

sions about the cultural factors that may contribute to the
Based on your conclusions, develop a claim of policy argu
strategies for bringing the United States' teen birth rate
other developing countries.

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Boss's Son (2005)

5 The first weeks were the worst.
They were all full-timers
half a generation older at least,
and me headed for college, pegged for sure
among beer drinking, beer trucking men.
And they let me know it,
their muscle cars and pick-ups more real
than jock glory and SAT's.

10 Whatever I'd done, they stuck
a big fat "but" on its skinny ass:
I was football captain, but I was quarterback—
just another name for bossing guys around.
I was strong enough, *but* I liked books.
15 I had a pretty girl, *but* I was pussywhipped.
My pride unraveled like a baseball's snarled insides.
So I did twice my share, blisters
torn til calluses covered my hands like shells.

20 Gradually, they taught me their secrets:
let your legs do the lifting and save your back.
Load last things first so pints, quarts, cans, kegs
come undone top to bottom, back to front,
first stop to last and handle everything just once.
Snugging the load, making it stay that way all day
25 so corners and dumbshit drivers don't tumble it away
in explosions of foam soaking up half a day's pay.
After work we hung around and drank for free.
I salvaged bottles from the cooler's breakage bin,
hosing off scum and bits of glass.
30 I guzzled, smoked, swore with the best of them.
Playing the boy at night, I played the man

next morning, showed up early
and tried not to puke on company time.

Paydays we went to sour-smelling hangouts
of touchy pride and easy violence. Once
I saw a logger bite off a chunk
of a guy's cheek like an apple, then promise
to wait til he got back from the emergency room. 35
We waited, too, and they went at it again
for what seemed a good half hour.
Blood splattered all over the alley. 40

Those summers I changed
into that life easy as T-shirts and steel-toed boots,
doing the grunt work and putting down salesmen
like my father with their soft hands and ties,
gloried in sweat and sore muscles and hangovers 45
like nobody's goddamn boss's son.
After four years I was out of college
and out of there forever. Three months later,
the artery that burst inside my father's head
dropped him to the warehouse floor and he was gone. 50

What did he wonder about me living so hard,
trying to prove myself to everyone but him?
It was one more thing between us
I couldn't explain and he wouldn't understand.
I wanted the world to love me, I suppose, 55
on its own rough terms,
but I wanted him to love me, too,
for whatever man I was or was trying to be,
for the first time not in the name of the father
but some pilgrim who could be any man's son. 55

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Write about what you see as the **connotations** of the word "pride" in line 15 and then again about its connotations in line 34.
2. How does pride help this young adult establish his independence and identity?
3. Read back over the poem's closing four lines, beginning with, "but I wanted him to love me, too...." Exercise your creative thinking and offer your interpretation of those final lines. As you speculate, consider the phrase, "in the name of the father," juxtaposed with the image of "some pilgrim."