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ENC 1102

21 March 2022

### Summary and Analysis of Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"

#### Summary

"A Rose for Emily" was published in 1930 and written by Nobel Prize author William Faulkner. The story was written in five parts and takes place in a fictional town perhaps in Mississippi where Faulkner had grown up. Faulkner opened the story with Part I introducing the main character and the anonymous narrator: "When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral..." Faulkner described the town as decaying and provided historical information with words such as Union, Confederate soldiers, and the battle of Jefferson. Readers are informed about the higher social status of Emily who refused to pay taxes nor recognized the authority of the town.

In Part II, the narrator recalls a time in the past when a horrible smell emanated from Emily's house. The townspeople had tried to find the source of the smell and devised a way to reduce it by sneaking onto the property and placing lime around it. The narrator as a voice of the townspeople tells of Emily's strict father who disapproved of any man wanting to court his daughter, the mental illness in Emily's family, and her unwillingness to allow the corpse of her father to be taken away.

In Part III, the narrator informs readers the town is being upgraded with new sidewalks; hence, unknown men and machinery have been brought into town for the upgrade. Townspeople become alarmed when Emily is seen out on the town with the project foreman, Homer Barron. At the end of Part III, readers learn that that Emily has succeeded in buying

poison from the town druggist which is placed in a box labeled "For rats."

In Part IV, the narrator speaking on behalf of the town reveals that the ministers get Emily's cousins in Alabama to come stay with her for a while. The townspeople watch and wonder if Homer Barron will come back since construction ended., if the cousins will leave, if Emily will marry him, or if she will kill herself. Then, readers are informed that a neighbor has seen Homer Barron enter Emily's home from the back door. After that, Homer Barron is never seen again. Time passes in the story, and readers learn that Emily opened up her house for a brief time to teach china painting to the young girls of the town. After, Emily remains in the home and has little contact with outsiders. Years pass like this, and she dies.

In Part V, Faulkner takes readers back to the beginning of the story which opened with a funeral. The narrator reveals that the two female cousins have returned to give the funeral. After Emily is interred, the townspeople enter the house, explore it, and encounter a locked room that they break into. The decayed corpse of Homer Barron is found on the bed with evidence that Emily had laid there, too.

### Analysis

One of the themes in the story is the idea that under the restrictive circumstances for single women at the time living in a small town, the townspeople could play a role in driving a young woman mad even to the point of contemplating suicide or murder. The townspeople are guilty in the sense because they have made Emily into an object of intense attention even to the point of trying to set up her life. Faulkner has the narrator speak on behalf of the townspeople using first the person plural viewpoint. For example, in Part V, it reads "Already, we knew there was one room in that region above the stairs which no one has seen in forty years..."

The townspeople are portrayed as acting together as they gossip about Miss Emily.

Sometimes the group is defined more specifically as shown in the following excerpt: “the ladies began to say that it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people. The men did not want to interfere” (453). Furthermore, a “Baptist minister” goes and talks to her, and his wife writes to her relatives to have them come visit. Although these seem to be individual actions, the whole town is presented as participating in them; for example, the narrator explains, “So, she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments” after the relatives arrived (453). Throughout the story, this “we” seems to be a large force that tries to shape Miss Emily. This “we” brings in the relatives who, in turn, make Miss Emily define her relationship with Homer and push her towards murder.

### Works Cited

Faulkner, William. "A Rose for Emily," *Literature for Composition*. Ed. Sylvan Barnet, William Burto, William E. Cain, and Cheryl L. Nixon. 11th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2017. 451-56. Print.