

Critique for 'a rose for emily' essay (critical writing)

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First published in 1930, *A Rose for Emily* is a captivating must-read chef-d'oeuvre by Faulkner that artistically presents an account of a society that is immensely resistant to the inevitable change. Although the story is narrated in a manner that reflects a mix up of various chronological accounts, it is clear that the story can be analyzed from the perspectives of hidden messages underlying the themes of the story.

Dilworth (1999) is also inclined to this line of view when he asserts that Faulkner attempts to convey themes of change and death (p. 253). Indeed, in the paper, I agree with this argument in the sense that, by using various references to *A Rose for Emily*, Dilworth evidences that death looms right from the first section to the fifth section of the story.

The themes of change are reflected by Miss Emily's denial of the fate of death and refusal to comply with the obligation for paying taxes. In this perspective, Dilworth argues that the killing of Homer Barron "is eclipsed in the imagination of readers by evidence of some sort of necrophilia" (1999, p. 251).

The focus of this paper is to analyze the article, *A Romance to Kill For: Homicidal Complicity in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"* published in the journal of *Studies in Short Fiction* in terms of logicalness of the presented arguments coupled with giving the writer's response to the article.

Dilworth sees the existing relationship between the narrator and Emily as largely symbiotic. This means that Emily and the society represented by the narrator can only exist mutually with each other. To reinforce this argument, Dilworth argues that the traits and behaviors of Emily are creations of the

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narrator thus implying that he presents Emily as the symbol of communicating what he believes to be the cultural values of the society in which he lives.

Arguably, therefore, the actions of the main character such as killing followed by evading justice and failure to pay taxes without any legal action being taken upon her are depictive of the eminent shortfalls of the white society of the south during the time of writing of the short story.

For instance, quoting a critique of the short story (Helen Nebeker), Dilworth affirms, " the narrator's awareness of events implies long held knowledge of murder which the narrator has kept secret to preserve the honor and myth of the south" (p. 253). Arguably, therefore, this means that the society was aware of certain atrocities that were committed by certain highly profiled persons and yet they could not be brought to book.

According to Dilworth, this happened due to the idealization of white women belonging to high-class social status. This is evidenced by Dilworth's argument, " white women of class were not to be troubled by certain worldly obligations" (Dilworth, 1999, p. 258). The negation from complying with the worldly obligations includes the refusal to pay taxes.

As Dilworth puts it, the society represented by Emily is highly segregated in terms of compliance to legal provisions. For instance, he argues that Emily went to buy arsenic though on request to explain what and how she meant to use it. She declined to reply although it was a legal requirement for her to

do so. Nevertheless, the drug dealer could not force her to do it or even refuse to sell it to her.

Another issue that concerns Dilworth is the nature of the society depicted by Emily in terms of equal applicability of justice especially in the case where a stench issued from Emily's house. When the matter was brought before a judge, he "refused to make a public issue of it since one does not accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad" (Dilworth, 1999, p. 255). Dilworth does not hesitate to criticize the Christianity as being characterized by religious hypocrisy.

For instance, he argues that the fact that Emily and Barron lived together before they were legally married implied that the society engaged in fornication yet people like Emily were Christians. In this context, Dilworth claims that Emily "chose to enter into collusion with the society to the extent of maintaining her image as a proper high-class southern Christian" (Dilworth, 1999, p. 255).

However, Dilworth maintains that he believes that the society never knew about the evils of Emily until her death, and a rotting corpse was found by the side of an indent of a woman with Emily's hair resting on it. However, he also raises several counterarguments including the knowledge of the townspeople that she had bought arsenic, which, if she was to take it, could have made her kill herself (p. 269). In a different perspective, this implies that Dilworth thinks that the townspeople are also capable of committing homicide.

One of the central concerns of Dilworth entails placing a logically substantive argument about the townspeople's knowledge of homicide. In particular, Dilworth argues, " on the basis of the evidence, it is inconceivable, I think, that the townspeople did not know early on about Emily's killing Homer Barron" (Dilworth, 1999, p. 257).

