Selected Short Stories Study Guide

Selected Short Stories by William Faulkner

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Barn Burning

Barn Burning Summary

The story opens with a hearing in the justice of the peace's court, within a small country store, where Abner Snopes is charged with arson—setting fire to a barn belonging to his overseer, Mr. Harris. Because there is no direct substantiating evidence, the justice throws the case out of court but admonishes Snopes and his family to vacate the county by nightfall. On the way out of the general store/courtroom, someone knocks the young boy, Col. Sartoris Snopes ("Sarty") on the back of the head and accuses him of burning the barn. Evidently accustomed to sudden departures because of Abner's penchant for setting fires, the family loads up their wagon and prepares to leave. They include Abner and his wife and her two twin sisters, the young Sarty and his two older brothers.

After traveling all night, they arrive at their new home where Abner has a position as tenant farmer for eight months. The family's first task is to clean a rug for Major de Spain, the landlord, which Snopes himself had sullied upon entering the white mansion. In the process of cleaning the rug, the two daughters and mother use lye and further damage it. De Spain demands that Snopes pay him damages by giving him 20 bushels of corn at harvest time. Snopes apeals to the justice of the peace, who reduces the penalty to 10 bushels. Snarling with resentment, Snopes orders his son Sarty to get his container of kerosene. His wife and children beg him to stop, but Abner leaves the house and heads for the barn. One of the sons runs up to the de Spain mansion and alerts the overseer by shouting "Barn! Barn!" De Spain rides off on his horse in pursuit of Snopes, while his son Sarty runs into the woods to hide; he hears three shots and sees the inferno. At daybreak, he rouses himself from a stuporous sleep, and heads further away, never to return.

Barn Burning Analysis

Whether this story is intended to be symbolic of the struggles of "poor white" southerners to claim some dignity and respect is for the reader to decide. That is certainly one possible interpretation. Another is that Abner Snopes is a badly damaged man, mentally and physically, and the signs are not only his limp but his pyromania which seems to be his only way to express his anger. Indeed, when Snopes feels backed into a corner he reacts with fear which quickly becomes anger which quickly becomes pyromania. The ways that his brokenness affects the family are obvious and are expressed in his wife's anxious hyper-vigilance and anxiety that another loss of control could happen any time, as well as in his son Sarty's confused sense of loyalty to his father whom we wants to idolize but who seems to him an empty shell. The two older brothers, perhaps trying to defend their mother and the family against their father's, have a worried, tense connection with Abner; the wife's twin sisters seem to exist in a mentally deficient world apart from reality. Faulkner leaves it to the reader's imagination whether Snopes is killed by Col. De Spain in his final act of arson, but the

implications are that this is the final blow for this fragile family of tenant farmers. Sarty, at the end, is the only one who seems to escape the fate of the rest by running away into the dark woods as the barn burns.

Two Soldiers

Two Soldiers Summary

Two young brothers hear the news about the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor on the over-loud radio of a neighbor. The older brother, Pete, announces that he's going to Memphis to sign up for the Army but he tells his younger brother, the narrator, that he's too young and needs to stay at home to help their father with farming. On the evening after his brother leaves for Memphis, the younger one slips out of the house after his parents are asleep and walks 22 miles into Jefferson, where he is taken into custody by a policeman, who walks him to the bus station and tries to contact his relatives. During some confusion at the bus terminal, he slips onto the bus and rides the 80 miles to Memphis, where he expects to find his brother at the Army recruitment center. At the recruitment center, he tells the soldiers he wants to join the Army with his brother. They laugh at the nine-year-old; he demands to see his brother but is in a detachment leaving that day for Little Rock. The boy pulls a knife and tries to slash the soldiers but they subdue him. The soldiers summon Pete from his post and he arrives shortly, in uniform, and tells his brother sternly he has to return home. Then he kisses him and leaves. One of them makes a call, and an older woman arrives and invites the boy to her house for supper. When he arrives, there is a soldier waiting, like him, to be fed. Anxious, the boy refuses food and gets into a military vehicle ("a big car with a soldier driving it') and is driven home to Jefferson, tears streaming down his cheeks.

Two Soldiers Analysis

This is a heart-breaking story about brotherly admiration combined with the yearning of poor, rural, southern people to find a bigger and better life elsewhere. Interestingly, there is a parallel between the actions and reactions of the unnamed nine-year-old narrator and his 18-year-old brother, Pete, in the hours immediately after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and the reactions of many young Americans who signed up for military service in the wake of the September 11 terrorist strikes in New York and Washington, D.C. The story also demonstrates in a quite literal way how patriotism works, and how much pain war causes even if there is no death in the family. The reader sees the knee-jerk reaction of Pete, and his younger brother's knee-jerk reaction to Pete, and how those reactions cause real fear in their parents. Particularly touching is the portrait of their mother, who is torn between her loving devotion to both sons and her need to protect them, in conflict with her noble need to support their patriotism and loyalty.

A Rose for Emily

A Rose for Emily Summary

Miss Emily Grierson, the short, plump daughter of the late Colonel Sartoris, dies after living her entire life in the large frame house built by her father in 1894 and willed to her upon his death. Colonel Sartoris, as mayor, agrees with the town that in exchenge for his many services during the war, taxes upon the property will be suspended until the debt is paid off. Miss Emily, believing her father's statement that no taxes will ever need to be paid, refuses year after year to pay them when she receives notices from the trax collector. Her house is dark, still and filled with layers of dust so thick that objects can hardly be made out. Her funeral provides an opportunity for towns people to reflect on her life and to swap stories that will help fill in the gaps of what is known about her.

The local gossip is that Miss Emily has a sweetheart (Homer Barron) who visits occasionally, but who stops coming because of the constant disapproval by Colonel Sartoris of all her suitors. Then the neighbors began to complain of a stench of rotting flesh but because of her social status none of the local authorities would question her. One night around midnight, four men are seen criss-crossing her lawn and property and tossing some powder out of bags. Within a couple of days, the smell has abated. But when her father dies a few years later, she refused to let anyone take the body for burial. Just at the point of breaking and entering by the authorities, Miss Emily relents and allows her father's body to be properly buried.

Emily goes to the local pharmacy and buys some arsenic to use to kill rats, she tells the pharmacist. Townspeople gossip that Emily plans to commit suicide and for months she disappears in her house, with only her black servant coming and going with groceries. Occasional sightings of Miss Emily confirm that she is alive, obese and aging, with "iron gray hair, like that of a man." She keeps the house locked tight for six or seven years, then at the age of 40 she gives lessons in china painting for a while, then shuts the house for good and only the black servant is seen on the premises, except for an occasional shadow moving around downstairs. It appears that the upper portion of the house has been closed. However, taxes on the property by then had been paid.

Then, at the age of 74. Miss Emily dies in a downstairs room. The taciturn, aged servant lets townspeople inside. Searching the house, they break down the door to the upstairs bedroom and find the dusty corpse of a man lying in the bed, his arms extended in an embrace. On the pillow next to the corpse is a pillow with the indentation of a human head and a single, long strand of iron gray hair.

A Rose for Emily Analysis

Faulkner uses an elegiac tone for this twisted tale of thwarted lives and love. In fact, the tragedy of Miss Emily Grierson, unlovely Southern belle held hostage by her heritage

and family, is obviously and usefully symbolic of the demise of the Old South. Her entire existence is defined by her family's once-proud position of leadership and respect in the town. Her father, a former colonel in the Confederate Army and former mayor, has evolved a complex web of quid-pro-quo with his chums that he hopes, and convinces his daughter, will prevent any taxes ever being levied against his property. Later generations without those ties, however demand and finally get Miss Emily to pay the taxes.

She lives alone in the dusty old house with her "Negro" man servant, who appears in the story symbolically and literally, as the last breathing remnant of slavery by any other name. Miss Emily has several gentlemen callers, all of whom are driven away by her father. After he dies (symbolic of the demise of old Southern patriarchy), Miss Emily has another boyfriend in whom she develops a serious romantic interest. When he shows signs of slipping away, she poisons him with arsenic and lies down with him in the upstairs bedroom in an embrace "that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love." After Miss Emily's death, the townspeople discover his rotted corpse in the sealed-off upper portion of her house, and find one of her silver hairs deposited on the adjacent pillow. Like the Old South that depended upon slavery, Miss Emily fails in her attempt to hold onto something that was never hers.

Dry September

Dry September Summary

Rumors spread throughout the town of Jefferson that a white spinster, Miss Minne Cooper, has been raped by a black man named Will Mayes. A conversation among the all-white clients at the barbershop quickly results in an exchange of heated opinions. The majority of clients and barbers agrees that such an alleged crime should be avenged for the protection of their own wives and daughters. One of the barbers, who says he knows both alleged victim and alleged perpetrator, says he doesn't believe Will Mayes could have committed rape, and that the others should get the facts before they get carried away. The barber, who is called a "damn niggerlover" and told to go back North, reminds the good ole boys that he is from Jefferson and that he believes nothing has happened and that the story is pure fabrication. "Do you accuse a white woman of lying?" shouts one of the clients at the barber shop. The atmosphere becomes more charged as a man named McLendon crashes into the barbershop and challenges everyone to take revenge for the alleged rape. In the sea of fear that washes over the men, they shout their allegiance to McLendon and their anger at Will Mayes.

