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Lennie Snopes, A Closer Look

EVEN IN DISCUSSIONS LIMITED SPECIFICALLY TO THAT TINY CORNER OF THE Faulkner opus called “Barn Burning,” few spend time on the mother of Sarty Snopes.¹ No one misses the hope of new life for the boy as he leaves his family and does not look back, but we dismiss Sarty’s mother though she contributes significantly to the impact of the story. Her reactions mirror Sarty’s crisis, and the “grief and despair” Faulkner attributes to Sarty are also hers. She functions as a sort of miners’ canary whose cries break the silence at critical moments. Her outbursts provoke more questions than answers and cannot be labeled choric or interpretive, but if we give ear to Lennie’s brief and anguished articulations, allowing her to emerge from a background she seems always to inhabit even in critical commentary, we will perceive with greater clarity the issues at stake for her son and gain access to the complexities of “Barn Burning” on new and deeper levels.

Lennie Snopes actually says little and has no noticeable influence on the actions and choices of her husband. Edmond L. Volpe discusses the family dynamic here, but mentions Lennie only in passing, interpreting her as a sort of foil for Abner, the character in “Barn Burning” no one can ignore: “The will-less, abject creature that is his wife symbolizes the power of his will. What Ab had done to his wife, he sets out to do to the emerging will of his son” (236). While accepting this view as far as it goes, we may also wonder whether Faulkner really means for us to take Abner’s cue and reduce Lennie to insignificance.

In fact, the male characters should not be our only focus. If Lennie remains invisible in the twists and turns of the language, the close shaving of moral and psychological fine points; if we miss her scenes and remain deaf to her utterances, we lose much Faulkner provides to make gripping and credible a story that is hers as well as Abner’s, Sarty’s, and De Spain’s. Lennie becomes the context of Sarty’s surprising choice. Through her, we understand more clearly the inner struggle driving her child into his future alone. As if in answer to the easy objection, “No

¹“Barn Burning” is often called Faulkner’s best short story: “one of his most profound” (Volpe 232); “a masterpiece—technically brilliant, thematically disturbing and convincing” (Skei 58); a work of “extraordinary power and poignancy” (Ford 537).

ten-year-old would do that!" Faulkner provides a mother who shares the boy's life and emotions, a person who occupies the center of his determining moments. What she does moves the plot toward Sarty's defining realization and prepares us for it. Lennie Snopes appears at important junctures, and her cries punctuate the instant, prodding the reader to attend.

There are other reasons to look closely at a character usually deemed too unimportant for comment. The weight Faulkner places on the whole Snopes ethos, for example, creates its own significance. Volpe identifies "the inhuman ego blindness" from which "the crimes people inflict upon their fellow men" are derived in Faulkner's writing (238). The *ego blindness*, according to Volpe, "achieves its apotheosis in the satanic Ab Snopes of 'Barn Burning'" (238). According to this view, Snopes and the story he dominates together represent a key to some of Faulkner's perennial themes. In fact, the Snopeses and "Snopesism" become a kind of shorthand designation for everything Faulkner opposes and invite a close study of this element in his fiction. Jean Weisgerber notes that these people are "abominated by Faulkner" (9). As a mere cipher in Abner's household, Lennie has a place in the circle of Snopeses though, of course, she is not a Snopes by blood. Faulkner will press the point, linking this mother with the son who is an exception in the Snopes breed. Despite the fact that "blood" is Abner's shorthand for what it means to be a Snopes, the "fierce pull of blood" seems to exert its force as a genetic inheritance Sarty has from his mother as well as from his Snopes father. Something is drawing Sarty *out*. The "pull of blood" may define his loyalty to Abner, but the boy has another bloodline, a powerful influence stirring his inner conflict and impacting his decisions.

