

A rose for emily – biography william faulkner

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“ Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town...” (Faulkner). “ A Rose for Emily” is a short story about the life of a woman with a tragic history. Faulkner’s commentary on social class is apparent in the story. Using a reader response criticism, a reader can analyze “ A Rose for Emily” using the aspects of gender, social class, and secrets.

To begin with, the role of gender is apparent in “ A Rose for Emily”. Faulkner’s commentary on the role of women in society is clear; he believes that women are inferior to men, almost as second class citizens. For example, the story begins with Faulkner saying, “ When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house...” (Faulkner). Faulkner makes his beliefs about the role of gender clear by saying that men attended Miss Emily’s funeral with honor and respect whereas women attend the funeral out of curiosity to see her house. He portrays women as less honorable. Moreover, Faulkner believes that a woman’s true value to society is her appearance.

He spends a lot of time detailing Miss Emily’s appearance throughout the stages of her life. No example is clearer than where he says, “ When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning gray. During the next few years it grew grayer and grayer until it attained an even-pepper-and-salt iron gray, when it ceased turning.” Faulkner gives the impression that a woman’s main value is her appearance because the detail he describes Miss Emily’s in. He doesn’t detail any male character as vividly as

he does Emily and he focuses on her appearance beyond any of her other aspects. Further, social class plays an important role in “ A Rose for Emily”.

Faulkner’s use of the character Tobe highlights the role of race in the setting of “ A Rose for Emily”. Tobe is disrespected and dehumanized throughout the story. For example, Judge Stevens refers to him as, “...that nigger of hers...” (Faulkner). This shows the dehumanization of blacks in that timeframe because Tobe’s identity is taken from him by all but Miss Emily when they don’t call him by name. It degrades Tobe to be called nigger, the townspeople don’t even give him the essential courtesy of respecting his name.

Furthermore, social class plays a role in separating the rich from the poor. Miss Emily is judged for having a romance with the less affluent, Homer Barron. In the following line the townspeople’s reactions to their relationship is apparent, “‘ Poor Emily’, the whispering began. ‘ Do you suppose it’s really so?’ they said to one another” (Faulkner). The townspeople frowned upon her relationship with Homer as a result of the barriers set up by social class. Homer is a day laborer whereas Miss Emily comes from an opulent family, this gives them the impression that he is beneath her.

Moreover, secrets are used by Faulkner throughout “ A Rose for Emily”. The use of secrets in “ A Rose for Emily” are generally as foreshadowing. For example, Faulkner uses the aforementioned technique in the following line, “...so they were not surprised when the smell developed” (Faulkner). The foreshadowing here is that the smell developed as a result of Homer Barron’s dead body being kept by Miss Emily in her house. The townspeople where

never allowed inside the house after Homer was last seen and they never make the connection that Miss Emily murdered him until after her death where they discover his decomposed corpse in Miss Emily's bed. Another example of such a secret being used as foreshadowing is in the line, " We did not say she was crazy then.

We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will" (Faulkner). The secret here is that Miss Emily is indeed crazy and the foreshadowing is that she would repeat a similar action later on by holding on to Homer Barron's corpse. To conclude, the aspects of gender, social class, and secrets play a prominent role in helping a reader use a reader response criticism to analyze " A Rose for Emily". A reader can learn about the social inequality from this topic. From the short story one can also learn to not become too attached to people and let go when it is time.