A Rose for Emily Study Guide

A Rose for Emily by William Faulkner

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Contents

Introduction

William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" was originally published in the April 30, 1930, issue of *Forum*. It was his first short story published in a major magazine. A slightly revised version was published in two collections of his short fiction, *These 13* (1931) and *Collected Stories* (1950). It has been published in dozens of anthologies as well. "A Rose for Emily" is the story of an eccentric spinster, Emily Grierson. An unnamed narrator details the strange circumstances of Emily's life and her odd relationships with her father, her lover, and the town of Jefferson, and the horrible secret she hides. The story's subtle complexities continue to inspire critics while casual readers find it one of Faulkner's most accessible works. The popularity of the story is due in no small part to its gruesome ending.

Faulkner often used short stories to "flesh out" the fictional kingdom of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, for his novels. In fact, he revised some of his short fiction to be used as chapters in those novels. "A Rose for Emily" takes place in Jefferson, the county seat of Yoknapatawpha. Jefferson is a critical setting in much of Faulkner's fiction. The character of Colonel Sartoris plays a role in the story; he is also an important character in the history of Yoknapatawpha. However, "A Rose for Emily" is a story that stands by itself. Faulkner himself modestly referred to it as a "ghost story," but many critics recognize it as an extraordinarily versatile work. As Frank A. Littler writes in *Notes on Mississippi Writers*, "A Rose for Emily" has been ". . . read variously as a Gothic horror tale, a study in abnormal psychology, an allegory of the relations between North and South, a meditation on the nature of time, and a tragedy with Emily as a sort of tragic heroine."

Author Biography

William Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi, on September 25, 1897. His family moved to Oxford, Mississippi, just before he was five. Faulkner belonged to a once-wealthy family of former plantation owners. He spent his boyhood hunting and fishing in and around Lafayette County. He grew up listening to the stories and myths of the region, and he was especially impressed by the legendary life of the great-grandfather who was his namesake. He was a high school dropout, but he nevertheless developed a passion for literature, originally planning to be a poet. After working briefly as a clerk for the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, he reported to a recruiting station to sign up for World War I. He hoped to become a pilot and fight the Germans in the skies over France; however, they rejected him for being too small. He later signed on with the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) to train as a pilot, but the war ended before he saw any combat.

After the war ended, Faulkner worked in a bookstore in New York, where he met Elizabeth Prall Anderson, the wife of noted writer Sherwood Anderson. His apprenticeship as a serious writer began when he traveled to New Orleans and lived among a group of writers and artists, including Anderson, who encouraged Faulkner's vision. Although he originally dreamed of being a poet, he ultimately found his voice in fiction. His invention of the mythical Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, gave him an almost endless source of colorful characters and stories. His greatest novels and short stories are set in Yoknapatawpha.

Faulkner used pieces of his own life and family history in his fiction. His great-grandfather, William Clark Falkner (Faulkner added the "u" to the spelling of his name when he joined the RCAF so that it would appear "more British")—who was also known as the Old Colonel—served as the inspiration for Colonel Sartoris. Colonel Sartoris, who plays a small but important role in "A Rose for Emily," is also a major character in the novel *Flags in the Dust*. Faulkner based part of the character of Emily on a cousin, Mary Louise Neilson, who had married a Yankee street paver named Jack Barron. More importantly, the character of Miss Emily is the town eccentric—Faulkner certainly understood eccentricity, having made it a lifelong practice. For example, when he was in his twenties taking language classes at the University of Mississippi, he was known as "Count No Count" for what many considered to be an aloof, arrogant, and foppish manner (though his poetry, essays, and sketches were in all of the student publications of the time). Like Emily, Faulkner was often frowned upon in his own home town. He became a pariah in Oxford in the fifties when he spoke out publicly against racism and segregation.

Faulkner published almost twenty novels, several volumes of short fiction, and two volumes of poetry. He wrote many screenplays, essays, and articles for magazines and newspapers. He traveled widely, giving lectures at American colleges as well as foreign universities. He won two Pulitzer Prizes, a National Book Award, and the Nobel Prize for Literature. Faulkner died on July 6, 1962, the same day his great-grandfather, the Old Colonel, had been born on 137 years earlier.

Plot Summary

The story, told in five sections, opens in section one with an unnamed narrator describing the funeral of Miss Emily Grierson. (The narrator always refers to himself in collective pronouns; he is perceived as being the voice of the average citizen of the town of Jefferson.) He notes that while the men attend the funeral out of obligation, the women go primarily because no one has been inside Emily's house for years. The narrator describes what was once a grand house "set on what had once been our most select street." Emily's origins are aristocratic, but both her house and the neighborhood it is in have deteriorated. The narrator notes that, prior to her death, Emily had been "a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town." This is because Colonel Sartoris, the former mayor of the town, remitted Emily's taxes dating from the death of her father "on into perpetuity." Apparently, Emily's father left her with nothing when he died. Colonel Sartoris invented a story explaining the remittance of Emily's taxes (it is the town's method of paying back a loan to her father) to save her from the embarrassment of accepting charity.

The narrator uses this opportunity to segue into the first of several flashbacks in the story. The first incident he describes takes place approximately a decade before Emily's death. A new generation of politicians takes over Jefferson's government. They are unmoved by Colonel Sartoris's grand gesture on Emily's behalf and they attempt to collect taxes from her. She ignores their notices and letters. Finally, the Board of Aldermen sends a deputation to discuss the situation with her. The men are led into a decrepit parlor by Emily's black manservant, Tobe. The first physical description of Emily is unflattering: she is ". . . a small, fat woman in black" who looks "bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue." After the spokesman awkwardly explains the reason for their visit, Emily repeatedly insists that she has no taxes in Jefferson and tells the men to see Colonel Sartoris. The narrator notes that Colonel Sartoris has been dead at that point for almost ten years. She sends the men away from her house with nothing.

Section two begins as the narrator segues into another flashback that takes place thirty years before the unsuccessful tax collection. In this episode, Emily's neighbors complain of an awful smell emanating from her home. The narrator reveals that Emily had a sweetheart who deserted her shortly before people began complaining about the smell. The ladies of the town attribute the stench to the poor housekeeping of Emily's manservant, Tobe. However, despite several complaints, Judge Stevens, the town's mayor during this era, is reluctant to do anything about it for fear of offending Emily ("Dammit, sir . . . will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?"). This forces a small contingent of men to take action. Four of them sneak around Emily's house after midnight, sprinkling lime around her house and in her cellar. When they are done, they see that " . . . a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol."

The narrator notes the town's pity for Emily at this point in a discussion of her family's past. The narrator reveals that Emily once had a mad greataunt, old lady Wyatt. He also

notes that Emily is apparently a spinster because of her father's insistence that "none of the young men were good enough" for her. The narrator then describes the awful circumstances that follow Emily's father's death. Emily is at first in such deep denial she refuses to acknowledge that her father is dead. She finally breaks down after three days and allows the townspeople to remove his body.

The narrator begins to detail Emily's burgeoning relationship with Homer Barron, a Yankee construction foreman, in section three. The narrator seems sympathetic, but the ladies and many of the older people in town find Emily's behavior scandalous. They gossip about how pathetic Emily has become whenever she rides through the town in a buggy with Homer. However, the narrator notes that Emily still carries herself with pride, even when she purchases arsenic from the town's druggist. The druggist tells her that the law requires her to tell him how she plans to use the poison, but she simply stares at him until he backs away and wraps up the arsenic. He writes "for rats" on the box.

At the beginning of section four, the town believes that Emily may commit suicide with the poison she has purchased. The narrator backs up the story again by detailing the circumstances leading up to Emily's purchase of the arsenic. At first, the town believes that Emily will marry Homer Barron when she is seen with him, despite Homer's statements that he is not the marrying type. However, a marriage never takes place, and the boldness of their relationship upsets many of the town's ladies. They send a minister to talk to Emily, but the following Sunday she rides through town yet again in the buggy with Homer. The minister's wife sends away for Emily's two female cousins from Alabama in the hope that they will convince Emily to either marry Homer or end the affair. During their visit, Emily purchases a toilet set engraved with Homer's initials, as well as a complete set of men's clothing, including a nightshirt. This leads the town to believe that Emily will marry Homer and rid herself of the conceited cousins. Homer leaves Jefferson, apparently to give Emily the opportunity to chase the cousins off. The cousins leave a week later, and Homer is seen going into Emily's house three days after they leave. Homer is never seen again after that and the townspeople believe he has jilted Emily.

Emily is not seen in town for almost six months. When she is finally seen on the streets of Jefferson again, she is fat and her hair has turned gray. Her house remains closed to visitors, except for a period of six or seven years when she gives china-painting lessons. She doesn't allow the town to put an address on her house and she continues to ignore the tax notices they send her. Occasionally, she is seen in one of the downstairs windows; she has apparently closed the top floor of the house. Finally, she dies, alone except for her manservant, Tobe.

