

Barn burning by william faulkner

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

s Barn Burning “ Barn Burning” is a widely anthologized short story written by William Faulkner that highlights the coming of age of a young boy named Sartoris “ Sarty” Snopes and how he perceives the behavior of his elders around him as its primary themes. The plot follows the life of the Snopes family, who are forced to relocate as a result of the father, Abner Snopes, the patriarch and the main antagonist of the story. Abner Snopes’ pyromaniacal and compulsive desire to exact revenge often leaves him in a tight spot with the law and his son, Sarty; whom he always blackmails in to lying for him in court. Due to his son’s testimony, there aren’t any evidences against Abner but the judge advises him, “ This case is closed. I can't find against you, Snopes, but I can give you advice. Leave this country and don't come back.” (Faulkner, 1993) However, in the end when his father pulls the same trick twice, it is hinted in the story that he is shot dead by the owner of the barn and Sarty, instead of going back to cover his father’s faults runs away from home to turn over a new leaf. There are a number of psychological issues and aspects that the story discusses; particularly child psyche and perceptions. Sarty’s character in the story can be defined as morality in its unformed and crude nature; in other words, a sense of right and wrong that was not developed by understanding but by the individual’s own evaluation of a particular situation. (Faulkner, 1993) The “ Barn Burning” has also been called a ‘ story of initiation’ by literary analysts. ‘ Stories of initiation’ is a category according literary theories that include plots that put the protagonist through life-changing experiences. An initiation story unravels gradually and the protagonist incorporates intense dynamism in his traits. By the end of the story, the character has a profound epiphantic moment that provides him or her insight in to the situation at hand. These are the

<https://assignbuster.com/barn-burning-by-william-faulkner/>

characteristics as theorized by analysts, who also label the Barn Burning as a story of initiation since it incorporates all the elements mentioned earlier. In order to further validate their claims, these aspects will be discussed in greater detail. Sarty Snopes is a ten year old boy and like any other child of his age it can be assumed that he embodies the innocence and impressionability that every child possesses at that age. His innocence is quite ostensible from the fact that although he dislikes lying in court for his father and realizes that setting fire to someone else's barn is bad, however he is incapable of expressing and articulating exactly why it's wrong. Like a child, he is easily overpowered by his parents and coerced to do things that he doesn't want to do. He is heavily dependent on his father, sees his enemies as his own which is why he is fearful of Abner that keeps him from reporting the actual matter to the police and relocate with the rest of his family members. He is infused with a false belief that by lying for his father he is doing a favor to his family and maintaining his loyalty to his kin. Even though, it contradicts his conscience but through this aspect it can be clearly deduced that even though with a distinct sense of morality, Sarty was still a boy with false conceptions and impressionability that made him vulnerable and a complex character. Sarty is faced with the same conflicts, when his father decides to burn down De Spain's barn as well, for whom Sarty had held a particularly high opinion and did not want them to go through the same ordeal. This is the first time Sarty manages to oppose his father and stands up to his entire family. At one point, when Abner Snopes asks his wife to restrain Sarty, so that he does not go on and warn the De Spain's about his father's plan but he threatens his own mother instead that he will hit her if she does not let him go. This shows that Sarty truly acknowledges his

<https://assignbuster.com/barn-burning-by-william-faulkner/>

father's unfair and immature handlings of conflicts; therefore, he chooses to hurt his mother in order to stop his father. Even though, Sarty is unable to warn them on time but his father meets his end as a result, this is the final resolution of Sarty's conflicts. With Sarty's father gone he makes a firm choice of not being a part of the events that had transpired just a few moments ago. This is the epiphantic moment that was being discussed earlier and he seeks out a final resolution for all his conflicts. With his father's death, it can be postulated that Sarty has now begun to understand that all the fears and qualms that he had regarding his father's depraved behavior was indeed true and was followed by grave consequences. However, his strong opposition had caused him to become a pariah in his family and this realization was then followed by his decisive choice that is to run away from home. Although, the thought had first crossed his mind but at that time he had a moral duty to perform, which was to save De Spain's barn; the only place that had given him a sense of security, hope and peace that his family failed to provide him with. After knowing that he had done his part to try and put a stop to his father's actions, he calmly made the choice and kept on walking " without ever looking back" marking the end of the story. Having discussed the various elements of an initiation story, they are quite ostensible in the ' Barn Burning'. The protagonist is dynamic and has a compelling character that causes him to learn and mature over the course of the story. (Faulkner, 1993) If the protagonist is assessed from Marcus' three stages of initiation, it seems that Sarty actually goes through a " tentative initiation". The death of Sarty's father is the ultimate eradication of his fears and his final maturation as an adult. Although, he makes the decision to leave his family for good but for a ten year old child there are many conflicts

<https://assignbuster.com/barn-burning-by-william-faulkner/>

and experiences that are yet to mould him. Hence, this was just the shaping of his moral character and as described by Marcus, this form of initiation actually took him to the thresholds of adulthood to see the world from his own perspective, untouched by his father's influence. In conclusion, the story triggered some intense questions regarding nature vs. nurture debate for the way Sarty turned out despite his family's contrasting behavior and also discussing the innate sense of justice in every human being regardless of their education or family backgrounds. Work Cited Faulkner, William. "Barn Burning." Selected Short Stories of William Faulkner. New York: The Modern Library, 1993. 1-25. 1962.