

A secure work they  
had to reserve



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

A Critical Approach To “ Barn Burning” (by William Faulkner)” Barn Burning” is a sad story because it very clearly shows the classical struggle between the privileged and the underprivileged classes.

Time after time emotions of despair surface from both the protagonist and the antagonist involved in the story. This story outlines two distinct protagonists and two distinct antagonists. The first two are Colonel Sartoris Snopes (Sarty) and his father Abner Snopes (Ab). Sarty is the protagonist surrounded by his father's antagonism whereas Ab is the protagonist antagonized by the social structure and the struggle that is imposed on him and his family. The economic status of the main characters is poor, without hope of improving their condition, and at the mercy of a quasi-feudal system in North America during the late 1800's. Being a sharecropper, Ab and his family had to share half or two-thirds of the harvest with the landowner and out of their share pay for the necessities of life.

As a result of this status, Ab and his family know from the start what the future will hold — hard work for their landlord and mere survival for them. No hope for advancement prevails throughout the story. Sarty, his brother and the twin sisters have no access to education, as they must spend their time working in the fields or at home performing familial duties. Nutrition is lacking. He could smell the coffee from the room where they would presently eat the cold food remaining from the mid-afternoon meal (PARA.

55). As a consequence, poor health combined with inadequate opportunity results in low morale. A morale which the writer is identifying with the middle class of his times that same quality which in later years would cause his

descendants to over-run the engine before putting a motor car into motion (PARA.

20) The Snope family manages to survive and find work. However, the work offers little other than a chance for survival. I reckon I'll have a word with the man that aims to begin tomorrow owning me body and soul for the next eight months (PARA 40). Like nomads they were forced to move constantly. Due to seasons and crop rotation, in order to secure work they had to reserve land with different landowners. Ab's emotional instability is a predominant factor contributing to his erratic behavior throughout the story. The family has moved a dozen times from farm to farm, and at times forced to forfeit their agreement with the landlord due to Ab's unacceptable behavior. A behavior which throughout the story is transformed into a rebellion, by Ab smearing the landowner's carpet with horse manure and then suing him for charging him too much for the damage.

These acts symbolize frustration with the system and a radical approach to rebel against it. Knowing that punishment could not be avoided when committing such acts, Ab's actions take on a more dramatic meaning as if he is trying to convey a message. He is aware of the economic injustice and he must respond even at the risk of him and his family being prosecuted or ostracized. Ab's constant rebellion is displayed by a rough, sour character and exemplified when he burns his landlord's barn down.

He feels despair and loss, and inflicts damage to whomever he happens to be working for. Although the story centers on the feelings and thoughts of Ab's youngest son Sarty, the economic implications of his entire family play a

vital role in justifying (not condoning) his father's behavior, which is the pivotal reason for Sarty's controversial feelings on which the whole story is based. Sarty's main dilemma is his loyalty to his family which collides with his disappointment and suppressed dislike of his own father. He tends to hide his feelings by denying the facts, our Enemy he thought in that despair; our mine and hisn both! He's my Father! (PARA. 1) and The boy said nothing.

Enemy! Enemy! he thought; for a moment he could not even see, could not see that the Justice's face was kindly. (PARA. 10). The story's emotional turns are clearly defined by Sarty's thoughts and Ab's actions. Sarty's dilemma and Ab's frustrations continually grab the reader, serving up a series of emotionally laden dilemmas: Given the circumstances of the story, is Ab's barn burning justified? Should Sarty tell the landlord that Ab was responsible for burning down the barn? Is the outdated sociological Blaming the Victim theory valid? Is the lose-win arrangement between sharecropper and landowner a morally acceptable one? Burning a barn or any act