

Barn burning



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' Barn Burning' is a short story written by William Faulkner and first published in Harper's Magazine on June 1939. As the name suggests, the story has to do with the infamous barn burnings that took place in the post civil war days in the South. However, one could not imagine the gravity of the issues discussed in the story just through the title and yet it entails the main reason of conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist.

Faulkner, born in 1897, in New Albany, Mississippi, wrote novels and stories based on the conflicts that struck the South. This story is no exception, however, the greatest job that he served as a writer was the intricate fabrication of fine play of words with the anxiety and aggression that the protagonist faced. The characters in the story play an important part in explaining to readers the general behavior of people. The main characters are an antagonist who gains sadistic pleasure in destroying the elements of law in the society, a protagonist who chooses the right path and in turn shows the readers the right path, and the secondary characters who either are the cause for the behavior of antagonist or are meek observers who do not have the heart to choose the right path. This story has it all.

In the story, the protagonist is young Sartoris Snopes, or Sarty as he is referred to in the rest of the story, and the antagonist his stern father, Abner Snopes. The conflict that forms the central theme is the loyalty towards one's blood or loyalty towards truth and justice. While the antagonist prefers the former to the two, more to satisfy his own evil deeds and to secure his

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foothold, the protagonist prefers the latter. The conflict arises because the two are related by blood and while on many occasions Sarty tries to show his sense of loyalty to blood, he fails to understand his father's desire to destroy his enemy, more so when he himself is responsible for creating that enemy. Young Sarty is in a bind because the antagonist is his father, so while his morals prefer justice and truth, they also compel him to be faithful to his father. Parents are the central figure for a child, however, with Sarty choosing the path of justice at the end, the writer shows how relations need to be restrained in order to do the right thing, which also indicates breaking free from the illusions and the bonds that keep a person from doing the right thing.

Abner Snopes is a disgruntled man who is unable to find his sense of security for the simple reason because he is poor and ruled by others. This is what makes him what he is, a man preferring revenge to calm. His calm is lost because he cannot rule, he lacks the sense of power that brings along with it a sense of security, which is also the reason for the snobbish ways of the other characters he had to deal with, whether Harris or De Spain. This is what makes him a barnburner, for he knows too well the importance of a barn that he decides to burn one whenever someone crosses his path.

In the story, the older brother appears a mere shadow of his father who prefers to live life the way his father told him to, burning barns of enemies. Protagonist's mother and aunt are the only characters who believe in the sense of justice but are too meek to follow the path. Maybe the reason was that they were not independent like a man, in the times the story is written in, which made them fearsome, and in spite of not agreeing to Abner's ways just gave in. This also makes it easy for readers to understand where the

young Snopes got his sense of justice. The sisters mentioned in the story do not have a significant role, except representing that section of society who cannot care less about justice, morals as long as they are fed and are able to live their life. The butler mentioned in the story, is black, and shows how Abner disrespects him just because he wants someone to be controlled by him.

It is important to note the different ways in which the protagonist and antagonist think, while Sarty thinks of the Justice as the person who does what he is assigned for, provide justice while Abner thinks of them as just enemies.

Sarty notices that his father possesses a “ stiff black back” that is not dwarfed by the house. Snopes is defiant of the mansion’s magnificence, and as Sarty watches him walk down the lane toward the house, we are presented with the central image of the story: “ Watching him, the boy remarked the absolutely undeviating course which his father held and saw the stiff foot come squarely down in a pile of fresh droppings where a horse had stood in the drive and which his father could have avoided by a simple change of stride. (Robert)”

This indicates that the antagonist is not what the society made him but he chose to be. His pride, envy, and ego all contributed to his being. He lacks self-control and that is why he is the antagonist.

The young Sarty finally finds his way out ones he is able to break free of the fear of being alone and in turn breaks free of the bonds. He informs De Spain of the danger to his barn but once he does that, he knows his blood will no longer be related to anything but justice and in doing this, he showed the readers the right path.

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