Dilworth assumes that Emily must have expressed the guilt of her sins among the townspeople even though they may not have talked about it amongst themselves. In this argument, there is a breach of one element of logical argument. There lacks a direct evidence from the story depicting Emily in any state of remorse or any other form of emotion that shows her feeling for being sorry for either killing her lover or by denying her father's death for four days.

However, in linking Emily with the death of Barron, Dilworth uses evidence from the story to prove his argument. For instance, he quotes the townspeople's knowledge of the last time that they saw Barron enter his lover's house by arguing out, " they knew that her lover was last seen entering at the kitchen door at dusk one evening" (Dilworth , 1999, p. 258).

However, an alternative argument is considered in this particular situation whereby one would also think that Barron could have moved out of the house without the knowledge on the townspeople by chance just as it was by chance that they saw her enter the house. Therefore, although he provides evidence that it happened after Emily had bought the arsenic, Barron having deserted her, when a stench came out upon entering the house. Therefore, it becomes hard to approximate the time of poisoning exactly.

Dilworth places a question on why the four men sent by town council members to “scatter lime around the foundation of the house, in her cellar” (p. 257) executed this task while they could have conceived that the intensity of the smell was far greater than that of a rotting rat or a snake as suggested by the judge.

While it could be possible for the four men to suspect that the smell should have emanated from a large corpse, it is also important to note that they could have possibly suspected that the corpse was of a human being if the men knew that Emily had the capacity to kill.

This is only possible if they had the experience of situations in which Emily had killed people and buried them secretly. In this sense, it becomes hard to prove that the four men had the knowledge that Emily could have killed somebody. Amid this argument, Dilworth is quick to point out that there is no evidence of what the four men thought of because Faulkner does not tell the reader about their thoughts. Consequently, this argument is illogical since it lacks evidences and necessary proofs.

Emily had engaged in a number of instances in which she defied her noble responsibilities to the state. She was defiant. Nevertheless, should this be enough to form the basis for the townspeople to suspect her as having taken her lover's life? In this context, Dilworth argues, “apart from the recent or long awareness of the closed room, knowledge of Emily's buying arsenic, her refusal to state its purpose, and the memory of the smell of corruption are enough to suggest a 40-year-old suspicion, if not outright certainty of murder” (p. 259).

Logically, it is clear that Dilworth implies that, since the townspeople could have had the awareness of the situations in which Emily deviated from the moral line, the situations are also likely indicators of her involvement with killing her lover.

Unfortunately, the situations are distinctive: a clear margin can be drawn between them. Their interconnection that a situation results to another unrelated situation is a complete departure from logical reasoning since the evidences are not connected directly with the consequences associated with each situation.

There are many ways of interpreting or attaching meaning for any literary work. One way is to interpret it from the context of its setting. Historically, racial discrimination, denial of certain rights to women, and even belief in the superiority of persons in the high-class social group were issues that had to be dealt with in the early 20th century.

A Rose for Emily seems to be set within this chronological period.

Consequently, it is possible that, through Emily, Faulkner actually portrayed the differences among people in relation to their social status.

This means that the society may have known about the evils committed by Emily. However, because of the fear associated with her social status, they could not have confronted her. From the arguments raised by Dilworth implicating Emily with the death of her lover, it is arguable that Emily's failure to respond to the druggist about the purpose of the arsenic is an evidence of suspecting her to have poisoned her lover.

Otherwise, from the story itself, the reader is only told that the status of the corpse by the time it was found was in the last stages of decomposition. Nothing shows that the cause of death was through poisoning. This makes it hard to determine whether Emily actually poisoned rats, just as the arsenic was labeled 'for rats,' or her lover.

A Rose for Emily is a short story written by Faulkner. It attracts valid interpretations. In this paper, the focus was to analyze Dilworth's article 'A Romance to Kill For: Homicidal Complicity in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"' who provides one of the ways of interpreting the short story. The concern was to scrutinize the logic of the arguments presented by Dilworth. The paper has argued that, while some arguments are logical, others lack adequate evidence to support them.

Dilworth, T. (1999). A Romance to Kill For: Homicidal Complicity in Faulkner's A Rose for Emily. *Studies in short fiction*, 36(3), 251-264.