

# A critique of "uncovering the past: the role of dust imagery in a rose for emily" ...

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



Aubrey Binder's "Uncovering the Past: The Role of Dust Imagery in a Rose For Emily" explains that the motifs of dust and decay are very important and prominent in Faulkner's story. Binder's arguments for the motifs are strong, especially for the motif of dust. However, her article provides very little literary evidence for the motif of decay. While I agree with Binder's motif of dust, I don't agree with her arguments for the motif of decay, and I believe that the motif of pity would better fit the text.

Binder's motif of dust is heavily supported in the text. She believes that the dust covering the objects and people in Emily's home represents the obscuring of past events. She makes it very apparent that the dust does not change or erode the past, it simply hides it. (Binder 5) The dust provides ambiguity which helps to keep the townspeople clueless about what's really going on inside Emily's home. To support this statement, Binder points out that Homer Barron's body was covered in an "even coating of the patient and biding dust." This quote exemplifies how the dust really conceals parts of Emily's life from the townspeople. When the townspeople found Homer's body, it's like the dust was being brushed away, revealing the truth of the past. The dust shows how events from the past are sometimes discovered, so the dust does not make Emily invincible from outside presence. The dust is brushed away and the past is revealed, altering Miss Emily's life several times throughout the text. Binder provides an example of this when the government officials come to Miss Emily and tell her that she owes taxes to the town. When the officials enter Miss Emily's home, they disturb the dust and uncover the fact that Emily does owe taxes to the town. However, Emily,

disliking change, held onto Colonel Sartoris' involved story that made her exempt from taxes.

Binder also states that other elements that aren't actual events in the story also are affected by the dust. Binder uses the example of the continuous influence of Emily's father even after his death. "The house filled with dust and shadows..." is a quote from the text that shows how Emily's father influenced her life. He left her with a very small amount of money, and no husband because of his strict standards. Emily's father made her unavailable to be wed, Binder links the psychological damage that her father inflicted on her to Homer's murder. Emily murdered Homer so that he could never leave her. This idea was supported by the following quote from the text, "...and we all knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will." Emily clinged onto Homer because he was the only thing she had left.

Binder claims that decay is a strong motif in this short story, however she hardly even mentions decay in her review. Binder states that, "The reader finds descriptions of decay in the slow degrading of the town, Emily's inherited home, and even in the aging Emily herself." After she describes how decay could be a motif, she goes on to explain the motif of dust but never revisits decay. The rest of Binder's review is about how dust affected "A Rose for Emily." Binder makes the very common literary mistake of not providing enough evidence from the text. She jumps to the conclusion that because Miss Emily and her house seem to be decaying that decay a major

motif of this story. When really, the decay is more of a description about the setting and Miss Emily herself rather than a motif.

A possible motif that is well supported by literary evidence is the motif of pity and it actually plays an important role in this story. Binder touches on the topic of how the townspeople feel sorry for Emily, but she doesn't talk about how very important their pity is. The townspeople were always slightly pitious to the Grierson's because of how highly they believed themselves to be, when in reality they were not. The townspeople really pitied Emily after her father died. "At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized..." When her father died, she refused to give the body up until they threatened to use force. "We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that." The townspeople didn't believe that she was crazy because they knew that her relationship with her father was the only real relationship she had, so when she lost her father the townspeople felt sorry for her. After her father's death, the town officials remitted her taxes, but to evade the obvious charity of the act, Colonel Sartoris created a story about how Emily's father loaned money to the town and that remitting Emily's taxes was the town's way of repaying the loan. Another example to support the motif of pity is when Emily visits the druggist to buy some arsenic, claiming it was for killing rats. Many of the townspeople suspected that Emily was going to use the poison to kill herself, but they thought it would be 'the best thing.'

Binder's article, "Uncovering the Past: The Role of Dust Imagery in a 'Rose For Emily'" is very well thought out and really captures the story, "A Rose

for Emily." Her motif of dust is supported with textual evidence and is crucial to the story. The dust in Faulkner's story symbolizes the secrecy of Emily's life and the unveiling of those secrets. I disagree about her arguments for decay. The element of decay is only a description in the story, however, the motif of pity is well supported by literary evidence and is a crucial element to the story.

Binder, Aubrey. "Uncovering The Past: The Role Of Dust Imagery In A ROSE FOR EMILY." *Explicator* 70. 1 (2012): 5-7. MasterFILE Elite. Web. 22 Sept. 2016.