

"the half-skinned steer" by annie proulx essay sample

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The story “ The Half-Skinned Steer” by Annie Proulx could be classified in the Return to the womb arch-type. It fits that unit theme very well, mainly because the main character in the story, whose name is Mero, returns to his place of birth and childhood almost sixty years later. The one major event that leads him back home is the death of his brother Rollo. Mero had left the country out by Cheyenne, Wyoming to go and live in New York City. Over that time he had grown to become a fairly rich man. He had everything that a man could possibly ask for at that place in time. He had a Cadillac, a cellular phone, lots of money, and a nice house.

Although he wasn't very successful in his marriages because he was married several times, he was successful in politics. The story says that he got in local politics and out again without a scandal. So, maybe he followed the rules there or just never got caught. This tells us that he is a fairly intelligent man. He had went many years without contact from his family out on the ranch in Wyoming and then one day he gets a phone call from Rollo's wife that he has been killed and he decides to make the trip half way across the country to see his brother laid to rest.

Annie Proulx does an excellent job of structuring her sentences to where they fill our minds with countless images that we can see happening in real life, well almost everything. The sentences are very descriptive. That is one example of how her style comes into play with her writing. Also she can use the characters and she arranges the story in chronological way that makes

you go back after you have read the story and re-arrange the events to where they come out in order.

The style of Annie Proulx is somewhat like that of William Faulkner in that they both use very in-depth sentence structures and a lot of black humor. One example from the story was the very first sentence that reads: " In the Long Unfurling of his life, from tight-wound kid hustler in a wool suit riding the train out of Cheyenne to geriatric limper in this spooled out year, Mero had kicked down thoughts of the place where he began, a so-called ranch on strange ground at the south hinge of the green horns." In this sentence alone we are able to depict his whole life story. From there we are going to learn how he made the transformation. One more example is when Proulx is telling us about the breeding herd at the ranch: " The breeding herd was down to eighty-two, and a cow wasn't worth more than fifteen dollars, but they kept mending fence, whittling ears and scorching hides, hauling cows out of mud holes, and hunting lions in the hope that sooner or later the old man would move to Ten Sleep with his woman and his bottle and they could, as had their grandmother Olive when Jacob Corn disappointed her, pull the place taut.

In this giant sentence alone we know that the farm has fallen on hard times. Also we can picture the characters performing each of the jobs, which were hard jobs. We can also see that the father is an alcoholic and they want him to leave in hopes of having the farm all to them. It seemed like the father was just in the way. Another way that Proulx is similar to Faulkner is that they both use black humor in their stories. Black humor is things in a story

that you laugh at or find funny even though it is a serious matter. An example from the story would be when an Emus kill Rollo. We find it funny that such an animal could actually kill someone, but we still know we shouldn't laugh at the matter. It's possible, but it's the last thing on earth we would think he could die from! Another example could be when Mero is stuck in the snowstorm and his car is buried and he gets out to see how bad it is stuck. When he gets out he locks the door. After he is finished looking at the situation he tries to get back into the car and notices that he has locked the door with the keys still in the ignition.

So, he gets a giant rock and shatters the drivers' side window. Then after he gets back into the car he looks over and notices that the passenger side had been unlocked this whole time. Also, the names in the story could give some hints of black humor that gives them meaning. The names Tick Corn and Tin Head are two that really stick out from the beginning of the story. Louise was Tick Corns wife. Tick corn was Rollo's son and had been helping them run the ranch out in Wyoming. She phones Mero in the beginning to tell him that Rollo has died. When Mero hears her name he recalls the bloated gray insects pulled off the dogs. He also thinks that this Tick was going to get the whole damn ranch and bloat up on it. This is another example of how the black humor is evident throughout the whole story. It adds a lot of things to the story and makes it more enjoyable and you want to keep reading to find out what will happen next.

Proulx's characters also play an important role in the story. Her characters are representative of the kind of people that she grew up around. The

Wyoming people have certain attitudes and are funny characters. This is where the black humor comes into play. Mero is a smart, wealthy, eccentric, unfaithful, self-made man. Then there is his dad's girlfriend that's in her mid 20's, while he is in his 60's. The girlfriend is also very pretty. We know that the girlfriend has a teasing, center-of-attention kind of personality. The reason we know this is because after she tells the story about the half-skinned-steer Mero goes to bed and he can't sleep. We assume that he has the girlfriend running through his mind and that he has a lust for her. There is one character in the story, whose name plays an important part of who they are. There is a man whose name is Tin Head. The girlfriend explains, in her story that she's telling Rollo, Mero, and their dad, that he had a metal plate in his head from falling down some cement steps. She said the metal plate ate at his brain.

This having been said nothing was right on there farming either. They had blue chickens and calves were being born with three legs and his kids were piebald. Also, Tin Head never finished anything he started. When the girlfriend said this we can sense that there is some foreshadowing developing. She describes Tin Head as the kind of person that isn't very normal and someone that's missing some common sense. She proceeds to tell the story about how he skins one steer every year before winter so they would have something to eat during that time. So, one day he decides that he is going to skin a steer for winter. After he hits the steer with one good blow from the ax, he hangs it up and gets about halfway finished skinning the steer and decides to go eat some dinner. After dinner he decides to go

take a nap. When he wakes up he walks outside and notices that the steer is gone!

At first he thinks that a neighbor has stolen it, but then he looks around and finally notices something bloody and staggering out by the west side of the mountain. Just then it stops and looks back directly towards him. And all that distance he can see the raw meat of the head and the shoulder muscles and the empty mouth with no tongue wide open and it's red eyes glaring at him. He could sense that the steer was giving off so much hate it was as if they were arrows headed straight for him. Then the girlfriend describes how Tin Head knows he is done for and anybody associated with Tin Head is going to die. Then she ends her story. This small story inside the main story is unique in that it ties up with the story in the end. It was as if there were two stories to make one. That is one reason why the story is chronologically out of order. You have the normal story in-between and then there is the girlfriend, who is telling about Tin Head and the half-skinned-steer. Then they both interwove in the end.