The narrator returns to his recollection of Emily's funeral at the beginning of section five. As soon as Tobe lets the ladies into the house, he leaves out the back door and is never seen again. The funeral is a morbid affair. Soon after Emily is buried, several of the men force the upstairs open. There they find what is evidently the rotten corpse of Homer Barron. Even more grotesque, they find a long strand of iron-gray hair on the pillow next to his remains.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

The whole town went to the funeral of Emily Grierson. It was held in a large house, decorated in a garish, baroque style, in what once was the best of neighborhoods, an area now invaded by cotton gins and garages. She would be buried in the cemetery, beside the remains of distinguished neighbors, whose houses had long surrendered to the perverse progress of the new, commercial neighborhood, along with, of course, some soldiers of the Civil War, from both sides, buried anonymously, but with honor.

Emily was respected by the men of the town. They had gone to her funeral to pay their respects. However, the women had a different perspective. They had been driven by curiosity. After all, no one, except one solitary servant, had been inside her house in ten years.

Emily had the curious distinction of having her taxes paid by the town since 1894, a tradition that was developed through a fiction created by the then mayor, Colonel Sartoris, who claimed this honorarium was in repayment for a loan given to the town by her father. It was a fiction she believed in, for she wouldn't have accepted charity.

However, in a future generation, Colonel Sartoris' invention was disregarded and Miss Emily was billed for her taxes. However, the tax notice received no reply. Later, the aldermen wrote her a letter, charging her to visit the sheriff's office. With still no reply, the Mayor wrote, saying he would drop by or have a car sent for her. She wrote back, stylishly, that she did not go out anymore. In the note, she enclosed the tax notice.

As this was an unusual affront to he heads of the city, the aldermen called a meeting. The decided to visit her en masse in her home. They smelled the dusty signs of neglect and were led to the parlor where they sat on cracked, leather furniture as sunbeams shot through a solitary window, dust particles spinning silently in the heavy air.

Miss Emily was not a pretty sight anymore. Her petite frame was offset by an unnatural obesity. She wore a gold chain around her waist and walked with difficulty on an ebony cane with a golden head. A watch danged down from the gold chain and, in the silence of her entrance, its ticking pervaded the dusty room. The fatness pervaded her countenance. Her eyes are sunk in it. Still, they moved actively from one alderman to the next. They all had risen in unison to salute her as she entered the room, standing besides the door without asking them to sit. .

When they brought the tax notice to her attention, she told them that she did not pay any taxes to Jefferson. Did she see the Sheriff's note? She reminded them of the arrangement with Mayor Sartoris, a gentleman who had been deceased for a decade. She asked them to look at the records and to check with him. However, before they can remind her that the good Colonel is dead, she asked her servant to let them out.

Thirty years ago she had done the same with their fathers after the complaint about the smell. She had dismissed them without consequence and now she dismissed their sons. After her father died and her fiancé had deserted her, she kept to herself. She did not go out and the only trace of life in the old house was a young black man who went back and forth from the market.

Yes, at that time, years ago, a smell developed around her property. The women on the block were not surprised because her only attendant was a man- and how could he be expected to keep the house in order? A complaint to Judge Stevens, the mayor of the time, was followed by another and yet another. Yet, how could they bring such a complaint to the distinguished matron of that fine house? Their solution was unique. The Aldermen came in the dark of night, even breaking a basement window. They sowed lime dust over the property. Within a few weeks the smell disappeared.

Emily's plight now caught the attention of the town. Was she going to share the fate of her great Aunt Wyatt who lost her sanity at the end of her life? Here she was, the sole scion of a distinguished family- living alone, without lover, friend or family.

They remembered when her father had died, how she had denied his death until the final moment before the law was about to intrude. She finally let him be buried. Wasn't her insistence on his still living a sure sign of mental decrepitude? However, the townspeople, at this point, forgave her for that incident. They did not question her sanity.

After that, she was sick for a while, reappearing with severely short hair like a tragic angel in stained glass. The summer following her father's death, she began to see Homer Barron, the foreman of a construction company. Barron was a Yankee and a newcomer and was leading the efforts to pave the sidewalks in Jefferson.

To the townspeople, consorting seriously with a man who worked in construction, a common day laborer, foreman or not, was a serious fall from grace. They hoped her family would help her, but her father, prior to his death, had squabbled with them over her great aunt's estate. Miss Emily was abandoned. The litany of pity now increased.

Then came the time she went to the druggist, demanding arsenic. He obeyed the law. He asked, what was she to use it for? She remained firm in her silence. He relented to her unyielding stare, giving her the poison. When it was delivered to her, the box said, "For rats." Of course, many in the town heard the story. They assumed it was for suicide, and perhaps that would be for the best, many thought.

However, still, her relationship with Barron continued. He seemed to be a man's man, hanging out with his men, drinking. Not the marrying type, it was said. Of course, they hated her for the high style in which she held herself as they rode together in the buggy with yellow wheels and the princely stallions that drew them on their appointed Sunday ride.

The Baptist minister was compelled by his flock to go talk to her, even though she was Episcopalian. He kept the results of the interview to himself. Later the minister's wife wrote to her relatives in Alabama and two of her cousins made the journey.

While the cousins were there, Miss Emily made a few dramatic purchases- a toilet set, for a man, made in silver with Homer Barron's initials engraved on it; then a complete set of man's clothing, including, of all things, a nightshirt! Was the marriage a *fait accompli?*

However, after the pavements were finished, Barron vanished. The cousins left. Three days later, a neighbor gossiped that Barron was let in by the back door. However,, after that, though, Barron was gone permanently. Miss Emily disappeared from the streets. When she was seen again, she was fat, her hair turning, over the years, to a vigorous iron-gray. She led a quiet, isolated life until she was forty, when she conducted china-painting classes for several years. When that period ended, she resumed her isolation.

She refused to put numbers on her house when free postal service arrived. She never claimed her yearly tax notice. One could sometimes see her at an upper window but could not discern whether she looked out upon the streets or kept her mind and her eyes inside. Eventually she died in her bed on a moldy pillow.

The two cousins came to her funeral. Emily lay beneath a crayon portrait of her father as the old men of Jefferson, some in their ancient Confederate uniforms, talked about her, as if she had been their dancing partner, their friend.

Then, it came the time for opening a room which had been closed for forty years. It took an effort, but they finally managed to break in. A man, much decomposed, lay in the bed. There were the silver toilet articles with the engraved letters, "H. B." upon them. Upon his desecrated and desiccated body lay the nightshirt. And, he himself- it was as though, at one time, he had been locked in an embrace. Beside him on the indented pillow was a strand of iron-gray hair. The dead man had not died without attention or alone.

Analysis

This enigmatic little story, written by the master storyteller, William Faulkner, is a story about gossip and appearance- about the sensibilities of a small town, which downsized the gravity of Emily Grierson's condition.

Among them, for many decades, Emily Grierson was revered and envied by people of the town, for her wealth, for her position and for her consort, with whom she paraded around the town. For much of it, having lost her father through death and most of her family through a family feud, she lived alone. In her later years, she only had Homer Barron, a construction foreman, as a serious prospect. The town gossiped about her loneliness and conjectured vigorously about various stages of her relationship with Barron. In all respects, they misread that relationship.

This is the kind of story that was created for the South. There is the genteel aristocracy, which scorns her flirtation with a lower class. There are the city fathers who note her tax rebellion, but are, in the end, to civilized to take action against her. Indeed, it is this gentility that compels them to eliminate the problem with the smells of her home by stealing to her house at night and spreading throughout her property the smell-neutralizing lime. There are those who gossip over her supposed wedding, his supposed return, the arsenic, her servant. Everything about her is consumed with gossip; all beneath the service, as would be appropriate in a small, southern town.

Relentlessly, they try to help her. They make personal visits to woo her tax dollars; a minister's wife intervenes with her family, leading to a visit by her cousins. They get rid of the smell for her so that she will not be embarrassed. In the end, they decide to ignore her non-payment of taxes. They pity her openly but do not just sit back. They give her the arsenic without pressing her for answers. They extend towards her, but she ignores them. When the aldermen visit, she does not ask them to sit, but she does ask them to leave.

Faulkner paints a picture of an eccentric old spinster, a woman whose life has been unfulfilled and tragic—a woman who is beyond help through the efforts of her community. Even worse, she is a woman that the town cannot really read. Their inability to assess her is not uncovered until her death, where the macabre Miss Emily is finally revealed for what she is.

For forty years, she has converted one of her rooms to a mausoleum. There, Homer Barron lies, never having had the advantage or the courtesy of a funeral. In his last moment, she had lain beside her. There is evidence that perhaps he even died in her embrace.

Emily was not just an eccentric old woman. She was a murderer in her midst. Her lover lay there, blissfully undisturbed, a testimony to the ignorance, the futility of gossip and character assessments.

Perhaps, wherever Miss Emily was, she was laughing at them. As for the fate of Homer Barron, he had lived with her for the greater part of his life, decaying in an upper room. Her love had permeated her last few moments. She lay beside him as he died, her prospects for future perhaps dawning on her, finally, as she barricaded his room for the decades to come.

