

Characterization in a rose for emily

[Life](#), [Emotions](#)



Name: Instructor: Course: Date: Characterization in a Rose for Emily A Rose for Emily is a short story written by William Faulkner. It is the story of an old woman told through a third party narrator about the degeneration of the woman since her father's death. The woman, Emily, once seen as pretty and coming from a wealthy family suffers immensely after her father dies and locks herself up in their mansion. Little is seen of her afterwards until the arrival of a Negro laborer who becomes her suitor and who disappears after some time, never to be seen again.

The end of the story reveals the “ secret” behind Emily's isolation, which are the death of her suitor and the confinement of his corpse in the house (Volpe 11). With such a sad and unexpected conclusion, the reader is left with a lot to ponder upon regarding the true state of mind of the main character Emily. Characterization is an important aspect of any story. In this particular one, Emily is the main character and her attributes are brought out through a recollection and documentation of her life by those who have always known her. The story is depicted from a third perspective, which makes it unclear whether the sentiments expressed about Emily are true based on their own experience with her or from the general perception that the townspeople have of her. The character of Emily is depicted as that of a monument, a figure of significance from a past existence and that of someone static to change. As aforementioned, it is not clear if this analysis is based on the narrator's own opinion from his personal encounter with Emily, or it is that of the entire town who view her as a mysterious character.

On various occasions, the narrator is seen to be speaking on behalf of the entire town thus his opinions stem from a collective view. This is seen from

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this extract, “ When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral,” from the first line of the story (Faulkner 5). From the above description, the society views Emily as stubborn to change as indicated on various occasions in the story. She is still held up in her past life, one filled with opulence despite being left a pauper with the mansion being her only inheritance.

However, a lot of detail is overlooked as to why she behaves the way she does. Much of what the narrator describes is derived from the community’s notion and mere speculation of her character. From the story, it is clear that the character of Emily as explained to the reader is that which has been molded by the society. This is devoid of the true emotions that she experiences and the definite reason for her isolation, facts against which I would argue. I am of the opinion that if the townsfolk had had the chance of fully interacting with Emily then her characterization would be different. My argument is based upon the characterization of Emily resulting from assumptions and not concise evidence that would require close interaction.

However, it is evident that there is more to Emily than meets the eye. Her nature of being static to change is influenced by many factors, which if analyzed critically will produce a different depiction of Emily’s character. I think that Emily is a woman used to a certain life, surrounded by particular people without whom she is unable to cope. It is obvious that her deceased father helped shape the character of Emily in a significant manner.

Described as a controlling man though respected by many of the old folk for his achievements, he may have influenced how Emily viewed certain things

in life and how she conducted herself (Towner, 17). This does not necessarily mean that Emily herself was not in fear of her father.

It is probable that she was scared and thus strived to follow her father's example. Therefore, when he died, Emily might have been unable to cope with the idea of being alone, with no one to guide her as he had done. This to me was the reason why she clung to his corpse for days after his death. Although she appeared remorseless, Emily had lost a strong pillar in her life and the facade was a way of dealing with her grief.

The town was quick in judging her emotions without scrutinizing the facts surrounding the implications of her father's death. To describe her, as being emotionless was inhuman given the fact that she had refused to acknowledge the death, breaking down to the point of saying that he had not died and instead was still with her. Emily was full of grief, which depicts her as humane despite a later description by the narrator that she had only become humanized after her recent decline from a wealthy life. This is one of the aspects of Emily's character, which the narrator and the town overlooked. Locking herself up in the house was not a deliberate act so as not to interact with the town folks. I still view it as a way of displaying her grief over her loss.

Besides, even before the tragic event of death she had always led a life of seclusion. Therefore, this was in no way new and should not have warranted any surprise or indifference from the town. It is obvious that Emily had a problem accepting the loss of loved ones, a trait that still made her more human.

This is seen in the manner in which she fell in love with the Negro laborer, and when it became apparent that he would also leave her, she poisoned him. His death was only discovered after that of Emily's when people from the town managed to break into the previously barred upper rooms of the mansion. It also served as an explanation of the dark truth, which Emily had held onto for years. The stench emanating from the house could be accounted for, including the main reason for Emily's degeneration into the state of despair that haunted her until her death. All the above can only be possible of a woman desperate for love and attention.

Although her state of mind is in question especially after the way she resorts to extreme measures to secure this attention, it is obvious that she is hurt by the lack of these. Losing another loved one was going to affect her terribly, which must have been the reason she poisoned her suitor (Towner et al 53). This shows that she was truly in love with him and with her advanced age and solitude could not bear to lose him.

