

Lamb by bernard mac laverty analysis essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Lamb is a novel written by Bernard Mac Laverty in 1980 and it is set in the beginning in a strict catholic home for boys in Galway. The novel surrounds the lives of the Christian Brothers who are priests that run the home and also the boys who are sent there to live. Brother Benedict is the spiritual leader who heads the Christian Brothers that run the home.

He is tyrannical, cruel and bullied both Owen Kane and Brother Sebastian in the home. In contrast to him Brother Sebastian a young priest under his authority that is humane and compassionate in his treatment of the boys in the home. This is shown in Brother Benedict's bullying of a young boy in the home called Owen Kane and also by Brother Sebastian's defence of him and the fact that he helps the boy escape with him. When after escaping the Home things don't work out for Owen Kane and Brother Sebastian, so the idea of killing Owen is thought of by Brother Sebastian as an "act of love". I disagree that killing Owen Kane was an "act of love" and I find that Brother Sebastian was a coward and his actions were reprehensible.

There are certain parallels between the author and the novel. Brother Sebastian loses his father as the author also did and Owen Kane is 12 which is the same age the author lost his father. Owen Kane's father leaves him never to be heard of again. The loss of this father figure brings about big changes in the author and his characters lives.

The author has also dedicated this novel to his father which shows that his relationship with his father was important to him. Another parallel is that the author went to a strict Catholic School, St Malachy's College and in his other book called "The anatomy school" he also criticises the teaching, the

oppressive atmosphere and the staff's attitudes towards the pupils. The death of Brother Sebastian's father changes his life as he no longer feels the need to stay with The Christian Brothers as he wouldn't feel guilty disappointing his father now that he had passed away. Read about game of nasty things questions The money left to him in his fathers will enables him to change his life. It is because of his vow of poverty that he realises that to obtain the money before the Christian Brothers he will have to leave the order and take the money with him. Brother Benedict threatened Brother Sebastian not to leave as he said " and remember if you do leave in hurried circumstances we can make it difficult for you to get a job. The Church in Ireland, Brother, has as many fingers as there are pies.

Remember that. The author creates the bleak atmosphere at the home by describing outside it with a metaphor and also personification " surrounding the whole complex was a high wire fence which screamed and whistled in the constant wind from the sea. " The weather is described as " it seemed to rain continually" which also makes it seem a very depressing and cold place to live. Another metaphor is used to describe the home as " miles from nowhere on a promontory jutting its forehead into the Atlantic wind. The inside of the home is painted cold colours like green on the walls with brown lino on the floors. One of the boys who lived at the home described how it was scrubbed clean and dead " like a corpse.

" The air inside was said to be " full of disinfectant and polish and each boy had a cleaning duty to do every day" which would make it seem a clinical and disciplined place. Brother Benedict revels in his power over priests and the children in the home. At the beginning of the novel I feel that Brother

Benedict is condescending and humiliates Brother Sebastian. When Benedict gets to the point of his meeting with Sebastian about his father's will, Benedict says, "I am surrounded by the educationally sub-normal" when Brother Sebastian fails to understand the term intestate.

When Brother Sebastian speaks of leaving and criticises a twelve year old such as Owen Kane being treated as a criminal for "mitching school and running away from home", Brother Benedict admits that "if they do not conform we thrash them". Benedict goes on to say to Sebastian "there is no room for your soft-centred, self-centred idealism". This quote from Benedict shows the author using alliteration and sibilance to highlight this view through repetition. Brother Benedict is described like a bird which is a recurring theme in the book. When Brother Sebastian reveals he wishes to leave Benedict is depicted through a simile such as "Benedict sat waiting with a bird like tilt of the head, sharp, beakish, owl-like" gives a very vivid description of Benedict. It portrays Benedict as animalistic in the character of an owl which is a bird of prey which pounces.

The words the author uses "before he pecked" "A chicken eyeing a seed" all seem to make Benedict a nasty predator through imagery. Benedict's attitude towards children is shown when he says "anybody who says he loves children doesn't understand them". I found Brother Sebastian to be a compassionate man who was against violence towards the boys in the Home. I think he was rebellious as he didn't want to be there and he didn't really care for Brother Benedict or his treatment of the boys.

I feel that Brother Sebastian had empathy towards Owen as he too felt bullied and imprisoned at the Home by Brother Benedict. Sebastian was a teacher of woodwork and not an academic person like Benedict claimed to be. I feel Sebastian was more down to earth and practical in this sense of how he taught the children skills in working with their hands which was beneficial to them if they were also not very academic. Sebastian shows integrity and he doesn't revel in authority over the boys or abuse his power as a teacher. I think Owen Kane was a very ill and abused child who needed medical care and nurturing.

