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Sartrean Existentialism and Abner's Odyssey for Self-identity in Faulkner's Writings

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Abstract

This essay examines Abner Snopes; one of the most distinct character in William Faulkner's writings and major character in his short story "Barn Burning" from Jean-Paul Sartre's perspective on existentialism. Sartre defines human exploration of personal identity as swaying movement between being and becoming. Studying Faulkner's Abner from Sartre's philosophy helps to understand the general human tendency of struggling to achieve one's true self. Abner as an uncompromising foe in "Barn Burning," creates suffering to his employers and disapproves the actions of his own relatives. His fury drives him to continue damaging other people's property. His fury provoke him to burn his master's barn in retaliation. Even after repeated attempts, Abner's odyssey for achieving the social acceptance and dignity fail. Realizing his place in society is still his unfulfilled ambition; his spirit wobbles between being himself and conforming to societal standards. Therefore, study of Abner's personality through Sartrean existentialism helps us to understand not only the particular fictional individual but dominant existential crisis among all of us. Hence, this essay attempts to explain the ways an individual's character and identity gets shaped by his wobbling quest of being and becoming in society by taking Abner's case as the point of critical analysis.

Keywords: Abner, existentialism, being and becoming, modernism, capitalism

Introduction

Abner Snopes; a father character in Faulkner's short story "Barn Burning" fluctuates across the conflict of social ethics and morality while attempting to pursue one's self-discovery. His pursuit of self-identity shapes his rebellious character against the plantation owners and oppressive landlords. His rebelliousness against all the morality signifies conflict an individual lives throughout his life on trying to form his identity and sustain his dignity. To study the factors creating such existential crisis in an individual by Sartre's philosophy as described in his seminal text *Being and Nothingness* (1969) helps us understand the distinct phenomenon all humans experience while working for their identity. In "Barn Burning" Abner's servility to his privileged and wealthy landlords create the chaos in choice of his decisions shaping his destructive behavior. His will to inspire his son to follow his own blood signifies to stick to his true self of being the poor peasant and revolt against the established moral codes for the underprivileged like them. The society that sets standard codes for its morality but acts opposite to its own ethics create the conflicts among its individuals. From this, some distinct characters like Abner revolt attempting to restore the sense of morality and during the process their own personalities oscillate between being what they are and attempting to become what they desire. Abner's barn burning, his vengeance and failure to pursue the very morality he wishes for himself signifies the modern individual's attempt and failure to live by the morals and ethics he believes in.

Literature Review

In her discussion of the economic agency opposing the plantation system in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942), Kayaba (2021) refers to the money loaned to the slaves on various problems as "conscience money" (p. 57). But, there was never a sufficient payment or fair reparation for the injustice and exploitation that slaves endured during the illustrious South era. Through his portrayal of the tumultuous connection between former slave owners and their unacknowledged Black relatives on the Southern plantation, Faulkner addresses the insufficiency of monetary reparations in his books. Reading the novel's economic exchanges between the two races, according to Kayaba, reveals not only the agency of Black characters struggling in the White-centered plantation system but also institutional violence that continues to manipulate Blacks' (physical) properties in the postbellum era (p. 58). It shows how Faulkner tried to give his Black characters agency. Accordingly, Faulkner's self-critical thoughts offer the contemporary endeavors to use the best visible and corrective techniques to resolve the dispute between Blacks and Whites.

Dallaire (2023), analyzing trauma, race, and resurrection through the lens of Dilsey's character in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), contends that Faulkner's method of bringing back to life the archetypal southern character in his works reflects his nostalgia and yearning for the illustrious antebellum era (p. 3). Racism-related tragedy in American history affects Faulkner's characters. Such trauma recurrence via the characters also represents the drive toward societal repetition (Forter, p. 280, as cited in Dallaire p. 389), both in Faulkner's own subconscious and across the Black communities. Our social interactions further exacerbate the wounds from past and present societal traumas. The creation and perpetuation of traumas shaped by social and historical factors characterize every culture today. But Faulkner's use of traumatized people in his writings suggests his desire for appropriate recognition and response to his socially oppressed characters in the long term.

