

Example of symbolism in a rose for emily essay

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“ Ode to a Nightingale,” and “ Ode to a Grecian Urn”

No writing is truly complete without the use of figurative language; one element of this language is the symbol. In “ A Rose for Emily,” by William Faulkner; “ Ode to a Nightingale,” and “ Ode to a Grecian Urn,” by John Keats the authors use symbol to represent the theme of death.

“ A Rose for Emily” is Faulkner’s Gothic and most famous short story, Emily’s father died. Miss Emily realizes that everything she has is gone and in a rather uncanny way she reasons that if she could keep her father alive by pretending he is not dead, she could keep her status in the community. Consequently, she refuses to accept her father’s death; nonetheless, the town won and after three days she allowed them to bury her father. Poor Miss Emily is left alone and delusional, trying to hold on to a past that is no longer there.

Like most women alone and penniless, Miss Emily seeks redemption through a husband; and when the crude Homer comes to town she sees a way to rejuvenate her dying life. Marrying Homer would have another type of death for Emily; she would be giving up everything that the Old South represents. Even the town thought so, that is the reason they sent for her relatives to talk some sense into her. Only they need not have worry, Homer does not like ladies. As a matter of fact, they should have worry, but no one knows that Emily’s mind is dying faster than the house and her physical appearance. Homer not liking women is no threat to Miss Emily; she knows how to keep him forever hers. This time no one will tell her what to do or convince that Homer is dead. She poisoned him and keeps him locked in the top floor of the house in the bridal chamber, until her death. As Homer lay

decaying, despite the fact that she is alive, Miss Emily is decaying mentally and physically. When her father was alive, she was a beautiful, slender woman but the years have taken their toll on her. She is:

A small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough (2).

Miss Emily is a fallen monument, her death marks the end of an era, the period and traditions that Emily represents have come to an end, with her goes the last of the aristocrats. Miss Emily lives in a house that she inherited from her dead father; when he died the house and Miss Emily begin their death march.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. 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 (1).

The house and its occupants are symbols of death literally and physically. Even Miss Emily's faithful servant, after he opened to door the town's people, walked out the back door and disappeared. Clearly it is stated that

he is declining too; he was with her since he was a young man.

Unlike Faulkner's Miss Emily, Keats does not deny death, he accepts it but he wishes that there was something he could do to prevent it. Keats has already seen his brother die from tuberculosis and knowing that he has the same disease, he knows that his death was eminent but rather than dying, he wishes that he could transfer himself to a place of serenity. Keats would die happily if he went to a place where he does not experience trials and write his poetry forever. In line four he does say directly, I want to better place when I die, he alludes to it with the symbol of Lethe. Lethe is the river of forgetfulness on the way to Hades (death). According to Keats' friend, Charles Brown Keats spent time at his home in Hampstead, nearby a nightingale built its nest and Keats found a special kind of tranquility as it singing each morning. Keats does not envy the nightingale; he reveres it and wishes he could find its profound peace (lines 5, 6).

Keats knows he must die and he is not fighting or running away or denying the finality of death and he spends the rest of the stanza writing about the contentment that he aspires to in the afterlife. He expresses his idea of what would be an idyllic place for him after death. In the third stanza Keats knows that death will come and is not afraid of it but he hates how the body grows frail and distorted (lines 21-25). Keats would like to live in a world where people do not die in their youth and he is happy that the nightingale does not know a world "Where youth pale, and spectre-thin, and dies (line 26). Throughout the third stanza there is no symbol of death Keats addresses in graphic details what often transpires before dying.

Unselfishly, Keats wants the nightingale to make music forever; to delight

others with eternal singing. He begins the stanza by telling the nightingale to go away, to preserve itself. In lines forty-two and forty-three, he reverts to using symbols; he tells the nightingale that he will fly to it but not on “Bacchus prods”—the god of wine who is usually drawn in a chariot drawn by leopards. Instead he said he will come to it “on the viewless wings of Poesy;” meaning he will come in is imagination. In his heart Keats know that death is sure and his imaginations are a source of comfort especially when it is mingled with the serenity of the nightingale’s song.

Keats is happiest writing poetry, and his desire is to write forever. “

Darkling,” the first word in stanza six, is used to represent the night. He personifies death and states that there is a relationship between them symbolizing a love affair. He whispers soft words to it in the night and would be gratified if at midnight it quietly takes him (lines 65, 66). Keats refers to the nightingale’s immortality; it was alive in ancient days and song for Ruth, a widow in the Old Testament. He did not say how old the nightingale is but he knows it is very old therefore; he uses “Ruth” as a symbol of age. The poem ends and Keats has clearly been by the presence of the nightingale’s sinning he was taken to place he has never been; a place that if it existed would have made him happy to die.

Unlike Faulkner and Keats, Browning uses death as a threat as a way to satisfy himself. The poem is based upon the story of Alfonso II, duke of Rerrara, whose young wife died three years after they were married. Alfonso negotiated with an agent to find him a new wife, but before he does so he is showing him the picture of his first wife. “Stranger like you that picture countenance,/ The depth and passion of its earnest glance,/ But to myself

they turned (since more puts by/ The curtain I have drawn for you, but I” (lines 7-10). What Alfonso is telling the agent is that he is a jealous man and he does not want a wife who will look at other men. He continues to list the requirement for a wife but he does not actually say them he implies them, there is no direct symbols, however the agent cannot miss the implications of the picture on the wall. The picture of his first wife on the wall is symbol of the physical attributes his wife must possess; and if she does not know her place he will kill her just like he did his first wife.(lines 45-7). Despite Browning’s lack of tangible symbols, the theme of death is as present in his poem as it is in Faulkner and Keats’ writing.

There are many reasons for symbols in writing; for clarification, to make comparison, as representation for certain imagery, and as implication to what the writer wants to say. These three writers use one or more of these objectives in their writings. In Faulkner’s story, he spoke of death directly but he also symbolizes it; he uses the house to show dying and Miss Emily’s reluctance to let go of traditions is a symbol of one trying to delay death. Later he again uses the physical decline of Miss Emily’s to illustrate death in a timely form. There is nothing complicated about Faulkner’s theme of death and any reader can easily detect it.

The “ Ode to a Nightingale” is an enjoyable poem; nevertheless the reader needs to have some background information to truly understand it. It is easy for a reader to think that Keats is morbid because he talks so much about death; but one the reader finds out that Keats watched his brother died a slow painful death clarity will come to him or her. More importantly, when the reader discovers that Keats is fated to the same type of death as his

brother, comprehension will come to him or her. There are many symbols in Keats poem, words like Lethe, the river that runs to Hades; Flora the Roman goddess of flowers; Bacchus, the god of wine who is often transported in chariots drawn by leopards. There are just a few of the symbols Keats mentions in his poem, consequently a little bit of mythology is necessary to thoroughly relish Keats' poetry.

People have substituted many different words and phrases for the words "death" for example, passed; decease, he or she went to heaven. Browning's poem is full of such implications, nothing is clearly said but one cannot miss the message of his first wife on the wall. At least the physical attributes are clear. This poem presents the most challenge and again one must do some background exploration; get the story behind the poem. In this poem the duke says more by showing the duchess's picture than by his consistence rambling; however one puts the picture and his speech together the pieces fit perfectly.

Writing is not always readily understandable, and the best writings are sometimes base on event, folklore, mythology, an event or an era; and to fully grasp the meaning of certain symbols one needs to acquaint his or herself with the background of the author(s). Faulkner, Keats, And Browning were writers of different era and although they write of the same theme each uses a different style.