He must have been upset to have kept wetting the bed at 12 years of age and of the ridicule from the other boys. I felt bad that he was targeted by Brother Benedict as he was one of the youngest boys there. I think Owen put up a front to pretend he was tough as he had to, to be able to survive in the Home. Brother Sebastian decided to leave the home when his father dies and leaves him some money as he saw this as an opportunity and the means to leave without fear of letting his father down now that he had passed away. Sebastian is told by Benedict that because of his vow of poverty that the money from his fathers will should go to the Christian Brothers instead. Sebastian decides not to give them the money but instead to keep it all himself.

Sebastian says that he wants to save himself from the slack tide of his life, which shows the author using this metaphor to show that Sebastian felt trapped and stifled where he was. Brother Sebastian is against the violence used to make the boys in the home conform. In one such incident Brother Benedict beats Owen for painting graffiti on the wall outside, because it ends

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with the word OK, Owen Kane's initials even though Benedict knows that it wasn't actually Owen who did it. I feel that Sebastian was wrong to take Owen with him as Owen was not legally his child and he suffered from epileptic seizures that made him dependant on medication.

Taking Owen made Sebastian a criminal as the boy leaving with him was seem as a kidnapping. The structure of the novel was set at the beginning in the Home in Ireland and then the two main characters escape to London. When they are being searched for in London they then return to Ireland again to avoid detection. Another reason is that Sebastian plans to let Owen die there in an epileptic fit.

Sebastian and Owen went to London to escape from the Home. Sebastian took Owen away from the cruelty and violence of the home to save him. Owen ran away from the Home with Sebastian as it was his only chance to escape and have any chance of happiness or hope in life. When Michael reverts back to his original name of Michael Lamb from Brother Sebastian the author uses his name Michael which means " who is like God" as a symbolic reference. In this reference to God Michael also grants Owen wishes as if he were a God to go to a football match, to fly and to swim. Michael like God thinks that he can give life and take it away when he plans to kill Owen for his own good and as an act of love.

In the same ways that the author uses Owens name knowing that it means Lamb to symbolize that Owen will be as a sacrificial lamb to Michael who acts as though he is a God in taking Owens life as an " act of love". This phrase " act of love" also comes up in the magazine article that the

receptionist at the first hotel is reading. It is written by a man called Garth Abrahams so Michael uses the name M Abraham and son to sign the register at the hotel. Yet again the author is showing through names that Michael is like Abraham and Owen is his son who he was asked to sacrifice. Michael tries to act as Owens father in London but he is not mature enough for this role.

Unlike the fatherly figure he tries to portray by supplying the boy with shelter, food, clean clothing and even gets him to take a bath Michael fails to take responsibility as the adult in the relationship. Michael offers Owen cigarettes to let him smoke and then takes him to an amusement arcade to gamble on the slot machines. He then brings Owen to a toy shop and along with glider kits he buys the boy a fake gun and a real knife. Michael then draws attention to them both by borrowing a bread board and a ruler from the hotel receptionist which shows he is not thinking about his actions. Michael then asks Owen if he would like to join in at a birthday party in the hotel and this causes Owen to tears of embarrassment as Owen knew he would not fit in and yet again Michael would have been attracting attention to them by making Owen join the other kids at the party.

Owen would have stood out as he was not brought up in a home like the other children at the party and would have had a Dublin accent. This could have got them both caught in London but Michael is unaware of how to deal with these situations. Then to make matters worse Michael pulls out a lot of money and he ends up losing it on a bet and finds that the tree men around him have tricked him. This shows he is immature to handle money and therefore cannot look after himself let alone Owen properly. At the beginning

of the book Michael is an authority figure over Owen in the oppressive Home. Owen didn't trust anyone and was unhappy at the beginning but when they run away to London Owen becomes closer to Michael.

This is shown when Owen calls Michael by his real name to show him that he had got him a present. Owen grinned when Michael said "It's a beauty.

Thanks" and this showed that Owen wanted to make Michael happy and that he was showing his love and appreciation to him. When Michael realizes that Owen has stolen a pen to give him he shouts at the boy about the implications of being caught in doing so. This is the first time Michael has ever seen the boy cry as beatings and a broken collarbone did not.

Michael realizes that he has hurt the boy's feelings by telling him off for the present that he had stolen. Owen then comes towards Michael and the hug which is unusual for Owen to show affection of to trust anyone in this way. This is a positive step for Owen to begin to trust someone and to give and receive love and affection. Mac Laverty illustrates the tension and foreboding through references to the weather which seem to set the mood. He also uses the radio broadcasts of the news of "the kidnapping of Owen" to bring reality back into the characters lives. In the second hotel Michael and Owen go to in London it is ironic that the maid at the hotel is also from Ireland.

