

# Gossip in Faulkners a rose for Emily research paper

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In William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," we follow the spinster Emily as she progresses through her life in Jefferson. However, the way this tale is told is rather unique, as instead of following a single narrator (Emily or someone else in her life), the audience is given a first-person collective narration, many people throughout the town offering their opinion on the goings-on in Emily's house. The use of the collective first-person narrative is Faulkner's way of building up a notoriety and legend to Emily, so that when the grisly truth is discovered at the very end of the story, it carries a more profound payoff and sense of horror.

Much like in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Faulkner does not display what Emily has done to Homer right away, much like how Norman Bates' mother is hidden from the audience until the very end of the film (McDermott 455). This allows us to imagine what could possibly be going on in the house in both instances. The suspense of withholding the truth about the mysterious goings-on (the reclusiveness of Emily, the strange smell coming from the house) makes the mind fill in the blanks, both for the reader and the characters.

Unlike most first-person stories, where one character is chosen as the audience's liaison between story and reader, the reader hears from the collective 'we,' being many others in the town. The fact that more than one narrator is used makes the story far more complex than most, and also allows for a more accurate look at the town itself. Through the fact that they all think alike enough to form the same opinions on Emily (and are also co-narrating to each other through gossip and conjecture), the town itself becomes a character, and that unit becomes the narrator of the story.

This same contrast also sets Emily apart from the rest of the town, and further cements her outsider status. The story is essentially set into two sides; Emily and the townspeople. Emily does not pay the taxes she needs to due to a childhood favor that was offered her by Colonel Sartoris; this forms the basis of her rebellion and seclusion from the town. As a result, there is no one specific townspeople who forms a connection to her, save Homer.

If the story had been from Homer's point of view, it would have been fairly short, the discovery of Homer's fate being the climax of the story. However, since the story necessitates that we do not know what happens to him yet, the only remaining narrators must be the people. The creation of a single other townspeople to narrate the story would limit the narrative to that one person's perspective, and not give an accurate impression of the town as a collective, a force of nature.

In creating the collective 'we' to look over at Emily and judge her, we can get a sense of Emily's seclusion and exclusion from the town. Her confidence and insistence on not paying taxes does not make her friends in the town, and as such she is excised; she can never be part of the collective that makes up the narrator of the story, particularly as she is the subject.

The townspeople watch Emily from a distance, never learning too many details about her life. In this instance, their narration can then be considered unreliable, as the reader and the townspeople never get a good read into Emily's psyche, only witnessing the aftermath after the fact. Despite the fact that they do not know what is going on, it does not stop the townspeople from guessing - the fact that they are all equally shut out of Emily's life

makes them all the more curious as to what is going on with her. (Miller 2004)

The first-person plural also connects us with the idea of gossip and speculation – the fact that, despite it being none of their business, the people of the town still wonder about Emily. They want to know what her relationship is with Homer, why she has not married at thirty, and why she continually refuses to pay taxes year after year. She sets herself apart as an individual, doing things that are not the norm for the people around her – by making everyone in the town wonder about her, Faulkner shows that there is no one quite like Emily in Jefferson. (Miller 2004)

Both the separate values of the community and the individual are at play in “*A Rose for Emily*” – it is essentially Emily vs. the town, and we are viewing it through the town’s perspective. Perhaps if we were to have gotten the story from the point of view of Emily, her own situation would be described far differently. However, we would have also known exactly what she was doing the whole time. By putting the audience at a distance (the same distance as the townspeople feel from her), the mysteries of her fate and true self become the subject of suspense and mystery, which is infinitely more interesting than learning everything as it happens.

In this story, Faulkner uses the collective ‘we’ in the first person to have the entirety of the town act as narrator for the story in order to build up suspense for the end of the tale. Emily telling the story would lead to no suspense, as would Homer doing the same. Also, there is no narrative room to establish a single townspeople who would wonder about Emily, and that

would not showcase the various thoughts of the town. As a result, the reader gets to learn everything the town thinks collectively about Emily, creating a sense of mystery around this solitary figure that is solved in a very gruesome way.

## Works Cited

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