Critics discuss the nature of Sarty's decision-making process. Phyllis Franklin positions Sarty "against a background of conflicting values"—that is, "traditional values" (held by characters like De Spain), "the private values of Abner Snopes, and the traditional but ineffectual moral tendencies of Ab's wife" (189). In Franklin's view Sarty is "caught between three worlds" (Eldred 690). Yet to contrast "traditional values" or "traditional . . . moral tendencies" with the "private values" of Ab Snopes is to define not three but two ways these people interact with each other and with the community, making Sarty's frame of reference essentially the same as his mother's, the traditional and moral one.

Marilyn Claire Ford interprets Sarty as “an extraordinary moral force in the embattled world of the Snopeses” (540), but though she makes the point, she does not link the morality of Sarty’s choices to Lennie. Eldred characterizes “Barn Burning” as “another psychological, Oedipal story of a young boy’s initiation into manhood” (689), but it is difficult to locate Lennie Snopes in such a framework. To leave her out of it altogether is the better choice and prevents our misinterpreting her. “Barn Burning” is more than a boy’s initiation into adulthood, Oedipal or otherwise. Sarty’s decision does move him toward maturity, but it is his courage, his firm intention to be aligned with truth, and his acceptance of all consequences that form the moral dimension Franklin and Ford observe.

The potent moral agency of this story is actually three Sartys—the ten-year-old, a Sarty who is “older,” and a Sarty “older still,” the man mulling over these events twenty years down the road, thinking in midlife about what happened at the De Spain farm (Faulkner 7-8). If Faulkner wants to persuade us of the inevitability of Sarty’s choice—the “almost tragic inevitability,” Hans Skei calls it (68)—he could probably find no more convincing means than linking the decision to Sarty’s makeup, clearly evident in the ten-year-old, fully interpreted by the later Sartys, and suggested *in medias res* by the responses of his mother even before Sarty faces his defining crisis. Yet when Skei argues that “the story specifies character traits that Sarty may have inherited from her and not from his father” (65), he obscures the significance of the point by his oblique stating of it. Skei discovers strong and positive qualities in the boy, but even in doing so he fails to connect them with Lennie Snopes: “Sarty may well be found to have some in-born human qualities—a sense of justice, a feeling of what is right and wrong” (67). These are salient qualities which suggest Lennie, not Abner. Once again Sarty’s mother disappears.

Jane Hiles discusses Sarty’s genetic inheritance but focuses entirely upon Abner, as if Sarty, like Athena, has had only one parent—a father. She notes that the narrator of the story “posits . . . instinctive drives and inherent character” and “considers heredity to be the force that shapes both” (330-31). Finding Sarty’s departure a reenactment of the “pattern of alienation, aggression and escape established by his father” (336), Hiles believes that “Sarty’s rebellion is, in effect, a repetition of Ab’s subversion of the code of public law” (337). Narrowing the subject to a biological emphasis ironically undercuts Hiles’s point because any such

reference inevitably brings forward the fact that human beings have two principal sources, not just one, from which they obtain their make-up. Going beyond those who merely undervalue the significance of a mother in Sarty's life and character, Hiles negates Lennie's contribution altogether: "Wherever Sarty goes, it is not only improbable but—genetics being what they are—impossible for him to eliminate inbred characteristics" (337). Genetics being what they are, the inheritance factor—if we with Hiles admit one—actually presents a different picture. Though fictional, Sarty and Lennie are, in fact, recognizable human beings. The literary imagination that conceived these characters links them genetically—parent and child. That sons share character traits with mothers as well as with fathers is a point we cannot dismiss. In fact, Faulkner will not let us.

