

Faulkner's "rose for emily" vs dubus "killings" essay



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Love and Death: A Comparison and Contrast of William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" and Andre Dubus's "Killings" The French journalist Octave Mirabaeu once said, "Murder is born of love, and love attains its greatest intensity in murder." This quote echoed through the literary writings of William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" and Andre Dubus's "Killings".

Faulkner crafted a story around Emily Grierson, a genteel woman in the southern United States during an era when everyone was scrutinized, forced to uphold a social code, and maintain a moral order. Emily, ruled by a dominating father who sent away any would-be suitors, is left to find a mate at an age that her society's standards consider to be non-traditional. At the age of thirty Emily's internal drive to be a wife overpowers her pride when she meets Homer Baron, a less than ideal Yankee construction worker. After much intervention her love affair takes a tragic turn in the most intense attempt to repair her self-esteem and image. Matt Fowler, the protagonist in Andre Dubus's "Killings", reasons that the justice system is not working in the manner it should and ensures the punishment for killing Fowler's son, Frank, is appropriate for the crime he has committed. Although neither Matt Fowler nor Strout are murderers, the intensity of love overwhelms them beyond logic and despite the potential consequences as they look past their human morality and take a life in a tragic tale of love and revenge.

The two stories share many differences, but the underlying theme based on crimes of passion leaves the reader with the ethical dilemma of contemplating whether murder can be justified. In "A Rose for Emily", Emily was forced not to forget her "nobles oblige" and to maintain her status in an

egalitarian society (Faulkner, "Rose" 93). Conversely Matt is a store owner in a suburb outside the city limits of Boston, Massachusetts. Although they both hail from different eras and societies, both stories deal with love and the faux pas of their societies.

In Emily's case she is described by the other women of the town as a "... disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people" (Faulkner, "Rose" 94). Similarly Matt's son Frank was spending time with a married woman, Mary Ann, as she was portrayed, "four years older than him," "had two children," and "was in the process of a divorce" (Dubus, "Killings" 105). Another similarity faced by Matt and Emily is their desire for revenge in the conflict of love lost. Emily is taunted with the notion of Homer leaving her, as Homer depicts him self as "not a marrying man" (Faulkner, "Rose" 94). Broken down by the townspeople and plagued by low self-esteem, she snaps.

She follows the fracture in her sanity and goes to see a druggist, "I wasn't some poison...I want the best you have. I don't care what kind" (Faulkner, "Rose" 94). Matt shares the same loss of sanity when his wife, Ruth, informs him how difficult it is to live without her son while Strout "walks the Goddamn Streets," as Matt would later tell Willis (Dubus, "Killings" 103). Willis, Matt's friend and later accomplice, attempts to console Matt and listens to him as he reiterates to him how Ruth sees Strout constantly. She can't even go out for cigarettes and aspirin.

It's killing her" (Dubus, "Killings" 103). Both Matt and Emily are troubled by the conflict in their lives and decide to take firm grasp in the reins of their

destiny. Although both Emily's and Matt's crimes are pre-meditated, they differ greatly in respect to the human element of compassion. Faulkner describes Emily as a "strained flag" implying that she is under a great deal of stress and on the verge of breaking with no intentions of anyone swaying her mind (Faulkner, "Rose" 94).

When she confronts the druggist she gives him an unspoken ultimatum. "She just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up." (Faulkner, "Rose" 94). Forced by her stress, she had reached her breaking point and had decided on what was to happen. Although Matt's tough mentality and determination is very present, he still presents a compassionate side to his character.

His compassion was forced by thoughts of love and joy involving Mary Ann and his deceased son Frank. To ease Strout's mind, Matt lies and tells him, "We've got you a ticket, and a job. A friend of Mr. Trottier's. Out west"(Dubus, "Killings" 111).

Through the roller coaster of emotions, Matt still maintained confidence in what he was to do. It's undeniable the Matt and Emily both committed pre-meditated and well thought out murders. However, the difference between Emily and Matt is the purpose behind each of their crimes. Emily poisons Hank in an almost vengeful way, because he was going to leave her.

This was a crime that was committed based in self-interest. Yet the town still honored her. Upon her death, Faulkner writes, "the whole town went to her funeral: the man though a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument"

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(Faulkner, " Rose" 94). On the other hand, Dubus paints a rather gruesome image of Matt, writing, " Matt went to him and shot him once in the back of the head" (Dubus, " Killings" 113).

We find that Emily and Matt both kill for their own specific reasons. Faulkner develops Emily's story in such a way that it can potentially draw empathy for her situation and consider the reason for her death justifiable. However, when the two characters and their plights were compared and contrasted, Matt's reason for killing Strout is a more compelling reason for a justifiable homicide. While the stories propose two completely different characters, Emily and Matt commit similar moral wrongs for their own unique purpose. References Faulkner, William.

" A Rose for Emily. " In The compact Bedford Introduction to Literature. Ed. Michael Meyer. 8th ed. Boston: Bedford/St.

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