

CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF MISS EMILY GRIERSON IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S - A ROSE FOR EMILY.

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ABSTRACT: A Rose for Emily is a short story by American Nobel prize winning author William Faulkner, first published in the April 30,1930 issue of The Forum.The story takes place in Faulkner's fictional city ,Jefferson,Mississippi, in the fictional County of Yoknapatawpha County.It was Faulkner's first short story published in a national magazine.Faulkner described the title as " an allegorical title; the meaning was , here was a woman who has had a tragedy and nothing could be done about it , and I pitied her and this was a salute....to a woman you would hand a rose".

The story opens with a brief first- person account of the funeral of Miss Emily Grierson, an elderly Southern spinster.It then proceeds in a nonlinear fashion to the narrator's recollections of Emily's archaic and increasingly strange behavior throughout the years.Emily is a member of a family in the antebellum southern aristocracy; after the Civil War, the family has fallen on hard times.she and her father,the last two of the clan,continue to live as if in the past; neither will consent to a marriage for Emily to a man below their perceived status.Her father dies when Emily is about thirty; she refuses to accept that he has been dead for three days, behavior written off by the community as part of her grieving process.

After her acceptance of her father's death,Emily revives somewhat; she becomes friendly with Homer Barron , a northern laborer who comes to the town as a contractor to pave the sidewalks.The connection surprises the rest of the community : the match would have been much below her earlier standards, and Homer had himself claimed that he was " not a marrying man".The town appeals to Emily's distant cousins, her closest remaining relatives, but they have been on bad terms with Emily and her father, and had not even been present at her father's funeral.The cousins arrive at Emily's house, quickly gaining a reputation even worse than that of Emily; the sentiment of the town rallies behind Emily in opposition to the cousins. Indeed, during this time, Emily buys arsenic poison from a drug store, without giving reasons for needing it; neighbors believe that she means to poison herself, and returns three days after the cousin's departure.One person reports seeing Homer Barron walking in the house at night,never seen after though.

Despite these turnabouts in her social status,Emily continues to behave haughtily ,as she had before her father died.Her reputation is such that the city council find themselves unable to confront her about a strong smell emanating from her house. Instead, they decide to send men to her house under the cover of night to sprinkle lime

around the house, dissipating the smell with the passage of time. Colonel Sartoris, the town mayor, made a gentleman's agreement to overlook her taxes as an act of charity, done under a pretext of repayment towards her father to assuage Emily's pride. Years later, when the next generation has come to power, Emily insists on this informal arrangement, flatly refusing that she owes any taxes; the council declines to press the issue. Emily has become a recluse, never seen out of the house, rarely accepting people into it. The community comes to view her as a "hereditary obligation" on the town, who must be humored and tolerated.

Emily's affair with Homer Barron continues and her reputation is further compromised. The town Baptist minister talks with Emily and later declares that he will never go back to her and talk about her marriage. Emily orders a silver toilet set monogrammed with Homer's initials, talk of the couple's marriage resumes. Homer, absent from the town, is believed to be preparing for Emily's move to the north or avoiding her intrusive relatives.

After the cousin's departure, Homer enters the Grierson home one evening and is then never seen again. Holed up in the house, Emily grows plump and gray. Despite the occasional lesson she gives in China painting, her door remains closed to outsiders. She refuses to pay the annual tax bill. She eventually closes the top floor of the house, presenting rare glimpses of herself occasionally. Nothing is heard about her until her death at seventy-four. Only Tobe, the servant, is seen going in and out of the house.

After her death, Emily's body is laid out in the parlor, and the women, town elders, and the two cousins attend the service. The door to a sealed upstairs room that had not been opened for forty years is broken down by the townspeople. Frozen in time, the room exhibits the items for an upcoming wedding and a man's suit is laid out. Homer Barron's body is stretched out on the bed, in an advanced stage of decay. The onlookers then notice the indentation of a head in the pillow beside Homer's body and a long strand of Emily's gray hair on the pillow.

