

Freytag's pyramid in a rose for emily

Literature, Russian Literature



Though a non-linear narrative, Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily* fits well into the dramatic structure outlined in Freytag's Pyramid. Exposition is centered around the death of the eponymous character, Emily Grierson, and details her history in the town of Jefferson.

Moving backward in time, a deal between Emily and a former mayor, Colonel Sartoris, is discussed, in which Emily is remitted of all taxes due to a loan Emily's father made to the town before his death. This expository information allows the reader to form a more substantive picture of Emily before the narrative actually begins.

Faulkner establishes the tone of the story as cryptic and elliptical. Emily is someone who can only be known vaguely, through all that can be understood in a few incidents. By failing to disclose too much about Emily, Faulkner lends her an air of mystery, thus heightening the reader's interest in her character.

The story then leaps back in time thirty years, when there was concern in Jefferson over a smell coming from Emily's house. This is the point of rising action, in which the narrative acquires tautness in conflict. Now the narrative is propelled forward by the reader's curiosity- what is causing this horrible smell? All of this builds on the mystery surrounding Emily, she becomes not so much a woman as an apparition, a vague blur in the mind of the reader.

As the narrative proceeds on it constantly moves backward in time, so that the climax occurs at the point furthest in the past. Emily's purchase of the arsenic precedes chronologically the events of the first, second, fourth, and

fifth parts of the story. *A Rose for Emily* inverts the traditional narrative structure in which a story generally drives toward some point in the future, delving into the past for its revelations.

The purchase of the arsenic must be regarded as the story's climax for it is the only instance in which Emily takes action within the narrative. She resolves here to take that action, the fruits of which are revealed in the final part of the story when the skeleton of Homer Barron is found in her bedroom.

Part four of the story represents falling action, as with the purchase of the arsenic the fate of Homer Barron has been settled. That the arrival of Emily's family, or "kin" as Faulkner refers to them, is merely brushed upon in the vaguest terms serves as evidence- the focus of the story is elsewhere. All that is left here is for the story to unravel into the denouement, which comes of course with the discovery of her supposed husband's corpse.

Here, Faulkner pulls back the curtain and allows the reader to briefly glimpse some of the mystery behind Emily, and by simply suggesting at one perversion, he hints at a whole host of other strange activities. Thus the story is concluded not by solving the mystery, but rather by increasing its lurid allure.

In a story, such as *A Rose for Emily*, which is as much about ambience as it is about creating drama, a small action can carry great weight. Emily's very presence, "dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse," shocks the small town of Jefferson out of entropy and into the life of narrative.

Thus, though the story is nominally propelled along by curiosity over a strange odor emanating from her house, it is Emily herself in the end that

sustains the interest of the reader. Though Freytag's Pyramid is an excellent guide for distilling dramatic structure from an otherwise elusive narrative, its application is limited. While the model corresponds to the purely dramatic elements of *A Rose for Emily* it cannot account for such complementary elements such as tone and style, which often facilitate drama just as much as a well-honed structure.

Faulkner's writing operates obliquely, touching points of interest and then just as quickly departing from them, leaving a slight fog about the people and places he evokes. The use of Freytag's Pyramid can help shine a light through this fog and offer one a greater insight into the nature of this mysterious piece, *A Rose for Emily*.