

THE MAIN FEATURES OF ANALYZING SYMBOLS IN “A ROSE FOR EMILY” BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10389445>

Abstract. William Faulkner is among the greatest experimentalists of the 20th century novelists. The 1950 Nobel Prize presentation speech calls Faulkner the “unrivaled master of all living British and American novelists”. A Rose for Emily is one of his wellknown short stories and is widely used in English classroom. Some people regard the story as a reflection of the dying Old South and the growing New South, which is practical and bent on industrialization. Some read the story as an allegory. By the characterization of the heroine Miss Emily and with the use of symbols and images, we can understand the relationship between the South and the North, between the past and the present, illusion and reality, permanence and change, and death and life.

Keywords: Characterization, Symbol, Image, description, stylistic device, term.

Introduction. William Faulkner (1897-1962) is a giant in the realm of American literature. More than simply a renowned Mississippi writer, the Nobel Prize-winning novelist and short story writer is acclaimed through the world as one of the twentieth century's greatest writers. During what is generally considered his period of greatest artistic achievement, from *The Sound and the Fury* in 1929 to *Go Down, Moses* in 1942, Faulkner accomplished in a little over a decade more artistically than most writers accomplish over a lifetime of writing. His effective use of the stream of consciousness, multiple points of view, symbolism and imagery, place him among the rank of the greatest modern writers along with James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Some short stories written by Faulkner were later incorporated into novels. “A Rose for Emily” is a classic story representing Faulkner's favorite subject matter, theme and style. Through the life of the heroine of the story, the author reveals the fate of the aristocracy and the new changes in the South of America after the Civil War. [1,102]

The Characterization of Miss Emily Was Portrayed in the Story.

Through telling this story and exploring the character of Miss Emily, Faulkner reveals his ambivalent relationship to the South, of which he felt proud and ashamed at the same time. Miss Emily's personality was warped with which

the author shares sympathy to her. [2,47]

Miss Emily Is a Woman of Firm Will and Strong Character.

Miss Emily lives by clinging to her conviction and she ignores successfully in her life all the testimony of her senses. She refuses to pay the taxes because she is convinced that Colonel Sartoris is still alive. She refuses to bury her father because she believes that he is not dead. She accepts the advances of Homer Barron perhaps because she thinks he truly loves her. She kills Homer Barron maybe because she judges it the best way to ensure a faithful and lasting marriage. And she sleeps beside the dead Barron because to her he is still living. The author uses four adjectives—"dear, inescapable, impervious, and tranquil" (Faulkner, 1990) to describe how the townspeople felt about Miss Emily. These words are precise, but these are usual adjectives that don't fit comfortably together. They reflected the townspeople's ambivalent attitude toward Emily. [3] She was dear because she represented the Southern heritage to a certain extent. She was capable because she was "a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town" (Faulkner). She was impervious and not affected by any changes taking place in the town, and her imperviousness was well reflected by her ignoring the tax notice and her refusal to pay taxes. She was tranquil. Though she was tragic, she remained calm and free from disturbance. Her tranquility as well as rigidity was portrayed by her motionless silhouette in the window. She was certainly perverse, always behaving in an unreasonable way and regularly doing the opposite of what people expected her to do.

Rose

The meaning of the title "A Rose for Emily" is ambiguous, full of symbolic meanings, capable of various interpretations. A rose is a cliché, symbolizing love and a pledge of faithfulness. From the story, we can see Miss Emily was denied love. So, in this sense, the title has an ironic meaning. In one way, Miss Emily is closely related to the image of rose. When she was young, she was a slender figure in white, courted by many young men. She herself is fond of rose, as her valance curtains are of rose color and her lights are rose-shaped. In another way, a rose is a gift to a loved one, and the whole story is the narrator's or Faulkner's tribute to Emily, and also to the Old South, of which Miss Emily is the symbol. A rose for somebody can also mean a kind of memorial, an offering, in memory of somebody. Faulkner was once directly asked the meaning of the title and replied: O it's simply the poor woman had had no life at all. Her father had kept her more or less locked up and then she had a lover who was about to quit her, she had to murder him. It was just "A Rose for Emily" –that's all. [4,33]

House

Miss Emily's house was built in the 1870s after the end of the Civil War. Compared with houses of the Greek revival style with columns built before the war like those we see in the movie "Gone with the Wind", this gothic revival style was fancy, frivolous, and not very solemn-looking. [5] With time went on, the whole street was becoming modern and commercial, only Miss Emily's house remained the same. Although her house was decaying, it still assumed an air of a stubborn and frivolous girl. Her house was old, in decay, pretentious, and completely out of place, was more unpleasant to look at. So the author personifies Miss Emily's house by using words like "lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay" (Faulkner, 1990). This symbolizes that the house and its owner share the same character.

Watch

In the story, there is a description of Miss Emily's watch, "with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt" (Faulkner)—the fact that it vanished into her belt means that the watch was hidden under her belt and therefore invisible. In the story, the narrator tells us, "Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain." (Faulkner) The watch has a symbolic meaning. If the watch vanished into her belt, that means she did not look at the watch. The watch is a symbol of time. In his novel "The sound and the Fury", Faulkner also uses watches and clocks as symbols of time. Just as one of the characters in that novel trying to smash a watch to stop the time, Miss Emily, by making her watch invisible, tried to ignore the passage of time as well as any changes brought about by the passage of time. [6]

Miss Emily

Miss Emily had lived a long life and had become a tradition because she represented the aristocracy of the Old South that had lost out in the Civil War. She was a care because she was old, unmarried, and without family, and the people in the town felt they must take care of her. They felt that taking care of her was their duty and obligation. And this obligation passed from generation to generation as long as she lived. [7,95]

Conclusions

Thematically, "A Rose for Emily" is a very rich and complicated story. Through the depiction of the character- Miss Emily, we can see the plot of the story evolve around many conflicts – the conflict between Mr. Grierson and his daughter, the conflict between Miss Emily and Homer Barron, the conflict between Miss Emily and the community of the town, and the conflict between the past and the

present. On a psychological level, the story explores the inner world of a human being, the main character's conflict with the established codes of conduct and her conflict with her own heart. By exploiting the "tricks" of vague references, ambiguities, symbolism, imagery and etc, Faulkner hopes to invite us readers to participate in the process of seeking the truths of the inner life of the townspeople as they cope with Miss Emily. Faulkner is regarded as a "deep psychologist" (Minghan, 1997). The short story "A Rose for Emily" lives up to that high praise.

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