

A rose for emily

The short story, "A Rose for Emily," by William Faulkner is a nineteenth-century romanticism piece dealing with a woman's struggle with the transition into a new era. The main character, Miss Emily is a stubborn and sheltered woman who refuses, or perhaps cannot except that the world around her is changing. She lives in her father's house in isolation with her Negro servant Tobe seemingly unaffected by time. Miss Emily was raised by her father and was taught that she was of a higher class than the rest of the town. The Griersons, once a prestigious family name, becomes part of the past and no longer holds such resonance. She was continuously reminded that no man was good enough for her, which then led to a life without the love of another man besides her father. Once her father dies, she refuses to come to terms with his death and repeatedly claims that her father is still alive. Her denial of death as well as time due to her life of isolation and warped mental state is directly related to her upbringing and sheltered lifestyle from her father. Instead of accepting events in her life that bring change, Miss Emily is determined to force her surroundings to stay familiar.

Within this short story there are many characters that bring meaning to the plot. Along with Miss Emily and her father the other main characters include Homer Barron, Miss Emily's servant Tobe, Colonel Sartoris, Judge Stevens, and Miss Emily's mentally ill great aunt Wyatt. Although these characters do not share equal amounts of contributions to the story they all were given names, which implies that they had a significant purpose throughout the story. The secondary characters are people of the town who include, complaining neighbors, the druggist, the four men who poured the lime in the basement, the Baptist minister, his wife, Miss Emily's two female cousins, the mayor, and the aldermen. Through his characters Faulkner contrasted the past and present era. Miss Emily represented the past as well as her father, Colonel Sartoris, and Tobe. These characters defined what the past represented and how it was going to be continued. However, the present was expressed through Homer Barron, the new Board of Aldermen, and the new generation of the town's people. These particular characters supported progress and change for the community as well as for Miss Emily by representing the present time.

Although not a named character, the narration is done in third person from the perspective of a resident from the town Emily resides in. The reader becomes a member of society understanding the views of the other town's people. If the story were told in first person through Miss Emily's perspective, the story would take on a new conflict. Since this is not the case, the reader is unable to fully understand Miss Emily's mindset and reasoning for her actions. Although the reader does not know what Miss Emily is thinking they learn about events in her past that help shape her character. Because the reader is held back from certain information, the story becomes a suspenseful mystery. The language of "A Rose for Emily" is descriptive as well as symbolic. Faulkner represents Emily's rejection to change and wish to live in the past through dialog and description of setting. For example, when the mayor comes to her house to discuss her taxes, after sending her three notices in the mail, she repeats that her father took care of it with Colonel Sartoris and does not owe anything. The words the author chooses to describe the house and Emily coincide. The house is described as having a smell of dust and disuse. In the next paragraph she is described as looking bloated like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Both descriptions of the setting

and of Miss Emily are dark and morbid. Faulkner's use of language and choice of words justify the tone and foreshadowing of the story.

The setting of Faulkner's short story takes place in a town called Jefferson. The house of Miss Emily was described on page 154 as a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been the most select street. On the top of page 155 the narrator explains how garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood and only Miss Emily's house was left lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores. The setting is quite significant to the meaning of the text in the fact that the author shows how the town has transformed while the Grierson residence still remains decaying.

This story starts out at the present time after Miss Emily had already died but quickly moves into a flashback, where the reader is taken back in time to catch up to the present time. The flashback begins with the exposition. The reader is given information about Miss Emily's history and explains the strong interest from the community in regards to her death. As the reader learns more about Miss Emily several complications start to arise which are her refusal to pay taxes and the offensive odors that start leaking from her house. From the conflicts a series of events started to occur such as the neighbor's unhappiness and loss of patience with Miss Emily. The neighbors knew from past experience that the smells that came from her house most likely was the result of her unwillingness to dispose the remains of someone that was living in the house with her. The only solution to take care of the smell was to sprinkle lime in her basement. The turning point of the story occurred when Miss Emily went to the druggist to purchase poison. She did not give a purpose to why she needed arsenic. However, this was a central event that foreshadowed what was to come. Unlike most stories, the climax of this story did not come till the last page. The story caught the reader up to the point when Miss Emily expired. After she was buried a few of the town's people went up to the room that they knew no one had been in for forty years. The body of the missing Homer Barron was found with an indentation on the pillow next to the corpse with an iron-gray hair lying upon it. Although there is no more text to give an explanation the denouement is up to the reader.

Symbolism is seen throughout the entire short story. Most of the symbolism that is used represents the contrast of Miss Emily's sense of time to reality. Specific characters and descriptions of setting show the difference of the world Miss Emily was mentally living in and the world that really existed. Other symbols such as the crayon portrait that Emily kept of her father represented how important he was in her life and how she will continue to remain in the distant past. The color rose found at the end of the story in the room where Homer was found represented love. Smell was one of the most important symbols throughout the story. The smell of the house, dusty, dank and the smell of disuse were used to express how the house was an example of the lack of progression on Emily's part. Along with the house smelling of dust, the offensive odor from the decaying corpses of her father and Homer protruding from her house was symbolic of her unwillingness to let go.

Throughout William Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily" time and isolation are the continuous themes. Emily's father raised her to believe that she was better than everyone

else and did not allow her to have social interaction with any other men in her life. Because the other person she loved was her father, she was not willing to let him go when he died. She continued to live only believing the things that her father had taught her which prevented her to progress with the time. When she did meet someone who released her from her isolation, she wanted to prevent him from leaving by temporarily cheating death. After years of attempting to defeat time, Miss Emily fell victim to it. She met the same fate as her father, her house, and Homer Barron.