

William Faulkner's "A Rose For Emily"

As you read the story, "A Rose for Emily," focus on the plot structure. Interestingly, Faulkner has structured the story into 5 parts; however, they are not chronological. Why? What did Faulkner have in mind about the chaotic narrative structure?

Consider the characters. Who is your narrator? Yes, it is a townspeople—obviously, someone who has learned information about Miss Emily through the town gossip. How is Miss Emily described throughout the story from the opener to the end of the story? What do we know about her father?

Consider any foreshadowing in the story. Look for figurative language, like symbols and imagery.

Part I

We learn that Miss Emily has passed, and some of the townspeople are at her funeral. For the most part, people attend only out of curiosity. Focus on the description of her house, which is "a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street." Can you find any comparison between the house and Miss Emily?

We then are told that Miss Emily had been a "a duty, a care, a hereditary obligation upon the town." Apparently, Miss Emily was only tolerated in town. What does it mean to be a "hereditary obligation?" Was she, too, an "eyesore"?

We also get other descriptions of Miss Emily. For example, in the first description the reader has of Miss Emily, when the aldermen visit her house to ask for her taxes, she is described as "bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue." This comparison of Miss Emily to a drowned body suggests that she has been dead inside for a time now. One symbol that is evident of Miss Emily's loss of reality/time is the "invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain." What does tell us about Miss Emily's state of mind?

In 1894, the mayor, Colonel Sartoris remitted her taxes after the death of her father. When the next generation came into office, the Board of Alderman had a meeting to decide how to collect taxes from Miss Emily, who was in the habit of not paying them. A "deputation" went to her house and waited in the dusty parlor until Miss Emily entered. She repeats that Colonel Sartoris has told her she has no taxes in Jefferson. The Colonel had been dead for almost a decade. This is another example of Miss Emily's loss of reality/time.

Part II

This section moves into a flashback narrative. It is two years after the death of Miss Emily's father and just a short time after the disappearance of her sweetheart—the one that people thought she would marry. One of the first conflicts we find is the neighbors complaining to Judge Stevens, the mayor, about the smell. The Board of Aldermen met to discuss what to do, and rather than confront Miss Emily, as the young one suggested, they sneak over to her house and sprinkle lime around.

A major detail about Miss Emily we find out almost 40 years ago (she's in her early 30s now and unmarried) is that her father died. However, she denies it. Finally, after three days and under threat of law and force, she allows her father to be buried. The townspeople did not say she was crazy then, because they assumed she had to "cling to that which had robbed her" of a married life, since her father had driven away her suitors. The townspeople had begun to "feel really sorry for her." How do you feel about Miss Emily in this scene? Do you also feel sorry for her? What future does she have now? What we will learn later is that this scene foreshadows the end.

Part III

The story in this section provides information on how the South is going through a reconstruction. A construction company arrives to first pave the sidewalks. The foreman, Homer Barron, “a big, dark, ready man with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face,” begins to court Miss Emily and we observe him in Miss Emily’s company driving on Sundays. The old people said, “Poor Emily. Her kinsfolk should come to her.” Why? Miss Emily was a Grierson, someone of Southern nobility. Why would she be in the company of a Northerner, a construction worker?

Another point of interest in this section is when Miss Emily went to the druggist because she wants “some poison.” She decides on arsenic. The druggist gives her the poison while strongly implying that it should only be used “for rats and such.” When the package is delivered to her, “For rats” is written on it. Why would Miss Emily buy arsenic?

Part IV

Although Miss Emily continues to see Homer, the women of the town began to question her riding around in the buggy with Homer Barron, a man with no intention of marriage, as he “had remarked—he like men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks’ Club—that he was not a marrying man.”