The loyal young Sarty's responses do not originate with Abner Snopes; so much is clear when we look closely at the barn burner and his tribe. To Charles Mitchell, "Abner's defiant will" suggests "the Christian archetype of unsubmitiveness—Satan" (186). For Max L. Loges he is "a man who is loyal to no one other than himself or his family (which is a mere extension of himself)" (44). Cleanth Brooks speaks of "the infamous Snopes clan" (10) and their "purely predatory impulses" (222). Indeed, for Brooks, "Snopesism" is notable for its "lack of any kind of integrity" (222), something that becomes a threat on a broad scale, not just in terms of petty thievery and inconvenience to the Yoknapatawpha communities: "The Snopeses, therefore, because they recognize no values but self-interest and have unlimited vitality, threaten to take over the modern South" (307). Still, as Brooks explains, it is futile to oppose them: "The difficulty of fighting Flem and Snopesism in general is that it is like fighting a kind of gangrene or some sort of loathsome mold" (222). Weisgerber observes: "The triumph of this robust and cynical tribe is surely an inglorious one! The Snopeses give no quarter, but their success is due as much to the weakness of their victims as to their own vigor and skill" (148).

More recent critics who emphasize the injustices of the sharecropper system and find Abner Snopes' criminal resistance understandable if not attractive seem to forget Faulkner's harsh presentation of the man. In fact, he is a figure of horror right out of the Southern Gothic tradition:

[Sarty] followed the stiff back, the stiff and ruthless limp, up the slope and on to the starlit road where, turning, he would see his father against the stars but without face

or depth—a shape black, flat, and bloodless as though cut from tin in the iron folds of the frockcoat which had not been made for him, the voice harsh like tin and without heat like tin. (8)

This character has a “hand like a curled claw” (11) and “pebble-colored eyes”; the “shaggy iron-gray brows” over them twitch (12). The “almost pleasant, almost gentle” voice that responds to Sarty’s offer to hide the corn De Spain demands is sinister, not kindly. Here the face is “absolutely calm” (19); but this is the same face that will loom over Sarty on his last night at home, and not even here in the father-and-son conversation about De Spain’s corn will Faulkner allow us to trust the calm demeanor or the pleasantness and gentleness of the voice.

Faulkner has already painted chilling pictures of Abner, and he returns in the details of Sarty’s last night to the Gothic images previously outlined. The gentle, even pleasant manner Snopes can adopt if he chooses is now nowhere to be seen. With Sarty, we shrink from “the face stooping at him in breathless and frozen ferocity, the cold, dead voice speaking over him” (21). If earlier, the “outrageous voice” was “calm” (9), here we note that Faulkner has intensified the frightening quality of Abner’s speech. Volpe draws attention to “the son’s nightmarish vision of his father” (236) and finds the concluding confrontation between Sarty and Abner a scene “right out of a child’s nightmare” (238). Abner mostly appears in darkness—always in shabby, funereal black. Faulkner qualifies the description of the “ironlike black coat,” observing that it “had once been black” but now has “that friction-glazed greenish cast of the bodies of old house flies” (11).

If Snopes, the father, looks like this and if Snopesism equals an utter lack of integrity, we have to conclude that Abner’s, not Lennie’s, genetic mark defines the criminal elements of the breed. The lines of this genetic stamp appear in high relief in the older brother as yet unnamed in “Barn Burning.” Sarty is also Abner’s son, but Snopesism does not account for who Sarty is or who he will become. Faulkner is not genetically unaware, and unlike many of his readers, he does not narrow his perspective to a focus exclusively male. In Lennie Snopes, he suggests who Sarty really is and also prepares us for the changes we will soon see in him. Faulkner’s characterization of Lennie foreshadows the outcomes just as acquaintance with the flesh-and-blood mother might provide clues to the life choices of a biologically actual Sarty.

