

---

## **Character and Symbol in Barn Burning by Karl F. Zender: Article Analysis**

**Zender, Karl F. "Character and Symbol in 'Barn Burning.'" *College Literature*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1989, pp. 48–59. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/25111801](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25111801).**

Karl Zender explains there is an obvious realism in Faulkner's story but the modernist twist throughout is the symbolism of the irony which causes the reader to depart from realism to some deeper meaning. Thus, leaving the reader to decide what deeper meaning to connect the characters to the plot itself. This is true. The story is full of realism with symbolism that leads me to believe that there is a deeper meaning. Zender breaks down literature to a psychological and social function and that the *Barn Burning* by William Faulkner embodies that. The value of the story within the theme are ever-present and show the means of loyalty and maturation within the character named Sarty. Namely, Zender portrays Faulkner's climax, of Sarty, essentially killing his father, as a setting of Sarty's maturity knowing that he must move on.

Zender points to the engagement of three questions that sends Sarty to progress throughout the story. First, why does Ab take Sarty to the De Spain house the first time, Second, Why does he take Sarty the second time, and third, why does he refuse to tie Sarty to the bed as his other son suggests, before leaving to burn Spain's barn? But overall, Zender compares these questions to the loyalty Sarty feels and the pull of values that contradict each other with the defense of his father burning barns. Zender shows this feeling when explaining that Sarty feels freedom when he sees the large De Spain home. The blood ties that Sarty is taught are more important than anything else create conflict for him and his father.. Zender explains that merely seeing these questions and conflicts as merely developmental cut down the stories significance. Also, commonly we see the character but not beyond his predicament. The story is not meant for us, as readers, to limit ourselves to these things like the predicament and the development of the character, but also the values and meaning for today's world from a classical text.

Zender explains that the event of taking his son to the large De Spain house was meant to derail his son's thoughts of disloyalty by showing that even the purest of things can be contaminated. Ab, with the swift of his foot, tracks feces on the rug which symbolizes this point. It is a crucial point in the understanding of Ab and Sarty's relationship. It is a relationship that is still mending after Sarty's misstep in the beginning of the story with the Justice of the Court. It is a relationship in which Ab takes control of as the family rested before arriving at the De Spain house. Ab struck his son and instructed him on loyalty as is implied was taught to his son before. Zender points out that Faulkner often has a parental-to-child relationship within his stories. The relationships are often personal and complicated. The fact that Ab had multiple instances of symbolism within the actions of his son is evident and Zender explains that as crucial to the storyline and the theme. In following Zender's advice, looking at this story as the development of Sarty and his maturity but looking farther at the outlining symbolism and meaning brought a better understanding to the message and theme being portrayed by Faulkner.

---

Zender shows that the psychological fracture of instruction from a teacher-student method as is magnified by Faulkner with Ab and Sarty is a crucial part to the story and shows truth to Zender's analysis that the Burning Barn is a story of Psychological function. Although I agree with the assessment that the relationship plays a large role throughout, I don't find it true that his father took him as a mentor would take a student. Zender does a great job though, throughout of breaking down the bigger picture and often incorporated examples from other texts in proving his point of emphasis. There was plenty of textual evidence to come to the same conclusion as Zender through his analysis.

edubirdie.com