

# Barn burning



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Shannon Nicholson English 101 Spring 2006 Mrs. Lovinguth " Barn Burning"--

William Faulkner's short story Barn Burning was first published in June 1939 issue of Harper's Bazaar. The historical perspective and background at that time is important to the story-this was a Great Depression Era in America (" Barn Burning-A Story from the 30ies"). Although viewed as a criminal act by today's standards, the burning of barns was common during the Great Depression. The only difference being that the burned barns actually belonged to the farmers, whereas in this story, Abner Snopes burned other people's barns. Even though the story itself is not set in the Depression Era, but somewhere at the end of 19th century, the same themes of family heritage, maturation, and inequality are present in the story as they were at the time that Faulkner wrote this story. Faulkner's ability to impart his " strongly topographical imagination"(Miller 211) adds color and zest to this story, which can be taken at face value with some implicit tones contributing to the dilemmas of Sarty. The story, in a fairly solid Faulknerian manner, is centered on the conflict a young boy, Sarty Snopes, experiences, in relation to being faithful to his father versus behaving in the right manner ethically. From the beginning, we can see the extreme anguish of young Sarty, who once again has to lie to protect his father, feeling " fear and despair and the old grief of blood" (Faulkner 350). Sarty has no choice; he was born into this family, and inherited with it " the old fierce pull of blood" (Faulkner 348). His father is described as a man with " wolf like independence and even courage when the advantage was at least neutral which impressed strangers, as if they got from his latent ravening ferocity not so much a sense of dependability as a feeling that his ferocious conviction in the rightness of his own actions would be of advantage to all whose interest lay with his"

(Faulkner 350). This description is important and somewhat explains Sarty's loyalty to his father, perhaps because of the fear of reprisal should he attempt to dissuade Abner from breaking the law. It also, on the other hand, explains some of the motives Abner Snopes has for doing what he does; as we see later in the story, he not only purposefully stains his new landlord, Mayor de Spain's, expensive French rug with horse manure from his feet, but he also attempts to burn his barn in the end. Long-endured oppression as a member of disadvantaged class, poverty, and ensuing jealous rage in relation to the wealthy, are what motivates Abner Snopes to commit his criminal acts. As a character in the story, he is juxtaposed to his young son, who, in spite of his age, knows what is morally right and what is not, and finally makes the morally right choice, turning his back on his father, and frantically warning De Spain: " Barn!" (Faulkner 359).

Faulkner allows Sarty the ability to act on his thoughts by way of a spur-of-the-moment decision that inadvertently causes his father's likely death. Thus, the theme of maturation arises late in the story. He runs away and does " not look back" (Faulkner 360). Pamela S. Saur, in *Property, Wealth, and " American Dream"* in 'Barn Burning' says: " It is more difficult to find words for what Sarty has chosen instead of loyalty to his father. Without considering the complications raised by the above questions, it may appear that Sarty has chosen simple goodness or conformity to a law-abiding, just society. Actually, Sarty flees his tyrannical, outlaw father, but [he in the same time flees] the alternative of abject submission represented by his mother, and a society in which justice is elusive and poverty, suffering, and inequality are prevalent." Every reader of this story should consider the manner in which Faulkner delivers a multi-themed message with the simple <https://assignbuster.com/barn-burning/>

story of a child's troubled life. By allowing young Sarty to develop his own morals and choose righteousness over blood, Faulkner has touched on an age-old question. Is blood thicker than water In this case at least, the answer is no.

The narrator's limited omniscient perspective is important in that it paints the picture of the setting as well as each character's place in the setting, and provides insight into the mind of young Sarty. Faulkner has a tremendous gift in that " the events of his works take place within an elaborately mapped mental or textual landscape in which characters are associated with places" (Miller 211). This is evident in the harsh conditions that the Snopes must endure due to Abner's previous " profession" as a horse thief. In the story, everything from the smell of the courthouse, to the condition of Mrs. Snope's dowry, suggests a sense of retribution on the part of fate. Hence, everything associated with Abner Snopes is ugly, dirty, junky, and worn. This includes his racial attitudes towards African-Americans, although at the time this story was set, these attitudes were widely accepted in the South.

The tragic culmination and resolution to the story implies that the " old pull of blood" (Faulkner 348) has been broken by the young Snopes. His father, and possibly his brother, were apparently the only criminal minded members in the family. In some aspect, his sense of justice was rather twisted as to provoke a " how dare you punish me" attitude. Fortunately, Sarty has the strong desire to break free from the family curse created by his father and the intestinal fortitude to make it happen. We are not sure what kind of future awaits Sarty, but he walks on " toward the dark woods. . . [and into] the rapid and urgent beating of the urgent and quiring heart of the late spring night" (Faulkner 360).

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