Faulkner identifies Sarty as his mother's child by specifically attributing to Lennie the boy's willingness to work:

During the rest of that week he worked steadily, at what was within his scope and some which was beyond it, with an industry that did not need to be driven nor even commanded twice; he had this from his mother, with the difference that some at least of what he did he liked to do, such as splitting wood. (16)

Faulkner goes on to describe the "half-size axe which his mother and aunt had earned, or saved money somehow, to present him with at Christmas" (16-17), making the connection between mother and son a bond of affection as well as a genetic one. Sarty seems to have gained his more human traits through both nature and nurture—if not at his father's, then at his mother's knee. In like manner, Sarty's loyalty to Abner Snopes, though a young boy's natural admiration for his father, is arguably connected to Lennie Snopes's loyal submissiveness. Pamela S. Saur, as well as Volpe, notes her "abject submission." Like Sarty's, her loyalty is no doubt blended with a generous measure of fear, becoming the basis of the grief and despair Faulkner associates with her as with Sarty. She does not influence Abner though she knows him much better than Sarty does. She submits, as Ab and the culture expect her to; her passivity becomes a significant aspect of the story and contributes to the atmosphere of misery and hopelessness surrounding her and her son.

Lennie Snopes seems always to be crying. She enters the story weeping as she tries to help her youngest child, bloodied by a boy "half again his size" who is hissing "Barn burner!" The scene occurs moments after a frustrated Justice of the Peace orders Abner Snopes to "Take your wagon and get out of this country before dark" (5). Faulkner sketches the women, as in part he presents Abner, through details of clothing. Lennie and her sister are dressed in "calico and sun bonnets . . . sitting on and among the sorry residue of the dozen or more movings which even the boy could remember" (6).

The Snopes family's household effects, the "sorry residue" of previous moves now packed into the wagon to be moved again, includes a "clock inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which would not run, stopped at some fourteen minutes past two o'clock of a dead and forgotten day and time, which had been his mother's dowry" (6). Faulkner's perennial interest in the past makes of it a sort of inlay upon the present, exemplified here in the mother-of-pearl on this clock. The timepiece cannot go unnoticed.

Indeed, this item of Lennie's dowry is, in fact, the only bit of finery Faulkner offers to embellish his picture of these unfortunate people. The daughters wear "cheap" and "tawdry" ribbons (9, 13), but when their mother was a bride, she was launched on the disastrous marriage with a fine clock. The time it is supposed to monitor seems to have ceased altogether, and the heavy, useless piece of furniture is now a mere encumbrance, a suggestion of good things Lennie may have experienced previously but lost with this marriage, a symbol perhaps for hope itself long ago abandoned. There is no such thing as the "life and times" of Lennie Snopes. She has no history. But the timepiece serves as a reminder of her personal, more fortunate past and appears in stark contrast to the plainness of calico and sunbonnet, the current uniform of a poor sharecropper's wife.

Lennie Snopes is crying as she gets out of the wagon to wash Sarty's wound. She perhaps grieves over the crazily courageous loyalty of her ten-year-old son, who—unlike his older and presumably bigger, stronger brother—cannot tolerate an insult to their father. She gets down from the wagon, distancing herself from this symbol of the itinerant, criminal Snopes family, as Sarty himself will later separate himself from everything—wagon, rented house, father, mother, brother, twin sisters, aunt, and especially barn burning. Her leaving the wagon becomes a cameo-sized foreshadowing of the astonishing, barely believable event that climaxes the coming-of-age story Faulkner is telling about Sarty. Here his mother wants to clean Sarty's injuries, but Abner stops her. He seems intuitively to catch the significance of her leaving the wagon. "Get back," he growls, and repeats the command. In the interchange between the two speakers here, Abner's words envelop Lennie's, even as he has enveloped her life, her times:

"Get back," the father said.

"He's hurt, I got to get some water and wash his . . ."

"Get back in the wagon," his father said. (6)

Faulkner tells us twice that it is the father who speaks, linking Abner's coldness with his identity as Sarty's father at the very moment Sarty's mother is trying to care for the injured boy. The bit of dialogue creates a contrast between the two parents that could hardly be more telling. When Sarty refuses his mother's ministrations, taking his cue from his father's coldness, the still-loyal boy matches the pattern father

has set for son. Sarty's loyalty will become an essential element in the dynamic energizing the plot of this story. Sarty could, but he clearly does not, hate his father. In fact, it becomes evident that Sarty will have to overcome his misplaced loyalty if he is to break free and become his own morally superior man. His mother's entrapment never ends, but in her suffering we understand more clearly what Sarty suffers. Moreover, Faulkner will set her, as well as Sarty, in brief opposition to Abner. Her objections will be ineffectual, but she will openly state her opposition. In these moments, Faulkner prepares us for the more sustained opposition that grows to crisis point and deliverance for Sarty.

