

Jaclyn Crane

Brother Bailey

English 495

13 March 2013

Decaying Values: An Interpretation of Faulkner's view of Values in "A Rose for Emily"

Whether educated, uneducated, of high-birth, or low, people are generally offered plenty of opportunities to commit wicked actions. These evil actions make no sense to those who live outside the realm of this wickedness. What causes a good person to fall so far and land in the horrifying category of murderer? In his story "A Rose for Emily," William Faulkner presents an interesting view concerning those who commit heinous acts and how the people close to them missed the slow fall of that person into wickedness.

William Faulkner is "one of the most preeminent American writers of the twentieth Century" (European Graduate School). Faulkner's family was Southern and "lost all of its financial power during the [Civil War]" (EGS). As Faulkner went to school he dabbled in poetry, screenwriting, and writing novels. Faulkner's literary career started when he wrote newspaper sketches and stories for *Times-Picayune* and took off when Faulkner published his work *The Sound and the Fury* which "ranked sixth on the Modern Library's on the 100 best English-language novels of the twentieth century" (Charters 408, EGS). Faulkner's works that received critical acclaim include *Sanctuary*, *A Rose for Emily*, *August*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* (EGS). Faulkner's works center around the moral issues he saw during his time between whites and blacks, those wealthy and poor, and the debauchery of men towards women (Nobelprize.org).

In William Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily" we see, in a convoluted chronology of narration, a Southern girl brought up by a restrictive father. All she longs for is a husband and family. After her father dies, Emily, the Southern girl, takes a Yankee carpetbagger for a lover. The gossiping community watches as the young man supposedly takes Emily's virtue then leaves. After a time, he comes back to Emily and she accepts him. Emily passes away, and the community joins together at her house, but when they enter a locked room they find Emily's lover, decayed on the bed, with a silver strand of hair on the pillow beside him.

Critics have pondered "A Rose for Emily" and offered many interpretations concerning the mental stability of Emily's mind and offer necrophilia as the answer. Emily is not the only character who is questioned; the narrator and the chronology of the story have presented a challenge for many a critic. The use of plural pronouns has led some critics to infer the story's narrator is a representation of the community's gossip. One critic has even brought forth the idea that the narrator was an accomplice in the murder of Emily's lover, Homer Barron. It seems Faulkner has written this story for those willing to offer interpretations.

Jack Scherting presents his interpretation concerning "A Rose for Emily" in his essay, "Emily Grierson's Oedipus complex: Motif, Motive, and Meaning in Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily'." Scherting proposes that the answer to Homer Barron's murder lies in understanding the Oedipal behavior Emily has for her father. Emily uses Homer Barron as a surrogate for father, for whom she has desires, and when society demands this situation to be fixed, she murders Homer Barron to keep him for the release of these desires. Scherting ventures forth, knowing that the answer to what "A Rose for Emily" means lies in discovering Emily's motive "to poison her lover and conceal his corpse from the public for some forty years" (397). First the reader must bypass the strange way that the narrator tells the tale and realize that Emily has "a

psychotic personality,” and this allows the reader to focus on the question of why Emily murdered her lover (397). Scherting goes against critic Paul D. McGlynn’s, interpretation that Emily felt jilted and tried to “override the opinions of the people and the laws of death and decay” by murdering and keeping the body of her lover by proving there is no evidence that Homer Barron jilted Emily Grierson (398).

Evidence supporting Scherting’s interpretation is spread throughout the text, and Scherting begins by addressing that Homer Barron and Emily Grierson’s met together often during an estimated two year period. Scherting notes that Homer Barron “visited Emily on a regular basis” (398). The other pieces of evidence Scherting offers include Homer and Emily’s affair being interrupted by the cousins’ visit and the people of Jefferson’s ability to only assume that Homer had abandoned Emily when he was left in the upstairs bedroom patiently waiting for Emily in death.

With one interpretation’s legitimacy in question, Scherting still must find a motive for the murder of Homer Barron. In answer, Scherting brings in Freud’s idea of Oedipal behavior. This behavior includes a daughter’s desire to have her father in a sexual manner. The connection between Freud and Faulkner is the timeframe of Faulkner’s writing and the popularity of Freud’s ideas. When Faulkner was writing “A Rose for Emily,” Freudian theories were prevalent and Faulkner himself spoke of Emily’s aspirations which could not be repressed and if attempted they would “come up somewhere else and very likely in a tragic form” (399). In this case, the form was Homer Barron’s murder.