A single voice of reason asks whether the alleged incident ever took place. He reminds the group that Miss Minnie had reported an baseless claim about a year earlier that a man had climbed onto her roof and was watching her undress. McLendon roars that it doesn't make any difference whether the rape actually occurred: they need to make sure "the black sons [don't] get away with it until one really does it." The agitated group coalesces into a crowed of vigilantes who have lost their individual identities and individual sense of responsibility; they become a bloodthirsty mob. They meet in two cars outside the ice plant where Mayes is the night watchman. They kidnap him, throw handcuffs on him and jam him inside one of the cars. In the other car, the barber named Hawkshaw protests Will Mayes' innocence, but he is ignored. As they speed recklessly far out into the country with Mayes pleading and begging for his life, an argument breaks out among the white men over his innocence; the group in the second car opens the door and pushes the barber out onto the ravine where he falls, rolls, is hurt and eventually climbs up and starts to limp toward town.

The other car speeds ahead, and Mayes is executed. When the ring leader McLendon returns home after midnight, he gets into a fight with his wife, throws her across the room, undresses and puts his revolver on the bedside table. He goes to the screened porch in the dry still darkness that "seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars."

Dry September Analysis

This short story masterfully captures the chemistry by which fear can flame into anger and violence. The cowardly characters who, on nothing more substantial than a rumor,

decide to kill a young black man as revenge for allegedly raping an unstable white woman, seem in Faulkner's tale like dry tinder that flares into a raging fire with only a small spark. The title suggests the emotional tinder box that fuels the brutal kidnapping and execution of Will Mayes, even though the leader of the mob admits Will may be innocent but barks to his followers that they need to kill him anyway just to keep other blacks in their (subservient) place. Like a hate-filled inferno, fear among the group of white men in the barbershop quickly turns them into beasts despite the protestations of at least one barber that there is no evidence of any rape and nothing to implicate Will Mayes, who he says is a friend.

The appeals to reason fail because the men have clearly cast aside their reason and are driven by fear-fueled rage. The story rings true regardless of time and place when the reader recalls other actual and more recent hate crimes in the headlines, such as the gay man in Texas who was chained to a truck and dragged miles to his excruciatingly painful death. It also exposes on a small canvas the mechanism by which fear can be used to manipulate otherwise "normal" people into committing acts of unspeakable barbarity—as in the case of Nazism and fascism. The story is unsettling because it demonstrates how thin is the veneer of "civilization" and how deep fears driven by circumstances, even the weather, can quickly make cowards into murderers.

That Evening Sun

That Evening Sun Summary

When Dilsey, their regular cook is sick, the children of a white family are sent to Negro Hollow to summon Nancy, who substitutes for Dilsey when she is sick. The children include the nine-year-old narrator, Quentin, his seven-year-old sister Caddy and five-year-old brother Jason. The children are advised by their father not to cross the ditch because they might run into Jesus, a small, dangerous black man with a scar across his face from a knife fight. Unable to rouse Nancy by calling her name, the children toss stones onto her roof until she comes naked to the door and pokes her head out. "What yawl mean, chunking my house?" Nancy says. "What you little devils mean?" When she at first refuses to come, the children ask whether she's drunk. She tells them to leave her alone and goes inside. They continue throwing rocks on her roof for a while, then leave.

One day Nancy is arrested for public drunkenness and on the way to jail she passes by a banker and deacon in the Baptist church who owes her money. "When you going to pay me, white man?" she blurts out repeatedly, until Mr. Stoval knocks her down in the street. As she continues to hector him, this pillar of the community kicks her in the mouth and knocks several teeth out. Nancy turns ans spits out the blood and teeth and continues her tirade all the way into jail, where she is heard raving and singing all through the night. Nancy tries to hang herself from the window bar, but the jailer cuts her down and revises her, then beats her. The jailer says she is intoxicated with cocaine, not whiskey. As she goes about her domestic chores for the white family, the frightening black man named Jesus with a large scar from a knife fight across his face hangs out in the kitchen with her. He asks whether she has a watermelon under her skirt, Nancy says it isn't his child. Jesus tells her in profane language that he would like to knife the man who made her pregnant. Nancy then runs him out of the house. The father of the three children tells Jesus to never come to his house again.

After dinner one night, Nancy explains to the family that Jesus has left her and gone to Memphis. The father tells his wife he will walk Nancy home because there is a rumor about that Jesus has returned and is waiting for her. After some protests by his wife the father—accompanied by his three children—walks Nancy home. Along the way, Nancy says she can feel Jesus' presence everywhere and is afraid. The father and three children continue to walk Nancy home each night while Dilsey is sick. Finally, the family makes a bed for Nancy on the floor of the kitchen so she doesn't get scared. When Dilsey returns, Nancy comes to the kitchen one day and tells her she's still scared of Jesus; Dilsey says she'll find someone to walk her home. Nancy then reminds the three children of the fun they all had one night when she stayed with them in their rooms. She asks the children to come to her house that night, promising them an evening of fun.

Jason, the youngest, makes it plain that he does not ant to go to Nancy's house but follows along anyway. Once there, he says he wants to go back home but can't go

alone. They ask her to tell a story, and she obliges by telling of a queen who lives near a ditch where a "bad man" is hiding. Jason continues to whine and Nancy tells the children she will make them some popcorn. When she pulls out her battered old popper and thrusts it into the fire, it falls open and spills the kernels. Nancy retrieves most of the kernels from the ashes, cleans them, and puts the popper back into the fire. Later, when the children's father arrives to bring them home he tells her there is no sign of Jesus. As they turn to leave, Nancy talks fatalistically about what will happen to her and the father tells her to be sure and close the latch on the door after they leave. Nancy, however, leaves the door open and they can hear her saying, "I just done got tired. I just a nigger. It ain't no fault of mine."

That Evening Sun Analysis

Faulkner evidently borrows a phrase from "St. Louis Blues" for this tale about fear and captivity. Nancy, who seems at the end of her rope when the story opens, is kicked in the mouth by a white banker in the town of Jefferson when she pleads with him to pay her overdue wages as a domestic. Then she is thrown in jail for public intoxication, where she tries to hang herself with her dress exposing her pregnant, protruding abdomen. The white jailer cuts her down in time to save her life, then beats her senseless. Nancy serves as a fill-in cook for a white family when their regular cook, Dilsey, is sick. One day while working in their kitchen, Nancy gets into an exchange with her boyfriend, Jesus, about the baby he calls a "watermelon." She says it's not his child and Jesus threatens to kill someone because of it. Jesus is a short, very dark black man with a knifing scar across his face. Jesus disappears to Memphis after he is ordered off the white family's property, but Nancy is terrified that he'll return and attack her with his razor. Just as Jesus is a captive of his rage toward white people, Nancy is captive of her fear of Jesus.

After staying in the white family's home, sleeping on a pallet in the kitchen, for a long time during one of Dilsey's illnesses, Nancy finally decides to go back home and is accompanied by the three white children, including the nine-year-old narrator. She convinces them to come with her by reminding them of the fun they had once when she stayed overnight in their room. Nancy, practically trembling with fear, agrees to tell the children a story, which they love, and when they get restless to return home she offers popcorn. In effect, she holds them captive because of her fear of Jesus who has not yet been seen anywhere. The corn spills into the fireplace, so she retrieves some of the kernels and makes popcorn. However, the children are irritable and restless until their father arrives to take them back home—evidently a short distance away on the other side of a ravine. Nancy says she's afraid of the dark, and that she's "got my coffin money saved up." The father dismisses her fears as baseless. As the family heads home in the dark, they see Nancy through the open front door, chanting that she is "just a nigger" and that she is not at fault (presumably for the pregnancy). At last resigned to her fears after a lifetime of brutality and abuse, Nancy seems to have come unhinged in a way the white family probably could never understand.

Red Leaves

Red Leaves Summary

Two Indians—Three Basket and Louis Berry—walk through the forest to abandoned slave quarters, discussing the burden of the black population and comparing notes on the palatability of black flesh. The two Indians are puzzled that blacks seem to enjoy sweating, which they feel is unhealthy. The main cabin reeks of black bodies, and the Indians leave when they start to sense that former slaves are looking at them. In the main slave quarters, the two Indians pick up the scent of long-gone African slaves, their sweat, their fear. "That is black man's fear which you smell. It does not smell as ours does," Three Basket says.