Unlike the bigger boy Sarty attacks just before the family "leaves the country," he does not allow himself to use the words "barn burner." Imitating his father's speech patterns, as well as his generally negative and hostile tone, Sarty refuses to name a deed that, through the omission, gains—besides the required secrecy—a kind of inverse sanctity, something that calls for awe and respect too great for iteration. However, Sarty's patterning himself after a father who never names the crime represents only half the picture Faulkner wants us to see. In fact, Sarty is more than conflicted.

The grief and despair typical of Lennie Snopes form our first impression of Sarty as he begins his agonized though clear-headed assessment of what brought his father to court. Watching these proceedings, Sarty thinks: "*He aims for me to lie. . . . And I will have to do hit*" (4). The case against Abner Snopes tells us much about the man. With Sarty, we begin to discover who his father is. We learn, for example, of Snopes's sly manipulation of the black man, a member of a powerless group the current social order regularly allows itself to view with suspicion. Abner puts this unsuspecting person in danger of being lynched instead of himself or hanged by a noose no less lethal because it is legal if the law gets its hands on him. When this black man innocently carries the message, "He say to tell you wood and hay kin burn" (4), he risks putting his neck in a noose a Snopes will not feel. Before Sarty can leave, however, he will have to resolve the conflict he feels with respect to his father. Faulkner clarifies the issues, giving us Lennie's view of them.

Sarty's mother cannot flee, but like the black man and Sarty also, she is distressed by her husband's crimes. The cry she utters the next time we see her concludes her part in a sequence Volpe finds "as eerie as the

opening scene of *Macbeth*” (235) and tells us much. “Let me do it,” she puts in, as the cleaning of the dung-stained rug in the boiling wash pot commences (Faulkner 13). Abner refuses, telling her, “You go back and git dinner. . . I’ll tend to this” (13). Her grieving, desperate cry will soon alert us to what Abner means when he says, “I’ll tend to this.” The words “grief and despair” are repeated as an almost choric litany in the story, and here Faulkner attributes to Lennie Snopes feelings he has already revealed as Sarty’s. The repetition creates emphasis, and the shared emotions provide one of the subtle links between mother and son. She continues to watch the rug cleaning from the house, and as the proceedings play out, an odd and critically significant thing happens. Lennie Snopes cries out, pleading with her husband, who is doing nothing more threatening at the moment than examining “a flattish fragment of field stone” he has picked up from the ground (14).

Whether we notice or entirely miss Abner’s concentration on this little rock, we have to hear the cry, uttered as it is by a person who knows Ab intimately. Through Lennie’s eyes and her reaction, we see that the moment is significant. Faulkner breaks up her six-word utterance with no fewer than four full stops, giving it a gasping intensity we have to listen to: “Abner. Abner. Please don’t. Please, Abner” (14). *Don’t? Please don’t?* Faulkner forces us to look more closely at what this man is doing and to hear as if with our own ears the grief-stricken tone of this beleaguered woman. We can now discern several things Faulkner clearly wants us to know.

First—and this assumes that we’ve already perceived Lennie’s full meaning (*Abner. Abner. Please don’t burn another barn. Please, Abner.*)—we realize how little it takes to create and recreate the psychotic sense of insult that fuels Abner Snopes’s “ravens and jealous rage” (11). The reasonable anger of De Spain, a man whose property Snopes has ruined, and his just expectation of fair recompense—even these ordinary interruptions of daily life and routine business dealings—are enough to set Snopes off. Snopes seems to take on the role of divine Justice: no action of his can be called to account. Though the second Justice of the Peace will rule slightly in Abner’s favor, it becomes clear that for him there can be no court of law higher than his own inclinations. When Lennie cries out, her grief and despair mirror what Sarty feels in the opening scene and have the same cause and source. Her

cry is directed toward Abner and brings him into sharp focus for us. We have to look at what he is doing.