Was there any sign of the depth of her depravity? Not at all. She kept her dignity and her secret to herself. Were the townspeople to blame for their ignorance? Of course not. They would keep gossiping and life would continue- and Miss Emily's secret would one day be forgotten, if it were not for this story, a masterpiece of irony and compression.

Characters

Homer Barron

Homer Barron is the Yankee construction foreman who becomes Emily Grierson's first real beau. His relationship with Emily is considered scandalous because he is a Northerner and because it doesn't appear as if they will ever be married. In fact, it is known that he drinks with younger men in the Elks' Club and he has remarked that he is not a marrying man. The lovers ignore the gossip of the town until Emily's two female cousins from Alabama arrive. Homer leaves town for several days until the cousins go back to Alabama. Meanwhile, Emily purchases arsenic, a monogrammed toilet set with the initials H.B., and men's clothing. Homer returns to Jefferson three days after Emily's cousins leave and he is seen entering her home. He is never seen (alive) again. However, what is presumably his corpse is discovered in a ghastly bridal suite on the top floor of the Grierson house after Emily's funeral.

Druggist

The druggist sells Emily arsenic while her two female cousins from Alabama are visiting her. Emily just stares at him when he tells her that the law requires her to tell him why she is buying it. He backs down without an answer and writes "for rats" on the box.

Emily's cousins

Emily's cousins arrive after receiving a letter from the Baptist minister's wife. Apparently, they visit to discourage Emily's relationship with Homer Barron. Homer leaves while they are in town, and then returns after they have been gone for three days. The narrator, speaking for many in the town, hopes that Emily can rid herself of the cousins because they are ". . . even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been."

Emily's father

Although there is only a brief description of Emily's father in section two of the story, he plays an important role in the development of her character. Certainly Emily learns her genteel ways from him. It is his influence that deprives her of a husband when she is young; the narrator says that the town pictured Emily and her father as a ". . . tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the backflung front door." Emily at first refuses to acknowledge his death. She doesn't allow anyone to remove her father's body; finally, after three days she breaks down and lets someone remove the cadaver. This foreshadows the town's discovery of Homer Barron's decomposed corpse on the top floor in Emily's house after her death.

Emily Grierson

Emily Grierson, referred to as Miss Emily throughout the story, is the main character of "A Rose for Emily." An unnamed narrator tells her strange story through a series of flashbacks. She is essentially the town eccentric. The narrator compares her to "an idol in a niche . . . dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse." Emily is born to a proud, aristocratic family sometime during the Civil War; her life in many ways reflects the disintegration of the Old South during the Reconstruction and the early twentieth century. Although her mother is never mentioned, her father plays an important part in shaping her character. He chases away Emily's potential suitors because none of them are "good enough" for his daughter. His death leaves Emily a tragic, penniless spinster. She may even be mad—she denies that her father is dead at first and she won't allow anyone to remove his corpse until she breaks down after three days. However, she later causes a scandal when she falls in love with Homer Barron, a Yankee construction foreman who is paving the streets in Jefferson. The narrator's various clues (Emily's purchase of arsenic; the awful smell coming from her home after Homer disappears) and the town's grotesque discovery at the end of the story suggest that Emily is driven to murder when she begins to fear that Homer may leave her.

Minister

The Baptist minister, under pressure from the ladies of the town, goes to Emily (although she is Episcopal) to discuss her relationship with Homer Barron. He never tells anyone what happens and he refuses to go back to her. The following Sunday, Emily and Homer are seen riding through the town in the buggy again.

Minister's wife

The minister's wife sends a letter to Emily's relations in Alabama after her husband calls upon Emily. The letter prompts a visit from two of Emily's female cousins.

Narrator

The unnamed narrator refers to himself in collective pronouns throughout the story. As Isaac Rodman points out in *The Faulkner Journal*, "The critical consensus remains that the narrator of 'A Rose for Emily' speaks for his community." Although there are a few sub-groups to which the narrator refers to as separate (for example, the "ladies" and the "older people" of the town), readers assume that he speaks for the majority of the average people of Jefferson. He tells Emily's story in a series of flashbacks which culminates in the dreadful discovery of a decomposed corpse on the top floor of the Grierson home after her death. The narrator never directly claims that Emily murders her lover, Homer Barron, and keeps his corpse in a bed for more than forty years. However, the events he chooses to detail, including Emily's purchase of arsenic and the

stench that comes from her house after Homer Barron's disappearance, lead readers to that perception.

The negro

See Tobe

Colonel Sartoris

Colonel Sartoris is the mayor of Jefferson when Emily's father dies. He remits Emily's taxes "into perpetuity" because he knows that her father was unable to leave her with anything but the house. Sartoris, being a prototypical southern gentleman, invents a story involving a loan that Emily's father had made to the town in order to spare Emily the embarrassment of accepting charity. The narrator contrasts this chivalrous act with another edict made by Sartoris stating that ". . . no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron." Colonel Sartoris appears in other works by Faulkner; he is a pivotal character in the history of Yoknapatawpha County.

Judge Stevens

Judge Stevens is the mayor of Jefferson when the townspeople begin to complain of the awful odor coming from the Grierson house. Like Colonel Sartoris, he is from a generation that believes an honorable man does not publicly confront a woman with an embarrassing situation. He refuses to allow anyone to discuss the smell with her. Instead, four men sneak onto the Grierson property after midnight and sprinkle lime around the house to rid the town of the disgusting stench.

Tobe

Tobe is Emily's black manservant and, for most of the story, her only companion. He is often the only sign of life about the Grierson house. The ladies find it shocking that Emily allows him to maintain her kitchen, and they blame his poor housekeeping for the development of the smell after Emily is "deserted" by Homer Barron. He rarely speaks to anyone. He is the only person present when Emily dies. He lets the townspeople into the Grierson house after her death, after which he promptly leaves, never to be seen again.

Old Lady Wyatt

Old lady Wyatt is Emily Grierson's great-aunt. The narrator makes reference to her as having gone ". . . completely crazy at last," suggesting perhaps that madness runs in the Grierson family. The narrator also mentions that Emily's father had a falling out with their kin in Alabama over old lady Wyatt's estate.

Themes

Death

Death is prevalent, both literally and figuratively, in "A Rose for Emily." Five actual deaths are discussed or mentioned in passing, and there are obvious references to death throughout the story. The story begins in section one with the narrator's recollections of Emily's funeral. He reminisces that it is Emily's father's death that prompts Colonel Sartoris to remit her taxes "into perpetuity." This leads to the story of the aldermen attempting to collect taxes from Emily. The narrator's description of Emily is that of a drowned woman: "She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue." One of the reasons the aldermen are bold enough to try to collect Emily's taxes is that Colonel Sartoris has been dead for a decade. Of course, this doesn't discourage Emily—she expects the men to discuss the matter with him anyway. When the narrator returns to the subject of the death of Emily's father, he reveals that Emily at first denies that he is dead. She keeps his body for three days before she finally breaks down and allows her father to be buried. This scene foreshadows the grisly discovery at the end of the story. The narrator also mentions the madness and death of old lady Wyatt, Emily's great-aunt. Finally, the discovery of a long strand of iron-gray hair lying on a pillow next to the moldy corpse entombed in Emily's boudoir suggests that Emily is a necrophiliac (literally, "one who loves the dead").

The Decline of the Old South

One of the major themes in Faulkner's fiction is the decline of the Old South after the Civil War. There are many examples of this theme in "A Rose for Emily." Before the Civil War, Southern society was composed of landed gentry, merchants, tenant farmers, and slaves. The aristocratic men of this period had an unspoken code of chivalry, and women were the innocent, pure guardians of morality. For example, Colonel Sartoris concocts an elaborate story to spare Emily's feelings when he remits her taxes; the narrator states, "Only a man of Colonel Sartoris's generation and thought could have invented [the story], and only a woman could have believed it." When the smell develops around the Grierson house, a younger man suggests that Emily should be confronted with it. Judge Stevens, who is from the same generation as the Colonel, asks him, "Dammit, sir . . . will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?" It is also noted that Emily's father is from this same generation, an arrogant Southern aristocrat who believes that no man is good enough for his daughter.

However, post-Civil War society in the South was radically different. At one time, the Grierson home was in one of the finest neighborhoods in Jefferson; by the time of Emily's death, ". . . garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood." The generation that follows Colonel Sartoris is not swayed by his old Southern code of honor. This is why the twentieth-century Jefferson Board of Aldermen attempts to collect Emily's taxes a decade after the Colonel's death.

The reaction to the Yankee, Homer Barron, also serves to delineate the difference between the generations. The younger generation finds it easier to accept Homer, while the older folks find his relationship with a woman born to old Southern gentility unacceptable. Emily's china-painting lessons also show the change in Southern society. Her pupils are the daughters and granddaughters of Colonel Sartoris's contemporaries. However, the narrator notes that ". . . the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of color and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines." Finally, Emily's dark secret might serve as a metaphor for the general decadence of the Old South.