I am in no way in support of the atrocious crime that she committed, but I only seek to portray her emotional side, one that the narrator overlooked. With regard to her inability to change, I would instead refer to it as fear to change not necessarily because of stubbornness but due to a desire to hold on to that which once defined her. By referring to her and the house as monuments, the narrator was not farfetched. However, this is because the past reminded her of a good life while the future brought uncertainty. Contrary to the narrator's opinion, I think that Emily should instead have been described as a coward, one afraid of embracing the future and not

necessarily change. Furthermore, this should not have been attributed to her refusal to pay taxes as the new law required and her decline to have a mailbox number nailed to her door. It is a fact that this trend came about with the new wave of modernization, but her refusal is not enough to show her inability to change, rather she was just following the agreement made between her father and the former mayor.

Her generation was still entitled to the privileges once accorded to them, and she was only abiding by this fact. The fact that she left her house unkempt and only retained the services of an old man servant is in no way connected to change in my opinion. I think that she was too engulfed in her grief to care about the little things in her life. She was too concerned about holding on to what was left of her life to think of whether others cared. For instance, she was oblivious of the smell from her house, one that no one had the courage to point out to her. It can be argued from this that she was degenerating mentally thus could not tell the reality from illusions.

To me, all this are pointers to the fact that she craved for the attention and care that had eluded her. It could be that the loss of her two most beloved people had turned her into a mental case and she was afraid of soliciting help for fear of the consequences of her actions. Part of her static nature is derived from the attitude of the people towards her. From her earlier life before her father's death, there was little interaction between her and the town people. This was mainly because of the difference in economic status between them. Many people viewed her family to be above them, thus they often stuck to their various social groups.

From such a historical background, it is obvious that Emily's relationship with her fellow town occupants was strained. With this in mind she was often left alone with information about her only coming from her manservant or the few times that she visited the town. It can therefore be deduced that the townsfolk did little to endear themselves to Emily, especially the women who only gossiped about her and speculated on the appearance of her house, which served as their only reason for attending her funeral. Emily was in no position to seek help because of fear of the perceptions that people had of her. The only solution out of this was to remain in solitude and ponder on her problems alone.

My point from the argument above is that the town was also involved in shaping Emily's supposed character of being static to change. Their relations with her differed with gender, with the men viewing her with "respect" while the women thought of her only as a figure of the upper class who could not mingle with the rest of the townsfolk (Polk et al, 7). This was a wrong judgment given that she was set to get married to a Negro laborer. At the time, there were laws differentiating whites from Negroes and their relations were largely limited. This shows a contrast in views expressed by the narrator and the true character of Emily. Emily must have found herself distanced from the society, which contributed to her solitude, wrongfully viewed as the inability to express change. Besides the fact that she was freely relating with a Negro is proof of her embracing of change. Given the laws put in place she displayed remarkably that she can deviate from the norm by this relationship.

Conclusively, I have demonstrated in the above argument that the characterization in this short story with regard to the main character Emily was misguided. This is however not in reference to all the attributes accorded to her by the narrator who seems to be speaking from a communal point of view. My argument is only against her portrayal as one incapable of embracing change and as a monumental figure lacking emotions. From the evidence I have placed above, it is clear that the narrator and the people he or she was speaking on behalf of looked at only a few angles to her life and used inconclusive findings to mould Emily's character. Personally I think she was a woman worthy of pity and in dire need of help, not to mention company to counter her lifelong solitude. Her character is instead that of a coward, lacking the courage to address the fears that define her life and an introvert who is driven to this state by history and the grief that she bears within her. She is also full of sentiments as opposed to her depiction as one lacking emotions by the narrator (Skei, 35). This are both brought out through the themes of isolation, compassion and forgiveness.

Emily lives in solitude after being overwhelmed by grief of her father's death and after the death of her suitor. Additionally her isolation was influenced by a long history of strained interactions with the townsfolk. Compassion is what the narrator and the town as a whole should have extended to Emily after her father's death instead of only being curious and critical of her. This is partly my reason for insisting on their contribution to her isolation, as they did nothing to help. Forgiveness is brought out through Emily's inability to forgive herself for her suitor's death, which she is responsible for. This implies that guilt could also have formed the basis for her declining mental

state and detachment from reality. Therefore, instead of castigating Emily, the narrator and the people whose views he represented should have taken a keener look at the realities in Emily's life. There was more to her character than what lay on the surface, upon which the narrator dwelt.

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