At this moment, Snopes is considering new and scandalous abuses of property, community, and law. He feels the heat of the flames as he pictures the offending De Spain's barn. The flattish fieldstone is flint, the sort one could use to strike a spark. Lennie Snopes recognizes all the signs: the magnitude of the perceived offense De Spain has effected, the fire blazing not just under the backyard wash pot, but also in the dark recesses of her husband's perennially injured heart, the means—if not this stone, then another one more effective—to strike a spark in the hay and burn a barn. She interprets for us a moment another observer would not be able to recognize. Her cry wakes us up and alerts us to an important point in the development of the plot.

The conflict between De Spain and Abner intensifies, resulting in the court's favoring and ruling against both of them; in town for the hearing, Abner delays his tardy planting even longer, something Sarty makes us notice (19). This trip to town bears scrutiny. Here perhaps Snopes acquires the non-suspicious supply of oil ("oil we were oiling the wagon with" [21]) and gains another benefit, as well—the availability of a blacksmith shop where the wheels of the wagon can be tightened. The fuel for the fire is now on hand and the getaway vehicle prepared. Snopes has also had occasion to chat with the blacksmith, the local expert on fire (19-20). Snopes's scrutiny of the fieldstone suggests a questioning of its quality—how well might it suit his purposes? The smith would have something better, and any tenant farmer could reasonably ask about an aid for starting a cooking fire. Matches probably came into common use in the US in the late 1880s (Bellis).² Snopes's Civil War experience ("thirty years ago," Faulkner 5) suggests 1895 at the latest as the time frame of the story, but we can assume that Snopes's fire-starting equipment is basic—the flint he can find on the ground, the fieldstone.

The night that finally shakes Sarty out of his misguided loyalty to his father and frees him from his criminal enterprise, Lennie Snopes again occupies a crucial place in the scene though at first we do not see her. The scene opens with another of her outbursts; her husband counters the opposition with violence: "the mother tugged at his arm until he shifted the lamp to the other hand and flung her back, not savagely or viciously,

²Bellis and others note that early matches were called "lucifers."

just hard, into the wall, her hands flung out against the wall for balance, her mouth open and in her face the same quality of hopeless despair as had been in her voice" (21). Her words, coming from a considerably more respectful and reverent age than ours, are more like a prayer than a thoughtless interjection. As before, the plea erupts in a stream of broken up, staccato monosyllables, again bracketed by a name: "Abner! No! No! Oh, God. Oh, God. Abner!" (20). The anguished utterance is an ironic commingling of contradiction and petition—a response of fear involving an admixture that is part objection, part crazily convoluted and idolatrous acceptance of her lot as this man's wife. Here this despairing and grieving woman adds a human name to her appeal to God as she addresses the man to whom, in upside-down obedience, she also pays homage. The deeds and plans of a terrifying oppressor and criminal tyrant stir her opposition, but an overriding fear leaves her without will or energy sufficient for real confrontation. Though she objects, she cannot act and her immobility becomes complicity. Loyal to a man her very nature resists, she is bound and cannot escape: he is her husband. Her cry wrenches the heart, making us wonder about the social order she is a part of, raising an inevitable question: *Who does she think God is?*