The men are searching for a runaway slave belonging to the Chief Issetibbeha The Indians' "Negro question" begins with deceased Chief Doom, who buys some slaves from a slave trader and uses them to clear land for farming. Then the slaves multiply faster than the chief can find work for them, so he sells them and makes a tidy profit to hand off to his son, Issetibbeha. Doom establishes his provenance in the broken bow of a river steamer shipwrecked in a storm, then dragged to a hilltop. He also summons a group of tribal elders to squat stolidly, smoking a pipe, and ponder what to do with the blacks. After Doom's death, his own slave manservant runs away and is found in three days.

Issetibbeha, as overseer of the growing plantation, assumes the role of "the man" and is smitten by a young black slave girl. The pairing produces a son, Moketubba, who as a three-year-old child has a distinctly Mongolian face "that appeared to exist in a complete and unfathomable lethargy" except when looking at a pair of small, red slippers that allegedly once belonged to King Louis of France, husband of Madame Pompadour. Moketubba tries to get the slippers on his feet until the age of 16, while his father laughs at him under his breath, although his fat, indolent son continues to try on the shoes secretly. When Issetibbeha learns from his second wife that his son has stolen the slippers, he summons Moketubba and gives him the slippers, He also sends his wife away, and lives alone.

The idle slaves begin to lead "lives transplanted whole out of African jungles," and tribal elders "gathered in squatting conclave" to help Issetibbeha decide what to do. One option is to eat them, another to raise the blacks as any other crop, for sale on the market. As Issetibbeha is dying, the tribe prepares for a giant funeral service and feast. Some tribal members gather food for the feast, while Three Basket and Louis Berry go searching for the runaway. The fugitive slave hides overnight in the barn on the first day of the feast, where he can hear the drums and smell the food being prepared. He hears rats scurrying in the barn during the night; the next morning the slave breaks away and runs into the swamp, covering his face and body with mud. On the second night, the slave eats a frog and a few fish from the slough. As he runs, the slave is aware of the approach of the two Indians; on the third day they come face-to-face with the exhausted

slave, gently touch his mud-caked arm, and one says: "Come. You ran well. Do not be ashamed."

The two Indians lead the slave back to the plantation steamboat and offer him food, which he greedily thrusts into his mouth. Then it rolls out again and down his chest. "I want water," the slave says, and the Indians lead him to the drinking well where he scoops gourd after gourd of clear water into his mouth, over his face, and down his body. "They waited, patient, grave, decorous, implacable, clansmen and guest and kin," then the Indians lead the slave back to the steamboat where Issetibeha is being prepared for burial.

Red Leaves Analysis

This story encompasses the themes of slavery and freedom, racism and kinship. From the perspective of the Indians, the arrival of the white man has been nothing but trouble as the different groups try to accommodate, or exterminate, each other. When European settlers bring African slaves to clear and work the land, their numbers increase out of proportion to their useful employment; some run away and some are bought by Indians. Soon the Indians also have a surplus of black slaves, and they begin to view them as subhuman as they ponder whether to eat them or sell them—or both. The dehumanization of the blacks by whites is thus passed onto their Indian owners, who seem to believe that slaves enjoy sweating in the sun while their copper skin should be sweat-free. The Indians look upon the black slaves with the same racist contempt as the whites.

When one of the slaves runs away during a tribal preparation for the funeral of Issetibeha, two Indians track him down and congratulate him for running well for three days. Suddenly, there is a shift toward a more accepting, humanistic attitude toward the slave as the Indians realize he wants what they want: freedom. Slave and Indian are united in kinship and common humanity, as the racial stereotype handed down from the white man is discarded. Once they are on the same footing, the Indian no longer needs to demonize the African to salve his conscience about slavery and they can experience the bonds of brotherhood. Faulkner's story points to empathy as the way around exploitation, and shows that Indians—just like whites and Africans—can be prejudiced, narrow and foolish, but that a sense of decency seems to live in every human heart, no matter how insecure.

Lo!

Lo! Summary

A day in the life of an American president, not long after the Revolutionary War, includes more news of Indian attacks on settlers and their property, a constitutional land grant issue, and the constant irritation of having "uncivilized" Indians living and working in the White House as servants. The Indians won't wear pantaloons which the president deems proper—especially on the eve of a visit from a French delegation—and they leave gnawed-on bones on the plush carpet to stumble over. The story opens with the president trying to sneak out of the building without confronting the Indian servants or their raggedy appearance, to meet his secretary for breakfast where he gets more news of troubles. "Damn, damn, damn!" the president chants as he walks around the room. Meanwhile, a pair of Indians squat in the hallway corridor, a gamecock in their basket, and discuss how difficult it is for them to adjust to life in Washington, DC. In their beaver hats, they curse the climate and the fact they're expected to speak like white men.

At breakfast, the president's secretary reads an item from the newspaper about a claim filed by a Dutch farmer in Pennsylvania who is demanding payment from the federal treasury of $200 in gold for an Indian attack that resulted in the burning of his barn, death of his cow and the escape of his black slave. The secretary tells the president "the entire Atlantic seaboard north of the Potomac River [is] overrun by creatures in beaver hats and frock coats and woolen drawers, frightening women and children, setting fire to barns and running off slaves, killing deer." The president doesn't understand why the Indians won't wear the pantaloons he has commissioned for them and paid out of his own pocket, and presented to them as a badge of honor. The Indians, in return, come to his bedroom at 5 a.m. where his wife is still sleeping to present him with a loosely wrapped bundle that contains a lot of gold braid including epaulets, sash and sword as part of a costume. The group of Indians stands around his bedroom, waiting for him to try on the new gift.

The president is further outraged to learn of a dispute in which a French-Indian man named either Weddel or Vidal claims to own all of Mississippi on the west side of a river. Wedel sells a small portion of his land to a white man who installs a toll bridge at the narrowest point on the river and erects a toll booth where he sits collecting tolls and raising the gate by a rope. A dispute with his Indian nephew results in the murder of the white man, and he is so charged by the federal agent in the territory. A delegation of Indians, though, comes to Washington to demand an investigation to clear the nephew's name of any guilt. The president directs his secretary to send word to the Indians he'll have an investigation and that the nephew isn't facing any charges in Washington, DC. When Weddel's uncle comes to the White House, the president personally writes out a pardon for Weddel that says he is not guilty of murder and that the delegation should return home and "never do this again, because next time he will be disappointed."

The uncle says another contingent of Indians, temporarily waylaid en route, will be arriving in the capitol soon to attend ceremonies exonerating Weddel. Panic-stricken, the president looks at his secretary and tries to imagine what ceremonies they can concoct to satisfy the Indians so they'll leave before the French delegation can encounter them. Time is on the Indians' side, and eventually a cavalcade of Indians walks down a major avenue, led by the carriage in which ride the president, the Indian uncle and the nephew in a February snow. A crowd gathers and the presidential guard readies an old cannon. The president improvises a ceremony of exoneration, reading in stentorian tones 10 sonnets by Petrarch, grabbed hastily from a table on the way to the ceremony. The cannon is sounded. At the end, the president declares: "Nephew of Francis Weddel, you are free. Return to your home."

By fall, the president sits contentedly at his desk in the autumn sun when he receives a letter from Weddel's uncle, telling the president that "this rash and heedless boy" is involved with the drowning of a white man in the river after a swimming contest, and that the Indians are planning another trip to the capitol so the president can reprimand him. The president hysterically dictates a letter exonerating Francis Weddel, "his heirs, descendants and assigns from now on in perpetuity" provided they never cross to the eastern side of the river. The president hands the letter to a cavalry colonel and tells him their orders are to stop the Indian delegation even if it means shooting "every horse, mule and ox" because he knows the Indians won't walk all the way to Washington. The president points out to his secretary gleefully the spot on the map where the Indians will be intercepted.

Lo! Analysis

Faulkner creates a humorous juxtaposition of the world of the American Indian (Native American) and the white ruling class in this story. The unnamed president is irritated, frustrated and angered as he gets caught in a vise between the "heathen" practices of Indians as they search for a kind of justice from their European-descended overlords, and the imminent arrival of a delegation from France that he hopes to impress with the culturally and democratically advanced young nation. The Indians have come to Washington to seek forgiveness for one of their own accused of murder in a remote area of Mississippi. However, they have come at an awkward time for the president, who wishes neither to offend the Indians nor to shock the French. As Indians traipse past the White House with a half-dozen deer carcasses slung over the backs of three horses, and Indian house servants leave half-eaten animal bones lying on the expensive pile carpeting, the president tries to satisfy those who have come to redress the murder charge.

Sensing that the presence of so many Indians in the nation's capitol is an embarrassment to the president, one of their leaders (uncle of the accused Francis Weddel), seems very amused as he tells the president more of his people are on the way to witness a "forgiveness ceremony." Panic-stricken, the president arranges a bogus ceremony complete with booming cannon and the reading of Petrarchian sonnets. He also presents the delegation with a letter exonerating Weddel, and the

Indians return home. Both Indians and the white president have used cultural blackmail to resolve the crisis—the Indians simply by their appearance in numbers in the capitol, the president and his advisers by staging an empty ritual full of pomp and circumstance. Peace returns briefly, until the president receives a letter from the same uncle saying that Weddel is in trouble again. The president dispatches the cavalry to stop the Indians from reaching the White House at any cost.