William Faulkner once said, "Given a choice between grief and nothing, I'd choose grief". He further explains why he would do this in his classic *A Rose for Emily*; although the story revolves around Emily, not Faulkner. He details the loneliness and selfishness of a poor woman, who is unable to grip the idea of death and suffers a great deal of denial. After her father's death, she behaves indifferently and haughtily, in defiance and non-acceptance of the normal cultural and social norms. The story takes place in the south, during a time period of racial discrimination and major political change. By using Reader Response criticism, we can analyze the story through the aspects of the secret held within the story, the anthropological evidence of racism, and gender focus too.

The hidden, underlying message Faulkner wishes to convey are the themes of death and change. Death looms through the story from the beginning right on through to the end as the narrator begins describing the beginning of Miss Emily's funeral. Miss Emily herself chooses not to accept the fate of death when her father passes away.

She is so frightened of change that she wouldn't allow the city to put numbers on her house for mail." Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them." (Faulkner). Through this quote one can see the struggle that Miss Emily had to maintain her traditions

and her attempts to force the town to remain at a standstill. This is her most severe attempt to preserve her life and the time period in which she lived. She would rather have nothing than grief over something lost.

Faulkner attempts to convey the prevalent racism of the times. The South was once known for its extreme prejudice and racism. "They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow" (Faulkner). This use of the derogatory term 'negro' clearly shows the author's intentions. Faulkner is able to show how stripped of their identities the blacks were. This was so severe that in some cases African Americans became 'property' to some, which the author was able to convey. "Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor - he who fathered the edict that no negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron - remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity". One can clearly see through Colonel Sartoris's intentions were to enforce rules in which African Americans were to be seen as workers, not people who socialized. This strongly prejudiced of not allowing African Americans to be seen outside of labour as human beings is clearly seen in the story.

We can analyze the story from the point of gender. Faulkner explains the roles of women in the South and how they were seen through the eyes of men. "When Miss Emily Grierson died the whole town went to her funeral: the men out of respectful affection for a fallen monument and the women mostly out of curiosity". One can clearly see the writer's attempt to make men the stronger gender. "Only a man of Colonel Sartoris's generation could have invented it and only a woman could have believed it". The Colonel is described as being an ingenious man, but in the sentence Emily's name is not mentioned when the two are compared. The statement made in the story assumes the Colonel to be almost a godlike figure, assuming that men are the better gender.

Over the course of the story, Miss Emily's erratic and idiosyncratic behavior becomes outright bizarre, and the reader is left wondering how to explain the fact that Miss Emily has spent years living and sleeping with the corpse of Homer BARRON. The townspeople did not say that she was crazy, and she was never diagnosed, evaluated, or treated by health professionals. Yet, by the story's conclusion, the reader can go back through the narrative and identify many episodes in which Miss Emily's character and behavior hinted at possible mental illness. It is reasonable to propose that Miss Emily developed this mental illness (schizophrenia) as a response to the demanding conditions in which she was living as a Southern woman from an aristocratic family. She decompensated because she was unable to develop healthy and adaptive coping and defense mechanisms which most people can. She was unable to, and therefore, developed psychotic symptoms in response to the situation faced.

In the case of Miss Emily, an analysis of the setting and the other characters in the story, as well as an examination of some of the story's themes and especially incidents involving Emily's father, helps the readers to understand the particular pressures with which Emily was trying to cope and how, by extension, she might have developed schizophrenia. She was from a family of great stature and wealth in their small Southern community, and Miss Emily was always burdened with the great expectations that others had of her. Her community held her as having hereditary obligation to maintain certain traditions. Her father was rigid in reinforcing these expectations. He was

the man who thwarted her life so many times. For example, he drove all of Miss Emily's suitors away because none were perceived as good enough for her. As a result, she never married.