Sarty whirls about, and what he sees in the foreground of his mother's cry is his father as he pours the oil from the lamp into a five-gallon kerosene can (20-21). When Volpe finds that "In all the scenes, the mother remains a peripheral figure in the boy's consciousness" (235), his attention is on Sarty, not Lennie, whom he observes, almost in passing, on the sidelines. However, to see her in Sarty's periphery "in all the scenes" is to underscore, if unintentionally, her significance for her son. Now, Faulkner makes us, with Sarty, hear this mother's outcry, and because of it, we realize once again that we, too, need to think about what Abner is doing. We find him engaged in no mere detail of a farming household's nightly routine: as he pours the lamp oil into the can, Abner is gathering his supplies of fuel, making preparations to burn another barn. For light there is now only a candle stub burning in a bottleneck. The darkened setting prefigures the lowering of moral darkness upon this family as Sarty, with increasing awareness, considers a final break. The light in this Gothic scene is going out in more ways than one. The oil of the lamp is not enough. Abner tells Sarty three times to get more oil:

“Go to the barn, and get that can of oil we were oiling the wagon with,” he said.
 The boy did not move. Then he could speak.
 “What . . .” he cried. “What are you . . .”
 “Go get that oil,” his father said. “Go.” (21)

Sarty’s despair and grief begin to wane, edged out by questions and rising anger. Though he obeys his father’s order to go for the oilcan, he thinks “*I could run on and on and never look back, never need to see his face again. Only I can’t. I can’t*” (21). Sarty’s assigned place in the Snopes family is becoming plain to the boy. Not only must he lie for his father in a court of law, but like his older brother he must also join in their father’s criminal projects. By obediently going to the barn for the oilcan, he himself becomes an accessory. Indeed, his participation has already begun. Tonight will not be Sarty’s initiation. Harris’s identifying him in court as a boy with knowledge about the burning of his barn shows that Sarty has already been initiated. But now Sarty has had time to think, and one conclusion he will no doubt remember twenty years later is this: his presence as a mere ten-year-old helped shield his father from harm. Who, what desperate and outraged farmer even, would blast away with a shotgun when a child is present?

As Sarty returns to the house with the oilcan, again he hears his mother crying. The weeping becomes spatial, and Sarty enters the engulfing sound: “he ran back to the house and into it, into the sound of his mother’s weeping in the next room” (21). All the grief and despair he has begun to shed as indignation and courage rise seem to be settling darkly over a person he loves. Sarty witnesses her anguish. Our seeing this with him is critical to an understanding of the Sarty Faulkner is unveiling at this moment.

Sarty’s first act of resistance is to remind his father of the black man he had previously sent to Harris to say, “wood and hay kin burn.” With his mother’s weeping as backdrop and reminder, Sarty links this moment with the first barn burning of the story. The connection is significant. The boy seems to see that sending a black man to warn would be more decent. Does he now also see this as putting another unsuspecting messenger in jeopardy? Perhaps he does. If so, Sarty’s question might be sarcastic, though we cannot know. Still, we are probably correct to hear distinct opposition, as if Sarty were asking: *Aren’t you going to send one of them to get caught and not us?* We cannot be sure. What we can see

with perfect clarity is Sarty's growing readiness to contradict his father. A new Sarty is emerging, a Sarty becoming less and less conflicted as the seconds pass. Sarty makes his decision. His mother's weeping tips the balance.

What Abner hears is his older son, his first lieutenant in barn burning, suggesting that he tie Sarty to the bedpost. Abner accurately discerns the unstated question in the brother's comment: Can Sarty be trusted? Will he be loyal to the blood? The older brother has caught Sarty's contradictory mood; his bedpost solution suggests a point toward which Sarty has been moving from the first court scene, the realization that distancing himself from barn burning will be the same as distancing himself from his family. Abner sees what he previously suspected, that Sarty *is* capable of betraying the blood, the family, even his father. Tying Sarty to the bedpost would keep him under control, but Abner thinks of a more effective plan for addressing the problem the boy now represents. When Abner says, "Lennie. Take hold of him. I want to see you do it," she obeys, whispering as if with her last breath: "I'll hold him" (22).