Community vs. Isolation

The odd relationship between the town of Jefferson and Emily is a recurrent theme in "A Rose for Emily." At her funeral, the narrator notes that Emily has been ". . . a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town." However, Emily has very little to do with the townspeople during her life. Her father prevents her from dating anyone because he doesn't believe any of the men in Jefferson are good enough for her and, after his death, Emily continues to isolate herself from the rest of the community for the better part of her life. The only notable exceptions to her isolation are her Sunday rides with Homer Barron, her shopping trips for arsenic and men's clothing, and the chinapainting lessons she gives to the young women of the town for a few years. These exceptions only serve to show how alienated Emily is from the rest of Jefferson.

Although Emily is indifferent to the town, the town seems to be almost obsessed with her. The reaction Jefferson has to her relationship with Homer Barron exemplifies this obsession. The ladies of Jefferson are mortified because they think the relationship is ". . . a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people." The older people dislike the relationship because they think it is bad form for a Southern woman to associate with a Yankee. The narrator pities Emily and secretly hopes that she will outsmart her cousins and marry Homer. These various reactions demonstrate an interesting conflict. Even though Emily views herself as separate from the community, the community still embraces her. They view her as ". . . an idol in a niche . . . passed from generation to generation— dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse."

Style

Flashback and Foreshadowing

Flashback and foreshadowing are two often used literary devices that utilize time in order to produce a desired effect. Flashbacks are used to present action that occurs before the beginning of a story; foreshadowing creates expectation for action that has not yet happened. Faulkner uses both devices in "A Rose for Emily." The story is told by the narrator through a series of non-sequential flashbacks. The narrator begins the story by describing the scene of Emily's funeral; this description, however, is actually a flashback because the story ends with the narrator's memory of the town's discovery of the corpse in the Grierson home after Emily's funeral. Throughout the story, the narrator flashes back and forth through various events in the life and times of Emily Grierson and the town of Jefferson. Each piece of the story told by the narrator prompts another piece of the story, regardless of chronology. For example, the narrator recalls Emily's funeral, which leads him to remember when Colonel Sartoris relieved her of taxes. This of course leads to the story of the aldermen trying to collect Emily's taxes after the death of the Colonel. The narrative thus works much in the same haphazard manner as human memory does.

The narrator foreshadows the grisly discovery at the end of the story with several scenes. First, when the aldermen attempt to collect Emily's taxes, her house is described as decrepit, almost a mausoleum. Emily herself is compared to a drowned corpse. Then, in section two, the stench that emanates from the Grierson house is most certainly one of death. Another powerful example of foreshadowing comes when Emily refuses to let anyone take the body of her father after his death until she relents after three days. When Emily finally has access to another corpse, she jealously guards it for over forty years!

Point of View

The point of view in "A Rose for Emily" is unique. The story is told by an unnamed narrator in the first-person collective. One might even argue that the narrator is the main character. There are hints as to the age, race, gender, and class of the narrator, but an identity is never actually revealed. Isaac Rodman notes in The Faulkner Journal that the critical consensus remains that the narrator speaks for his community. (Rodman, however, goes on to present a convincing argument that the narrator may be a loner or eccentric of some kind speaking from "ironic detachment.") Regardless of identity, the narrator proves to be a clever, humorous, and sympathetic storyteller. He is clever because of the way he pieces the story together to build to a shocking climax. His humor is evident in his almost whimsical tone throughout what most would consider to be a morbid tale. Finally, the narrator is sympathetic to both Emily and the town of Jefferson. This is demonstrated in his pity for Emily and in his understanding that the

town's reactions are driven by circumstances beyond its control (". . . Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town").

Setting

"A Rose for Emily" is set in Faulkner's mythical county, Yoknapatawpha, Mississippi. The town of Jefferson is the county seat of Yoknapatawpha. In *William Faulkner: His Life and Work*, David Minter writes, "More than any major American writer of our time, including Robert Frost, Faulkner is associated with a region. He is our great provincial." Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County are based upon the real city of Oxford and Lafayette County in Mississippi, where Faulkner spent most of his life. Once he established this fictional, yet familiar, setting, he was able to tap his creativity to invent a history for Yoknapatawpha and populate the county with colorful characters like Emily Grierson and Colonel Sartoris. The land and its history exert a great influence over many of Faulkner's characters. Emily is no exception; she is trapped in Jefferson's past.

Structure

The best of Faulkner's fiction is characterized by the craftsmanship of its structure. *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* are both examples of daring experimentation with point of view and time in the novel. He wrote "A Rose for Emily" during the same period he worked on those novels. The story moves seamlessly back and forth in time through almost fifty years in its five sections. Each episode in the life of Emily and the history of Jefferson is obviously interconnected, yet the clues aren't given in chronological order. Thus, the final scene is powerful because the narrator does not tell the story in a straightforward, beginning-to-end fashion. This is why the story is even more entertaining and enlightening when read for the second time.

Historical Context

The Reconstruction after the Civil War had a profound and humbling effect on Southern society. The South's outdated plantation economy, based so long upon slave labor, was devastated by emancipation. Northern opportunists, known as "carpetbaggers," came in droves to take advantage of the economic chaos. Some Southern aristocrats found themselves working the land alongside tenant farmers and former slaves. Faulkner came from a family that once owned a plantation. The history of his family and of the South in general inspired Faulkner's imagination.

The short stories and novels Faulkner wrote about Yoknapatawpha County combine to create an epic, mythical history of this era. David Minter, in his biography *William Faulkner: His Life and Work*, notes that as a teenager, Faulkner was known for being observational to the point of oddness: "Sometimes he joined the old men of Oxford on the town square . . . there he sat or stood motionless, quiet, as though held fast by some inner scene or some inner sense of himself." It was in this manner that Faulkner soaked up the legends of his region. He heard Civil War stories from the old veterans, hunting stories from his father, stories of his great-grandfather's heroic exploits from his grandfather, and fables about the animals in the forest told by Mammy Caroline Barr, an ex-slave who watched over him when he was a small boy. The stories he heard, along with his experiences in Oxford during his own lifetime, greatly inform the scope of his work.

"A Rose for Emily," in a few pages, covers approximately three-quarters of a century. The birth of Emily Grierson takes place sometime around the Civil War. Her death takes place sometime in the late 1920s or early 1930s—that is, sometime around the year Faulkner wrote the story. Because Faulkner came from a family with an aristocratic bearing and associated with other similar families, he was familiar with the arrogance of characters like the Griersons. Some of these people continued to behave as if they were still privileged plantation owners although their wealth was gone. However, Faulkner spent much of his time observing ordinary townspeople as well, and this is why he was able to capture the voice of the common people of Jefferson in the character of the narrator.

The narrator in "A Rose for Emily" notes a change in the character of his town when Jefferson's Board of Aldermen attempts to collect Emily's taxes. Originally, the town was governed by men of the old South like Colonel Sartoris and Judge Stevens. Men like this operated under a code of chivalry that was extremely protective of white women. Thus, Colonel Sartoris is unable to allow the town to tax a poor spinster, and Judge Stevens is unable to confront Emily about the smell coming from her house. As each generation passes the torch, however, the newer generations are further and further away from the antiquated social mores of their forebears. The men who try to collect Emily's taxes don't operate under the same code of conduct as their grandfathers and great-grandfathers did. Emily is not a "damsel in distress" to these men; she is a nuisance, a hindrance to progress. Faulkner was very interested in this conflict between nineteenth and twentieth-century Southern society. The old Southern families of his

novels, such as the Compsons in *The Sound and the Fury*, ultimately collapse under the weight of their histories. In "A Rose for Emily," Emily Grierson is certainly a character trapped in her genteel past, although she literally has a "skeleton in the closet."

Critical Overview

Faulkner is now regarded by most critics as one of the greatest American writers of the twentieth century. However, "A Rose for Emily," written in 1929, was actually rejected by *Scribner's* and other magazines before *Forum* published it in 1930. Although one of his greatest novels, *The Sound and the Fury*, was published just before "A Rose for Emily" in 1929, many American critics did not immediately recognize Faulkner as a groundbreaking writer. As is often the case with many challenging American authors, Faulkner was identified as a unique American voice in Europe long before he gained respect at home. In fact, as late as 1950, after he won the Nobel Prize for Literature, the *New York Times* (quoted in Robert Penn Warren's introduction To *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*) published an editorial claiming that his work was "too often vicious, depraved, decadent, [and] corrupt." "Americans most fervently hope," the *Times* continued, that neither the award given by Sweden nor the "enormous vogue of Faulkner's works" among foreigners meant that they associated American life with his fiction.

Interestingly enough, it is in *The New York Times* twenty years earlier that one can read an extremely favorable review of *These 13*, the first collection of Faulkner's short stories. "A Rose for Emily" is published in this edition. The reviewer notes that Faulkner was "hailed in England, before he was known here except to a small circle, as the latest star in the American literary firmament." He writes that "A Rose for Emily" is "one of the strongest, as it is certainly the most gruesome, tales in the volume." The story was also published in *Collected Stories* in 1950. The reviews for this volume were even more laudatory. In the *New York Herald Tribune*, Horace Gregory compares Faulkner to influential and brilliant writers such as Dostoevsky, Melville, James, and Joyce.

