
Analysis of the Responsibilities of the Hero in William Faulkner's Book, A Rose for Emily

In the short story "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner Miss Emily Grierson is the protagonist. Emily Grierson is seen as an outsider in her town. The town Emily lives in is in the south and is changing and evolving from old traditions. Even as society presses Miss Emily to adapt and change to the new ways, she is defiant and refuses to do so. Miss Emily is a southern belle who is set in her ways. Faulkner describes Miss Emily Grierson's character as an insubordinate, tragic figure, with a twisted desire for love.

Faulkner establishes that Emily is seen as an outsider by the rest of the townspeople when he writes, "WHEN Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old man-servant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in at least ten years." Emily preferred to keep to herself and perhaps this is why the townspeople were so curious about her house and lifestyle. Emily was seen as a monument of the town. As the town adapted to society's changes, Miss Emily did not. Faulkner describes her home by stating, "But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; 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." Miss Emily had not changed a thing inside or outside her home. Faulkner also describes the inside of her home when he writes, "It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell." Again he describes the amount dust by stating, "It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sun ray." Emily Grierson's lack of change throughout her home supports the fact that she is reluctant to change.

Faulkner describes a time period when Miss Emily gave china-painting lessons. Faulkner writes, "[s]ave a period of six or seven years, when she was about forty, during which she gave lessons in china-painting." The time period that Emily Grierson gave painting lessons shows that she had some contact with the community during that time. Although, as the newer generation came, her students grew up and faded away. Thus, bringing Emily's connection with the community to a halt.

Miss Emily is notorious for neglecting to obey the law. She preferred to do things her own way. The author depicts this several times throughout the short story. One example of this would be when Miss Emily is mailed a tax notice. She does not reply to the first mailed notice, nor the formal letter written to her by the sheriff's office concerning the tax notice. Even when the mayor himself writes to Miss Emily, the tax notice is sent back without comment. The author depicts this when he writes, "A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a 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." Miss Emily later states that she has no taxes in Jefferson, regardless of the fact that things have now changed because Colonel Sartoris had been dead for almost ten years at this point. She shows her defiance again when she purchases arsenic

poison. Miss Emily refuses to tell the druggist what the poison is for. The druggist sells Miss Emily the poison anyway and labels it for 'rats'. At this time, the townspeople believe that Miss Emily is going to kill herself and pity her even more so. Another example of her defiance is when Emily refused to have a mailbox placed at her residence. The author elaborates on this by stating, "When the town got free postal delivery, Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten metal numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them." Again, Miss Emily shows just how set in her ways she really is, and how she prefers to do things her way.

As far as Faulkner describes in the short story "A Rose for Emily", Miss Emily is an only child. The author does not speak about any siblings or Miss Emily's mother. The author elaborates on Emily's father to show the reader just how much Emily was her father's daughter. Emily's father kept her from having a husband or significant other up until his death and even after. Faulkner supports this two different times by writing, "None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such" and "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." When Emily's father died she refused to let people remove his body from the home for three days. The author states this when he writes, "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." Emily only had her father, and she adored him.

Emily was lonely after her father's death, until she met Homer Barron. Homer Barron was a northern day laborer. Homer was the foreman of a construction company. It was not like a Grierson to think seriously of a day laborer. The townspeople looked down on Emily for forgetting "noblesse oblige". It was rumor that Homer Barron wished to leave Miss Emily. Miss Emily would not have her love leave her like her father had left her. Miss Emily had an emotional attachment to Homer Barron and would do anything to keep him from leaving her. Miss Emily found the only solution to be killing Homer. The poison Emily purchased is used to kill Homer Barron. Emily's father had kept her from being able to find love and now that she had found it, she refused to let it go. The townspeople and her father had interfered in Emily's happiness, leaving her with an intense desire for love. Faulkner writes about this interference when he states, "Then some of 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, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister—Miss Emily's people were Episcopal—to call upon her." When Emily's 'love' was threatened by Homer Barron wanting to leave, she felt as if she had no choice other than killing him.

Not much is known about Miss Emily Grierson. Thus, she is seen as impervious. The townspeople know enough about her to pity her, but do not really know her personally. Miss Emily is an outcast because she refused to do things the way the rest of the townspeople did things. Killing Homer Barron shows Emily's intense desire for love and what can happen when that opportunity is taken away.