Yet, when her father dies, that we note the acceleration of her mental decline. When the ill individual has no longer to cope with managing external stresses, their defense yields completely and they succumb to psychotic symptoms that have been latent. After her father's death, having been sick for some time, she begins to avoid contact with others and other psychotic symptoms begins to appear. The inability to either feel or demonstrate appropriate affect, or emotion, that is appropriate to a particular situation is one of the classic symptoms of schizophrenia. Perhaps more tellingly, Emily insisted to the visitors that her father was not dead. For this reason, therefore, she would not allow or permit his body to be removed until she broke down and the townspeople quickly removed the body before she could protest.

Despite this and other evidence that she is not mentally or emotionally well, the townspeople persist in enabling her to maintain her delusions. Their denial is almost as pathological as her own symptoms. When the terrible stench emanating from her home comes, the people address the problem to Judge Steven's who rages while saying "Dammit, sir...will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?", as if the smell was merely a body odor rather than a pervasive stench. The younger generation relents, and the men responsible for such local concerns sneak into Miss Emily's basement surreptitiously to spread lime as an effort to eliminate the odor.

The readers learn that Miss Emily has retracted entirely into a world of delusion and fantasy. There is a period where she withdraws from society altogether. The change that the narrator reports the townspeople having observed the time they saw her. She has gone fat and her hair were turning gray. At this time, she is totally unable to attend to her personal appearance and to perform what mental health practitioners call the tasks of daily living - such as hygiene and grooming - demonstrating severe deficits in the area of social and/or occupational functioning. She is totally unable to relate to other people in an appropriate manner. Although her contact with others is limited, when she is forced to interact socially, she is irrational and inappropriate.

There are other episodes scattered throughout the story indicating Miss Emily's compromised mental state. Early in the story, before her mental degeneration, the narrator relates an episode in which Miss Emily appears before the town officials to insist that she does not owe taxes. It is her insistence against the facts that they present and her refusal to listen to Alderman at all that makes her more than a stubborn town eccentric. When she goes to the pharmacy to buy poison, she does not tell the pharmacist the reason to her buying the poison, she declines answering and the pharmacist does not insist. Next, along with sleeping with a corpse, she purchases items for man that the town believes is her betrothed, but who is presumably dead and decaying in Miss Emily's bed. When the townspeople, after her death, kick down the bedroom door years later, a Tableau is displayed that is "decked and furnished as for a bridal" but frozen in time and covered with dust and tarnish. Clearly, Miss Emily's grasp on reality had slipped completely.

Emily is the classic outsider, controlling and limiting the town's access to her true identity by remaining hidden. The house that shields Emily from the outside world suggests the mind of the woman inhabiting it: shuttered, dusty, and dark. The subject of the town's intense scrutiny, she is a muted and mysterious figure. She enforces her own sense of law and conduct, such as when she refuses to pay her taxes or state her purpose for buying arsenic. She also skirts the law when she refuses to have numbers attached to her house when federal mail service is instituted. Her dismissal of law takes on more sinister consequences late on.

The narrator portrays Emily as a monument, but at the same time she is pitied and often irritating, demanding to live life on her own terms. The subject of gossip and speculation, the townspeople cluck their tongues at the fact that she accepts Homer's attention with no firm wedding plan. After she purchases the poison, the townspeople conclude that she was going to end her life. Her instabilities, however, lead her in different directions. The story's final scene suggests that she is a necrophiliac, i.e., a person sexually attracted to a dead body. In a broader sense, the term also describes a powerful desire to control another, usually in the context of a romantic or deeply personal relationship. Emily is controlled throughout by her father, Mr. Grierson. After his death, Emily temporarily controls him by refusing to give up his dead body. She ultimately transfers this control to Homer, the object of her affection. Unable to find a traditional way to express her desire to possess Homer, she takes his life to achieve total power over him.

Faulkner's most famous, most popular, and most anthologized story on Emily Grierson evokes the terms Southern Gothic and grotesque, two types of literature in which the general tone is one of gloom, terror, and understated violence. The story is Faulkner's best example of these forms because it contains unimaginably dark images: a decaying mansion, a corpse, a murder, a mysterious servant who disappears, and, most horrible of all, necrophilia—an erotic or sexual attraction to corpses.

