Southern Gothic in Barn Burning and A Good Man Is Hard to Find Comparative Analysis

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Introduction

“A Good Man is Hard to Find” was a short story first published in 1955 and written by famous American author Flannery O’Connor. It is a part of the authors’ short stories collection of the same title. “Barn Burning” was another short story first published in 1939 and written by American author William Faulkner. It deals with vengeance, the influence of fathers, and class conflicts. Both short stories have a similar theme about the family of how the grandmother and Abner are responsible for their tragedy. As for their genre, both share the same dark humour, where both include transgressive thoughts. Additionally, both stories share the same fatal flaw in which how the family has to overcome a tragic final. Both writers have great respect for Southern Gothic literature. Flannery O’Connor was an American essayist, short story writer and novelist who wrote a number of commentaries and reviews, as well as thirty-two short stories and two novels. Her writings often revolve around violent situations, grotesque characters and regional settings. Actually, she was a Southern author who frequently wrote in a sardonic Southern Gothic style. On the other hand, the second short story author, William Cuthbert Faulkner, was a Nobel laureate American writer who wrote plays, essays, poetry, screenplays, short stories and novels. He is documented as the most celebrated writer in the literature world, especially in Southern literature.

Body: Compare And Contrast

The prime aim of this essay is to conduct a compare and contrast analysis of these two stories from the perspective of Southern Gothic elements, where Southern Gothic is documented as a subpart of the Gothic writing in the American genre that takes place in the American South. It combines the elements of romance, tragedies, exaggerations, and dark humour. The Southern Gothic literature set of characteristics is much more than the use of country-folk lifestyle, barn-raised corn-fed and southern dialects. Though the characteristics are apparently loose with the perspective of literature as a whole, they are certainly leading in the works of this sub-genre. Both Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man is Hard to Find” and William Faulkner’s “Barn Burning” are perfect models of Southern Gothic in that they offer violence, figurative or literal imprisonment, pivotal characters outside the norm and a sense of place.

A comprehensive element of Southern Gothic literature is the use of a “pivotal character or someone close to them who is set apart from the world by a disability or odd way of seeing the world (Oprah).” As per my understanding, it can be more efficiently read if someone goes further with it and indicates that these diverse ways of observing all God’s creatures originated from difficult situations or predicaments, “Gothic novels display the reactions of their characters to trying or appalling situations (Hume).” In “Barn Burning,” Abner is apparently a pyromaniac with slight control over his irritation. After a keen evaluation of the literature, I observe that it is essential to highlight the “freakishness” in “A Good Man is Hard to Find” as Oprah’s Distinguishing Features article sketched.

Both stories demonstrate how both characters are described as selfish and manipulative. Seen in the part where the father in the story of “Barn Burning” tries to manipulate his son, “You got to learn to stick to your own blood, or you aren’t going to have any blood to stick to you” (Faulkner 165). This is a way of manipulating in which he is trying to make his son feel responsible to stay with his family and not to give them his back because it is his blood and he needs to respect that. In Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man Is Hard to Find”, the grandmother is manipulative when she says,”I wouldn’t take my children in any direction with a criminal like that aloose in it” (O’Connor 430). This part demonstrates how the grandmother is manipulating by not wanting to take her children to a criminal like Misfit, but it is interesting because later, she does exactly this. The grandmother is the type of person who makes lies in order to get what she wants,”There was a secret panel in this house” (O’Conner 433). She lies, wanting to make this a reason to still go to the house, and this demonstrates the way she is using this lie in order to get what she wants. On the other hand, in the story “Barn Burning”, the father is portrayed as a “horse trader,” though he was more than a horse stealer, “the table wherein Justice sat/ his father and his father’s enemy (our enemy he thought in that despair, our! Mine and his both! He’s my father!) Stood” (Faulkner 162). He is marc more than someone who steals but more like someone who fights for money rather than loyalty. Both characters Abner from “Barn Burning” and the grandmother from “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” really did not change throughout the story. They remain the same selfish and manipulative characters.

In the Story of Barn Burning by William Faulkner, we can describe all the main parts that actually mean something special to the author, or it’s trying to say something deep. Furthermore, we could find the fire as a symbol of revenge and destruction: “wood and hay kin burn, that night barn burn” (Faulkner 2). This an example that fire could be damaging to a person’s personal stuff because if we take a look at the story, the owner of the barn had the trauma of his barn being burned because he harmed the character’s persona or did something mean to Abner. As the story goes in the middle of the story, Abner has the reputation of being a troublemaker, and this is an example of how his reputation affects him. States, “Barn Burner” (Faulkner 2). Essentially, now he is considered a maniac or a person who seeks revenge and the symbol of fire means the payback and the destruction of somebody.

Another example of the fire symbol is that it represents masculinity, and we can actually see it in Abner because of all the braveness he has to confront the people who do harm to him and his family. Accordingly, in a text, it shows that Abner shows his courage and masculinity towards the life events

that he is experiencing and here is an example “outrageous voice, still rang, and repercussed” (Faulkner 3). It actually gives a brief model of how Abner is with all the authority he has and that his showing dominance. On the other hand, Abner’s character is reckless (behaviour that is characteristic of or appropriate to animals, particularly in being physical and instinctive). The character has this behaviour that wants him to do harm to the people without thinking about the actions and the consequences. As we go along, the story has the view of Abner as the bad character, and this states that he takes revenge on everything they to him, “you must realize you have ruined that rug” (Faulkner 4).

However, I can make a connection with the story “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by saying that the actions of the grandma by calling her an old lady is an example of a symbol that her grandkids do not really like her and she is more a hated character inside the story, and we could contrast that both had something in common. Nonetheless, the grandma had trouble controlling herself by just trying to play the tough character, and we could say that it is the same as Abner with reckless behaviour; she did not quite think that everything she did could later bring her trouble. However, I found a quote where we could find the symbol, and The Misfit was talking to her and said, “God never made a finer woman than my mother, and my daddy’s heart was pure gold” (O’Connor 7). As far, The Misfit said to her something deep that had an impact on the grandma and it was relating the symbol to God or he was talking in a sarcastic way. In the conclusion of the symbol part, we could say that both stories had many symbols that helped us understand what objects had a major impact. Similarly, both stories have an epiphany because both characters realize that he/she is experiencing something deep or that both have opened their eyes and faced the consequences. The first starts with Barn Burning, as the main character has trouble controlling himself with all the anger that he has, I would be focusing on Sarty who is Abner’s son.

Conclusion

Finally, these two works are an example of Southern Gothic literature. Both stories share a similar conflict in which both characters are responsible for their cause, and we can see the way how both share a similar personality of selfishness and manipulation. However, the character from “Barn Burning”, Abner, is more impulsive and ambitious, while the grandmother in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” is a bit of a loudmouth and superficial. The way how both authors share so many similarities and differences in their stories is particularly amazing by way of their ending. One is unfinished, while the other one leaves a tragic moment in which the family is murdered.

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