Whether such political games between whites and Indians ever actually occurred, the story serves Faulkner's point that both groups had great difficulty accommodating each other. Seeds of what Indians came to see as the white man's treachery are sewn in this tale; how whites viewed Indians as heathens also is made clear in this cultural clash where the white man prevails largely by force of numbers and arms. The story bears some similarities to Tom Wolfe's modern day (1960's) "Mau-Mauing the Flack Catchers," in which a delegation of huge Samoans in tribal outfits and carrying spears marches into the San Francisco anti-poverty office and demands they be taken into account along with blacks and other minorities. The rhythmic pounding of their spears on the floor causes one white bureaucrat to be "singing a duet with his sphyncter" as he tries to cope with their demands.

Turnabout

Turnabout Summary

The title of this story applies to two things—the swift, agile turns that a British torpedo boat makes in pursuit of enemy ships during World War I, and to the final lines of the narrative when an American bomber pilot suddenly has an anti-war epiphany as he's releasing bombs onto a French chateau where German generals are gathered. Faulkner obviously draws upon his experience as a pilot during World War I to construct this gritty, hyper-masculine account of men in wartime; the powerful engines of the patrol torpedo boat and the aerial maneuvers of the twin-engine bomber take on lives of their own and become characters in the story, as much as the soldiers themselves.

The story opens with a comical account of American and British military police debating who should do what with a drunken British sailor named Claude who is arrested after passing out in the middle of a military supply route, which causes supply trucks to back up and their drivers to resort to a frenzy of honking horns and shouted imprecations. As the American MPs turn over the sailor to the British MPs, they learn that the drunken man is a crew member of a sleek, high-powered class of torpedo boats which, heavily camouflaged, dock under the wharf during days and wait for lower tides to patroi the harbors of the British coast at night looking for German warships. As they patrol, the men keep a running tally of how many vessels with "basket masts" they encounter.

The Americans take the drunken British sailor with them to the nearby military airfield. In the car, he falls asleep and revives just as they enter the mess hall, where he asks for whiskey. The Englishman talks loudly and tirelessly until American airman Captain Bogard pulls him away and tells him they're going "up" together on a bombing raid. Claude, a tall, willowy man of about 18, squeezes into the front machine gunner's pit, where he is shown how to fire the gun, duck his head and—if necessary—to be airsick inside the fuselage rather than over the wings. As they fly over Germany, Bogard notices that Claude is hanging his head over the side of the plane although he can fire the machine gun accurately and safely. After they release their bombs, the airmen feel the plane gain altitude and head back toward England.

The copilot crawls forward to the gunnery pit to tell Claude not to stick out his head because they'll soon be chased by "every squadron in the Hun Channel group" on top of them. "Get back," he yells at Claude. In his high-pitched British voice, Claude shouts: "Bomb." "Yes, they were bombs!" Captain MCGinnis yells back. We gave them hell! Get back to your gun!" The boy's high, faint voice rises above the roar of engines: "Bomb! All right?" McGinnis mutters, "Yes, yes. Back to your gun, damn you!" The flyers notice that their plane handles a bit oddly, pulling to one side. Only after they land on a beach on the English coast do they realize what Claude has been peering at over the side of the aircraft: a bomb hanging by its tail next to the right wheel. They see a line in the sand made by the bomb's tip, and realize with sudden astonishment how close to death they've been.

The next night, Claude and Captain Bogard climb aboard one of the British torpedo launchers, and roar off into the channel with Ronnie, the helmsman. As they speed out into open waters, Bogard is astonished that the boat seems to be traveling at least as fast as his airplane just before takeoff. Claude points out a German tramp steamer sitting in the harbor, a ship that may do double duty as an arms transport. The men, except Claude, fortify themselves with whiskey and Ronnie heads straight for a freighter anchored in the harbor, with a large Argentinian flag on its hull. The torpedo boat swoops up close, then turns suddenly and Bogard is thrown off balance down into the shallow hull. On its first pass, the boat fails to release the torpedo but continues circling at high speed until positioned for another shot. Pitching about wildly, the torpedo boat moves in again to the freighter, releases its torpedo, and turns sharply again. Captain Bogard becomes seasick, and misses the huge explosion of the target.

About a month later, Captain Bogard reads an item in an English newspaper about Torpedo Boat XOO1, Claude's boat, which had failed to return from coast patrol duty. Then the American airservice headquarters issues a bulletin congratulating him and his men for their bold daylight raid on an enemy ammunition depot several miles behind enemy lines. Reading of these events, Bogard relives the raid after taking out the munitions depot with two remaining bombs, and his painstaking efforts to position the bomber right over the chateau where German generals are at lunch. What if the place were filled with all the generals, kings, presidents, and admirals from both sides?! he asks himself.

Turnabout Analysis

Men in combat, in this case Americans and Englishmen, find they have much more in common than apart. In dealing with a drunken British sailor who has passed out in the middle of an important supply route, both British and Americans engage in the kind of hale fellow, well met camaraderie common in films about wartime. Two American pilots take the now-sobered British sailor up on a bombing mission over Germany, where he mans the forward machine gun while keeping his attention riveted down at the right side of the plane. Only after they land following a successful bombing run do the Americans realize that the sailor tried to warn them over the roar of the engines of a bomb stuck to the landing gear, dangerously close to explosion. In turn, the British sailor and two of his crewmates take the American pilot out on a torpedo run in the English channel in a very fast, high-powered boat. The Americans finally succeed in launching the torpedo against a large enemy freighter, which causes a gigantic explosion and water spout, then they race back to England zig-zagging their way between mines and enemy cannon fire.

The American pilot, Captain Bogard, later reads in a military newspaper of the loss of the torpedo boat and crew; he also receives word of his own commendation for bravery in dropping his last two bombs, after attacking a munitions depot, on a chateau where German brass are assembled—a risky maneuver that would probably caused him to be court-martialed had it not succeeded. Bogard flashes back to the moment of the bombing and recalls the adrenaline-fueled realization of the insanity of war, and his hope that the bombs might kill all the politicians, generals and kings who create wars.

One of a rich genre of anti-war stories inspired by actual combat, "Turnabout" is in a class with "Catch 22" and "Das Boot," which explore the meaning of bravery and honor in the context of mechanized murder. The final paragraphs drive home profoundly both the absurdity and desperation of warfare and its corrosive effects upon the soul.

Honor

Honor Summary

This story from the post-World War I era is a flesh-and-blood depiction of the "lost generation," those adults sandwiched between two world wars who never quite found a direction in life and were "lost." It opens with the narrator, Buck, giving his employer one day's notice that he's leaving, as he realizes that he "never learned to do anything" because his college career was cut short by his enlistment as an aviator when war broke out and everyone rushed to get in on the great adventure. The narrator recites his post-war years as a test pilot, a gambler, car salesman and wing-walker in a barn-storming circus. His partner in these aerial acrobatics is Howard Rogers, a decent man and excellent pilot who is married to Mildred. The three form a sort of family, as the Buck comes often to their house for dinner; Mildred and Buck become fascinated with each other. On one occasion, Buck arrives at their house for dinner and finds Mildred stretched out on the sofa, crying because of their lack of money. He offers to take them out to dinner, but Rogers shoos him out and says he'll see him the next morning at the airfield.

One day Buck decides to go to their house in the afternoon before dinner time, because he has time to kill and Rogers is booked all afternoon taking passengers aloft. Seized with a compulsion to go to Mildred's house, Buck finds her alone reading by the fire. "It was like gasoline from a broken line blazing up around you," he relates. Then Buck begins to study Rogers' face for any signs that he knows of their affair. Howard invites Buck again to their house and is greeted by both of them. Mildred puts her arms around Buck and kisses him, with her husband watching. Mildred says she and her husband have discussed the whole thing, and she's decided to go with Buck and divorce Howard because "we've agreed that we couldn't love one another any more after this and that this is the only sensible thing to do."

Shocked, Buck wishes that he and Howard were up in the sky performing stunts "out where it was cold and hard and quiet, to settle things," instead of in the awkward, confining living room. Mildred scrutinizes Buck's face for a moment, then runs to the mantel, crying, and accuses Buck of lying to her. Rogers tells Buck that he knows everything, and asks if he wants and loves Mildred. By the time Buck leaves, the couple has already agreed to terms of their divorce. The next day, the two men go up together to perform their stunts, including a loop during which Buck stands atop the wing held in place only by centrifugal force. This time, though, he slips and falls on the top wing and starts to slowly slide off the edge, with nothing to secure himself.. As he slowly slips, Rogers grabs him and pulls him back to safety. After they land, Rogers hands him a letter from his wife which Rogers tears up and throws on the ground. Rogers picks up the pieces and hands them back. "Don't be a fool," he tells Buck. Six months later, Buck gets a letter from Rogers telling him that he and Mildred have a son and that they've chosen him to be their son's godfather.