First published in the April 1930 Saturday Evening Post, "A Rose For Emily" was reprinted in *These Thirteen* (1931), a collection of thirteen of Faulkner's stories. It was later included in his *Collected Stories* (1950) and *In the Selected Short Stories Of William Faulkner* (1961).

Most discussions of the short story centre on Miss Emily Grierson, an aristocratic woman deeply admired by a community that places her on a pedestal and views her as a "tradition, a duty"—or the unnamed narrator describes her as "a fallen monument". In contrast to the community's views, we realize eventually that Miss Emily is a woman who not only poisons and kills her lover, but she keeps his rotting corpse in her bedroom and sleeps next to it for many years. The story's end emphasizes the length of time Miss Emily must have slept with her dead lover, long enough for the townspeople to find "a long strand of iron-gray hair" lying on the pillow next to "what was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt" and displaying a profound and fleshless grin.

The contrast between the aristocratic woman and her unspeakable secrets forms the basis of the story. Because the Griersons "held themselves a little too high for what they really were", Miss Emily's father forbids her to date socially, at least the community thinks so. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such

she becomes so terribly desperate for human love that she murders Homer and clings to his dead body .Using her aristocratic position to cover up the murder and the necrophilia.

Ironically she sentences herself to total isolation from the community , embracing the dead for solace.

Although, the readers first reaction to the short story might be one of horror or disgust Faulkner uses two literary techniques to create a seamless whole that makes the tale too intriguing to stop reading.Suspenseful, jumbled chronology of events , and the narrator's shifting point of view , which emphasizes Miss Emily's strength of purpose , her aloofness ,and her pride ,and lessons the horrors and repulsion of her actions.

The home that Emily shares with her father and eventually alone is symbolic of Emily's inner state.As the story opens,the house is vibrant and fresh,with clean, white walls.Emily also is vibrant and fresh in her youth,and she is as pure as the walls are white.Her father protects her purity by turning away any men he does not believe measure up to her standards- which are all of them.As the story progresses , the house becomes dirty, smelly,and foul, the same time , Emily grows older and her spirit more deranged.She descends into madness, not only killing her fiance, but also sleeping with his corpse.

The story never manifests an actual rose for Emily.However ,the title itself is symbolic .The rose represents the idea of love since young lovers often exchange the gift of roses ,expressing their affections.With so many suitors in her youth ,it seems inevitable that Emily will accept a rose from one of them, but she never does .When she meets Homer, it seems that finally she may have true love.That idea is preserved forever when she kills Homer, just as a rose is preserved forever in Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, Dr Heidegger's experiment, and just as Homer's corpse , her wedding day clothes are preserved in the room that she has sealed off in her home.

Emily's hair is symbolic of her sexuality throughout the story.After her father dies ,Emily cuts her hair short, appearing like a young girl though she is in her 30s.Her girlish appearance is symbolic of her sex immaturity which now seems destined to be frozen in time since her father has robbed her of many wedding chances.A few years after Homer's disappearance and her last chance to wed has gone, ,her hair turns gray,signifying the death of her sexuality. To reinforce this symbolism ,the townspeople find a strand of Emily's gray hair next to Homer's corpse in their would be marriage bed.

Emily is a symbol of the Old South, She resists change ,She writes a letter on 40 year old stationery, refuses to have metallic letters put on her mailbox for new mail delivery service and continues to insist on a handshake agreement she had with Colonel Sartoris excusing her from paying her taxes.The world is changing all around her, but she clings to her traditions and makes a living monument clinging to the past, no matter what progress or changes occur.

A rose for Emily is a short story of Gothic horror and tragedy. It presents a portrait of a lonely Mississippi woman who succumbs to mental illness while living reclusively according to the outmoded traditions of Old South aristocrats.

