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Struggle for Companionship Rather than Aristocracy: An Analysis of Emily in Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*

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Abstract:

“A Rose for Emily” is the first published and one of the most read creations of the American artistic tower William Faulkner. The setting of post-civil war America has been used effectively in the given Gothic tale. The prime aim of the present paper is to study the character of Miss Emily consequently explores the root causes of her persist struggles to grip the time and forbid changes. The study also clears the notion behind murder of Homer and reservation of his corpse for a life span. Along the narrative, she attempted to clutch the time, relished in the company of her father. However, it is her yearning for love and companionship rather than inclination for the southern aristocracy, which prompt her to do so. The study also discusses her choice of death over life by intercepting herself from the external world and lingered in an elusive sphere where her father and Homer both were lodged even though lifeless.

Keywords: change, life, death, struggle, companionship, past, present.

One of the 20th century's leading authors, William Faulkner is principally known for portraying the emotional transition faced by southerners as they emerged from an elapsed era to a new, further modern period. The offered story “A Rose for Emily” is a much-anthologized among the other highly praised works of Faulkner. As a successor of an old southern family, William Faulkner was born in Oxford, Mississippi in 1897. In addition to being a southerner, Faulkner experiences a primordial account of the conflict between past and present. He witnessed the troublesome struggles people face during that period: the struggles to survive, the struggle to be treated as an equal, the struggle to clenching the aged paths and assign into the younger one. Faulkner brings this theme to life in “A Rose for Emily” but with several new prospects specifically the personality of Miss Emily.

Emily is the protagonist of the story and undoubtedly the most centered attractions of the Faulkner's fictional city, Jefferson, Mississippi that has been employed as a context in numerous of his works. Being the last generation of a southern aristocratic family ruined by the war, Emily is a mysterious spinster who rarely went out, had never been married, moreover deceased alone at the age of 74. Her entire existence was puzzled for the townspeople to piece together as the story has an abundance of mysteries and certain of them remained unsolved till the close. Therefore, it provides an opportunity for the readers to scrutinize the story from various aspects. Over the course of story Miss Emily keeps on struggling to clasp time and forbid changes. Her strife is not that as one can easily come across in other prominent works of Faulkner, however a

significant change has been highlighted in the case of Emily as the struggle to control time is not in favor of the old aristocracy and traditions instead to control the time when her father was alive. She wants to remain alive that loving and protective atmosphere around herself.

An irregular timeline has been exerted to highlight the intrinsic struggle between the fantasy world, she originates for herself in addition to the reality of life. In the first instance, she emerges to the reader as a proud, noble woman yet by the story's conclusion; the reader can go back through the narrative and identify several episodes where Miss Emily's character and behavior hinted at the intense longing for an emotional support and companionship. With Miss Emily, Faulkner himself pitied as he didn't portray her as a haughty, aristocratic southern woman. Perceived by the townsfolk as an icon and a monument, but deep down, she was a broken woman, shielding herself from the changes of the world by repressing the changes and instead living in a make-believe world. Possibility of mental illness can be, even if the town desired to renounce this fact and leave her intact as a social idol.

The only child of her father, Miss Emily is furthermore the last generation of a grand family ruined by the war. So taking up Emily under the control and care, Mr. Grierson nurtured her consequently implanted his archaic South values, manners, and etiquettes in her. All her young South suitors have been eliminated by her father apparently since they could not evaluate up to his elderly South standards. In those years, townspeople generally regarded Emily as an arrogant but true daughter of Mr. Grierson, an epitome of former southern aristocracy. Being an acquiescent child of her rigid and grievous father, Emily always showed the utmost respect for him. However, she had wonderful suitors as well as symbols of her healthy future at one point of time, but her father sent them away and she did nothing to stop him. The narrator outlines, "Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such. We had long thought of them 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 back-flung front door." (Collected Stories 123) It is suggested by his turned back and the horsewhip that he was always being indifferent towards the emotional well-being of his daughter. He strictly commands life and personality of Emily without taking care of her future and chase away every suitors of her.

Although Mr. Grierson adores his nobility and traditions more than his only daughter yet he is the only source of life the poor girl know. Until he was existent, she dwells similar a little girl in lap of her father, although still single at the age of thirty, which is not common at the time of the story take place. At that time girls or women were believed to be dwelling under protection or shelter of their father, brother or husband. Emily's father has always been there for her, even when she does not want him to be. One day unexpectedly when her father expired, she came to recognize the actual situation of her life and baffled into a state of denial. Her life changed thoroughly after the death of her father. Miss Emily herself chooses to renounce the fate of death,

furthermore abjured to survive in this world lonely at the age of thirty without a husband and even a single suitor in hand. Therefore, she determined to avoid the fact that he is now gone and she is alone. The sudden demise of Mr. Grierson causing her to be exceedingly afraid of being alone.”as is our custom Miss Emily met them at the door dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body.”(Collected Stories 123) She Emily tried to defy death by holding on to her father’s corpse and treating it as if he were still living. To embrace the time and keep her father alive in a self-made fantasy world, was her preference. The particular incident constructed a mental milestone in her life on which she would continue to build upon in an unhealthy manner. Emily is being clanged to the controlling paternal figure, whose denial and control became the only-yet extreme-form of love she knew. She gives up his body only reluctantly however, the ashes of her father interred into God’s acre, but Emily keeps him alive throughout her life. Faulkner says, “We did not say that she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.” (Collected Stories 124)