The Baptist minister called upon her, but left and refused to return; his wife wrote to Miss Emily’s family in Alabama a week later. Her “kinsfolk” came to her, from Alabama, even though there had been a falling out in the family. The townspeople thought that “the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been.” Homer Barron disappeared, but after the cousins from Alabama left, a neighbor reported seeing Homer Barron return to the house “at dusk one evening.” But he was never seen again. After that, Miss Emily did not leave the house

.For a period of “six or seven years” when she was about forty years old, Miss Emily gave china-painting lessons to “the daughters and granddaughters of Colonel Sartoris’ contemporaries.” Then the students stopped coming. Miss Emily also refused to let a mailbox be attached to her house when the town got postal delivery service. Years pass and Miss Emily “passed from generation to generation – dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.” The town did not even know she was sick before she died, since Tobe, her servant, did not talk to anyone. When she died at the age of 74, she had grown fat and her hair was turning gray until it was a “vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man.”

Part V

After letting in the mourners after Miss Emily’s death, Tobe disappeared out the back door. The two female cousins from Alabama arrived and held the funeral. The narrator describes how a group of townspeople waited until Miss Emily “was decently in the ground” before forcing open the door to a deserted room above the stairs. The room was coated in dust, and “decked and furnished as for a bridal,” including a man’s toiletries and “carefully folded” suit. And there on the bed was the rotting body of Homer Barron in a nightshirt. The diction choice of “tomb” hints to the reader what he or she is soon to discover: this room is, in fact, a tomb for Homer Barron. On the pillow next to him, also coated in dust, was the indentation of a head, and a single strand of “iron-gray hair.” Did that strand of hair belong to Miss Emily? What was Miss Emily doing for the last 40 years? Did Miss Emily use the arsenic to poison Homer? If so, why did she kill him? How was her refusal to bury her father a foreshadowing of this final revelation?

Theme

Miss Emily is stuck in the time of Colonel Sartoris. Her inability to adapt to change is demonstrated not only in her refusal to pay taxes after Colonel Sartoris remitted them, the

invisible watch, her Negro servant, her denial of the death of her father, the China-painting sessions, her refusal to have a mailbox when free postal delivery becomes available to the town, but also, and what is more important, her murdering a man and keeping his dead body in her bedroom for at least 40 years.

Plot structure

Now that you have finished reading the story, go back to the narrative structure—the plot. On the power point, I show you a linear plot structure. Obviously, this story is not linear. Why? Was Faulkner symbolizing the chaotic frame of mind of Miss Emily? If it were chronological, in what order would you organize this story? Look for key events after the death of her father — meeting of Homer (III)—poison (III)—disappearance (IV)—smell (II). Could this story be the Southern’s revenge against the North?

Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery”

The key to understanding Jackson’s “The Lottery” is through the series of ironies developed throughout the story. **Irony** is the use of opposites. For example, the setting of the story reflects a clear sunny summer day in June. It is a small community of 300 with a post office and a bank. Children are playing, men are talking, and women are gossiping. The procedures of the lottery are clear: Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves take care of black wooden box. Each head of household is called up to select a piece of paper from the box. Up to this juncture, nothing is out of the ordinary. In fact, up to the last name Zanini, the plot is still describing the exposition of the story.

The conflict begins with Tessie Hutchinson exclaiming, “It’s not fair,” after her husband is the “winner.” The reader doesn’t quite understand what is going on, didn’t the Hutchinson’s win? After crying three times that it wasn’t fair, the Hutchinson family has to select a paper individually. When a girl whispered, “I hope it’s not Nancy,” the reader wonders if the girl is jealous.

The falling action is so rapid that the reader is caught unaware. Then the stone hits Tessie on the side of the head. The story ends with the entire community, including Tessie’s own children, throwing stones.

The objectivity of the narration is sustained throughout the story until the conflict. The reader begins to question how a modern society seems captive to an inhumane tradition. The story does imply that this village lives and believes in this tradition because they did remember to use stones. Certainly, when the boys are piling rocks, the reader recognizes now the foreshadowing. The lottery is actually a preparation for a summer’s grave. Why is Old Man Warner upset? Could it be that others have challenged this tradition, this ritual? The fact that has participated 77 times illustrates that the lottery is truly embedded in society.

When this story was published in 1948 in *The New Yorker*, Jackson received letters from people who wanted to know where the lottery took place so they can visit the town. What does this say about our society?

“The Lottery,” thus, uses plot structure to tell a story chronologically with an enhanced exposition to then dramatize the conflict and moves the storyline rapidly to follow the action in the story.