When Michael lies to her about being from Swords she also reveals having a sister who comes from the same place. The maid also has heard the news of the kidnapping and asks Michael about it. She tells Michael it's "a man about your age and a boy". So out of the whole of London they meet someone who is from Ireland and knows they are too and that they fit the

description that the police are looking for. In the novel Michael's father is portrayed positively as a perfect loving father in contrast to Owens negative abusive father who tried to kill him. So when Brother Benedict also abuses Owen at the Home Michael wants to protect him and be a father figure to him as his father had been to Michael.

The author also uses the story of Daedalus and his son Icarus to convey a father and son relationship. Daedalus and his son Icarus both escape just like Michael and Owen from King Minos who resembles Brother Benedict at the Home. The tower which they escaped from was also surrounded by the sea which took the life of the son Icarus just as it will take the life of Owen. Daedalus loved his son so much that he helped him escape and told him to stay close to him to be safe. Michael also told Owen the same thing that he wanted Owen to trust him and stay close to him.

This is also a clue of the outcome of the story that began in love and it ends in tragedy. Michael loves Owen and Owen loves Michael and he showed him this by stealing the pen as a gift for Michael. Just like Daedalus Michael is a father figure who unconditionally loves the son figure in his life but it ends up that in trusting in these father figures the son doesn't make it. The author uses essential flashback techniques to give the reader an insight into the characters backgrounds. It tells of how Michael came to join the Christian Brothers to make his father proud. In contrast Owens father punished him and attempted to drown him.

Owens mother is also said to have tried to smother him with a pillow. It also shows how Owens mother put him in the Home not because like Michaels

father she was proud of him but he was sent as punishment as she couldn't look after him any longer. Owens grandmother is the only person who is said to have shown him affection. There are flashbacks when Michael remembers Owen taking a fit and how it affected him which shows how fragile the boy was at that time.

The punishment that Brother Benedict gave to Owen is shown to enforce Michael's decision to rescue Owen from the Home and to escape from working there also as he was against the brutality of the place and all it stood for. At the football match Michael shows a good fatherly side to him as he takes Owen into the locker room after he takes a fit and he steps up to the responsibility of fatherhood as the reality kicks in. Michael's attitude changes at this point as he knows now that Owen's illness is progressing and that it will draw attention to them both. Mac Laverty doesn't let us know of the plan that Michael says "appeared like demons" this simile is a hint at the fact that the thoughts he had of the plan were not good thoughts but were indeed dark.

This leads us into suspense about what Michael is planning to do and how the story will end. Michael is running low on money and he phones Maguire the solicitor to ask him to release some more of the funds to him. He realises that murder would be wrong and that if he had some more money then he could buy some time to postpone being caught or killing Owen. The tone of the novel becomes quite dark and desperate at this point. Both Owen and Michael are depressed with little money and with the police searching for them so the tone of freedom and happiness is turning into a feeling of being trapped and in despair.

I think Michael has now felt the weight of responsibility for looking after Owen and being a father figure isn't as easy as he had originally thought. I feel he has the boy's best interests at heart and that he at least tried to get more money from Maguire to not have to kill the boy to keep him from returning to the abusive Home. Depression is weighing heavily on Michael's judgement and he is alone in a country where he cannot seek help as by rescuing Owen he is not a wanted criminal. I am appalled that Michael could think of killing Owen as he is supposed to have been a priest and should have upheld the belief that murder is wrong.

The incident with Haddock shows how desperate Michael has become to leave Owen with a man like Haddock who takes drugs and who is gay and could possibly have been a paedophile. When Michael returns and finds Haddock with his arm around Owen he does become angry and tell Haddock to leave while he asks Owen did Haddock touch him which shows that Michael does care about Owen as a father would. Michael wants to protect Owen but he feels that living with Haddock is too dangerous for them both as Haddock finds out just who Michael really is. Haddock is described as having " a sly look about him" and being " slimy".

When Michael realises what Haddock is capable of he then knows that he must follow out the plan and go back to Ireland. Michael tries to be like his father in the way that he was the " perfect father". His father had a utilitarian view of life and we are told that he killed a gull and some rabbits to save them from pain. Michael too thinks that by killing Owen he will be saving him from pain. The final chapter is the longest as it has a lot of detail to build up suspense towards the climactic ending. Michael justifies killing Owen as he

feels it is an act of love and mercy to protect him from returning to the violence of the Home or to some Dublin slum with his “” totally inadequate and snivelling mother” as Michael describes her.

When Owen describes how the felling of going into a fit makes him happy and says he would like to feel that way all of the time Michael also uses this to justify how he kills him. I think that Michael was wrong to kill Owen as there could have been a lot of ways in which to save him from the Home without murdering him. I don't think there is an excuse to kill a child even if it is to save him from the violence of a Home it isn't a decision that Michael had the right to make. The only excuse that I can think of is that he was affected by depression when his father died and that he wasn't thinking straight at the time and he could see no other way out for him and Owen.