

The chrysanthemums versus a rose for emily



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The analysis of literary elements such as plot, symbolism and character development will be explored in this essay as they pertain to the stories "A Rose for Emily" and "The Chrysanthemums". The story by John Steinbeck "The Chrysanthemums" revolves around the main character of Elise whose main identity is of a wife, however the complexities of the character are revealed as Elise is more suited to being a man than a woman: She is more like a man in her appearance, her dressing as well as her mannerisms.

She has been brought up in a world which is male dominated and in order to retain her self and her personality, which is much aggressive, she tends to hide her feelings. Her relationship with her husband is cordial, in fact even formal. Steinbeck wrote "The Chrysanthemums" in the third person so that the reader gains a better knowledge of the characters. It is with the third person narrative that the reader is introduced to Henry and Elise and therefore has no first person bias about their situation and their demeanor towards each other.

Steinbeck, as well as Faulkner use the third person narrative so that the reader is not given any subjective telling of the story and is therefore free to make their own assessments of the characters. Both authors use symbolism to make their stories more layered and therefore more interesting to the reader. The character of Elisa is shown to be boyish as the author writes that Elisa wears a "a man's black hat pulled low down over her eyes, clodhopper shoes, a figured print dress almost completely covered by a big corduroy apron..." ("The Chrysanthemums", Steinbeck 748).

This depicts that Elisa longs to have the opportunity to be free and authoritative like a man in her society. Another form of symbolism Steinbeck makes use of is with the title of the story "The Chrysanthemums".

Chrysanthemums are flowers which need a specific amount of daylight to nurture and a specific amount time of the night to bloom. Elisa is depicted by the author in the same symbolist method where she is feminine, but takes the mannish approach to live in order to create a space for her. In Faulkner's story "A Rose for Emily" the rose is a flower that has thorns which is a protective defense used by this beautiful flower.

The flower is a strong symbol used to denote Emily's personality. Miss Emily was the epitome of Southern values in this story; she harkened the town back to the 'old ways' in her manner, in her presence and thus whenever another character in the story approached her they were forced to reckon with her set of mores instead of the present situation. This can be clearly seen in the manner in which she dealt with her taxes when the sheriff and the town committee tried to force her to pay her taxes and can especially be seen in the manner in which the town tried to get rid of the smell permeating from her house.

The town did not approach her in a civilized manner because they did not want to tell a lady (a lady) that she stank, which is opposite of the symbol of a rose which is a very fragrant flower. The setting of Steinbeck's story is in the Valley of Salinas which is also a plot for many of the author's other early publications. The area of the valley is described as having small towns and farms and which mostly deals in economic activity pertaining to the

agriculture sector. In this setting the lead character is put on a ranch as the wife of a rancher.

The setting of the story sets the mood of being in between things as the valley is created for its existence between two mountains just as Elise's character is created as a wife as well as rancher. The setting in Faulkner's story is in the American South where the town folk still have people who fought in the Civil War. The Civil War was a battle for rights; for racism to cease, or at least slavery. In the ideals of the south, slavery, unfortunately had become a 'tradition' and it is difficult for someone, especially for a culture to change their normality.

This 'change' that the Civil War brought upon the south is exercised quite stunningly through Faulkner's character Colonel Sartoris in that he refuses to change his mode of thinking for the purpose of a smooth transition of south values to northern norms, and thus gives the reader an august manner of racism, Colonel Sartoris, the mayor—he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity.

Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it. (Faulkner). Here is seen the tradition of the south in the fact that Sartoris would not allow '

Negro' women to appear in public without an apron, which is a truly racism and sexist law to permit to be enacted.

The south however during this time period was a place in which the older generation wanted to hold firm to their beliefs in a type of call for integrity, no matter the ridiculous nature of this integrity. The setting of the story is in the period of 1890s when the civil war was still fresh in the minds of the people and the aspect of black slavery and unequal rights for colored people were still prominent in the opinions of people depicted in the book. This is clearly evident by the adjectives and named used by the author to introduce and depict the presence of Ms. Emily's anservant who was of African American origin.

The criticism on the story however is, that the story is more gothic than it appears. This is mostly due to the fact that the story is based around an old and traditional environment where the mysterious behavior by Emily is depicted as horrific and unexpected in nature. Aside from this the style of the houses and the opinions harbored by people also clearly indicate a very conservative society which is not appreciative of the differences of people. The story itself on the other hand is written in a very haphazard and disorganized manner by the author.

This makes it a bit confusing to comprehend however on the whole it has a strong impact, specifically the ending of the story. The story titled " The Chrysanthemums" begins with a cliched scene where the female lead is in the garden tending to the plants while the husband Henry is off trading and selling livestock to earn money. However the mannerisms, as well as the

approach taken by Elise, the lead character, towards life are very male oriented: She lives in a male dominated society and as a result has created a specific place for herself in it where she can be herself.

The critical analysis of the story and the writing style depicts that the author has provided a description of how a female can have male as well as female personalities which are dynamic and changeable. " Upon deeper inspection the story has strong notes of feminism in the central character Elisa Allen. Elisa's actions and feelings reflect her struggle as a woman trying and failing to emasculate herself in a male dominated society. Elisa is at her strongest and most proud in the garden and becomes weak when placed in feminine positions such as going out to dinner with her husband.

Steinbeck carefully narrates this woman's frequent shifts between femininity and masculinity over a short period of time" (" First 1100 characters of Feminism in John Steinbeck's The Chrysanthemums"). In Faulkner's story he uses this idea of patriarchy to explore the difference between Emily still behaving as her over-bearing father wanted her to behave instead of behaving with the times she was currently living. Emily is ostracized from the community, all of them assuming she is too proud, too august for her contemporaries, and that she lives (or lived) her current life in the past, stuck to the ideals of her father.

This same statement could be a representation of America during this time frame of the Post-Civil War in which the patriarchy of the American government did not allow for certain southern ideals, mores, and traditions to survive the end of the war. It is in this generational gap that a true sense

of the mores, values, and traditions of the South can be felt; either in a character ignoring their heritage or in a character being so immersed in that heritage that they refuse to allow anything to die (as is the case for Miss Emily).

In either sense, there is a certain aspect of Faulkner's writing which cannot escape from being influenced by a Post-Civil War society, as has been seen in the previous pages in the character analysis of Miss Emily as well as some of the town folk in how they treat her. The main metaphor for this harboring sentiments of a time that has passed is best seen in Miss Emily's poisoning of the Yankee, and her refusal to allow either man in her life to be buried except when forced or through her own death. That is mainly what Faulkner wrote about, the inability of people to move forward in their own traditions, except through death.