Honor Analysis

Faulkner wants to show the reader that honor, of the type that exists between former war aviators, is more important than financial success or even marital fidelity. The two aviators (Buck and Howard) in this story have found hardscrabble employment after the end of the "Great War" as barnstorming performers, flying in loops and dives, wing-walking and buzzing crowds at outdoor expositions. There is a hint of existential world-weariness in their failure to secure more stable and more rewarding employment, and their poverty is a source of shame for them both. Something seems forever broken in both men, as if their war experiences had somehow shattered their souls. For their sense of honor as aviators, both Buck and Howard would be completely lost and without a compass to help them through life. Buck dropped out of college to enlist as an airman toward the end of World War I, so he could experience the great cause that his generation had come to view as nothing more than an adventure. However, death, destruction and the chaos of warfare had relieved both men of that romantic notion.

When Buck starts an affair with his friend's wife, it seems from his point of view to be a rather flat and emotionless coupling. For Mildred, their affair like most things in her life is melodrama. She acts seductively, seduces and then is spiteful toward Buck if he shows the least amount of hesitation. Her sudden turns of emotion and melodrama seem signs of an emotional shallowness that contrasts with the gravity and lack of excitement in her husband and in Buck. Mildred tells Howard all about her affair, which catches Buck off-guard when he visits and she throws himself at him while her husband is in the room. "I'm yours," she says, explaining that she and Howard have talked everything through and decided to get a divorce. They go up in the air together the next day, and Howard saves Buck's life as he's slipping off the wing.

Later that evening, Howard brings Buck a letter from his wife which he tears up and throws on the ground. Howard and Mildred leave the next day and Buck gets a letter from them six months later. Neither Buck nor Howard seems very emotional about these events; the story ends on a note of detachment, spiritual fatigue, the kind of grim acceptance of life characteristic of many of the literary anti-heroes who emerged from the Lost Generation—the kind of men often depicted on the screen by Humphrey Bogart.

There Was a Queen

There Was a Queen Summary

The last dying gasps of the proud Sartoris family provide dramatic tension that is largely retrospective. The last survivors of the family still live in the spacious quiet house with century-old heritage; the matriarch of the family is Virginia Sartoris ("Miss Jenny"), 90, sister of John Sartoris who built the house. Virginia lives out her last days in a wheelchair beside a window that looks out on the deliciously-scented flower garden. She is attended by Narcissa, her great-great nephew's wife and her son, Benbow ("Bory"), as well the half-white servant Elnora, the cook, her son Isom who tended the grounds, and her daughter Saddie, who cared for Virginia around the clock, even sleeping in cot beside her bed, "and tended her as though she were a baby." The entire population is effectively sealed off from the outside world, which white masters and black servants agree is filled with "town trash" who threaten to harm the Sartoris family, which is "quality."

The self-absorbed nature of the family and its fragile stability is threatened when Narcissa suddenly announces she's going to Memphis for a few days, without giving any reason, three days after having a man to the house for dinner—a Jew with a Phi Beta Kappa pin. She departs, leaving her 10-year-old son in the care of the servants. Elnora sizzles with unspoken resentment at being reminded again of her inferior status. When Narcissa returns she grabs her son and they run down to the creek, jump in with all their clothes on, then return in good spirits to the house. Their behavior has set off a spitired exchange among the servants and family, with Miss Jenny noting that "Miss Narcissa's doing a mighty lot of traipsing around all of a sudden." Miss Jenny reminds Narcissa about the obscene letters that arrived for the younger woman starting 12 years previously. Narcissa reminds Miss Jenny of the bank robbery at Colonel Sartoris' bank and the fact her collection of letters was missing the next day. At that time, she understood it was a bank bookkeeper who had taken the letters.

Narcissa tells Miss Jenny the man who came to dinner was a federal agent still trying to find the man who'd robbed the bank. He'd found the letters that the bookkeeper had taken after the bank robbery and then dropped somewhere. The agent had the letters for 12 years while working on the case. Narcissa tries to get him to return them to her, but he says he must turn them in to Washington. Knowing she could never buy the letters, Narcissa offers herself in exchange for the letters. She brings them back from Memphis and burns them all. Although she has sacrificed her personal dignity, Narcissa tells Miss Jenny, she has preserved the family's reputation as "quality." At dinner with her son, Narcissa asks him to come sit closer to her and wonders whether he missed her while she was in Memphis.

He replies that he slept with his Aunt Jenny and "we had a good time." Narcissa tries to get him to agree they will never be apart again.Under pressure, the boy replies, "All right." Elnora goes upstairs to Miss Jenny's room, takes one look at her, then returns to

the dining room. She stands still until she gets Narcissa's attention. "You better come quick, I reckon," she announces.

There Was a Queen Analysis

The delicately balanced world of southern aristocracy as it tries to adapt and survive in the modern world basically ends with the death of Miss Jenny, sister of John Sartoris, the last Sartoris man who was one of a line of men in the old southern tradition, with southern chivalry, a sense of honor and pride of family. But as But despite the fact that 90-year-old Miss Jenny seems the very embodiment of southern "quality" as she sits straight up with a head of snow-white hair in her wheelchair, the huge old Sartoris estate, like the family, is on a trajectory of decline. Its quiet is one sign of its life bleeding out. "So the quiet was now the quiet of womenfolks," Faulkner says. The servants as well as surfviving family members have been deeply imbued with a sense of honor and pride, and preserving those qualities becomes a primary reason for survival, to maintain the distinction of the Sartoris family as "quality," compared with the "town trash."

There is, however, a palpable sense of decay in this doomed mission, just as there is a palpable hint of incest when Narcissa seeks to control, even devour, her 10-year-old son with her demands for eternal fealty to her and to the Sartoris name. Judging from the boy's resilience and his easy manner with the black servants, there is every indication that he may someday break free of his psychological prison and develop into a complete person. The death of Miss Jenny in the final lines of this story seems more like a liberation than a tragedy, although not a liberation for the black servants who have spent their entire lives working and caring for this family. It is, however, emblematic of the death of the old south, its folkways and manners.

Mountain Victory

Mountain Victory Summary

At the end of the Civil War, a one-armed Confederate officer and his black servant, Jubal, appear at the cabin of a Tennessee family on an April afternoon, seeking shelter overnight. The black servant wears a Union overcoat and a piece of oilcloth over his head. In a rather imperious manner, the servant announces that Major Saucier Weddel wants to lodge in their barn with their horses. Taken somewhat aback, the barefoot woman at the front door learns from the officer as he approaches their cabin that he is on his way home to Mississippi from Virginia. She invites them inside their dirt-floored cabin while she speaks with her husband. Her daughter flees to the kitchen where she watches through cracks in the logs as her older brother, Vatch, takes cartridges from a box stamped U.S. Army from their case and lines them up on the table where he sits with his younger brother, Hule. Weddel explains that is was not uncommon for Confederates to use captured Union munitions near the end of the war.

Vatch offers Weddel a drink of moonshine whiskey; he refuses the drink but asks if he can take some out to his servant. He hands him a tumbler filled with a clear liquid, like water. Jubal drinks it down in one gulp, then exclaims, "whuf!" Later, Jubal enters the kitchen where the girl is working. She asks him questions about where the two men are going, and listens in a dreamy trance whenever Weddel's name is mentioned. She tells him that her brother, Vatch, thinks Weddel "is a nigra, too." Jubal responds by telling her she is just an ignorant hill-dweller who's never been anywhere. She gives him another shot of "corn" and the black man gulps it down, exclaims "whuf!" again and wipes his mouth. At dinner, Vatch's hostility comes to the surface when he tells of coming upon a Rebel officer and shooting him three times before he dies. His father tells Vatch to pipe down and threatens to thrash him.

Jubal finds another jug of white lightning under the floorboard, drinks greedily, then drops the jug and passes out. Weddel, the father and Vatch carry Jubal to the stable. The father orders them to leave at once; Weddel says he can't leave because of Jubal's condition but will leave early the next morning when is is sober. During the night, Vatch's younger brother Hule sneaks into the stable but Weddel sees him in the dark and tells him to stop. The boy identifies himself, then tells tells the officer awkwardly where the ladder to his sister's room is. Weddel tells him in no uncertain terms that he won't be climbing the ladder. "I have been away from home for four years," Weddel says. "All I want is to go home." As they depart early the next morning, Weddel tells Jubal that Hule has given him directions to turn left at the laurel copse. The boy grows agitated, pleading with Weddel to marry his sister and then take both of them with him. We'll work; we won't shame you," he says.

Weddel thanks him for the directions and tells him to go home, but the boy tells them to wait. "Turn back. They will be gone now," the boy says, his face ashen. Weddel instead spurs the horses on until both he and the boy following him are shot dead in the path.