In her analysis of *Absalom, Absalom* (1936), Gerend (2009) contends that Faulkner's literature represents the American empires, whose focus was on Haiti's dominance over social and cultural spheres. In Haiti and other Caribbean countries, America has long sought to project an image of itself as the father figure (Gerend, 2009, p. 20). The main discursive process that allowed the United States to invade and occupy Haiti for nineteen years, according to historian Mary A. Renda, was paternalism (as cited in Gerend, 2009, p. 18). Since Haiti was invaded by the US for nineteen years due to this political theory, it clearly reflects how the paternalist ideology of powerful nations undermines weaker and smaller countries. America's infatuation towards modern materialistic social life signifies the oppression that underprivileged groups suffered in socio-cultural sphere of America.

However, the white supremacy feelings was so deeply embedded in American society that it even made the poor whites take pride in themselves all blacks. In a similar vein, Raiford (2016) examines the idea of Faulkner's work by dissecting Sutpen, a character who illustrates how affluent white power dominates and impairs the agency of impoverished white people (p. 103). Even though Sutpen is a member of the lower class, he feeds his ego by boasting about his White lineage demonstrating the delusion of racial. Though the economic interests of poor whites in the South differed sharply with those of white elites—poor Southern whites nonetheless held themselves in high regard and harbored dreams of what they may become in the future. Labor historian Mark Fannin elucidates that slavery served as the cornerstone of all that white Southerners sustaining a strong white coalition (as cited in Raiford, p. 105). The white supremacy notion, thus, was actually responsible for the poor whites to suffer from the class disparity despite sharing similar experiences to their black folks.

Analyzing Faulkner's "Mink Snopes and Southern Livestock Control Practices," Zender (2022) contends that the majority of Faulkner's protagonists are lower-class individuals who rebel against the predetermined notion of rational society and fight racially dominating affluent masters (p. 119). The opening of the "Barn Burning" is the most concise and comprehensive illustration of a character from a lower social level resisting this change. Klarr (2019) contends that Faulkner depicts the deteriorating civilization and the emergence of gothic culture in his portrayal of the genuine Southern reality (p. 410). Faulkner's texts show large, opulent structures that were once the pinnacles of affluence in complete disrepair, together with abandoned plantation dwellings to illustrate the decline. Klarr contends:

The very deterioration of architectural space hybridizes the cultural conflicts it materializes, as it is the binary oppositions that give a culture its shape. Any physical-conceptual feature of a culture, including its spatial elements (home, farm, plantation), relational structures (slavery, feudalism, patriarchy), and collective imaginaries (myth, tale, narrative), are all losing coherence when a culture is said to be in decay. It is taking away their ability to organize. (p. 411)

Therefore, Klarr contends that Faulkner's work on the portrayal of South is "post-structural" meaning that fragmentation now exists where structure, a closed system, or a sort of palpable wholeness had existed. Since it changed the course of Southern decadence, Faulkner's sorrow over the passing of the splendid South recurrently appears in his texts.

The Yoknapatawpha books of Faulkner, according to Tebbets (2020), are haunted by patricides and near-patricides (p. 508). Throughout the majority of his books, the sons murder their dads, symbolizing the attempts of the young characters to rebel against the limitations imposed by their father figures. Therefore, they turn to patricide as a means of escaping the evils of patriarchy. In addition to being responsible fathers, they must eradicate the patriarchal system in their culture, which places women and people of color in a lower position within a male-dominated hierarchy that is thought to be normal and unchangeable (Tebbetts, p. 508). In *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and *Sanctuary* (1931), Stannard (2021) contends that Faulkner portrayed the corporeal and mental grotesque (p. 210). As his characters endure psychological suffering in a society that is estranged from them and fixated on the past or trauma, Faulkner advances Bakhtin's concept of "grotesque realism." His characters' aggressive and transgressive actions symbolize mourning. But when his characters experience bigotry, Faulkner reminds us that their presence and actions are not some terrible aberration but rather a reflection of the current social order. By bridging the enormous Atlantic Ocean that separates America and Europe, Honeini (2021) shows that

William Faulkner's "postage stamp of native soil" might be comprehended (p. 28). The Holocaust is one of the greatest catastrophes in human history, and Faulkner's writings become pertinent to it for their focus on the legacy of slavery and the history of racist brutality against African Americans.