Presently, critics continue to write about "A Rose for Emily." The subjects of the story are timeless: love, death, community vs. individuality, and the nature of time. Some of the criticism written recently concentrates on possible literary references within the story. For example, Peter L. Hays, in an article published in *Studies in American Fiction*, suggests that Faulkner may have used Emily Dickinson as a model for Emily Grierson. In *Studies in Short Fiction*, John F. Birk draws analogies between the structure, theme, and imagery in "A Rose for Emily" to the poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by Keats. The story continues to resonate even after seventy years because so many of the story's themes are a part of everyone's experience.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Akers is a freelance writer and editor. In the following essay, he discusses the major critical interpretations of "A Rose for Emily."

William Faulkner is widely considered to be one of the great American authors of the twentieth century. Although his greatest works are identified with a particular region and time (Mississippi in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), the themes he explores are universal. He was also an extremely accomplished writer in a technical sense. Novels such as *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* feature bold experimentation with shifts in time and narrative. Several of his short stories are favorites of anthologists, including "A Rose for Emily." This strange story of love, obsession, and death is a favorite among both readers and critics. The narrator, speaking for the town of Jefferson in Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, tells a series of stories about the town's reclusive spinster, Miss Emily Grierson. The stories build up to a gruesome revelation after Miss Emily's funeral. She apparently poisoned her lover, Homer Barron, and kept his corpse in an attic bedroom for over forty years. It is a common critical cliché to say that a story "exists on many levels," but in the case of "A Rose for Emily," this is the truth. Critic Frank A. Littler, in an essay published in *Notes on Mississippi Writers* regarding the chronology of the story, writes that "A Rose for Emily" has been read variously as ". . . a Gothic horror tale, a study in abnormal psychology, an allegory of the relations between North and South, a meditation on the nature of time, and a tragedy with Emily as a sort of tragic heroine." These various interpretations serve as a good starting point for discussion of the story.

The Gothic horror tale is a literary form dating back to 1764 with the first novel identified with the genre, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Ontralto*. Gothicism features an atmosphere of terror and dread: gloomy castles or mansions, sinister characters, and unexplained phenomena. Gothic novels and stories also often include unnatural combinations of sex and death. In a lecture to students documented by Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner in *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia 1957-1958*, Faulkner himself claimed that "A Rose for Emily" is a "ghost story." In fact, Faulkner is considered by many to be the progenitor of a sub-genre, the Southern gothic. The Southern gothic style combines the elements of classic Gothicism with particular Southern archetypes (the reclusive spinster, for example) and puts them in a Southern milieu. Faulkner's novels and stories about the South include dark, taboo subjects such as murder, suicide, and incest.

James M. Mellard, in *The Faulkner Journal*, argues that "A Rose for Emily" is a "retrospective Gothic;" that is, the reader is unaware that the story is Gothic until the end when Homer Barron's corpse is discovered. He points out that the narrator's tone is almost whimsical. He also notes that because the narrator's flashbacks are not presented in an ordinary sequential order, readers who are truly unfamiliar with the story don't put all the pieces together until the end. However, a truly careful first reading should begin to reveal the Gothic elements early i character when the aldermen enter her decrepit parlor in a futile attempt to collect her taxes. She is described as looking ". .

. bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue." She insists that the aldermen discuss the tax situation with a man who has been dead for a decade. If she is not yet a sinister character, she is certainly weird. In section two of the story, the unexplained smell coming from her house, the odd relationship she has with her father, and the suggestion that madness may run in her family by the reference to her "crazy" great-aunt, old lady Wyatt, are elements that, at the very least, hint at the Gothic nature of the story. Emily's purchase of arsenic should leave no doubt at that point that the story is leading to a Gothic conclusion.

It is Emily's awful deed that continues to captivate readers. Why would she do something so ghastly? How could she kill a man and bed his corpse? This line of questioning leads to a psychological examination of Emily's character. David Minter, in *William Faulkner: His Life and Work*, notes in several different passages the significant influence that Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychoanalysis, had on Faulkner's fiction. Freud theorized that repression, especially if it is sexual in nature, often results in psychological abnormality. In the story, Emily's overprotective, overbearing father denies her a normal relationship with the opposite sex by chasing away any potential mates. Because her father is the only man with whom she has had a close relationship, she denies his death and keeps his corpse in her house until she breaks down three days later when the doctors insist she let them take the body. Later in the story, the ladies of the town and her two female cousins from Alabama work to sabotage her relationship with Homer Barron. Of course, the narrator suggests that Homer himself may not exactly be enthusiastic about marrying Emily. However, it is left to the reader to imagine the exact circumstances leading to Homer's denouement. Finally, Emily takes the offensive by poisoning Homer so he can't abandon her. The discovery of a strand of her hair on the pillow next to the rotting corpse suggests that she slept with the cadaver or, even worse, had sex with it. Emily's repressive life therefore contributes to her (rather severe) psychological abnormality: necrophilia.

Some readers have interpreted the story as an allegory of the relations between the North and the South. This is apparently because the character of Homer Barron is a Yankee and Emily kills him. However, it would be difficult to argue that Emily's motivation in dating Homer is to kill him because he is a Northerner. The most obvious explanation for her willingness to date a man outside of her social caste would be that she is simply a very lonely woman. A less obvious, but nonetheless reasonable, explanation for her relationship with Homer would be that is her way of rebelling against her dead father. During his lifetime, her father prevented her from having an "acceptable" suitor. Thus, she rebels by associating with a man her father would have considered a pariah: a Yankee day-laborer. There is really little to suggest that the story is an allegory of the Civil War other than the fact that a Yankee is killed by a Southerner. Faulkner himself, in his lecture on the story at the University of Virginia, denies such an interpretation. He said that he believed that a writer is ". . . too busy trying to create flesh-and-blood people that will stand up and cast a shadow to have time to be conscious of all the symbolism that he may put into what he does or what people may read into it."

One can more confidently argue that "A Rose for Emily" is a meditation on the nature of time. Although the story is only a few pages long, it covers approximately three-quarters of a century. Faulkner cleverly constructed the story to show the elusive nature of time and memory. Several critics have written papers in attempts to devise a chronology for the story. It would surely please Faulkner that few of these chronologies are consistent with each other. In "A Rose for Emily," he is not concerned with actual dates. He is more interested in the conflict between time as a subjective experience and time as a force of physics. For example, in section five of the story, the narrator describes the very old men gathered at Emily's funeral. The old men, some who fought in the Civil War, mistakenly believe that Emily was a contemporary of theirs when in fact Emily was born sometime around the Civil War. The old men have confused ". . . time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottleneck of the most recent decade of years." Here, Faulkner profoundly and poetically comments on the human need to deny the passage of time and the astounding capacity of the human mind to use memory in that ultimately futile denial. Emily, of course, has other methods of denying time.

Since the denial of time is futile, it is also tragic. This is one reason the story can be read as a tragedy. But every tragedy needs a hero or heroine. Can Emily actually be considered a tragic heroine? At first glance, this is a tough sell. Many readers quite reasonably believe that Emily is some kind of monster, regardless of what Freud might have said. However, as many critics have noted, Faulkner's title suggests that he may think otherwise. "In his fiction," notes Minter in his biography of Faulkner, "he characteristically mingles compassion and judgement. Even his most terrible villains . . . he treats with considerable sympathy." Emily is such an example. In fact, the narrator twice describes Emily as an idol. Although she commits a foul crime, Faulkner views Emily as a victim of her circumstance. Faulkner despised slavery and racism, but he admired much of the chivalry and honor of the old South. Emily is a product of that society and she clings desperately to it as when she refuses to give up her father's body. She also becomes a victim of her old society. The one time in her life that she dares to let the past become a "diminishing road," that is, when she dates Homer, she is ridiculed, ostracized, shamed, and finally jilted. Her response is an effort to actually freeze time by poisoning Homer and keeping his corpse in her ghoulish boudoir.

Finally, it is a tribute to Faulkner's talent that this compact yet expansive story lends itself to so many interpretations. The discussion above briefly describes the most common interpretations made by readers and critics. However, there is a great deal of scholarship, entire volumes, written on "A Rose for Emily." Several critics, including Isaac Rodman in *The Faulkner Journal* and Milinda Schwab in *Studies in Short Fiction*, have presented convincing arguments of the town's complicity in Homer's murder. Many critics have written interesting papers on literary allusions that they find in the story; alternately, many critics find allusions to "A Rose for Emily" in contemporary literature. (An interesting paper might be written comparing and contrasting Faulkner's Emily with the character of Norman Bates, the schizophrenic, homicidal hotel-keeper/ amateur taxidermist of Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 film, Psycho.) "A Rose for Emily" remains a remarkable, provocative work regardless of the critical approach.

Source: Donald Akers, Overview of "A Rose for Emily," for *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In the following article, Burduck argues that the narrator of "A Rose for Emily" could be female.