Jubal crouches low as two men emerge from the copse. One drops his gun and bends down over the dead boy. "The durned fool! The durned fool!" exclaims the bent over man. The other man slowly backs up the hill, facing the spot where the corpses lie, and Vatch is huddled over his dead brother. Jubal watches as the rifleman fires into "the white shape of Vatch's face like a period on a page."

Mountain Victory Analysis

Racial and geographic prejudice combine into a toxic brew that creates insanity and violence, as a Confederate officer and his black servant encounter hillbillies in Tennessee at the end of the Civil War whose hatred for Rebels is palpable. Vatch, the oldest of three children, notices that Jubal, the officer's black manservant, is wearing a Union officer's overcoat and that the two travelers carry a case of Union musket cartridges with them. "We had to use yours now and then," Saucier Weddel, the Confederate major, explains. Vatch is a hothead who tells Weddel about the time he executed a Confederate major by propping him against a tree and firing three times with his musket.

The tension mounts when the daughter becomes infatuated with Weddel, who has asked to stay overnight in the barn. The father demands that the pair move on in their journey back to Mississippi, but when Jubal gets drunk the officer refuses to leave until daybreak. Hule, the younger brother, approaches Weddel in the dark barn and pleads with him to take him and his sister with them to Mississippi. His pleas seem like a prayer for deliverance from poverty and ignorance. When dawn comes, Weddel and Jubal are led by the younger brother into an ambush in which Vatch and his father kill Weddel and, mistakenly, the younger brother, Hule, as Jubal watches, horrified. Evidently, the father shoots his older son, Vatch, for firing on his own brother in this confounding bloodbath.

The story is a distillation of the absurdity of killing, whether in warfare or in passion, because the killers always reap the pain and remorse for their actions. The title of this story indicates its ironic twist, as the reader wonders whether this encounter is really a loss for all involved, rather than a "victory" wrought by pride and an unreasoning desire for revenge.

Beyond

Beyond Summary

An old man, a judge, dies at home surrounded by black servants but no family because he is a widower whose son died in an accident at the age of 10. At the moment of his death, the two servants at the foot of his bed begin to shout and wail and, irritated with the noise, the judge rises, throws an overcoat around himself and departs the house. He encounters a large crowd of people waiting to go inside. The judge is already "beyond" the physical world and among the departed spirits of the earth. He stops to chat with someone he knows, or knew when alive, and pulls a cigarette from his briefcase. He asks for a light, but the man has no matches. The judge protests that he'd rather encounter people like Voltaire and other philosophers than the present crowd. The judge pulls out a yellowed photo of his son sitting on the pony who later threw him to his death, and shows it to the man. The other tells the judge he's looking for his wife; they died when he rolled over their car on the way to their wedding, in order to avoid a child in the road. The other man wishes the judge luck in finding both his wife and child. The judge runs into an old friend with whom he once debated agnosticism, nihilism, atheism. The judge then encounters a woman and child; the young boy cries because he is bored with his collection of lead soldiers. The judge shows her the photo of his son, and she says: "Why it's Howard. Why, we see him every day riding his pony." The judge ignores her invitation to sit and wait for Howard; instead he visits the freshly-dug grave of his son and wipes away dirt and debris from the headstone He moves toward the scene of flowers, removes his overcoat and is dressed in clean clothes, his face just shaved. The judge lies down with his hands folded over his chest, and as he slips off into a profound slumber mutters: "Gentlemen of the jury, you may proceed."

Beyond Analysis

Faulkner deals with the issue of death and deliverance in this somewhat playful story that is also laced with tragedy. The judge finds after he dies that his son who died at 10 and his departed wife mean everything to him, although he can't find them in the brief hereafter that lasts a mili-second from closing his eyes to his burial. He flees "beyond" to get away from the crying and wailing of his servants, but encounters a large and irritating crowd. In the "beyond," which evidently the judge visits in a brief out-of-body experience, he seems to get answers at last to existential questions that had bothered him his whole life. He also finds other people who have suddenly and tragically lost loved ones but haven't been able to find them. Faulkner's descriptions of the "beyond" suggest a place of chaos as much as peace, a final resort where the physical life is still very much in evidence. The reader is left to wonder whether the "beyond" is simply another level of human consciousness.

Race at Morning

Race at Morning Summary

It's November and deer hunting time in the bayous of Mississippi. The narrator, a 12-year-old illiterate boy whose name is never given, relates the story of a hunting expedition in backwoods English. He's never gone to school because he works on the farm of Mister Ernest, who unofficially adopted him when his mother ran off with "that Vickiburg roadhouse feller" and his father left the next day. On third day, Mister Ernest appears and offers to take the boy in since his wife had died three years earlier. On this cold November morning the boy rides in the saddle behind Mister Ernest on Dan, while Simon leads the dogs headed by old Eagle into the bayou and across cane brakes. They pass by "standers" hunters crouched in the bushes with guns, and hear shots in the distance. The dogs get the scent of a huge deer buck with 12 antler tips they'd seen in the distance. As they race through the undergrowth, the boy sees a hanging vine approach rapidly. It sweeps over the head of the horse and catches on the saddle, throwing both riders into the air like a huge rubber band releasing its energy. Mistert Ernest, the boy and the saddle plop in the mud as Dan races off behind the dogs. They repair the broken stirrup, eventually find Dan, and remount. They track the buck all day, with only one sighting. Mr. Ernest fires his shotgun three times but has forgotten to load it. Hearing the noise, the buck runs away. The old man and the boy return to the hunting cabin as the other hunters—who only came along to drink and play cards away from their wives—leave to return home. The boy fetches some whiskey left behind for Mister Ernest, as they ponder the likelihood of bagging the buck next November.

Race at Morning Analysis

Faulkner distills the essence of southern manhood in this tale. The reader encounters good ole boys who play cards, drink whiskey, curse colorfully, carry guns and go hunting with sometimes disastrous results. There is a subplot involving the in loco parentis relationship between the narrator and his "adopted" father, Mister Ernest. The two seem to have a symbiotic relationship. Mister Ernest provides a male model and a sense of belonging to the young boy, who in turn helps him to hunt by pointing and shouting in his ears because he is deaf. Their dogged pursuit of an elusive buck deer is sometimes desperate, sometimes comical, as when both riders are hurled into the air by an overhanging vine. The nature of their relationship is revealed when the older man, irritated, asks that the next time they approach a vine the boy give him some warning—instead of beating him senseless. As they plod ever onward, the bright fall day ripens, then starts to fade. They have only gotten close to the buck once, but failed to shoot him because of another comical mistake. Throughout this frustrating day, the boy and man become more bonded as they face the same challenges. Finally, they return to the cabin with a sense of relief. As Mister Ernest relaxes with a glass of whiskey, he tries to correct the boy's grammar in a true gesture of paternal caring.

Characters

Abner Snopesappears in Barn Burning

Taciturn, feral, imbued with a fierce but primitive sense of justice. As a Snopes, Abner is identified with one of two broad types of Southerners depicted in Faulkner's work—Sartoris, or the aristocratic families whose wealth was largely wiped out during the Civil War, and Snopes, the poor, uneducated underclass of shiftless, often violent share croppers. Abner walks with a limp from having been shot in the heel by a Confederate soldier for stealing his horse and is a pyromaniac. Whenever he feels slighted, or used, by one of the upper class, his anger flares right away into pyromania. Abner has a history of such outbursts which has kept his wife in constant fear and his family on the run from place to place. Abner, as described in Barn Burning, is a sociopath whose latent criminality holds the entire family in a state of terror—not love and affection.

Col. Sartoris Snopesappears in Barn Burning

The young boy is known by the nickname, Sarty, and he both worships and fears his father; he thinks of his father as made of tin: stiff, cold, without depth. But he is more than willing to do anything to please him. The most vulnerable of the entire family, Sarty is also the only member of the family who seems to have a chance of surviving the erratic, irrational behavior of his father. Unfortunately Sarty has a mentally unstable father whose bursts of rage whenever he feels mistreated lead him to set fires. Eventually, after Abner sets fire to his employer's barn, Sarty runs off into the night to escape the shackles of his family and its pattern of pathology and constant trouble. The reader is left to wonder whether Sarty survives in the woods, whether he can find a better life for himself. The cyclical pattern of constant flight of his family doesn't seem likely to change.

Major de Spainappears in Barn Burning

Owner of the land on which the itinerant Snopes family of seven settles to farm after being thrown out of another county for an incident of arson (barn burning) involving the Abner Snopes and the previous landlord. Major de Spain is identified as one of the Sartoris clan, the favored upper-class against which Abner Snopes bears a grudge.

Pete Grierappears in Ywo Soldiers

Pete Grier is the older brother of the narrator in Two Soldiers, who enlists in the Army after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Emily Griersonappears in A Rose for Emily

Miss Emily is the short, pudgy daughter of a Civil War hero who leaves a handsome house and inheritance. Miss Emily can't find a suitable suitor, and probably murdered one of her boyfriends.