Gothic horror is a genre of fiction presenting dark, mysterious, terrifying events taking place in a gloomy or ghostly setting. The genre derives its name from the Gothic architectural style in Europe between the 12th and 16th centuries. Gothic structures like the cathedrals and castles featuring cavernous interiors with deep shadows, gargoyles looming on exterior ledges, and soaring spires suggestive of a supernatural presence. When a Gothic horror story takes place in the American South and centres in part of Southern cultural traditions and character types, as well as on a realistic rather than a romantic account of events, scholars often characterize the story as Southern Gothic.

Tragedy is a fictional genre about the downfall or ruination of the main character. In this genre, the sympathies of the narrator, reader or - in case of a play - the audience often lie with the main character even s/ he has committed an unspeakable crime or sin. A rose for Emily is such a case.

Faulkner divides the story into five short sections. The first section reports the funeral and burial of Emily and provides background on her house, her servant, and her tax status. The second section focuses on a foul smell coming from her house, the use of lime by the city officials to neutralize it, the insanity that runs in Emily's family, her father's refusal to allow young men to call on Emily, and the death and burial of her father. The third section introduces a Northerner, Homer BARRON, who comes to town with a construction crew and takes Emily for buggy rides. It also reports that she buys arsenic at the local drugstore. The fourth section tells of the townspeople's belief that Emily is setting a bad example by regularly keeping company with Homer BARRON. It also tells of the disappearance of BARRON, the years when Emily teaches China painting, and the death of Emily. The fifth section reports the happenings at Emily's funeral and a grotesque discovery in an upper room of the house.

The state of Emily's mind comes into question when the narrator reports that her great aunt had gone insane and when he informs the reader that Emily had refused for three days to release her father's body for burial. The reader then learns that she had purchased arsenic at the pharmacy and finally the body of Homer BARRON had lain decaying for years on a bed in an upstairs room. Next to it, a pillow with a head indentation indicates that Emily had slept with the body. In other words, Emily had been a necrophile ie a person fixated on death and/ or sexual relations with a dead person. Her mental illness may have been rooted partly in the same debility that afflicted her great- aunt and partly in the heavy handed influence of her father that turned her into a lonely recluse.

When Emily was a child, her father apparently indoctrinated her with the proud ways of the Old South. When she was old enough to socialize with young men and consider marriage, he banished her all would- be beaux. Her upbringing thus isolated her from the New South residents of the town; she had become totally dependent on, and totally attached to, her father. It is no wonder then, that when her father died, she refused to give up his body for

burial. It took townspeople three days to persuade her to surrender the corpse. Afterward, he reached from beyond the grave to continue to oppress her .

When Emily's father died, she had no husband, no income and so she clung to the past for support. She even denied that her father had died, a sign that her sanity was beginning to deteriorate. It took three days to give up her father's body for burial. Over the years, she remained in the past most of the time, living shut up in her house. Her only connection with the outside world, was Tobe, her servant, doing the household chores. However, in her struggle to cope up and escape her loneliness, she emerges from her seclusion twice: once to keep company with Homer Barron and a second time for seven years, teaching China painting to young people. After this painting teaching phase, she once again becomes a hidden relic of the old South. To manifest her repudiation of modern ways, she spurned the tax bills of the New generation of government leaders and prevented postal officials from installing a mailbox and an address number above her door. Moreover, she defiantly allowed her house to stand as it was before her father died, making no repairs or other improvements. She relied on her black servant for household chores, she got support from Colonel Sartoris in her stand against paying taxes. She ended her emotional exploitation by killing Homer. Allegorically, she represents not only the hard adherents of Old South ways but also subscribers to any other outmoded way of life- or to an antiquated belief, tradition, custom, trend, social movement etc- are anathema.

Emily is a symbol of the Old South. With her death, the lingering remnants of it dies with her - or at least, like the old men in their confederate uniforms- are about to die. Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* are some of the best known mystery stories. But some of the best mysteries present themselves in the house down the street in an ordinary city. Such is the case in *A Rose for Emily*. The residents of Jefferson closely follow the often perplexing developments at the Grierson house and wonder at the significance of this or that activity, with no clue. Faulkner reminds us that mysteries are a part of life. Everybody has secrets. And everybody occasionally acts in a way that not even s/ he can explain.