According to Faust (2020), Faulkner captured the psychological realities of the War's aftermath and the Confederate home front (p. 8). Faulkner stated that the human heart in conflict with itself was the sole subject worthy of literature in his 1950 Nobel Prize address. He writes about this issue while experiencing it himself. His tribulations compelled him to innovate and try new things, which produced his creative and moral insight. Similar to Marx's historical materialist approach, Miles (2008) contends that Faulkner's stories highlight the human spirit's resistance to the exploitative and dehumanizing aspects of America's dominant economic system while also exposing the ways in which ideologies operate under capitalism (p. 327). The yearning to alter the material circumstances that made up the society in which Faulkner lived and wrote, as well as his animosity for the logic of capitalism both get reflected in his writing.

On different note, Faulkner's literature, according to Bonds (2012), glorifies white supremacy (p. 63). In Faulkner's texts the white man makes the black person constantly identify as a black person rather than as a human being. As a result, his writings often get accused of spreading the subversive white ideology. Abner's trial for causing damage to Mr. Harris's property by allowing his pig run loose opens the narrative in a court of law. Mr. Harris's property gets harmed by Abner's pig. Abner's free will appears to be alluded to by the pig, who continues to wander aimlessly and cause havoc in all its surroundings. Leaving the pig free from a fence represents his inner drive to maintain his freedom. The fence that was intended to restrain the hog signifies the societal norms and behaviors that direct people to lead sensible lives. Faulkner writes, "He had no fence that would hold it...saw the wire I gave him still rolled on to the spool in his yard" (Barn Burning, p. 202). Abner's harmful characterization comes from his act of vengeance against his wounded will. Thus, he could be interpreted as a psychologically challenged individual diligent about setting barns on fire.

Abner falls prey to social conscience which labels everyone who falls short of societal expectations as illogical and unsuccessful. While actively adhering to social norms, one cannot be his/her own self. In such course, one loses one's sense of self, becoming someone else. This makes an individual feel dejected and detest one's metamorphosis from a biological to a social being. In Sartre's words, existence free from the taint of social consciousness signifies pure happiness. Thus, the life of innocence always gets preferred.

Abner impels his son Sarty to be loyal to his nature by incessantly reminding him to act his blood. Hence, Sarty resists the false life as his father reminds him to stick to his nature.

Therefore, how one defines what constitutes a decent existence becomes a challenging issue as it differs from individual to individual. Usually, the existential crisis bothers the economically underprivileged individuals. Such individuals try to attain a socially prescribed goal. However, when they fail, they act inconsistently with that expectation and thus get labeled as misfit. "Existence precedes essence," Sartre contends in *Being and Nothingness* (p. 438). He defines reality as a social fabrication based on existential philosophy. After the First and Second World Wars, many began to mistakenly believe that there could be a logical world. Thus, Abner as an individual also could not surpass this faith. Hence, overlooking Abner's ability to set the barn on fire would just be robbing of his agency to act on himself. Therefore, ignoring a seemingly insane looking action of an individual means ignoring justice to one's agency.