In a recent article, Hal Blythe discusses the central role played by the narrator in William Faulkner's gothic masterpiece "A Rose for Emily." Focusing on Miss Emily's bizarre affair and how it affronts the chivalric notions of the Old South, the narrator, according to Blythe, attempts to assuage the grief produced by Miss Emily's rejection of him by relating her story; telling her tale allows him to exact a measure of revenge. Faulkner's speaker, without doubt, serves as a pivotal player in this tale of grotesque love. Although Blythe grasps the significance of the narrator's place in the story, he bases his argument on a point that the story itself never makes completely clear. Blythe assumes that Faulkner's narrator is *male*. The possibility exists, however, that Faulkner intended his readers to view the tale-teller as being *female*.

Hints in the text suggest that Faulkner's speaker might be a woman. The narrative voice (the "we" in the story), a spokesperson for the town, appears very concerned with every detail of Emily's life. Faulkner provides us with an important clue concerning the gender of this narrator when he describes the townspeople's reaction to Emily's attachment to Homer Barron: "The men did not want to interfere, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister . . . to call upon her." Jefferson's male population seems apathetic regarding Emily's tryst; the men are not the least bit scandalized. The females in town (the "we" in the tale) are so concerned with Emily's eccentricities that they force their men to act; one very interested female in particular, the narrator, sees to it that Emily's story is not forgotten.

This coterie of Jefferson's "finer" ladies (represented by the narrator) seems highly offended by Emily's actions. This resentment might stem from two primary causes. First, the ladies (the phrase "the ladies" appears throughout the tale and might refer to the "proper" Southern belles living in town) find Miss Emily's pre-marital relationship immoral. Second, they resent Emily's seeing a Yankee man. In the eyes of these flowers of Southern femininity, Emily Grierson becomes a stain on the white gown of Southern womanhood.

Despite their bitterness toward Emily, the ladies of Jefferson feel some degree of sympathy for her. After her father's death, the ladies reminisce: "We remembered all the young men her father had driven away. . . ." Later, Homer Barron disappears, prompting this response: "Then we knew that this was to be expected too, as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and furious to die." These intensely felt statements suggest how a woman might react to another woman's loneliness; the narrator seems to empathize with Miss Emily on a woman-to-woman basis. Faulkner himself sheds interesting light on this matter when he describes Miss Emily as a woman "that just wanted to be loved and to love and to have a husband and a family," The women of Jefferson know that Emily, a fellow woman, possessed these feelings, and as women they feel as if some sort of biological bond

links them to "the last Grierson." Unlike the majority of the ladies in town, Miss Emily experienced neither the joys of marriage nor the fulfillment of child-bearing. If the ladies did not view Emily in a sympathetic way, would they have sent their daughters to her house for china-painting lessons?

Another possible reason exists for the speaker's sympathetic view of Emily. Our narrator knows (perhaps from the druggist) that Emily purchased poison, ostensibly to kill "rats." One slang use of the term "rat" applies to a man who has cheated on his lover. Perhaps Faulkner's tale-teller suspects that Emily feared that Homer would not remain faithful to her. In order to "keep" Homer by her side, Emily poisoned him. The speaker might sympathize with Emily somewhat because she believes that Emily did what she could to retain Homer's companionship and insure that he would not give her up for another woman. Faulkner's female narrator does not approve of Miss Emily's methods, but she understands what prompted them: Emily's weariness of being alone.

An additional clue regarding the narrator appears toward the end of *"A Rose for Emily"* when Faulkner's speaker emphasizes the first-person pronoun "they." Previously, our narrator has used "we" to indicate the town's collective female element. After Miss Emily is buried, the tale-teller relates how the residents of Jefferson learned of the gruesome secret lying upstairs in the long-closed bedroom. She makes one point very clear: " *They* waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before*they* opened it [my italics]." The "they" in this sentence are people strong enough to break down the door of this death chamber. Since most ladies in Jefferson would not be strong enough to force in a door, might not the reader assume that these initial intruders are men? The ladies follow the men into the room and make their ghastly discovery: "For a long while *we* [my italics] just stood there looking down at the profound and fleshless grin."

The reader is left with a very important question: why would a lady desire to repeat Miss Emily's story? The narrator's "dual vision" (as Blythe calls it) provides a clue. As a woman offended by Emily's actions, the speaker relates this tale of necrophilia in an attempt to vindicate Southern womanhood. She wants her listeners to understand that Emily was not representative of the typical "Southern Lady." Perhaps familiar with Caroline Bascomb Compson, Joanna Burden, and Rosa Coldfield, other infamous females living in the Jefferson vicinity, the narrator wants to convey to her audience that virtuous women (such as herself?) do still live in Jefferson. On the other hand, the speaker's sympathy for Emily, a woman lost in her own particularly lonely world, also prompts her to recall the tragic events of Emily's sterile life. As a woman, the tale-teller allows her heart to go out to "poor Emily."

Viewing the narrator of "A Rose for Emily" as a woman allows the reader to enjoy Faulkner's tale from a unique perspective. Indeed, such an interpretation offers an interesting alternative reading that emphasizes the important role women play in the fiction of Oxford, Mississippi's Nobel laureate.

Source: Michael L. Burduck, "Another View of Faulkner's Narrator in 'A Rose for Emily'," in *The University of Mississippi Studies in English*, Vol. VIII, 1990, pp. 209-11.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Davis discusses Faulkner's use of time and narrative structure in "A Rose for Emily," *commenting that together they "provide some of the most lucid and meaningful understandings of Faulkner's fiction*."

Nearly everyone familiar with the writings of William Faulkner is aware of the fracturings of time so common in his work. Many of his major characters spend much of their fictional lives trying to piece together their experiences and lives, to put them in some kind of chronological or existential order. Few of them succeed; and when they do, as is perhaps the case with Quentin Compson (*The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom*!), they most often find that to make sense of their lives is to create the necessity for self-destruction. But, most often, Faulkner's characters are like Charles Bon of *Absalom, Absalom!* who, when he leaves for college, is only on the periphery of an area of knowledge about himself and his world. Bon is described as "almost touching the answer lurking, just beyond his reach, inextricable, jumbled, and unrecognizable yet on the point of falling into a pattern which would reveal to him at once, like a flash of light, the meaning of his whole life."

But if Faulkner's characters are often at a loss with respect to the movements of their existences through time, his critics cannot be. Indeed, such detailings of temporal chronology, together with structural elaborations, provide some of the most lucid and meaningful understandings of Faulkner's fiction. Almost all of Faulkner's stories and novels can be better appreciated and more accurately u interrelationships of time and structure. In Faulkner's world theme exists as the hyphen in the compound temporal-structure. Not the least of such cases is "A Rose for Emily."

"A Rose for Emily" is divided into five sections, the first and last section having to do with the present, the now of the narration, with the three middle sections detailing the past. The story begins and ends with the death of Miss Emily Grierson; the three middle sections move through Miss Emily's life from a time soon after her father's death and shortly after her beau, Homer Barron, "had deserted her," to the time of her death.

Late in the fourth section of the story, Faulkner writes of Miss Emily, "Thus she passed from generation to generation—dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse." On first reading, this series of adjectives appears to be only another catalogue so familiar in Faulkner. Often it seems that Faulkner simply lists such a series of adjectives as if to say, "Take your choice of these, I don't care." Not so in this instance. Rather, it would seem that Faulkner uses these five adjectives to describe Miss Emily with some care and for a specific purpose. It could be argued that they are intended to refer to the successive sections of the story, each becoming as it were a sort of metaphorical characterization of the differing states through which the townspeople of Jefferson (and the readers) pass in their evaluation of Miss Emily. Correlating the two present sections with the adjectives that fall to them, we see Miss Emily as the paradox she has become in death, "dear" and "perverse," while before her death she was "inescapable, impervious, tranquil." Thus, during her life, the enigma of Miss Emily's personality, which

kept her seemingly immortal, impenetrable, and almost inevitably inescapable, has been clarified and crystalized by her death. A woman who, alive, "had been a tradition, a duty, and a care," and thus "dear" in several senses of that word, is revealed, in death, to have been what for years she had been suspected of being, "perverse."

But indeed even in the first section of the story there are numerous hints at the final portrait of the Miss Emily of section five. The men go to her funeral "through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument." Her house is "an eyesore among eyesores," it symbolizing Miss Emily herself in its "coquettish decay"; inside there is a "tarnished gilt easel"; Miss Emily has an "ebony cane with a tarnished gold head"; and she herself looks "bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water." Section two details the inescapable smell which surrounded Miss Emily's house after the disappearance of her suitor, Homer Barron. Section three recounts Miss Emily's romance with Homer Barron and the imperviousness of her position even after the townspeople feel pity for her (four times in this section—and once in section four—she is referred to as "poor Emily"). "She carried her head high enough—even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than even the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness." And section four moves from the time Miss Emily bought the arsenic, through the departure, return, and final disappearance of Homer, to the time of her death.