A question arises that - was Mr Grierson guilty of incest with his daughter. There are some faint suggestions hinting this. First, he drove all of Emily's would be suitors away. Second, Mr Grierson's wife is not mentioned (either dead or divorced) thus, there was no convenient outlet for his libido. Third, Emily keeps the corpse of her father, and refuses for his burial, later she keeps the corpse of Homer Barron. Fourth, insanity ran in the Grierson family. Old Lady Wyatt was insane, and possibly Emily too. Maybe, Mr Grierson knew of his daughter's illness, but he did not get her treated or made provisions for her care after his death.

The unnamed narrator in the story is a resident of the town in which the main character Emily lives. Although the true identity of the narrator is never revealed, the reader is left with some clues. Helen Nebeker notes that narrator may have been a part of group of men in town who had hoped to become the ideal mate for Emily, but who never lived up to her father's expectations or standards. Nebeker notes that in all the five sections, there is a continual shifting of person, from our to they to we....Miss Emily. The constant switch between first person and the third

person narrative, is indicative of someone who may not have seen firsthand all the events of the plot. In section 1, the narrator consistently uses the word "they" in reference to the meeting between Emily and the town's officials. The narrator, however, switches to a participant and begins using the first person narrative as Emily ages. This transition is evident that the narrator may have been younger than Emily, and may have been given background information on the main character due to his association with the town's officials. It is also possible that the narrator is actually a town official, the narrator hints at this association in section 4, 'each December we sent her a tax notice.

The narrator is central to the story's progression and to the suspense. A question arises as to why Faulkner used the narrator's point of view in the story's development. This is necessary as his lack of knowledge is crucial in the story's development. The narrator's failure to realize that Emily intended to kill 'rats' (technique of foreshadowing used by Faulkner), instead of committing suicide, allows the suspense of the story to be preserved. The dead body of Homer, the room being embalmed with memories, and her symbolic gray hair- all this could not have been narrated by Emily due to her mental state. It was essential that both the narrator and the reader make the discovery at the same time (of Homer's dead body) because it shows that no matter how much they tried to, they never were able to know Miss Emily's true identity.

Celia Roderigues believes that in the story the past is contrasted with the present era. The past is seen in Miss Emily, Colonel Sartoris, the old negro servant, and the Board of Aldermen, and the next generation with its more modern ideas, represent the present. Cleanth Brooks believes that Miss Emily's actions are the result of her strong independence. She refuses to be criticized by the town when she galls around with Homer Barron. She refuses to be left by him, so she murders him. She refuses to pay taxes because the long dead Colonel Sartoris told her she was not obliged to. Brooks admires Emily because she refused to conform to public opinion in a time when women were demanded to. The moral of the story being- heroic isolation pushed too far ends in homicidal madness. Hal Blythe believes Emily discovered that Barron was a homosexual. (Barron liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks club- that he was not a marrying man). She murdered him to save face. She buys men's perfumes, clothing etc to conceal the real identity of Homer. Blythe says "once again Faulkner has used sexual deviation to indicate the decay of an Old South tradition". Judith Fetterley gives the more plausible explanation. She believes that within her patriarchal society, Emily suffers the most injury from being forced into the position of a lady. She however, uses this stereotype to gain power over those who place her in this role. She believes that Faulkner used his mother's strong and independent identity as the basis for Emily Grierson. Emily's power over the town is proven by the fact that she is exempted from paying taxes in Jefferson, she gets away with the murder. Her behavior before the Board of Aldermen proves that she is incapable of logic or reason. She demands that they (Aldermen) leave. She gets what she likes because she plays up her role as a lady. She buys arsenic, and everyone believes that she will commit suicide, without knowing her true intentions. She lives, and no one knows as to the intention of her buying poison. When a foul smell emanates from her house, the reason is left unknown, even by the learned Judge Steven's. When Emily is thought to be mad, no one is suspicious because that is a typical result of bereavement in ladies.

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