Methodology

This study uses the library research approach to discuss, review and interpret Sartrean existentialism and Abner's character. By critically studying the research articles written on Faulkner's texts, motifs, his recurrent themes and dominant ideology, this study found Sartre's existential philosophy appropriate to interpret the subjectivity of Faulkner's characters. Sartre's seminal text *Being and Nothingness* (1969) categorically argues the conflict of the human subjectivity oscillating between being honest to one's true self and the acting according to the expectation of the society. Sartre (1969) argues that human beings in their quest to becoming their true self often end being nothing and realizing the nothingness of their efforts throughout their whole life. Hence, this essay analyzes the character of Mr. Abner Snopes in "Barn Burning" on light of his constant antagonism towards his landlords to see how one's quest to get satisfied on acting one's true self creates the tension and self-harming trench between being and becoming (becoming in a sense of acting according to the society's expectation). Thus, by categorically interpreting the seminal ideas of Sartre's existential philosophy, the essay interprets Abner's character as the prototype of modern individual who suffers from the anxiety whether to stick to one's true self or act according to societal expectation.

Results and Discussion

Using Sartre's theory of 'being-in-itself' and 'being-for-itself,' the enigma surrounding Abner's annoyance and violent deed of burning the barn could be analyzed. According to Sartre, people always strive for perfection. Such urge often signifies their quest for perfect will. As per human ego, the search for the 'perfect will' never gets fulfilled. An individual enforces disorder and confusion in the lives of others in an attempt to achieve perfection and order in his/her own life. Fire signifies Abner's strive for his attempt towards this perfection. His primary goal for survival gets symbolized by his act of stealing and surviving with the aid of the small fire. Fire symbolizes energy inherent inside an individual's free will. As stated in the story, "The element of fire spoke to some deep mainspring of his father's being" (Barn Burning, p. 204). The symbolic representation of one's 'free will' through fire suggests Abner's search for his agency.

"The passion of man is the reverse of that Christ," said Sartre (1969), "for man loses himself as man in order that God may be born" (p. 783). However, humans lose themselves in vain since the concept of God is inconsistent. "Man is passion, useless" (Sartre, 1969, p. 784). Existential agony stems from human's innate fear of their own potential. Abner never realizes his full potential or attains success. His effort remains in vain. In the modernity, human actions for materialistic gain, knowledge acquisition, and social prosperity often come at the expense of transgressing values and reason. Abner's pursuit for agency signifies fallacious attempt in seeking one's existence. Sartre contends that human nature is inherently flawed. We strive for perfection even when it remains certainly unattainable. Man, according to Sartre, is the tension and culmination of *pour-soi* (being-for-itself) and *en-soi* (being-in-itself). He refers to existence as the ultimate affirmation of both of these standards (p. lxvi). Being without consciousness is defined as being in itself. Things in their natural state remain in that mode as it suggests stability in life referring to one's self-awareness.

In the story, the Snopes family wagon is traveling forward. The wagon is always rolling, representing the journey of life that continues despite sadness and hopelessness. The fixed idea of essence of existence is profoundly challenged by Sarty's ignorance of their fate. The events turning opposite to Sarty's desire to halt at a particular moment signifies the meaninglessness of existence and its unpredictable nature. Hence, Sarty's desire naturally conflicts with his father's insistence on leading a roving life. However, the financial disaster he experiences causes his instability in life. He opposes hoarding grain so that planters would remain hungry since the impoverished who really cultivate crops get denied access to it. His

disturbed childhood represents his continuous desire for stable and happy life; "The wagon went on" (Barn Burning, p. 204). However, his incognizance signifies the possibilities, values, and temporalities of deficient human life. In Sartre's essence, "We are what we are not and we are not what we are" (p. xix). Thus, human existence signifies both achievement and negation at the same point.

Sarty, in contrast to his father, constantly slithers in the direction of a steady new existence. However, he frequently gets drawn to the idea of his ancestors' violent blood. He constantly smells the dread, sadness, and anguish due to his bodily hunger. The pull of blood reminds his biological lineage. The force of his familial genetics, which he dislikes and constantly disregards gets linked to his ancestry's blood. However, he suffers from dread, despair, and sadness due to the power of blood; "The smell and sense just a little of fear because mostly of despair and grief, the old fierce pool of blood" (Barn Burning, pp. 201-03). However, because of his young age, Sarty stands directly in opposition to his father.

