

## The “Subject” of “A Rose for Emily”

Fuhua Liu

School of Foreign Languages, Dalian Jiaotong University, Dalian, Liaoning 116028, China

### Abstract

Revolved round the central question “Who gives Emily a rose?”, the papers analyzes the “subject” of “A Rose for Emily”. Through the analysis, readers can better understand the heroine Emily, the theme of the short story and the attitude the writer holds.

### Keywords

subject, rose, Emily.

### 1. Introduction

William Faulkner was born in the southern part of the U. S.. Being one of the best writers in American literature, Faulkner won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954. “A Rose for Emily” is Faulkner’s best known short story for its profound theme and the use of modern techniques. Paradoxically, “rose” in the title seems to have nothing to do with the whole story as there is little mention of “rose” in the story except “faded rose color” and “rose-shaded lights” in part V when truth is revealed. But indeed, the title has its symbolic meanings. What does “rose” symbolize? And what is the subject of the title or who dedicate a rose to Emily?

### 2. Organization of the Text

#### 2.1. Subject 1: Emily’s Father

Emily’s father is the first “subject” who gives her a rose of “tradition”. Sitting at the top of the hierarchy system, Emily’s father considers all people in town inferior to his family which can be seen in his refusal of many young men’s proposal to his daughter, and he is in complete control of his daughter’s life which can be seen from the words “Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door”. For Emily, her father is the backbone of the family and his all. So when her father dies, she collapses and has been sick for quite a while. Emily’s tragedy is mostly from her father’s overprotection and the old tradition that the father orders her to keep. That is, as the descendant of aristocracy, Emily should have a sense of superiority and absolute authority and maintain an aristocrat’s dignity. A person’s own character shapes his or her future. Emily’s character is deeply rooted and her tragedy is doomed with the evolution of society.

#### 2.2. Subject 2: Emily’S Lover

Homer Barron is the second “subject” who gives Emily a rose of “romance”. “A big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face”, Homer Barron satisfies Emily both sexually and emotionally. This is the rosary dream that Homer Barron gives to Emily. Together with Homer Barron, Emily spends perhaps the happiest time in her life. Emily is ready to sacrifice all for Homer Barron. “Miss Emily had been to the jeweler’s and ordered a man’s toilet set in silver, with the letters H. B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men’s clothing, including a nightshirt.” Emily is lost in love and ready to sacrifice and all she has done is for Homer Barron. Homer Barron objectively gives Emily a rose, letting her taste the life of a normal adult woman. Being a playboy and gay from the North, Homer Barron

may have loved Emily, and at least intends her no harm. But the thorns of the romantic rose stings Emily that eventually leads to her tragedy.

### **2.3. Subject 3: Emily'S Town Neighbors**

Some of the local residents in town are the third "subject" who gives Emily a rose of "respect". They try every means to keep this "tradition" and prevent anyone from breaking it. Colonel Sartoris, the mayor, wants to remit taxes for Emily. To keep Emily's respectable profile, he makes an excuse by lying to the public that Emily's father has loaned money to the town and this is a way to pay back. When there is a smell around Emily' house, several citizens complain to the mayor Judge Stevens. They dare not to knock at Emily's door and speak to her directly. The mayor shows his reluctance to face Emily and he just won't accuse Emily of smelling bad in person. And one of the neighbors even says, "I am the last one in the world to bother Miss Emily". He will never even try to offend Emily if not for the disgusting smell. When Emily falls in love with Homer Barron, the whole town tries to help her out. They do this in order to save Emily's reputation. They just don't want the symbol of tradition and aristocracy to stumble. However, the local residents' narrow-mindedness accelerates Emily's tragedy.

### **2.4. Subject 4: Emily'S Servant**

Tobe is the fourth "subject" who gives Emily a rose of "loyalty". Tobe, a Negro, had accompanied Emily till her death. He should have had a chance to leave his master when slavery was abolished in the South, but he chose to stay. Serving as a gardener and cook, he took good care of Emily in everyday life, and kept the secret of decayed corpse of Homer Barron for many years till Emily's death. For most of the time, Tobe kept silent, seldom uttering a word. He had fulfilled his duty as a servant, and never betrayed Emily. With no intention to leave to seek his fortune and get married, Tobe sacrificed a lot to keep Emily's company.

### **2.5. Subject 4: William Faulkner the Writer**

The last and most important "subject" who gives Emily a rose is William Faulkner, the writer himself. He gives her a rose of "affirmation". Faulkner uses the symbol of rose to show his great sympathy and morning for Emily. Despite Emily's defect in character, the writer seems to appreciate Emily's sense of self-esteem and the grace shown under pressure. When the mayor of a new generation intends to levy tax on Emily, he and his followers have to communicate with Emily again and again. But Emily just shows her indifference. When they finally got a chance to meet with Miss Emily face to face, they delivered their speech, trembling all over. On the contrary, Emily just shows her contempt, and is very firm in her attitude, repeatedly saying "I have no taxes in Jefferson." The result is that "she vanquished them, horse and foot," The vivid contrast highlights Emily's inner power and iron backbone. She maintains the grace and image of an aristocrat.

In the writer's eyes, Emily is also a woman of courage who defends her love. It is incredible that Emily rooms and sleeps with the corpse of Homer Barron for almost half a century. The writer depicts that her hair has turned iron gray like men's hair. But she has done something not even a man can possibly do. She is not a woman who commits a murder and escapes. Instead, she wants to keep her love, once and for all. Although Faulkner seems to write the short story in an objective manner, and he is not without criticism on Emily who represents the decayed South tradition, he in some aspects shows his appreciation and sympathy.

## **3. Conclusion**

"They held a funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers". Symbolically, everyone attending the funeral dedicates a "flower" or possibly a "rose" to Emily to show his or her true love. The roses, symbols of romance, are

dedicated to show their respect for the tradition held by Miss Emily, loyalty and admiration of her eternal pride and grace.

## References

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