Sarty struggles to get away from her grasp, crying out: "Lemme go! . . . I don't want to have to hit you!" (22). He knows he is stronger, and when he yells, he issues his first warning of the night, here to a person he loves—a person who would have washed his injuries and who, with his aunt, had managed somehow to find money to buy that child-sized axe he uses every day, splitting wood while his father and brother sit idly in the yard. With Sarty's warning, we recall his father's model—the blow Abner delivered on that starlit road and his violent response to Lennie's opposition when he flung her against the wall. We have to wonder what other blows Sarty and his mother have witnessed or suffered. We can also perceive Abner's reasoning here: *Sarty loves his mother and he won't hurt her. She'll be afraid not to hold him. She knows what he can do to me and what I can do to him.* Faulkner does not ask us to believe that Sarty at ten can see into all the depths and subtleties of this terrible moment, a moment at the crossroads of his whole life when he will have to decide whether to be marked by his father's criminal identity or instead identify himself with the men gathered in that first JP courtroom, men who "wanted only truth, justice" (8). For later conclusions and better understanding, Faulkner gives us other Sartys, adult Sartys older, and older still.

Here, along with Lennie Snopes, Faulkner also gives us Lizzie, her sister, as interpreter of the scene. Even less visible than Lennie, Lizzie suddenly speaks from center stage, taking up the resistance to Abner his wife has been forced to abandon. Lizzie gives voice to a thought no doubt rising in Lennie's heart, a thought that seems to loosen the mother's hold and spring Sarty free: "Let him go! . . . If he don't, before God, I am going up there myself!"(22). When Lizzie offers to warn de Spain, her outrage is consistent with her helping Lennie buy the little axe in an expensive non-standard size to ease the youngest child's daily labor. She may be afraid of Abner Snopes, but she is not his wife. When Lizzie threatens action, she forces us to imagine something Lennie will not achieve. Lennie is no longer crying out. Now she is whispering; her opposition has been silenced by violence and terror. She can only comply. Fearing Abner's blows and what he may do to her son, she cannot act.

Faulkner has a purpose in bringing Lizzie forward at the end of the story though she is a shadow of a character. Like Lennie's, her sudden outburst gets our attention and raises an unexpected question: Is Lizzie a twin sister? The genetic factor evidenced in Sarty's sisters³ suggests the possibility of other twins, Lennie and Lizzie. In fact, by creating a duplicate in Lizzie, Faulkner makes a final statement about Sarty's mother.

The twin's sudden articulate eruption gives evidence of what is going on within Lennie herself and offers a resistance she can no longer launch. Lizzie fuels Sarty's growing courage and determination, helping him counter the lawless practices pressed upon him by father and brother. Lennie Snopes, doubled by an identical twin in the story, becomes a doubly important character, one doubly critical to our understanding.⁴ Do the twins symbolically represent two choices confronting Sarty? Indeed, Lennie and Lizzie clarify for us the issues crowding around the youngest child, issues he will understand and

³There is a haunting reappearance of the twin sisters in *The Hamlet*. The girls deserve analytical attention beyond the cursory glances they often receive. We may make our surmises about Lennie and Lizzie, but it is Faulkner who tells us that these "hulking" sisters are twins. Much more can be said about the Snopes women, especially as they function in *The Hamlet*.

⁴The suggestion of a double in "Barn Burning" is one of the many links between the works of Faulkner and Dostoevsky. See Weisgerber, 122-28.

articulate only in manhood: *Do I stay with this family or leave? Can I continue to take part in the vindictive rage of a criminal mind and chaotic life style? On my own can I go after truth, justice, kind-hearted concern?* Lennie's and Lizzie's responses bring the questions into bold relief just as Lennie's and Sarty's responses mirror and highlight each other's, defining his struggle more clearly. In Lennie Snopes and Lizzie, her twin, Faulkner gives us the emotional and interpretive wherewithal to see, hear, and believe the nearly impossible, that a ten-year-old boy could leave his family and not look back.

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