The society appears "ordered but not heavy enough to keep him footed solid in it, to resist it and try to change the course of its events" (Barn Burning, p. 206) to Sarty. The conflicting picture of an ideal existence hovers in his mind. Sartre considers human being as a mesh of self and self-in-being. It signifies living with duality. An individual always craves for attaining the perfection in life. Sarty consistently romanticizes the life he envisions for the future. His thoughts about the future never stop. He fails, however, to achieve that future due to his poverty. He describes his sensation being torn and caught between his fantasies (Barn Burning, p. 211). His father's violence and its consequences impedes his ambitions. He dislikes the world he lives in because he is a young, naive boy. According to Wang (2006), humans are an essential deficiency, and as long as they live, they never stop searching for a perfect future but which they fail to possess (p. 11). Sartre contends on the fact that humans never get entirely free from their social circumstances. He calls this facticity as they could not entirely change other's perception regarding them. Hence, Abner cannot change Sarty's interpretation of him. Moreover, Sarty mentions his 'stiff foot' twelve times attributing his mental conflict. Thus, humans cannot change their physical essence by themselves.

In recent times, while majority of the society is suffering from the large scale poverty and unemployment, certain portion of individuals have amassed immense wealth due to the expansion of capitalism and global corporatism. A select few individuals hold sway over the global economy. The economy is dominated by small and ultra-rich individuals. A global economic downturn has coincided with the world's transition to capitalism. The principles of a just society turn out to be useless in such circumstances. People develop negative attitude

towards their lives as a result of such circumstances. Sartre contends that denying scarcity is possible through negativism. It makes us realize integral humanity, a situation when everyone achieves social justice (Engel, p. 31). However social problems impede the concept of equity and justice. It gives rise to criminal activity, violations, and intellectual protest, even on digital platforms. Hence, it further demonstrates the absurdity of the actual world.

Humans therefore fail to discover the purpose of life under social circumstances. The way that people live now scarcely appears to have any purpose. Society's rational codes, norms, and ideals fail to provide the means of survival. Living optimistically in the hope of a better future only leads to ill faith. Moral rules get disregarded by those who would rather live in bad faith. However, when someone behaves this way, individuals responsible for creating such situation perceive it as an anarchy. In his analysis of Faulkner's Snopes fictions, Lessig (1999) looks at how Faulkner depicts class in the post-bellum South and how he handles the burgeoning market economy. One may see Snopes's aggressive behavior and self-aggrandizement as a reaction to his post-traumatic change. In Faulkner's novels, the isolation of a single person rebelling against a new commercial approach comprises dominant theme.

Humans illustrate agonized species, according to Sartre. The reason humans suffer is because, according to Sartre, "they are haunted by a totality as it neither becomes its true self nor its projected self" (p. xxiv). According to Kirkpatrick (2015), human existence is thus by its very essence a sad consciousness that cannot be transcended (p. 9). Abner's predicament, though, is rather obvious. Abner remains unhappy with who he feels like he is; he just wants to dodge his past. He often gets traumatized by the volatility of being or not being. Had he been privileged, he would have more benevolent towards life. His pursuit of stable life makes him unstable. The human irrationality implies Abner's awareness of the ideals of his landowners' civilized and utopian society. Abner thinks his behavior makes sense. Accordingly, he rationalizes his actions. As a result, he never stops appealing to his son's instincts. "His ferocious conviction in the rightness of his own actions would be of advantage to all whose interest lay with his" (Barn Burning, p. 204), describes his driving force that intensifies his son's desire for the affluent existence.

Privileged groups relentlessly attempt to oppress underprivileged while maintaining a core of order and calm. Uneven access to wealth and privileges act as the source of poverty-related irrationality. As Abner fails to provide his family the financial stability they need, he as a poor tenant laborer continuously faces danger of losing both his life and his family. The concealed irrationality that allows capitalists to manipulate social and cultural politics to their advantage produces a rebellious character from a starving man. Abner understands that his

circumstances involve the denial of his inherent nature. Being oneself pushes people further away from the materialist existence and the socially idealized idea of a civilized existence.