Miss Emily, who had been idle most of her life, is looked upon as an idol by the people of Jefferson. The word "idol" occurs twice in the story: when the men are sprinkling lime around her house a window is lighted "and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol"; and in later years, on and off at intervals, "we would see her in one of the downstairs windows—she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house—like the carven torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which." Miss Emily is indeed a kind of living avatar (she doesn't believe in death and refuses to admit that her father is dead until the townspeople "were about to resort to law and force") of the past of Jefferson. In the first section of the story she is described as a "fallen monument." Often she is referred to as a kind of deity, or at least as a representative, if not of the religious at least the political and social hierarchy of Jefferson: "the high and mighty Griersons." "When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows—sort of tragic and serene." And at death, catching up the earlier detail of "submerged in motionless water," Miss Emily is described as if she were in some sacred vault, "She died in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight." "They held the funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of flowers." The townspeople "waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground" before they opened the upstairs room. The room and the corpse are described as if they are the accouterments of an ancient tomb.

The violence of breaking down the door seemed to fill this room with pervading dust. A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's

toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. . . . The man himself lay in the bed. For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

Thus, with respect to the relationships of time and structure in "A Rose for Emily" Faulkner seems to be saying that although Miss Emily resists the passage of time, resists change, time ultimately fixes her in a rather perverse manner. In terms of life and existence, Miss Emily's past and her passages through and within time are "inescapable"; her struggles against time are of no avail. Time moves forward tranquilly, imperviously, and inescapably. Miss Emily is seen in the story, first and last, as she is in death. The struggle for existence and meaning in the now of every present is commendable, but to have too high a regard for the dearness of one's own life is ultimately to deny the possibility for its realization. To covet life too highly, thereby attempting to stop time, to freeze the flux of life, is to make of something "dear" a perversity.

Source: William V. Davis, "Another Flower for Faulkner's Bouquet: Theme and Structure in 'A Rose for Emily'," in *Notes on Mississippi Writers*, Vol. VII, No. 2, Fall, 1974, pp. 34-8.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, West discusses the contrast between the past and present in "A Rose for Emily."

The first clues to meaning in a short story usually arise from a detection of the principal contrasts which an author sets up. The most common, perhaps, are contrasts of character, but when characters are contrasted there is usually also a resultant contrast in terms of action. Since action reflects a moral or ethical state, contrasting action points to a contrast in ideological perspectives and hence toward the theme.

The principal contrast in William Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily" is between past time and present time: the past as represented in Emily herself, in Colonel Sartoris, in the old Negro servant, and in the Board of Aldermen who accepted the Colonel's attitude toward Emily and rescinded her taxes; the present is depicted through the unnamed narrator and is represented in the new Board of Aldermen, in Homer Barron (the representative or Yankee attitudes toward the Griersons and through them toward the entire South), and in what is called "the next generation with its more modern ideas."

Atmosphere is defined in the *Dictionary of World Literature* as "The particular world in which the events of a story or a play occur: time, place, conditions, and the attendant mood." When, as in "A Rose for Emily," the world depicted is a confusion between the past and the present, the atmosphere is one of distortion—of unreality. This unreal world results from the suspension of a natural time order. Normality consists in a decorous progression of the human being from birth, through youth, to age and finally death. Preciosity in children is as monstrous as idiocy in the adult, because both are *unnatural*. Monstrosity, however, is a sentimental subject for fiction unless it is the result of human action—the result of a willful attempt to circumvent time. When such circumvention produces acts of violence, as in "A Rose for Emily," the atmosphere becomes one of horror. Horror, however, represents only the extreme form of maladjusted nature. It is not produced in "A Rose for Emily" until the final act of violence h been disclosed. All that has gone before has prepared us by producing a general tone of mystery, foreboding, decay, etc., so that we may say the entire series of events that have gone before are "in key"—that is, they are depicted in a mood in which the final violence does not appear too shocking or horrible. We are inclined to say, "In such an atmosphere, anything may happen." Foreshadowing is often accomplished through atmosphere, and in this case the atmosphere prepares us for Emily's unnatural act at the end of the story. Actually, such preparation begins in the very first sentence:

When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in at least ten years.

Emily is portrayed as "a fallen monument," a *monument* for reasons which we shall examine later, *fallen* because she has shown herself susceptible to death (and decay) after all. In the mention of death, we are conditioned (as the psychologist says) for the more specific concern with it later on. The second paragraph depicts the essential ugliness of the contrast: the description of Miss Emily's house "lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores." (A juxtaposition of past and present.) We recognize this scene as an emblematic presentation of Miss Emily herself, suggested as it is through the words "stubborn and coquettish." The tone—and the contrast—is preserved in a description of the note which Miss Emily sent to the mayor, "a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink," and in the description of the interior of the house when the deputation from the Board of Aldermen visit her: "They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell." In the next paragraph a description of Emily discloses her similarity to the house: "She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue."

Emily had not always looked like this. When she was young and part of the world with which she was contemporary, she was, we are told, "a slender figure in white," as contrasted with her father, who is described as "a spraddled silhouette." In the picture of Emily and her father together, framed by the door, she frail and apparently hungering to participate in the life of her time, we have a reversal of the contrast which has already been presented and which is to be developed later. Even after her father's death, Emily is not monstrous, but rather looked like a girl "with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows—sort of tragic and serene." The suggestion is that she had already begun her entrance into that nether-world (a world which is depicted later as "rose-tinted"), but that she might even yet have been saved, had Homer Barron been another kind of man.

By the time the deputation from the new, progressive Board of Aldermen wait upon her concerning her delinquent taxes, however, she has completely retreated into her world of the past. There is no communication possible between her and them:

Her voice was dry and cold. "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves." "But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn't you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?" "I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said. "Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff. . . . I have no taxes in Jefferson." "But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We must go by the-" "See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson." "But Miss Emily-" "See Colonel Sartoris." [Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.] "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobe!" The Negro appeared. "Show these gentlemen out."

Just as Emily refused to acknowledge the death of her father, she now refuses to recognize the death of Colonel Sartoris. He had given his word, and ac cording to the traditional view, "his word" knew no death. It is the Past pitted against the Present— the Past with its social decorum, the Present with everything set down in "the books." Emily

dwells in the Past, always a world of unreality to us of the Present. Here are the facts which set the tone of the story and which create the atmosphere of unreality which surrounds it.

Such contrasts are used over and over again: the difference between the attitude of Judge Stevens (who is over eighty years old) and the attitude of the young man who comes to him about the "smell" at Emily's place. For the young man (who is a member of the "rising generation") it is easy. For him, Miss Emily's world has ceased to exist. The city's health regulations are on the books, "Dammit, sir," Judge Stevens replied, "will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?" Emily had given in to social pressure when she allowed them to bury her father, but she triumphed over society in the matter of the smell. She had won already when she bought the poison, refusing to comply with the requirements of the law, because for her they did not exist.

Such incidents seem, however, mere preparation for the final, more important contrast between Emily and Homer Barron. Emily is the town's aristocrat; Homer is a day laborer. Homer is an active man dealing with machinery and workmen— a man's man. He is a Yankee—a Northerner. Emily is a "monument" of Southern gentility. As such she is common property of the town, but in a special way—as an ideal of past values. Here the author seems to be commenting upon the complex relationship between the Southerner and his past and between the Southerner of the present and the Yankee from the North. She is unreal to her compatriots, yet she impresses them with her station, even at a time when they considered her *fallen*: "as if [her dignity] had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness." It appeared for a time that Homer had won her over, as though the demands of reality as depicted in him (earthiness) had triumphed over her withdrawal and seclusion. This is the conflict that is not resolved until the final scene. We can imagine, however, what the outcome might have been had Homer Barron, who was not a marrying man, succeeded, in the town's eyes, in seducing her (violating her world) and then deserted her. The view of Emily as a monument would have been destroyed. Emily might have become the object of continued gossip, but she would have become susceptible to the town's pity—therefore, human. Emily's world, however, continues to be the Past (in its extreme form it is death), and when she is threatened with desertion and disgrace, she not only takes refuge in that world, but she also takes Homer with her, in the only manner possible.

It is important too, to realize that during the period of Emily's courtship, the town became Emily's allies in a contest between Emily and her Grierson cousins, "because the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been." The cousins were protecting the general proprieties against which the town (and the times) was in gradual rebellion. Just as each succeeding generation rebels against its elders, so the town took sides with Emily against her relations. Had Homer Barron been the proper kind of man, it is implied, Miss Emily might have escaped both horns of the dilemma (her cousins' traditionalism and Homer's immorality) and become an accepted and respected member of the community. The town's attitude toward the Grierson cousins represents the usual ambiguous attitude of man toward the past: a mixture of veneration and rebelliousness. The unfaithfulness of Homer represents the final act in the drama of Emily's struggle to escape from the past. From the moment that she

realizes that he will desert her, tradition becomes magnified out of all proportion to life and death, and she conducts herself as though Homer really had been faithful— as though this view represented reality.

Miss Emily's position in regard to the specific problem of time is suggested in the scene where the old soldiers appear at her funeral. There are, we are told, two views of time: (1) the world of the present, viewing time as a mechanical progression in which the past is a diminishing road, never to be encountered again; (2) the world of tradition, viewing the past as a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from (us) now by the narrow bottleneck of the most recent decade of years. The first is the view of Homer Barron and the modern generation in Jefferson. The second is the view of the older members of the Board of Aldermen and of the confederate soldiers. Emily holds the second view, except that for her there is no bottleneck dividing her from the meadow of the past.

