

# A rose for the landlady: a dissection of the affections of the dahl and faulkner' ...

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



Roald Dahl and William Faulkner explore the curious connection between love and death through their tales of passion-induced murder. Dahl's "The Landlady" and Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" are remarkably similar, but diverge on key elements of the narrative, namely the differences between the love Miss Emily shows Homer Barron and the "love" the Landlady shows her victims. By juxtaposing these works and analyzing "The Landlady" through the context of its differences to "A Rose for Emily," it becomes apparent that, unlike Miss Emily, the Landlady does not love her victims. Instead, she idolizes their beauty without regard to their identities as people.

To begin, the difference in setting establishes both Emily's love for her victim and the Landlady's lack of love for her victims. The Landlady has created a trap; everything about her lodgings is meant to be charming and inviting. Upon seeing animals through the window, Billy notes that "Animals were usually a good sign in a place like this" (Dahl 1), but the animals are purposefully placed, acting as lures. Her sincerity is as much a facade as the stuffed pets that decorate her establishment. In parallel, the Grierson house is entirely private to all but Miss Emily, her servant and Homer Barron. The environment Miss Emily creates for her victim is protective. She does not enclose him in a prison, but his own little world inside her home — one where nothing exists outside their love for each other. The room is supposed to convey their marital but there are details that imply the space is meant specifically for Homer Barron. Not only are a "suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mule shoes and the discarded socks" (Faulkner V) found in the room but so are the silver toilet things with his initials on them. These details show that Miss Emily does not merely want a groom, but Homer Barron

specifically. Compare this again to the environment from “The Landlady.” Because of the nature of her method of killing, the Landlady is incapable of personalizing the environment in which she kills. She tells Billy, “I’m inclined to be... choosy and particular... But I’m always ready. Everything is always ready day and night in this house just on the off-chance that an acceptable young gentleman will come along” (Dahl 2). Always being ready means the environment is constantly being changed; a room cannot be left for years at a time and be suitable to sleep in when finally used. After comparing the environments where Miss Emily and the Landlady conduct their murders, it becomes clear that the efforts Miss Emily makes to personalize her space show that she genuinely loves her victim, while, in contrast, the Landlady’s readiness for anyone who meets her expectations shows she does not hold the same depth of affection for her victims.

One of the most revealing differences between the sentiments Miss Emily and the Landlady have for their victims is the details of the victims themselves. The Landlady is a serial killer with three victims, all strangers, by the end of her story. Miss Emily has only one confirmed victim: her fiancé Homer Barron. Although the difference at first seems inconsequential, it shows that the Landlady has less regard for her victims than Miss Emily has for hers. Billy Weaver’s accounts of his stay at the Bed and Breakfast clearly demonstrate that the Landlady is collecting young men based solely on their objective, attractive qualities. After remarking that Billy is an acceptable applicant to her establishment, the narration notes that “her blue eyes travelled slowly all the way down the length of Billy’s body, to his feet, and

then up again” (Dahl 2). This gesture, in particular, denotes sexual objectification. When the Landlady sexually objectifies Billy, she turns him into a means to an end, a tool that she uses in order to support her obsession. And by the end, he is a literal object to her. In their findings on serial murder, Ronald M. Holmes and Stephen T. Holmes write, “ The victim must fulfill the killer’s fantasy for him to be satisfied. Since most... serialists kill for sexual purposes, it is evident that the victim should... possess attractive traits” (Holmes and Holmes 223). This “ fantasy” is unsustainable, as evidenced by the Landlady taking multiple victims, but it is also unfulfilling as an emotional connection. On multiple occasions, the Landlady misidentifies or even forgets the names of those she has killed:

Because later on, if I happen to forget what you were called, then I can always come down here and look it up. I still do that almost every day with Mr Mulholland and Mr... Mr... (Dahl 5).

She does not appear to need a connection with them before killing. Any “ love” she could harbour for them is based on superficial qualities.

Further evidence that the Landlady does not love her victims, but idolizes their beauty, comes from juxtaposing her victims to Homer Barron. Unlike the Landlady and her victims, it is clear that Miss Emily and Homer Barron have a connection. The narrator notes that “ the streets had been finished some time” (Faulkner IV), yet Homer Barron stays in Jefferson with Miss Emily, presumably for her company. Additionally, the room containing Homer Barron’s corpse is described as “ decked and furnished as for a bridal”

(Faulkner V), confirming that they had intentions to marry. Cluff, Hunter and Hinch explain a situation extremely similar to Miss Emily's in their essay on female serial killers: "Female serialists avoid detection... in part because there is a reluctance by the community, including the police, to believe that these women are killers. Typically, the community feels pity for these women who have tragically lost someone close to them" (Cluff and Hunter and Hinch 296). Much like the scenario described, Miss Emily having killed Homer Barron does not undermine her love for him; she still very clearly cares. Because of their relationship, Miss Emily's motive for murdering her intended appears to be love, and more specifically, a fear that, like her father, he will leave her. Miss Emily is clearly unperturbed by death, so "leaving," in this case, refers to the physical body being taken away from her. The reader is shown how Miss Emily handles the death of a loved one from her actions after her father's death: "Miss Emily met [the townswomen] at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days... Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down" (Faulkner II). "She broke down" appears to imply that she stopped denying that her father was dead. However, this is not supported by Miss Emily's actions after killing Homer Barron. Instead, her actions seem to show that she does not view death as the end of her loved ones' existences.

While discussing the dichotomies found in Miss Emily's character, Dennis W. Allen writes that her narrative is "concerned with the mutation and corruption of bodies, with violations of the line between life and death" (Allen

686). Homer Barron's corpse is not shown to have had any attempt made to preserve it; his body ages along with Miss Emily. In a way, they fulfill the promise of marriage and spend their lives together. The Landlady conveys a completely different objective in her murders. When the Landlady kills young men, she does not allow them to decompose like Miss Emily but is heavily implied to taxidermy them: "I stuff all my little pets myself when they pass away" (Dahl 5). She is indirectly referring to Billy when she says this, not only confirming her intentions but also reaffirming that she does not see him as a person, but a commodity. While Homer Barron's intentions to stay with Miss Emily are ambiguous, the reader is perfectly aware that the men who stay at the Bed and Breakfast have no intention to stay with the Landlady. Both rob their victims of their autonomy, but the Landlady is actively violating her victims even after death. Comparing the Landlady's murders to Miss Emily's crime provides clear evidence that the Landlady does not love her victims, but merely wishes to preserve their beauty.

Both "A Rose for Emily" and "The Landlady" expertly handle the subject of murder committed because of passion. Though the two share many similarities, by comparing the Landlady's murders to Miss Emily's, it becomes clear that the Landlady does not love her victims, but is instead infatuated with their physical beauty and is uninterested by their identities as people. The environments convey Miss Emily's attempts to create a safe, personal space for Homer Barron while the Landlady merely keeps a tidy open room for the men who fall for her trap. Additionally, the details of the victims expose both the deep affection Miss Emily has for Homer Barron and

the superficial attraction the Landlady feels for her tenants. Comparing these works tells the reader that not all murders are created equal; even such a cruel act can be born of pure intentions.

## **Works Cited**

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