

The Symbolic Significance of the Rose in *A Rose for Emily*

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内容摘要: *A Rose for Emily* is one of the masterpieces of William Faulkner. This paper intends to analyze the symbolic meaning of the rose, and the relationship between the rose and Emily, trying to provide people a thorough understanding of the theme and the heroine's personality.

关键词: William Faulkner; *A Rose for Emily*; rose; Emily; symbolism; tragic love; south tradition
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William Faulkner, one of the most representative American writers in 20th century, is regarded as "the leader of the Literature of the American South". He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950, because he created a symbolic picture of the remote past "to retell the recurrent story of human dreams, bravery, and defeat, to make a statement about the past and use that statement to talk about man's slot in his world."

Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi, came from an old, white upper class. Though his family was in decline in the twentieth century, it still retained some old customs. And it was from his own family history that Faulkner drew the material for most of his fiction: the southern region's characteristics of white social status, racial violence, honor codes, and traditional moral values.

In his life, there are nineteenth novels, four collections of about seventy short stories, and two volumes of poetry under his name. Among his short stories, *A Rose for Emily* is his first and probably the best known to general readers and the one that, because of its macabre nature and elements of mystery and suspense, has enjoyed a long-lived popular appeal. The story is set in the town of Jefferson in his imaginary Yoknapatawpha County, the "mythi-

cal kingdom". The first person "we", as participants, observe and describe the whole life of Emily Grierson, the central character and a victim of the Old South. Dominated by her father and his rigid ideas of social status, she has been prevented from marrying during his lifetime. One year after her father's death, she falls in love with a northerner. When she finds that her lover is not a marrying man, she poisons him so that she can keep him. Although the plot of the story is not complicated, yet it can be considered as a minor panorama of his works.

In this novel, there are examples of Faulkner's artistic techniques and achievements, such as the exploration of psychological reality, the jumbled time, the social structure and mores of a Southern community, floating point of view, flashback and the relation of the past and present, etc. Besides these, however, Faulkner's explorations of the characters' psychological reality as well as his use of symbolism in this story are also worth our attention.

In *A Rose for Emily*, symbolism is the integral factor involved in understanding the theme that is the search for love and security, a basic human need can be met unfavorably in equivocal environments. Faulkner's use of symbolism profoundly develops the theme of the story, bringing to light the issues of

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morality that arise from a young woman's struggle to find love.

"Rose" is an important symbol in the story, which shows people's nostalgia to southern tradition, and probably further implies that Emily's life is just like a rose which remains in the memory of the people in Jefferson Town from generation to generation. Being the only connection of the dwellers in town and old tradition, Miss Emily is the representative of southern tradition and southern nobles — pride, callous and over-conceited, so she is regarded as the embodiment of tradition. Just because people were so passionate to the traditional values, family relations and the ways of living that she was cared so much by those people. It can be said that Miss Emily gains the noble respect of the community, the reasons lie in that, for them, she performs the functions of symbolizing a kind of system and culture. Her existence shows the tenacious struggle of vanishing southern traditions, and her death, declares the finish of an old age. Through the title *A Rose for Emily*, a picture seems to be unfolded before our eyes: everyone in funeral throws a flower on the coffin of Miss Emily to express their sad memories.

The ingenious usage of symbolism can make a common story fill with profound implications, even beyond writer's original intention. The title of the story is *A Rose for Emily*, but we can't find "rose" as a noun in the story. "Rose" just appears twice as an adjective in the last section, "...upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights..." Faulkner had ever written a poem which symbolizes rose as love. Undoubtedly, Faulkner uses rose to symbolize love tradition in this story.

Everyone knows rose is Anthony's blood, and the love story of Venus and Anthony just begins with the appearance of rose and ends with the death of the hero. So, it is doomed that Emily's love is a tragedy. In the south it was traditional for young lovers to give each other a flower, usually a rose, to be a sort of keepsake. The woman would press the trinket into the folds of certain favorite book to dry and preserve it. Then, whenever reading and happening upon it she would be reminded of the pastimes that occurred with its giver and be temporarily relieved of the pain

of separation. It is very obvious that Homer Barron plays the part of Emily's rose. But Homer Barron — a laborer, a symbol of youth, a northerner was out of her control. Emily could not keep her living lover with her. This is the reason why she murdered him. Emily needed something to fill up her vacant heart and lonely life. She got nothing but Homer. Homer was killed and laid in the wedding room. Beside him, "in the second pillow was the indentation of a head." Emily must have lain next to dead Homer for years. She needed him for her existence in this world, alive or dead. She kept him tucked away in a rose colored room which at times can be opened to allow the memories of her love to fleetingly wipe away her loneliness. Homer is Emily's passion, and he is the man she loved. She treated him like a rose and dried his body out. Emily's life is full of decay and it is the only real love she had ever known. Homer's death completes Emily and her love.

A Rose for Emily, "A Rose" and "Eros" are pronounced almost the same, so the title can be read as "Eros for Emily". In fact this is a story without a rose, however, it tells us Emily's psychological metamorphosis. Similarly, Emily's lover is called "Homer Barron", their spelling is only a letter "r" difference between "Homer" and "Home" and both of them are nearly the same pronunciation, but it implies that "Emily keeps him at home all the time". So at the end of the story, people found that Emily poisoned her lover and kept his corpse in her bedroom for forty years. Though the way that Emily tries her utmost to conquer time and love is very grotesque, we can deeply understand what she has done. Being influenced by her father, Miss Emily becomes the embodiment of old values which have deeply rooted in her thinking. In this way, Emily will never get a rose (Eros) in her life. Her bold spirit of pursuing love wins admiration from the public after her death (It's a great pity that Homer makes her deeply disappointed). So a rose which symbolizes love is a kind of compensation, a sort of grief.

Although there is no "rose" in the story, "rose" is a very important symbol to connect the theme and the characteristics of protagonists. Reading the title silently, it seems that we could see Faulkner standing

in front of Miss Emily’s grave with a bunch of roses. feelings for decaying southern traditions and home-
The title *A Rose for Emily* expresses author’s love land.
and sympathy to Emily, and also reflects his mixed

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