

Plot analysis for a rose for emily

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



"A Rose for Emily" is a story with a southern gothic style. The tragic story is told to readers through an anonymous narrator that speaks on behalf of the town's people, but is not close to Emily, the protagonist, personally. This narration helps sustain a level of curiosity about Emily since readers cannot gain personal insight into her life and psyche. It is commonly expressed that the two things of certainty in life are death and taxes, death being one of the main themes that runs throughout the story.

There is a time when Emily seems to be above human certainty in the way of taxes. This aversion to one certainty seems to amplify the other in her life, because the rest of the story contains nothing but death; the death of people, beauty, ideals, everything that once guarded Emily from the rest of the world. Even though it is in vain, the protagonist's motivation behind everything she does is to make time stand still, thus trying to avoid the other human certainty, death.

As a result of the story beginning with Emily's funeral, readers are introduced to Miss Emily's struggle with her antagonist, time, through the setting she lives in. Miss Emily represents a by-gone era, one that she veils her life of seclusion in, refusing to face the passage of time around her. Her house is in a state of decay just like her body, both marking their loss to time. It was a house that, "had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies...set on what had once been our most select street".

The house's description seems to mimic Emily's life because at one time she is described as a, "slender figure in white" and it is said that "None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily". It's as if the house's

once desirable location imitates Emily's one time desirability among suitors. This symbolism is used again when the house is described as, "lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps". The house is more of an out-of-date nuisance than an object of admiration, as Emily herself was before her death.

Faulkner's use of the word coquette, points to his intention for readers to see the symbolism of Emily's and the house's battle with time, because a coquette is a woman who endeavors without sincere affection to gain the admiration of men. Since Emily at one time had the admiration of men, she continues to behave as if time has not taken a toll on her desirable appearance before men, thus making her act as if she is still above their law. The town's mayor, Colonel Sartoris, promotes this thinking by remitting Emily's taxes after her father's death.

The colonel spins a tale to explain, saying that the tax remittance is to pay back her father for money he loaned the town. A story no one believes according to the author, except a woman. The author says, "When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction". When the new mayor personally writes Emily to inform her she must pay taxes like the rest of the community, the author describes Emily's reply as representing the forgotten past.

The story says the mayor, "received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment". Emily does everything as if no time has passed. As a result of Emily realizing

she cannot stop time, she chooses to shut out the passage of time in the world around her, by living a secluded life. The narrator says, " After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all".

It's at this time that the narrator informs readers about a strange smell emanating from Emily's house, a smell that the passage of time produces to betray her. Because Emily represents a time where people are limited by the role of class and gender in society, this limiting mind-set is what the towns people use as an excuse for the troubling smell. The author says, " the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man-a young man then-going in and out with a market basket. " Just as if a man-any man-could keep a kitchen properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed".

This same limiting mindset re-emerges when the Aldermen of the town meet to discuss a solution to the rising complaint of the gross smell. When the young man in the group of Aldermen, who represents the rising generation, suggests what he believes to be a simple solution of confronting Emily about the smell, he is quickly rebuked. The judge cuts him off by saying, " Dammit sir,"..." will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad"? Similar to Emily, the older men restrict their decisions based on tradition, thus denying the evidence that time produced to bring her to justice.

In the end, it is the passage of time that plays the role of Emily's antagonist. Despite her efforts of seclusion and refusal to change, time has its way with Emily and everything she clings to. One passage refers to a gold chain she wears with the end tucked in her waist; on the end of the chain is a watch.

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Emily carries her antagonist with her as if she believes its closeness will keep it from sneaking up on her; as if her own stubborn will set beside it, could stop the cursed mechanism from ticking forth its unpleasant reminder.