot to first to intrude. The narrator views his father in a very austere manner.

When we are first introduced to the narrator's father we find that he has a no-nonsense view of life. He does not like foolishness and likes to get right down to the point. Often the narrator is even afraid to offer his point of view in certain instances because he does not want to offend his father nor for him to think of him as childish. For instance, when the horses arrive the narrator's father repeatedly calls them ponies, " Ponies, he kept saying, ponies ponies ponies, like if he said it enough times, he might be able to make them go away" (119).

The narrator responds in a quiet tone " miniature horses, I told him. Not ponies. I kept my voice low, not sure I wanted him to hear me" (119). The narrator does voice his opinion to his because he is afraid to have an opposing view and is scared how he will react. Although the father comes off as very harsh in this example, there are times when he seems light-hearted. Throughout this short story, the father shows countenance, compassion and forgiveness towards his son. First, the narrator's father shows approval of his son.

For example, when the father and son are out by the horses one day, the father notices that the fence is in poor shape and gives his son the job of keeping it upright. A job he knows that his son will enjoy, but will also keep him working. He warns at the end, " Remember, my old man said as he went back to his tractor. First one that comes on my property, I kill" (125).

Although the father still threatens to punish his son, he is still trusting in his ability to mend the fence. The father knows how much the horses means to his son, so giving him this job shows that he does not actually want to have to kill them.

In addition, the father takes the time to ask his son about the horses when he finds his son out on the fence, " What makes them run like that? " (125). He even goes as far to ask if his son would like to own one. The narrator is hesitant to answer, not sure if it a trick question or not. He answers truthfully, saying yes that he would like to own one. It is at this moment that we first see the fathers caring side. The father is showing an interest in what matters to his son. Second, the father shows he is empathetic.

For instance, when the narrator finds himself waiting on his father while he loads the steers into the trailer to take to the stockyard. His father insisted that he stay in the cab as he did not have steel-toed boots and could easily lose a toe, just as he had done. Again this shows how his father is worried about more than just getting work done. The narrator is intently watching in the rearview mirror as his father loads his favorite steer, Rug, onto the trailer and then finishes up with the others. Just then his father stopped. When they were all embarked, when for the moment his work was done, his face fell slack and dull, and his shoulders slumped. And for a brief instant he stood

still, motionless, as I had never seen him. It was as though a breaker somewhere inside him had popped and he had been shut off” (126). In this moment, we are able to see that the narrator’s father is more than just a workingman, more than just a hard shell. He lets his soft side show for a split second, just long enough for his son to catch a glimpse in the mirror.

As fall turns to winter and snow begins to fall, we see another hidden trait emerge from the narrator’s father, forgiveness. The narrator is still maintaining the fence each day. It begins to snow one night and carries on into the next morning, when the narrator goes to check the fence that day he notices the horses all huddled together pressed against the fence. “ Most of them had clustered at a single point, to exchange body heat, I suppose. ” He continues on, “ The wire was stretched tight with the weight of them” (129). After a moment of hearing a strange noise he realizes it was not the horses making it, but the fence.

The next second the fence post collapses, and the horse set free onto their land. This causes us to wonder if the father will hold true to his word. The narrator notices his father standing in the field, “ snow had collected on the ridge of his shoulders,” (131) as if he had been there awhile. Cinnamon, the narrator’s favorite horse, began to approach his father and the narrator grows tense as he remembers his fathers warning. Cinnamon then tugs at his father, then once more knocking him over. “ He fell right on his ass in the snow, my old man, the Remington held high above his head” (131).

What happens next is reason for surprise, “ The Remington dropped to the ground, the bolt open, the breech empty. Half a dozen bright brass

cartridges left my old man's hand to skip and scatter across the snow. " In this moment, we see the father in whole: his caring and playful side that had only slightly peeked out before shines through. " The hood of his coat fell away from his face, and I saw that my old man was laughing" (131).

Throughout Pinckney Benedict's short story you are realize how the narrator's father is not as steel-toed as he may come across.

We see the approval, empathy, and forgiveness the narrator's father shows to his son. By the fathers actions of giving his son the job to maintain the fence, pausing for just a second after loading his favorite steer, and dropping the gun after the horses come onto his land, he shows us that even the toughest forget to wear their steel-toed boots at times. Work Cited Benedict, Pinckney. " Mercy" The Ecco Anthology of Contemporary American Short Fiction. Joyce Carol Oates and Christopher R. Beha. New York, New York: Harper Collins, 2008. Print. 119-131.