Homer Barronappears in A Rose for Emily

A former boyfriend of Miss Emily, whose rotted cadaver is discovered in the upstairs bedroom after Miss Emily dies.

Hawkshawappears in Dry September

Hawkshaw, a barber, is the lone voice of reason against a vigilante group that sets out to kill Will Mayes, a young black man suspected of raping a white woman.

Miss Minnie Cooperappears in Dry September

Miss Minnie is a young middle-aged spinster who lives alone in Jefferson, the alleged victim of a rape by Will Mayes, a black man. She is noteworthy for having once reported a peeping tom on her rooftop—a claim that is never substantiated.

Will Mayesappears in Dry September

Will Mayes is the young black man who is the object of a whispering campaign about alleged rape that triggers his execution by a vigilante group.

Jesusappears in That Evening Sun

A short, very dark black man with a razor scar across his face, Jesus is the boyfriend of Nancy the cook. When she becomes pregnant, he threatens to cut her and whoever the father is, then leaves for Memphis.

Nancyappears in That Evening Sun

Nancy is the on-call black cook to the white family, who fills in whenever their regular cook is ill. She is terrified of Jesus' return, and convinces herself that he is lurking in the darkness outside her cabin

Three Basketappears in Red Leaves

Three Basket is one of two Indians who search for a runaway black slave, and find him after a long trek.

Louis Berryappears in Red Leaves

Louis Berry is the second of two Indians who capture the runaway slave.

Issetebbheaappears in Red Leaves

Issetebhea is the chief of an unnamed Indian tribe who dies and is honored in a three-day feast.

Moketubbaappears in Red Leaves

Moketubba is the dim son of Issetebhea, who takes over as chief after his father dies.

The presidentappears in Lo!

Only referred to as the president, the time period of the story (early 19th Century) suggests that Faulkner may have had Andrew Jackson in mind when he created this character.

Francis Weddelappears in Lo!

Francis Weddel is an Indian who asks the president to intervene and resolve a land dispute in Mississippi.

Captain Bogardappears in Turnabout

Captain Bogard is the hardened American bomber pilot who has a pacifist epiphany in the midst of World War I.

Claudeappears in Turnabout

Claude is the effeminate but likable British seaman who is taken out of a drunken blackout by MPs and placed aboard Captain Bogard's bomber for a mission over Germany.

Buck Monaghanappears in Honor

A former aviator in World War I, Buck is a wing-walker in a flying circus who has an affair with Mildred, wife of Howard Rogers.

Howard Rogersappears in Honor

Rogers is the crackerjack pilot who, like Buck Monaghan, finds work in a flying circus at the end of World War I. Rogers flies the plane on whose wings Rogers walks.

Mildred Rogers

Mildred is the sexy, unfulfilled wife of pilot Howard Rogers with whom Buck has a brief affair.

Virginia Sartorisappears in There Was a Queen

Virginia ("Miss Jenny") is the matriarch and sole survivor of the noble Sartoris family. The white-haired 90-year-old spends her days in a wheelchair looking out of her window into the flower garden.

Narcissa Sartorisappears in There Was a Queen

Narcissa is the widow of Bayard Sartoris, who has a 10-year-old son and lives in the Sartoris mansion.

Elnoraappears in There Was a Queen

Elnora is the mulatto cook at the Sartoris household who resents her place as an "untouchable," not fully a part of the white or black culture.

Objects/Places

Yoknapataphaw Countyappears in Barn Burning

Yoknapataphaw County is the imaginary place in the American South where many of Faulkner's stories and novels are set. It is somewhere in Mississippi, but not on any map.

Memphisappears in Two Soldiers

As the largest city close to the rural Yoknapataphaw County, Memphis is the urban beacon for folks hoping to make a better life or to escape the horrors of life in a small southern town, such as Jefferson.

Jeffersonappears in A Rose for Emily

A small town in Mississippi, the county seat for Yoknapataphaw County.

Ice plantappears in Dry September

The ice plant in Jefferson is where Will Mayes works as watchman. It is from the ice plant that the young black man is kidnapped by a gang of racist morons, shackled and executed for a crime he didn't commit.

Pistolappears in Dry September

The weapon used by McLendon to murder the black man, Will Mayes. After the killing, he comes home late and plunks the pistol down on his bedside table, arousing his wife's suspicions..

Torpedo Boat XOOIappears in Turnabout

Torpedo Boat XOOI is the small, fast British boat used to attack enemy ships in the English Channel. One of its crew is Claude, who is a central character in the story and who goes missing after taking his American friend, Captain Bogard, with him on a night mission.

Handley-Page Bomberappears in Turnabout

The twin-engine Handley-Page is an American bomber flown by Captain Bogard on a mission over Germany. On board is the British torpedo boat crewman Claude, who's just been arrested by MPs for public intoxication.

Barbershopappears in Dry September

The town barbershop is a social meeting place—and the hub of gossip. When a rumor arrives that a white woman has been raped by a black man, it becomes the place where normally rational men turn into murderous beasts.

Razorappears in That Evening Sun

Nancy, the half-white cook for a white family, fears the return of her boyfriend and the razor he usually on a chain around his neck. She fears that he will kill her with the razor, in a rage for her pregnancy.

Tennesseeappears in Mountain Victory

The hills of Tennessee are where Confederate Major Saucier Weddel and his black servant encounter mountain men who kill the major and even one of their own family.

Themes

Dignity

In many of Faulkner's stories, a sense of dignity is portrayed as an essential component of human personality. Dignity, whether in the form of loyalty (however misplaced) or pride, is what motivates many of his characters as they seek it or try to maintain it. This kind of dignity is the all-but-forgotten dignity of the Old South, closer to a form of chivalry than anything else. In fact, many of his characters seem to have such an acute sense of the importance of dignity because of a strong ancestral memory of the humiliation and indignity brought to the Confederacy in the Civil War. In There Was a Queen, for example, a southern belle from a prominent family goes to the lengths of sleeping with a petty government official in Memphis in order to retrieve a cache of obscene mail she's received, so she can burn them and thereby preserve the Sartoris family dignity. Of course, the sad irony is that she must lose her individual dignity (she thinks) to preserve the dignity and honor of her family—a family that is fast disappearing in any event. In Barn Burning, tenant farmer Abner Snopes is a semi-literate pyromaniac whose wounded sense of dignity keeps his family constantly on the run.

Brutality

Slavery as a form of brutality permeates these stories. Paradoxically, the kind of human kindness often experienced between master and slave is juxtaposed with other forms of brutality. In Red Leaves, for example, a pair of Indians searching for a runaway black slave spend a great deal of time discussing whether it would make economic sense to eat the Africans because there are too many of them. In the next story, Lo!, one of the earliest American presidents struggles with how to be fair to American Indians while secretly wishing they would all disappear. Faulkner's point is that man's inhumanity to man is universal, and that those with power invariably will commit some kind of atrocity upon other men.

And especially in Dry September, this sense of brutality lurking just below the thin veneer of "civilization" is made shockingly apparent when a group of paranoid rednecks in a small southern town search out a black man who is unjustly accused of raping a white woman. Their fear is palpable as they draw strength from each other in a cowardly fashion to find and kill the young man.

Fear

In both Dry September and That Evening Sun, Faulkner shows how fear distorts the souls of the fearful. In the former story, a group of barbershop hooligans track down a black man rumored to have committed rape and execute him. The ring leader of these cowards says it doesn't really matter to him whether the man is innocent or guilty: the important things is that blacks be given a lesson. In That Evening Sun, a poor black

servant woman is so afraid that her hot-headed boyfriend will return from Memphis and slash her with his razor that she pleads with her master's children to stay with her overnight. She fears her boyfriend is lurking in a nearby ditch, waiting to kill her for getting pregnant. In both stories, people are driven to irrational behavior because of their uncontrolled fears.

In There Was a Queen, the last few members of the once-prominent Sartoris clan and their black servants try to isolate themselves from the outside world for fear that their "quality" is threatened by the "town trash." Ultimately, their world collapses around them when the family matriarch, Miss Jenny, dies at the age of 90. Fear also plays a large role in the murder of a Confederate major and the son of a Tennessee mountaineer, in Mountain Victory, as bitterness from the Civil War turns the mountain clan murderous.

Style

Point of View

In many instances, the point of view in each of these 13 stories is that of one of the characters in the narrative. There is rarely an omniscient authorial point of view, which is one reason the stories develop verisimilitude and reach deep into the reader's perceptions and emotions. The events that unfold in each story have the freshness and vitality of someone speaking without pretense from their own experience.

Instead of an absent narrator describing how an enraged tenant farmer burns down the barn to get even with the land owner, Faulkner tells the story from the point of view of the farmer's son, who helps his father ignite the fire although he doesn't understand the reasons. The overall tone is ironic, as unlikely events fit together in a kind of surprising outcome that seems, in each story, to be very life-like. Individual quirks and eccentricities become destiny for many of the characters, who often and react in ways they themselves don't fully understand—as in the bloody Mountain Victory that leaves a Confederate major in Tennessee and two sons of a hillbilly mountain man dead in a revenge killing gone awry.