During the years, she keeps a crayon portrait of him to watch over her even after his passing. Furthermore, a symbol of Mr. Grierson, the portrait referred to amidst significant events in the story. When the Board of Aldermen comes to meet Emily concerning her unpaid taxes and while Homer Barron first enters the Grierson home it is present. Although the townspeople would think that she will be less humanized after her father’s demise and starts to mingle with them, but all proved wrong by her as she maintained the way of her living the same as it was when her father was alive. “.....as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die”. (Collected Stories 127) No change has ever been made in her antique house and maintained as well while every other house acquired change completely over these long years. As interpret by Faulkner “only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps-an eyesore among eyesores.”(Collected Stories 119) The house that shields Emily from the real world indicate the mind of her: shuttered, dusty, and dark. As years go on and the times begin to change, she retreats into her house, refusing to go along with the new styles of living. “The disruption of a traditional family, shown in the Griersons, epitomizes the Southerner’s loss of their property. Emily’s house is “symbolic of the isolation she comes to live in.” (Skei 310)

When the next generation, came with new mayors and aldermen, with their more modern ideas, they penned her a formal letter, asking about the issue related to taxes in addition to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. After one week they collect a reply “..... note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.”(Collected Stories 120) While the alderman went to her house to discuss the matter of taxes, She even settled that by telling them

to confer Colonel Sartoris, who had been dead nearly ten years ago. The other event which shows her clinginess for time is that she wouldn't allow the city to put numbers on her house for mail. "Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them". (Collected Stories 128)

While breathing with memories of her late father, one day Emily looks out of the window of her imaginary world and notices somewhat that she might like about the change or the new south. The town had just let the contracts for pathways so along with the Construction Company, riggers and mules and machinery a foreman also comes as a fresh hope for Emily, his name is Homer Barron, a Northern laborer symbolized development or change. Homer is "a Yankee- a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face"(Collected Stories 124). Emily deeply needed to "become humanized" and love someone and to be loved since the passing of her father "left her all alone and a pauper". Emily becomes friendly with Homer Barron. "It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness."(Collected Stories 125) A working class fellow, he was not admissible for Emily by furthest standards, but she never cared about all this. As her yearning for companionship is so intensified that she wants to win him at any cost, lacking care of her purported southern nobility. The name of Homer is not reputable as when she had first begun to be noticed with Homer Barron, we had said, "She will marry him." Then we said, "She will persuade him yet," because Homer himself had remarked-"*he* liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club- that he was not the marrying man."(Collected Stories 126) The writer portrayed him as a fellow never meant for marrying. Sexually furthermore racially Homer is not so clearly identified as his appearance is described, "a big, dark, ready man," (Collected Stories 124) preferring the boys and mixing with "the niggers." (Collected Stories 124) His name is also similar in its sound to "homo" moreover Faulkner uses this kind of pun frequently in other works, too. However the question remains unanswered forever, whether the writer indicates a person who is gay or rather just a cheerful bachelor who want to stay away from the responsibilities of a wedlock.

An excellent time they enjoyed together, but life is not that smooth for Miss Emily. With Homer, she found love, but he did not. His reason behind the friendship with Miss Emily is purely self-seeking such as doing so grant him identification and a worthy prominence in the town, whereas Emily's life possessed significance equivalent to a national issue for townspeople. Having desire to be viewed out with her meanwhile he wants to stay away from any commitment in the slightest. He wants the popularity and the dignity that pass on with Miss Emily and her title, but still wishes to have his drinks with the boys and be a "man's man," but Emily is not ready to lose Homer as she lost her father. This time she seized matters into her own hands for the sake of preventing the change in their relationship from befalling. Her desire or should say helplessness to live with a person even after his death comes upon again and this time more vigorously.

