

Wanting Something You can't have: Babylon revisited vs. A Rose for Emily

There are many similarities and differences between the two main characters in the short stories "Babylon Revisited" and "A Rose for Emily". In this paper I will compare and contrast the main characters' situations in each story. I will first tell the differences between the plots and what each character is striving to achieve. I will conclude by relating the similarities and differences between both characters wanting something they can't have.

The main character in "Babylon Revisited", Charlie Wales, has come to Paris to try to get custody of his daughter Honoria from his late wife's sister Marion, to whom the child was entrusted after Charlie fell apart several years before due to alcoholism. In order to get Honoria back, he needs to present a facade of being much more "whole" than he really is. He is fully aware of the split between the "fantasy" he has created due to once being an alcoholic and the reality he now lives due to being sober. Charlie is now sincerely trying to re-invent himself and wants a chance at caring for his daughter. Nonetheless, this is a world his sister-in-law, Marion, would never be able to understand. Marion definitely has no time for Charlie, and one can see that her animosity stems from the time when he and her sister Helen were having marital problems. She refers to an incident when Charlie locked Helen out of the house in the snow, apparently a relatively short time before Helen's death. "When she was dying she asked me to look out for Honoria. If you hadn't been in a sanitarium then, it might have helped matters," Marion stated (page 386). Although there is no real medical connection between the snow

incident and Helen's heart attack, Marion still connects the two events in her mind because they occurred about the same time, and unjustifiably holds Charlie responsible for the death of his wife. Since Marion sees her dead sister as a victim, she sees Charlie as the villain. The possibility that Helen could have played an active part in the breakup of their marriage never crosses Marion's mind. Now, Charlie has to prove himself to Marion in order to get what he wants, his child and her love. "I'm able to give her certain advantages now. I'm going to take a French governess to Prague with me. I've got a lease on a new apartment," Charlie proclaimed (page 386).

In "A Rose for Emily", Emily Grierson, an aging spinster in Jefferson whose death and funeral drew the attention of the entire town, the narrator, which is considered "the town" and town gossip, conveys key moments in Emily's life, including the death of her father and a brief romance with a Yankee road paver, Homer Barron. The house she lives in smells rotten of dust and disuse. Emily is alone in the house, which represents her being alone in the "old south" and never wanting change. If Homer had triumphed in seducing Emily and deserting her, Emily would have become susceptible to the town's pity, therefore being thrown in the present world. However Emily's world was already in the past. When she was threatened with desertion and disgrace, she not only took refuge in that world but also took Homer with her in the only manner possible, his death. Homer represented the modern generation. Emily's room above the stairs was the place where she could feel comfortable and not have to worry about change. In the room, the living Emily and the dead Homer remained together as though not even death could separate them. Emily conquered time and tried to get what she wanted, which was Homer's love and attention. She only briefly conquered time and killed Homer and had no other choice

but to resort to retreating into her own world of the past. This was a world in which death was denied at the same time that it was shown to have existed. Emily was finally subject to death and to the invasion of her world by the curious inhabitants of the “new world” which was the present. "When Miss Emily died, the whole town went to her funeral...the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant...had seen in at least ten years"(page 395).

The two characters are different because Charlie wants to love and care for his daughter, which is his bloodline and worship, whereas Emily wants Homer as her husband because of her fear of being lonely, afraid and trapped in the south without change and without a husband. Charlie tries his best to achieve his goal of getting what he wants by becoming sober and presenting himself to Honoria's Aunt Marion wholeheartedly. Honoria's Aunt Marion and Charlie do not see eye to eye because of the death of Helen. Charlie's trip back to Paris to present his case to Marion is genuinely planned. He came to Marion with respect until she would not give him a fair chance to explain that he was on the right track and that the death of his wife was not his fault. All Charlie wanted was another chance with his daughter. He started off humble and respectful until Marion kept steering the custody battle toward the night Helen was locked out into the snow. He became irrational by continuing to argue with the stubborn Aunt Marion. Charlie did not let his guard down and allow Marion time to reevaluate her foolish grudges, and maybe that would have been the time that Marion could see that Honoria wanted to be with her father.

For a while Emily convinced herself that the townspeople still respected her. She came from a well to do family and her father raised her in a way that she was obligated to find someone close to his importance. She never really intended on Homer being the person to replace her father in the eyes of the town. He couldn't have replaced him because he was neither a son of the south nor a pillar of the community. Emily only considered Homer's role as simply a spouse, filling a vacancy where she needed to. Emily only had Homer to ask for permission to have his love. When Homer turned her down, she did not accept the fact that he was not interested and took his love and his life selfishly. She realized his presence would cause her to be pitied and laughed at. She could not bear the reality of being embarrassed, so she took desperate measures in order to savage the rest of her reputation she thought she had in the community. All Emily wanted was to be happy, but she went about reaching her happiness in the worst way. Her irrational decisions did not help her get what she wanted, which was love from Homer. The decisions she made caused her more pain and a rather tainted reputation in the community. The people in her community did not show up at her funeral on behalf of remorse and feeling, but due to being "nosy" and wanting to see the talk of the town for themselves.

The two characters are alike because both want the love and attention from people they put all of their life into. Charlie and Emily are both using the people they want to spend the rest of their lives with as their last chances. Getting custody of Honoria will be Charlie's last chance to keep his life on track whereas marrying Homer and living a life of fulfillment is Emily's last chance to get partially into the "new world." Charlie wants to have custody over Honoria because she will be his reminder that he has to stay on the

right track and remain sober. Honoria is his balance between staying sober and retreating back into his “fantasy” that he enters while he is drunk. In Emily’s case, Homer is her balance between her acceptance to change and her devotion to the “old south.”