
Comparison Of Little Red Riding Hood And Barn Burning

The Grimm Brothers' fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood and William Faulkner's short story of Barn Burning are both influential in expressing what society expects of men and women in different periods. In the familiar tale of Red Riding Hood, the author focuses primarily on a young girl who shows vulnerability to strangers. Similarly in Barn Burning, ten-year-old Sarty Snopes is forced to decide between loyalty to his family and the law. Both texts center around a child's state of innocence which allows them to become more vulnerable to the deception of others by their lack of experience in the real world. The way these characters are portrayed is an example of how society expects young girls and boys to behave. Girls are expected to be innocent and sweet, while boys are to be brave and tough. This brings about the question: Does obedience to these gender norms cause the downfall or success of identity in each character? Red Cap and Sarty follow their given gender norms which will ultimately create a sense of rebirth in each child to become a better person in society.

Both of these characters show obedience which is the way children's parents expect them to behave. In Red Riding Hood, the mother gives her a very clear order, which is not to stray away from the path when visiting her grandmother. "I'll do just as you say," Little Red Cap promised her mother." (Grimm 14). Red Cap is very quick to follow orders from her mother and understands the responsibility she has to make it safely to her grandmother's house. This visit could also symbolize her transition into womanhood by being entrusted to enter into the real world and walk the path alone. Similarly in Barn Burning, Sarty is told by his father Abner to remain silent and obedient even when he knows something is not right. "He aims for me to lie, he thought, again with that frantic grief and despair. And I will have to do it." (Faulkner 2). Sarty has no choice but to lie in court to save his father who has committed a crime. He knows that he should not condone his father's actions, but remains fearful of what will happen if he disobeys. By obeying his father, Sarty is only doing a man's work that will help shape his identity into manhood. Both children obey the rules that are given to them, but will become easily deceived by the relationships that are formed with others. Their obedience to the given gender norms will make them vulnerable which allows others to take advantage of them.

Once Red Cap meets the wolf, he can sweet talk her into picking flowers away from the path. "She thought to herself: 'If you bring a fresh bouquet to grandmother, she will be overjoyed.'" (Grimm 14). Red Cap is quick to obey others who try to take advantage of her because she has little experience understanding the danger of talking to strangers. She has grown up in the village for most of her life developing domesticated behavior while living with her mother. Red Cap has no choice but to be kind and submissive as this is what society expects of her. The wolf can be viewed as a predator with the intent to deceive a young child into doing what he wants by the act of manipulation and a false kindness. Red Cap is also seen as a female figure that reflects the wolf's fantasy or desire. "He walked beside Red Cap. Then he said: 'Little Red Cap, have you seen the beautiful flowers all about? Why don't you look around for a while?'" (Grimm 14). Red Cap is vulnerable due to her being a young girl and the wolf looks to fulfill his role of male dominance over her. The more the wolf uses his wit to interact with Red Cap is only convincing her to stray away from the path. Once Red Cap reaches the house she was once again deceived by the wolf in her grandmother's clothing. In James Thurber's version, Red Cap immediately pulls out an automatic and kills the wolf in her grandmother's bed. This shows

that young girls are less easier to fool in today's society, but in the Grimm version Red Cap is naive rather than suspicious. This mistake eventually leads to her downfall of being eaten by the wolf which proves just how easy it is for children to be deceived in this cultural setting. In the Brothers Grimm version, Red Cap is cut free from the wolf's stomach by a hunter, but in Perrault's version, she dies after being eaten. The difference between the two tales is a child being able to learn from their mistakes or ultimately causing their demise or downfall which results in no redemption. In the Grimm tale, Red Cap after being saved now understands her vulnerability in the real world and has shaped her into a woman to learn from her past mistakes.

In *Barn Burning*, Sarty and his father Abner share a relationship that is the complete opposite of a normal father and son relationship given the period in the 1800s. If Abner were to have a daughter, it can be assumed if he would expect the same obedience from her. Abner would enforce the same rules, but since she is a female in this period would not be expected to disobey. Society expects young boys to be encouraged and look up to their father figures. Sarty does obey his father, but it is not a healthy relationship being unable to make his own decisions. His father constantly states that family loyalty is more important than anything, but Sarty must also deal with what society expects of a person to obey the law. "You're getting to be a man. You got to learn. You gotta learn to stick to your own blood or you ain't going to have any blood to stick to you." (Faulkner 4). His father wants to see him obey and become a man, but only by manipulating him to do deny the law. There is also a threat that Sarty will be alone if he chooses his thoughts and feelings over the family. When Sarty chooses to act against socially suggested norms, the choices he makes are not from his own doing but his father's wishes. Sarty is only doing what is considered to be a man's work to please his father. He had always suffered from the internal conflict of wanting to become a man but felt cowardly and weak when being held back by his father. By the end of the story, Sarty runs into the woods knowing that he is free from the despair of his family without having any regret toward his betrayal. "He did not look back" (Faulkner 195); it is unknown what Sarty's life will be like in the future, but he will now become the man he is meant to be in society.

Both characters each have a manipulator who attempts to deceive them into doing what is morally or illegally wrong. In *Red Riding Hood*, the social context that is given shows how young girls or women can be seen as objects of sexual desire from men which they are easy to manipulate. Given the historical context in *Barn Burning*, we see how sharecropping and poverty in the American South shape the life of each family who lives there. This lifestyle can create a sense of corruption among families and will affect how young men and women will grow up in society. Both children are seen following the gender norms society expects from them, but also what is expected from their age. They are both innocent and naive, while still being able to make their own decisions which may lead to greater consequences they are aware of. At the end of each story, both children have become a better person and are now able to begin a new life and learn from their past mistakes. In *Red Riding Hood*, a hunter cuts open the wolf's stomach and sets Red Cap free to which she can learn from her mistake of trusting strangers. In *Barn Burning*, Sarty flees into the woods and can start a new life for himself and now make decisions on his own. These children now have a better understanding of their identity in the real world and know that any disobedience to the gender norms will cause conflict among them. Both of the children's obedience may also become a danger to them, but they will always be given a second chance in society if they continue to follow rules.