Scherting brings forth his evidence in favor of the Oedipal behavior theory’s presence in Faulkner’s story starting with the father daughter relationship. Emily’s father prevents her from seeing men, even those who were interested in her and this repressed her sexually. Emily’s

sexual repression caused her to transfer her sexual dependence to her father, and upon his death she could not cope. When the community takes her father's body, Emily regresses into her childhood and becomes "an emotional orphan in search of the father who had been taken from her" (400). When Homer Barron enters the picture, he is the perfect male to replace Emily's father. He is similar to her father as seen through the scenes where he is holding a horsewhip, his strong will, and how Emily replaces her father's body with that of Homer's (401). Scherting suggests that it is evident Emily is unable to discriminate "between past and present, between sleep and death, between which is vital and that which is decaying" and this is a piece to understanding the reason for murdering Homer (401).

When Emily is forced to either marry Homer or leave him as society demands, she is torn but finds a way to do both. "She simultaneously murdered and "married" Homer Barron" (402). She stopped the affair to appease society while still laying claim on Homer's body so he would be available for her desires. To conclude, Scherting provides three more evidences concerning Emily's desires for her father. He describes the portrait of her father in the room with the corpse which suggest that "the spirit of Mr. Grierson so preoccupied Emily's distorted universe that it dominated the personal identity of Homer Barron" (403). Scherting also provides another interpretation for this sentence within "A Rose for Emily," "Now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him," by saying the length of time is the time she has not had with her father and that Homer was "cuckolded by Emily's father every time he went to bed with her" (403). In his final paragraphs, Scherting suggests the rose reflects the symbolism from a Roman idea that "a rose suspended in a room signified that nothing which transpires *sub rosa* was to be divulged to the outside world," which shows that the true telling of

this story is hidden and is only recognized by those who understand the clues to Emily's subconscious feelings (404).

Scherting has addressed a question about Homer and his consideration towards Emily, and he has thoroughly described the Oedipal complex and its application to "A Rose for Emily." The reader might find the final supporting pieces of evidence in Scherting's argument lacking, however. Where Scherting's description of Oedipal behavior is fully explained within six pages, the last few pieces of evidence that support Emily's murder of Homer because of her sexual desires for her father are given only two and a half pages. It seems the real purpose of this essay is to suggest, through ample evidence, that Emily has sexual desires for her father rather than to answer the purpose of Homer's murder.

John L. Skinner offers another interpretation by finding the murder of Homer as simply another event and focuses on the narrator's logic as the key to understanding the story. Skinner uses a formalist approach to gain new insight into the narrator's analepsis in his essay "A Rose for Emily': Against Interpretation" by suggesting that by using the formalist theory to analyze the narrator's tale the reader will understand the narrator's flow of thought and logic. Skinner finds this interpretation "will have immediate relevance for this story and, perhaps, for more of Faulkner's fiction" (42).

Skinner uses the text to support his argument for a logical narrator. He begins by placing the text into five sections that "reflect the narrator's coherence" (45). The narrator begins by describing Miss Emily's funeral which in turn leads to a description of the house where the funeral is held. Pondering a moment longer, the narrator, whom Skinner assumes is part of an older generation and male, realizes the house is part of that older generation which is slowly dying out, and this pushes him gently toward remembering Miss Emily and her "hereditary

obligation upon the town” (45). After remembering Emily’s obligation, the narrator remembers her tax exemptions which the mayor, later in Emily’s life, tries to end by down-playing “Miss Emily’s favored status” (45). Emily has just gained her first victory over society.

In Skinner’s next section he recognizes the narrator views the continual tax exemption as a victory and equates this victory equal to the victory Miss Emily had in keeping a rotting corpse in her house when the smell was so malodourous the neighbors complained. Skinner admits “the transition here is less logical; if Emily kept her tax privileges by mere obtuseness over the smell there was not even a confrontation,” but defends his point by suggesting that this particular narrator admired Emily’s victories but skillfully showed this admiration “without unduly compromising his reliability” through his use of excessively descriptive language concerning Emily vanquishing “them horse and foot” (45). The narrator is thrown into new memories after returning to the present funeral where society currently considers Miss Emily as “poor Miss Emily” when previously society showed conflicting emotions after the death of Miss Emily’s father.

After speaking of Emily’s father’s death, it seems odd that the narrator jumps to Homer Barron, but Skinner provides the transition to section three by recognizing “the reemergence of Miss Emily after her father’s death” (45). This new Emily took no notice of society and its disapproval of her relationship with Homer Barron. This Emily was so similar to the other uncaring Emily later on the author could not help but compare the two appearances showing this side of Emily. The first was her relationship with Homer and the second was after he left her and she had gone to purchase poison where she had treated the store keeper in an equally unyielding manner. To the narrator, Skinner assumes, the poison would naturally lead to the thought “that the poison was purchased for the suicide of an unrequited lover” (46). Building on this thought

creates section four of the text where the narrator describes the relationship between Miss Emily and Homer Barron.