Abner gets involved to villainous acts after ostentatiously overwhelmed with yearn for a happy existence. Major de Spain, who constantly mistreats Abner for spoiling his rug, demands twenty maize bushels, which is nearly difficult for Abner to pay. "It cost a hundred dollars. But you never had a hundred dollars. You never will, so, I am going to charge you twenty bushels of corn against your crop" (Barn Burning, p. 210). Abner keeps returning to his conceit after understanding that stability in life is unachievable and fires the barn. Abner acts strangely because of these expectations and his unfavorable destiny despite his constant efforts to change it. However, the privileged group has already automated this deed in our society. The privileged group constantly strives for higher materialistic gains that elevates them to the dominant position. Even being aware about death humans irresistibly strive for the attractive materialistic life. They live a safer and healthier life as they successfully become able to deprive and oppress the underprivileged ones by imposing their standards. As Sartre states, "It is an act of bad faith to merely adopt these values" (as cited in Engel, p. 22). This makes humans to act as though there lies specific reason for their actions. Such impression deceives them and obfuscates their freedom. Hence, Abner's annoyance comes from failing to meet the societal expectations. He could have avoided his such action had society given him the opportunity to work for a better life.

The notion of reality in this civilization does not align with the reality of society. According to Sartre's explanation of negativistic ethics, morality of the positive sort is meaningless in a society where scarcity—a negative that is the result of human creation—rules. The destitute and downtrodden have little genuine choice in defining a universal morality. Scarcity drives mankind to commit evil. Institutions within society keep things scarce (Engel, p. 25). Billingslea (1991) examines Sarty's maturation as an adult and his search for a free soul due to his father's dominance on him. "Then he was moving, running, outside the house, toward the stable: this old habit, the old blood which he had not been permitted to choose for himself, which had been bequeathed him wily nilly and which had run for so long" (Barn Burning, p. 214) illustrates Sarty's helplessness in leaving the imprint of his ancestral blood.

The constant pressure from Abner to obey him traps his son in his expectations. Sarty wants to change, but he becomes incapable of breaking the strong ties of blood because of the profound impact his father left on him. Discovering one's true being becomes Sarty's inner spiritual quest represented by his transformation from a son to a fatherly voice. If Sarty's

actions are surprising or dubious, Billingslea (1991) argues, it's only because he chose to invoke that independent spirit that is contrary to our nature and frequently at odds with familial ties, rather than abiding by the social mores of the day (p. 16). His spiritual search for a just and moral society gets reflected in his conscience, which led him to warn de Spain and take responsibility for his father's actions. Thus, from psychoanalytic perspective his character travels from innocence to experience. Sartoris (1983) states:

The conflict between Abner Snopes and the Old South social order is delineated in two courtroom scenes, one opening the story and the other precipitating the final crisis....the fine levied in the second case and the transgression committed by Snopes in the first both allude to the feudal practice of cornbóte. (p. 3)

The word "cornbóte" is derived from the French word *amercement*, which means fine. Sartoris examines Snopes history from the perspective of twentieth-century feudalism. Due to his ongoing conviction of guilt and the frequent imposition of fines, Abner develops a sort of vindictive streak and destroys the feudal lord's possessions in order to vent his resentment. Hence, Abner's action is a sort of protest against societal and financial oppression. Since human psyche drives them more significantly than any animal, the relocation of rage via the violent and chaotic medium serves as a warning to society that no individual could ever be restricted like an animal.

Human destiny is an everlasting adventure. They lose themselves in being a social creature. Such disguised identity often agonizes them. For a man, existence with two faces works as an illusion making them less moral as a result. They attempt to cling to their essential purity rather than rejecting their actual selves. God resides within themselves rather than as an entity to be found somewhere else. Thus, Abner could not leave his will to be himself. Mitchell (1965) argues that Abner in reality burns the barns only at a certain times (p. 2). Mitchell so makes an effort to unearth his past. In the past Abner's was shot in the heel to put restrictions on his will. Thus, he recreates that event with the intention of nullifying those boundaries—that is, of inverting its moral declaration.