The reader can almost see Faulkner shaking his head in amazement as his characters stumble and fumble through life, each looking in his or her own way for salvation.

Setting

All of the stories are set in the rural South—often in small hamlets in Mississippi or other locales in the Old South, such as Tennessee. The fictional map for most of these stories is Yawknatapaphaw County, somewhere in Mississippi.

Language and Meaning

Faulkner uses dialect colorfully and effectively throughout. He has a perfect ear for the cadences, colloquialisms and folkways of black southerners, as well as the Sartorises (aristocratic southerners from old families) and Snopeses (poor tenant farmers). The directness of Faulkner's dialogue puts the reader immediately into the minds of the characters as well as the place and action, without much need for narrative explication.

The readers get a complete lesson in the pecking order on a southern plantation when a poor tenant farmer, Abner Snopes, comes to the door of the plantation owner, Colonel de Spain, and is greeted by the black house servant, who says: "Wipe yo foots, white man, fo you come in here. Major ain't home nohow." Pushing his way through the door, Snopes barks: "Get out of my way, nigger." And in That Evening Sun, when the servant Nancy is afraid to be left alone in her cabin at night, because she's afraid her boyfriend is lurking outside with a razor to kill her, she tells the white family: "When yawl go home,

I gone. Anyway, I got my coffin money saved up with Mr, Lovelady." The father tells Nancy not to be afraid: "Nonsense. You'll be the first thing I'll see in the kitchen tomorrow morning." And the terrified Nancy replies: "You'll see what you see, I reckon. But it will take the Lord to say what that will be."

Structure

As one of the innovators of the modern short story, Faulkner was very adept at placing his narratives in a fluid sense of time. These tales wander from past to future to present and sometimes seem to be in more than one time (at the same time). So the structure of these stories isn't always a seamless progression through time, as in reality, but rather a stream of consciousness structure that can take the reader inside the mind of one character as his mind jumps through different time zones, and then to another character, where the same process takes place. The result is a melange of structures and points of view that gives the stories a richness and depth not always found in short fiction.

Whatever structure develops in the narrative line comes naturally out of the characters themselves and their own actions. This allows for the unexpected, the outrageous, the shocking to seem quite natural. One example is Dry September where idle barbershop chatter stirs racial paranoia, which quickly blazes into a murderous rush to kill an innocent black man. Or, in Honor, a love triangle involving two former World War I aviators and the wife of one man is resolved and what seems an honorable way to both men, and the wife returns to her husband after throwing herself at her lover. It is a tension-filled story that seems headed toward violence, but Faulkner shows how the two aviators are able to settle their romantic entanglement by focusing on what they see as their sense of honor. The development of the story, and its outcome, are surprising because they follow the contours of the characters and not the dictates of a rigid plot line.

Quotes

"I told him he could have the hog when he paid me a dollar pound fee. That evening a nigger came with the dollar and got the hog. He was a strange nigger. He said. 'He say to tell you wood and hay kin burn.' I said, 'What?' 'That whut he say to tell you,' the nigger said. 'Wood and hay kin burn.' That night my barn burned. I got the stock out but I lost the barn." (Barn Burning, p. 2)

"The element of fire spoke to some mainspring of his father's being, as the element of steel or powder spoke to other men, as the one weapon for the preservation of integrity, else breath were not worth the breathing, and hence to be regarded with respect and used with discretion." (Barn Burning, p. 6)

"He [Sarty] saw the man in spectacles sitting at the plank table and he did not need to be told this was a Justice of the Peace; he sent one glare of fierce, exultant, partisan defiance at the man in collar and cravat now, whom he had seen but twice before in his life, and that on a galloping horse, who now wore on his face an expression not of rage but of amazed unbelief which the boy could not have known was at the incredible circumstance of being sued by one of his own tenants, and came and stood against his father and cried at the Justice: 'He ain't done it! He ain't burnt...' 'Go back to the wagon,' his father said." (Barn Burning, p. 17)

"We went to sleep. The next morning we eat breakfast by lamplight because the bus would pass at 6 o'clock. Maw wasn't crying now. She jest looked grim and busy, putting breakfast on the table while we eat it. Then she finished packing Pete's grip, except he never wanted to take no grip to the war, but maw and decent folks never went nowhere, not even to a war, without a change of clothes and something to tote them in. She put in the show box of fried chicken and biscuits and she put the Bible in, too, and then it was time to go." (Two Soldiers, p.32)

"Then I see Memphis. I knowed I was right this time. It was standing up into the air. It looked like about a dozen whole towns bigger than Jefferson was set up on one edge in a field, standing up into the air higher than a hill in Yoknapatawpha County. Then we was in it, with the bus stopping ever' few feet, it seemed like to me, until I didn't see how there could 'a' been nobody left in Mis'sippi a-tall to even sell me a bus ticket, let alone write out no case histories. Then the bus stopped. It was another bus dee-po, a heap bigger than the one in Jefferson. And I said, 'All right. Where do folks join the Army?'" (Two Soldiers, ...

"We did not say that she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will." (A Rose for Emily," p. 52)

"Will Mayes never done it, boys," the barber said. "If anybody done it. Why, you all know as well as I do there aint any town where they got better niggers than us. And you know

how a lady will kind of think things about men when there aint any reason to, and Miss Minne anyway—" (Dry September, p. 68)

"'He aint gone nowhere,' Nancy said. 'I can feel him. I can feel him now, in this lane. He hearing us talk, every word, hid somewhere, waiting. I aint seen him, and I aint going to see him again but once more, with that razor in his mouth. That razor on that string down his back, inside his shirt. And then I aint going to be even surprised.'" (That Evening Sun, p. 83)

"'I aint a nigger,' Jason said. 'Are you a nigger, Nancy?'
"'I hellborn, child,' Nancy said. 'I won't be nothing soon. I going back where I come from soon.'"
(That Evening Sun, p. 85)

"Man was not made to sweat."
"That's so. See what it has done to their flesh."
"Yes. Black. It has a bitter taste, too."
"You have eaten of it?"
"Once. I was young then, and more hardy in the appetite than now. Now it is different with me."
"There is a bitter taste to the flesh which I do not like."
"They are too valuable to eat now."
(Red Leaves, p. 101)

"You don't understand white people. They are like children: you have to handle them carefully because you never know what they are going to do next. So if it's the rule for guests to squat all night long in the cold outside this man's door, we'll just have to do it. Besides, hadn't you rather be in here than out yonder in the snow in one of those damn tents? So long as we're here, we'll have to try to act like these people believe that Indians ought to act." (Lo!, p. 135)

"The trouble is, I had never learned to do anything. You know how it was in those days, with even the college campuses full of British and French uniforms, and us all scared to death it would be over before we could get in and swank a pair of pilot's wings ourselves." (Honor, p. 197)

"I wanted to be out of there. I wanted to run. I wasn't scared. It was because it was all kind of hot and dirty. I wanted to be out where it was cold and hard and quiet, to settle things." (Honor, p. 205)

I was too far down the slope of the camber to bend my knees over the leading edge, and I could feel the wing creeping up under me. I didn't dare move. I knew that if I tried to sit up against the slipstream, I would go off backward. I could see by the tail and the horizon that we were upside down now, in a shallow dive, and I could see Rogers standing up in his cockpit, unfastening his belt, and I could turn my head a little more and see that when I went off I would miss the fuselage altogether, or maybe hit it with my shoulder." (Honor, p. 209)

"There is a certain integral consistency which, whether it be right or wrong, a man must cherish because it alone will ever permit him to die. So what I have been, I am; what I am I shall be until that instant comes when I am not. And then I shall have never been. How does it go? Non fui. Sum, Fui, non sum." (Beyond, p. 281)

Topics for Discussion

What is Faulkner's attitude toward his characters? Ironic? Compassionate? Mocking?

In A Rose for Emily, does the evidence support the theory that Miss Emily used arsenic to kill her lover? If so, why did she kill him?

Is it purely racial hatred that drives the barbershop gang in Dry September to kill an innocent black man? Or is there an element of southern chivalry to protect women that causes the violence? Or both?

Why does Nancy try desperately to keep the white children with her in the cabin in That Evening Sun?

What parallels do you see in the relationship of Native Americans to their government in Lo! and the relationship of minorities and the government today?

What accounts for Captain Bogard's conversion from a good soldier into a pacifist in Turnabout?

Does the kind of loyalty between soldiers described in Honor still exist today in a world of volunteer armies and computerized combat?

In There Was a Queen, is the dissolution of the Sartoris family a tragedy or a liberation? How is it different for the white Sartoris family compared with their servants?

What is Vatch's motive for wanting to kill Major Saucier Weddel in Mountain Victory?

How does defeat turn into victory at the end of Race at Morning?