The couple's relationship is described by society and the only interruption to the relationship is the arrival of the cousins. The arrival of the cousin is important for the narrator to mention because this shows society's demands are being heard. The final section of text, as Skinner explains is a natural occurrence when the narrator thinks of the time after the relationship when the public sees Emily next. Emily's appearance of "mental and physical decline" begins the downward spiral of thought towards Emily's death (46). This transition brings the narrator back to the present scene of Emily's funeral and how "the town comes to look at Miss Emily with mingled curiosity and respect" which leads to the town going to an upstairs bedroom and opening the door to reveal the skeleton inside (46). Skinner recognizes that this interpretation of the text answers the questions about the giant gaps in chronology, but he also associates the timeline with Gerard Genette's methodology of analyzing time.

Genette's methodology includes looking at the order of the analepses, which might be internal or external, looking at the duration, and looking at the frequency in accordance with appearance of events within a story (46). Genette focuses on the importance of the three factors of order, duration and frequency while analyzing "A Rose for Emily" while looking at time using his methodology. Though Skinner appreciates Genette's methodology, he thinks that Genette is using his methodology in consideration of Faulkner himself, rather than to the narrator Faulkner has created. This leads Skinner to explain the importance of the narrator in "A Rose for Emily."

Skinner argues that Emily is not the main character within Faulkner's story by explaining that Emily is a stereotypical figure.

Emily is a shadowy, ambivalent figure: in terms of *suzhet*, she may be represented as a grand old Southern lady; in the context of *fabula* she is little more than an unusual clinical case, a psychopath and necrophiliac who has committed a gruesome crime, but one which after all is matched daily for brutality in our news media. (49)

Skinner's explanation does show the unimportance of the character of Emily; however, it does not address the importance of the narrator.

Skinner's purpose for this essay appears to be in pointing out the flaws in Genette's methodology rather than making an intriguing interpretation about the narrator as the main character within "A Rose for Emily." Skinner uses two pages to show the logical thought process of the narrator but leaves this subject to explain Genette's methodology. In the paragraph following this Skinner argues against this methodology, and he swings to his subject, the narrator. The statement Skinner posed on the second to last page of his essay "but the peculiar mind and skills of the narrator are central to the story; the narrator himself . . . is the chief character," leaves the reader wanting more explanation to create clear connections between the narrator's logic and the narrator being the main character (49). Skinner's essay is indeed an exploration using the formalist view on the narrator's logic, but his last page shows the statement that needs to be argued. An explanation clearly articulated that connects the narrator's logic and his stance as the main character has the potential to be of more relevance than one insight into a singular work of Faulkner's.

In "The Narrator in 'A Rose for Emily,'" Ruth Sullivan interprets that the narrator has created a fictional character in Emily by viewing her life with his own perceptions of life and its meanings. Sullivan states, "Miss Emily is the Miss Emily the narrator sees" (175). To clarify her

outlook on the narrator, Sullivan acknowledges that the narrator is in a plural form; “They are anonymous town folk” who are “naïve watchers” and “of indeterminate age” whose “most significant action” is “watching” (161). For the ease of the reader, Sullivan uses the pronoun “he” to refer to the narrator. To look into the role of the narrator, Sullivan offers three lenses through which she suggests the narrator views Emily, first as “a high-born and eccentric citizen to curious neighbors,” second as a “voyeur,” and third as “mother to a child” (166).

The suggestion of the viewer being curious is a natural idea. There is plenty of textual evidence for Sullivan to use that suggests the narrator “sees,” “watches,” “glances,” and “notices” all that is going on in Emily’s life (161). Sullivan suggests that this curiosity might spring from “respect, admiration, awe, and affection; but it is also and equally stirred by discomfort and revulsion” (161). Sullivan suggests these emotions do not balance out the careful watching of the narrator. This leaves the question of why the narrator watches open.

In answer to this question, Sullivan boldly states that the narrator is a voyeur. In a surprising use of text, she offers evidence for this idea. In this sense, the narrator has a “sexual curiosity” which leads him to “sadistic” and “aggressive” actions (162). As the narrator watches Emily, he is taking away her privacy and intruding on her life. Since society is viewed as the narrator, these intrusions are shown through different actions as society pushes their way into Emily’s life. They come to the door with taxes, the minister comes, her family relations come, and they force their way in to bury her father. All of these actions invaded Emily’s privacy. Sullivan is suggesting that Emily’s house is symbolic of her body and as society pushes in they are taking her virtue. In the final scene we see society burst into a dead Emily’s room to view the secrets that she had carefully kept hidden. This act pushes society into the same position as Emily; they are symbolically introduced to necrophilia (164).