Abner's foot signifies his injured will because of the way his foot and will are intertwined. Abner's aggressive and disjunctive nature is a direct result of his earlier trauma. The trauma of his embarrassing history serves as a yardstick for his behavior. Therefore, rather than being a figure to hate, Abner is one to relate to. According to Sartre, "we want to be perfectly happy, and we realize that we can never be perfectly happy in this life, so our existence is played out in this uncertain space between desire and frustration, between possibility and failure, between hope and despair" (as cited in Wang, p. 11). Abner attests to

Sartre's moral crises and its degradation during violent or emergency situations. Thus, his good and bad deeds depend upon the treatment he receives from society.

Humans have a strong innate urge for survival. Prestige, morality, and reason can all become irrelevant in situations that real social conditions. Humans could merely be authentic and when acting the real world. Abner acting independently, being true to his roots, and nature makes him a Sartrean being torn apart between one's true will and social expectation. "You're getting to be a man. You got to learn. You got to learn to stick to your blood or you ain't going to have any blood to stick to you" (Barn Burning, p. 205). An individual creates a moral crisis if he/she acts on behalf of someone else. Masking one's true identity fosters a culture of hypocrisy in society. Thus, Faulkner's Abner and Sartre's "worthless, passionate guy" both types signify nonconformity. Such characters signify the realistic truth that breaking the rules often acts as the only way to survive in society. Humans always have parallel lives living with fake identity. Therefore, in Sartre's opinion they always strive for an unsuccessful synthesis of being and becoming (p. 194). Such situation produces the combination of being and becoming. Human nature is never one-dimensional and stagnant.

Sartre argues that one who lives by others' expectation ends up being divided from what one is. Humans discover their identity from the others, and thus often turn within to realize their true self. Augustine argues, "Humanity chose nothingness over being by exercising its freedom" (as cited in Kirkpatrick, p. 2). For this reason, bad deeds for the privileged groups often resembles spiritual quest for humans. Sin and evil originate from humanity. Human existence is meaningless making us untrustworthy storytellers of their actions. Adversary makes humans doubt on morality and philosophy. They lose faith from the entire belief system. According to Sartre, people alter their beliefs because of limitless wishes. Unfulfilled wishes provide significance to their experiences. As for the fundamental deficiency in human nature, Sartre argues that it is because of our belief system:

We are aware of our own incompleteness. We have questions, dilemmas, and moments of existential and moral anguish. We try to resolve this constitutive tension by mapping out a meaningful future and projecting ourselves towards a particular goal. In this way we freely establish an identity in relation to this future through our actions. (as cited in Wang p. 2)

In addition to independence, humans crave for a stable identity. Additionally, they believe that they can simultaneously obtain both of them. Humans often interpret their life as

meaningless existence when they accept its absurdity. The absurdist portrayal of Joker characters in the movies *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) and *Joker* (2019) also explores the themes of life's absurdity and the violent behavior that results from being abandoned by love and caring. The very essence of existing for one's true identity in an attempt of fulfilling societal expectation produces human irrationalism.

Conclusion

Humans often lose purpose on account of having divergent opinions and recognizing racial, social, and religious hierarchy inside their social belief systems. Acting sane in the context of socially absurd environment shapes the human characters similar to Abner and Joker. Faulkner's Abner embodies the dark and severe aspects of human nature. Abner and Joker embody masked humans living under the veil of their true identity. However, lacking their true identity also makes them unpredictably powerful. Burning the barn signifies Abner's attempt to preserve the society's everlasting conflict between chaos and order. Abner's wounded will and the frustration over his poverty drives him to commit the social crimes. An individual in need of money showcases his/her dark side when he/she gets defeated by factors such as class struggle, the labor market, and the economic system. Humans experiencing severe economic hardship get entangled with the absurdity of existence. Hence, Abner's barn burning justifies his resistance against the existential crisis produced from class struggle. The absurdity of human existence creates the conflict between being oneself and becoming the different self as expected by society.

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