Emily's small room above stairs has become that timeless meadow. In it, the living Emily and the dead Homer have remained together as though not even death could separate them. It is the monstrousness of this view which creates the final atmosphere of horror, and the scene is intensified by the portray al of the unchanged objects which have surrounded Homer in life. Here he lay in the roseate atmosphere of Emily's death-in-life: "What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust." The symbols of Homer's life of action have become mute and silent. Contrariwise, Emily's world, though it had been inviolate while she was alive, has been invaded after her death—the whole gruesome and unlovely tale unfolded.

In its simplest sense, the story says that death conquers all. But what is death? Upon one level, death is the past, tradition, whatever is opposite to the present. In the specific setting of this story, it is the past of the South in which the retrospective survivors of the War deny changing customs and the passage of time. Homer Barron, the Yankee, lived in the present, ready to take his pleasure and depart, apparently unwilling to consider the possibility of defeat, either by tradition (the Griersons) or by time (death) itself. In a sense, Emily conquered time, but only briefly and by retreating into her rose-tinted world of the past, a world in which death was denied at the same time that it is shown to have existed. Such retreat, the story implies, is hopeless, since everyone (even Emily) is finally subjected to death and the invasion of his world by the clamorous and curious inhabitants of the world of the present.

In these terms, it might seem that the story is a comment upon tradition and upon those people who live in a dream world of the past. But is it not also a comment upon the present? There is some justification for Emily's actions. She is a tragic—and heroic—figure. In the first place, she has been frustrated by her father, prevented from participating in the life of her contemporaries. When she attempts to achieve freedom, she is betrayed by a man who represents the new morality, threatened by disclosure and humiliation. The grounds of the tragedy is depicted in the scene already referred to between Emily and the deputation from the Board of Aldermen: for the new generation,

the word of Colonel Sartoris meant nothing. This was a new age, a different time; the present was not bound by the promises of the past. For Emily, however, the word of the Colonel was everything. The tax notice was but a scrap of paper.

Atmosphere, we might say, is nothing but the fictional reflection of man's attitude toward the state of the universe. The atmosphere of classic tragedy inveighed against the ethical dislocation of the Grecian world merely by portraying such dislocation and depicting man's tragic efforts to conform both to the will of the gods and to the demands of his own contemporary society. Such dislocation in the modern world is likely to be seen mirrored in the natural universe, with problems of death and time representing that flaw in the golden bowl of eighteenth and nineteenth-century natural philosophy which is the inheritance of our times. Perhaps our specific dilemma is the conflict of the pragmatic present against the set mores of the past. Homer Barron was an unheroic figure who put too much dependence upon his self-centered and rootless philosophy, a belief which suggested that he could take whatever he wanted without considering any obligation to the past (tradition) or to the future (death). Emily's resistance is heroic. Her tragic flaw is the conventional pride: she undertook to regulate the natural time-universe. She acted as though death did not exist, as though she could retain her unfaithful lover by poisoning him and holding his physical self prisoner in a world which had all of the appearances of reality except that most necessary of all things—life.

The extraction of a statement of theme from so complex a subject matter is dangerous and never wholly satisfactory. The subject, as we have seen, is concerned not alone with man's relationship to death, but with his relationship as it refers to all the facets of social intercourse. The theme is not one directed at presenting an attitude of Southerner to Yankee, or Yankee to Southerner, as has been hinted at in so many discussions of William Faulkner. The Southern Problem is one of the objective facts with which the theme is concerned, but the theme itself transcends it. Wallace Stevens is certainly right when he says that a theme may be emotive as well as intellectual and logical, and it is this recognition which explains why the extraction of a logical statement of theme is so delicate and dangerous an operation: the story is its theme as the life of the body is the body.

Nevertheless, in so far as a theme represents the meaning of a story, it can be observed in logical terms; indeed, these are the only terms in which it can be observed for those who, at a first or even a repeated reading, fail to recognize the implications of the total story. The logical statement, in other words, may be a clue to the total, emotive content. In these terms, "A Rose for Emily" would seem to be saying that man must come to terms both with the past and the present; for to ignore the first is to be guilty of a foolish innocence, to ignore the second is to become monstrous and inhuman, above all to betray an excessive pride (such as Emily Grierson's) before the humbling fact of death. The total story says what has been said in so much successful literature, that man's plight is tragic, but that there is heroism in an attempt to rise above it.

Source: Ray B. West, Jr., "Atmosphere and Theme in Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily'," in *William Faulkner: Four Decades of Criticism*, edited by Linda Welshimer Wagner, Michigan State University Press, 1973, pp.192-98.

Adaptations

"A Rose for Emily" was adapted for film by Chubbuck Cinema Co. It was produced an directed by Lyndon Chubbuck and written by H. Kaye Dyal. Anjelica Huston plays the role of Miss Emily.

Topics for Further Study

Except for the title, roses are never mentioned in the story. Why do you think Faulkner chose this title? Do you think the rose symbolizes anything in the story?

As the narrator is telling the story of how Emily's taxes were remitted, he remarks that Colonel Sartoris is the father of an edict declaring that ". . . no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron." Why do you think the narrator mentions this law? What does this remark tell us about the Colonel Sartoris and the narrator?

Look up the definition of "eccentric" in the dictionary. Find examples of eccentric characters in literature and film. Compare your examples with Emily Grierson. What qualities do these characters share? What is there to admire or dislike about them?

Only once in the story does the narrator place an event in a specific year. Find that event and year and see if you can put together a chronology. Does it seem consistent and realistic? Why or why not

Compare and Contrast

1930s: The 1929 collapse of the stock market in the U.S. leads to the Great Depression. Unemployment grows from 5 million in 1930 to 13 million in 1932 (24.9% of the population).

1990s: The U.S. economy booms. The stock market climbs to unprecedented levels, while unemployment is at a quarter-century low.

1930s: The thirties are part of a three-decade long golden age of radio. Families gather around the radio after dinner to listen to news, sports events, and dramas such as "The Shadow" and "Little Orphan Annie."

1990s: Media is pervasive in late twentiethcentury life. The choices seem endless; radio, television (with hundreds of channels), film, and the Internet provide people with information and entertainment twenty-four hours a day.

1930s: Bruno Hauptmann is tried for the kidnapping and murder of the Lindbergh baby. (Charles Lindbergh was the first man to fly across the Atlantic Ocean on a solo voyage.) Although many believe that there is a rush to judgement in Hauptmann's conviction, he is executed in 1936 via the electric chair. The press dub the proceedings the "Trial of the Century."

1990s: Former football star O.J. Simpson is arrested for the brutal murder of his ex-wife Nicole and her friend, Ron Goldman. The most incendiary topics of the time are involved: race, class, sex, gender, and fame. Simpson is acquitted (although a later jury finds him liable for the murders in a civil case). The press dub the proceedings the "Trial of the Centur

What Do I Read Next?

Collected Stories (1950) by William Faulkner is an exhaustive collection of his short fiction. The volume includes "Barn Burning" and many other stories about Yoknapatawpha County. *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) by William Faulkner is the novel that established his reputation as an important writer. This experimental novel concerns the decline of the once proud Compson family of Yoknapatawpha County. The story is told in four sections, each one detailing the disintegration of the Compsons from a different character's viewpoint. Faulkner used this technique in other novels as well, including As I Lay Dying (1930) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936).

Many of the works of Flannery O'Connor are in the same Southern Gothic tradition as "A Rose for Emily." Her short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1955) details a vacationing family's doomed encounter with an escaped criminal known as the Misfit.

Southern playwright Tennessee Williams examined many of the same themes in his work as Faulkner. His play *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) is the story of aging, tarnished Southern belle Blanche DuBois and the tense relationship she has with her brutish brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski.

Some of Truman Capote's fiction concerns life in the South in the 1930s. His novel, *The Grass Harp* (1951), tells the story of a group of eccentrics who disrupt their community when they retreat to the woods and begin living in a treehouse. The 1996 film *Kissed*, directed by Lynne Stopkewich and written by Barbara Gowdy, Angus Fraser, and Stopkewich, is the story of a woman (Molly Parker) whose obsession with death as a young girl leads her to a job in a mortuary and necrophilia.

Further Study

Allen, Dennis W. "Horror and Perverse Delight: Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily'." *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Winter 1984, pp. 685-96.

A fine overview of the story, featuring an in-depth psychological analysis of the character of Emily.

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This exhaustive study written by one of Faulkner's colleagues at the University of Virginia is considered by most critics to be the definitive Faulkner biography. Jacobs, John T. "Ironic Allusions in A Rose for Emily'." *Notes on Mississippi Writers*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1982, pp. 77-79. Jacobs provides a critical analysis of the role that the character of Homer Barron plays in the story.

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Winchell, Mark Royden. "For All the Heart's Endeavor: Romantic Pathology in Browning and Faulkner." *Notes on Mississippi Writers*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1983, pp. 57-63.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

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Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

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- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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