Emily must have tasted the harsh fact that the end of her relationship with Homer was figuring near, otherwise she would not decide to purchase arsenic from the local pharmacy. Although her act makes the townspeople assumed that she wants to dispossess her own life, but reversely she was plotting to control her relationship with Homer irrespective of any situation. “THE NEXT day we all said, “She will kill herself” and we said it would be the best thing”. (Collected Stories 126) In killing Homer, she was able to keep him near herself by dragging him in the same imaginary world she kept her father alive. However, she is unfamiliar with the fact that in reality Homer’s lifelessness rendered him permanently aloof from her. Emily buys a silver toilet set monogrammed with Homer’s initials, and new clothes that forced the townspeople to imagine their upcoming wedding. “Miss Emily had been to the jeweler's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H. B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing, including a nightshirt”(Collected Stories 126) But once again, they have been proved wrong and a day Homer disappeared unexpectedly after last caught entering into Emily’s house.

The absurd marriage with Homer or his corpse has disclosed her complex attempt to fuse life and death. However, it may be possible that Emily was not consciously aware about the lifelessness of Homer and may have continued to regard him as a living being; this could aid understanding why she slept with him every night, even though the flesh has long been gone from his bones, and he could not have looked like a living man. In her visionary sphere she was fascinated exceedingly that never admit the death of anyone either of her father or Colonel Sartoris or Homer, after whose ill fate, she is the only one. She perplexed in past memories of his father and Skelton of Homer immensely that stopped to take care of her body as she abandoned the difference of being alive or dead. She appears to be unaware of the reality that constantly threatens to break through her carefully sealed boundaries. The past is not a cloudy glint from her, but an ever-present, peaceful reality. Emily’s house and particularly her horrid bridal chamber are an extreme attempt to stop time and prevent change, although doing so comes at the expense of Homer’s life and her own life which could be positioned above than the present one. When people come to meet her they also felt that death immersed at her house everywhere “a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse--a close, dank smell.”(Collected Stories 120) Above the life, she chooses death by means of intercepting herself from the external world and lingered in an elusive sphere where her father and Homer both were lodged even though lifeless. Death is to be found more controllable and reliable for her than a life which is full of uncertainties.

The appearance which diminishing gradually is the outcome of life she inhabits moreover surrounded with Skelton, lifeless dogmas, dust and former reminiscences. The description of her look is being applied by Faulkner, to illustrate variations in her transitional psychotic condition from a young maiden of the thirties with hope and happiness to an embittered elderly woman. As

the fiction opens up Faulkner termed her “a fallen monument” (Collected Stories 119) and certainly she is not considered as a living creature by the townspeople. She is being reflected by them as “..... a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town.” (Collected Stories 119) In the early thirties, Faulkner portrayed her as “a slender figure in white” which is an emblem of the virginal attributed young women is presumed to have at the time. A chaste, virtuous, slim and attractive maiden as subsequently it was said that she possessed plenty of suitors. After the demise of her father, the first time she came out into society and her look likewise her psychic condition was entirely changed. “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”. (Collected Stories 124) In this figure, Emily feigned the similitude of a girl rather than of a sexually mature woman of thirty as she lost the hope for a normal life as a woman. The final image of Emily as a hoary woman, delineated in the doorway whilst discussing her taxes, contrasted sharply with the portrait of her youth: “They rose when she entered—a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her”. (Collected Stories 121) The overall replica, however, was of death as Emily now wore black instead of white. Black, which come out with its traditional suggestion of evil, hopelessness and of funeral. As suggested by her appearance, she is attending the lifelong funeral of her father, of Homer, of her shattered life and furthermore of herself. “She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another. . . Then, they could hear the invisible ticking at the end of the gold chain. . . Her voice was dry and cold” (Collected Stories 121) The figures of death emerged best frequently: her pallid complexion; her drowned, bloated body; her lost eyes; and the cold, dry voice. Not only had Emily been living with death, literally in the form of Homer's corpse, although somewhat essential had died inward her. The dominion of death prevails in her appearance, in her attitude, in her archaic shape calligraphy, in faded ink and moreover in her decayed house. For Emily, time and its inescapable shifts had died as the watch had faded vaguely into her belt. The final portrait describes that she became metaphorical, a living corpse.

With Miss Emily himself Faulkner pitied as he didn't portray her as snobbish, elite southern women, but as a victim of fate who drove into insanity by whatever happened to her. Time is not a calculated progression for Emily as her life in the fantasy world endured unstirred by reality. The recurring posture in the window represents a picture of the past. “Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol.” (Collected Stories 123). For Emily the past is not a diminishing road, but, instead, a gigantic meadow which no winter ever quite touches, moreover a meadow, all time, past and present, merged into one, and change ceased to exist. Although she failed in defying of time and consequently died at seventy-four in “a bridal” (Collected Stories 129) room. The flux of time resembles to have stopped in Emily's

consciousness. The complexities of the story which has its own cyclic structure reveal the existence of time lag, as shown in Emily's static image and her demented behavior. Apparently, Emily has stopped her psychological time by design, although failing in stopping her physical time. The merging of life and death authorized Emily to control the pain of loss-the loss of her father, to whom she adhered; material and sentimental love; and the accustomed feature of a woman's life

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