For the final view of the narrator as a child and Emily as a mother, Sullivan acknowledges the reader's original thought of outlandishness, but she proceeds to explain the narrator is a child "not chronologically but psychically: his psychic development is infantile" (166). Remembering this and the fact that the narrator is not one person but many with an indeterminate age, gender, occupation, or face in society, it is easy to see "that the narrator has only one dimension" which translates into the narrator being a childlike figure (166). Emily is formed into a mother figure "because only the real or surrogate mother could engage infantile feelings so deeply and enduringly" (168). The narrator has placed Emily on a pedestal by viewing her as "godlike" (168). In the narrator's view, Emily is "defying all merely human laws, institutions, and relationships, for she will not pay taxes or allow numbers to be affixed to her house, she resists allowing her father to be buried, she does not even marry as normal people do" (168). This idolization of Emily is also shown in the usage of the words "idol," "monument," and "angels" (169). This recognition of the narrator as the child and Emily as the mother shows the narrator's curiosity is simply that of a child constantly needing to know where the parent is and what they are doing (169). Whichever lens the reader chooses to view the narrator through, it is most important to realize the Emily seen in the story is the fictional character the narrator creates.

In "A Rose for Emily," William Faulkner ponders over traditional values and how they morph according to society's desires. In this interpretation, Emily Grierson represents traditional values, and Faulkner explores how society, as shown through the society-based narrator, induces Emily to exchange her traditional values for the values of society. Society's values are constantly changing according to society's desires and these changing values lead to the decay of society.

The sad tale of Emily Grierson begins at her funeral, “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 409). The narrator, as many critics argue, represents society’s view on things because the narration is done from the first person plural. For this interpretation, society and its ideas will be represented through a narrator whom will now be referred to as “she.” The usage of “she” as the pronoun stems from the likelihood that the narrator is a woman in a higher circle who gossips, and, as Skinner shows, has a thought process that connects unlike events together logically just as the average female mind works. Some may argue that the line “only a woman could have believed it” suggests that the narrator is a man but it seems to be simply a remark from a woman about what naïve women will believe (409). The interpretation of this line changes when the woman narrator believes Emily is not as intelligent, inferring that only uneducated women would believe the story. This would make the remark an insult not at women as a whole but at those unintelligent women like Emily Grierson.

The narrator’s point of view, as Sullivan emphasizes, is the only lens the reader has for which to view Emily; Emily is called a “fallen monument” whom the men respect (409). The term *fallen* implies that Emily was at one point held up. The question is left whether the men respect the fact that the monument has *fallen* or if they respected the monument while it *stood*. In this case it seems the men realize the monument was beautiful while it stood and the values it represented. Not only is Emily described as a monument, but as an “idol” (411). Though Emily is compared to a monument by society, society has conflicting emotions concerning her. During the funeral scene, Emily is respected and people have affection for her. These same feelings are reflected for her in the beginning of her life where society sees her as beautiful but later on this view twists into a vision of Emily as a skeletal figure.

The switch in opinion is caused by a new generation of people, and these people encourage change and efficiency. “When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement [concerning Emily’s taxes] created some little dissatisfaction” (409). The arrangement is not the only situation that caused dissatisfaction from society. It seems society is dissatisfied with Emily Grierson.

When a smell lingers around Emily’s house the new generation tries to find a way to solve the problem. Rather than speak to Emily, “they broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the outbuildings” (411). This action, on the part of the community, shows how “the new generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town” as they convinced one another to break the law through breaking and entering. Society also knew they were going against Miss Emily’s wishes by invading her privacy without her consent.

This new generation pushed their ideas and values on Emily as they pushed the Baptist minister to speak to her when she preferred to be left alone. The result was a Baptist minister who would not go to visit Emily again (413). The Baptist minister rejected her entirely. This disregard from society for Emily’s opinions is reflected in the action that one lady of society took to write to Emily’s relations (413). She invited them to come, once again, without Emily’s consent.

The most hurtful action against Emily happened as society ignored her desires concerning the burial of her father.

She told them her father was not dead. She did that for three days. With the ministers calling on her, and the doctors trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly. (411)

Though Emily tried to hold her ground, she was not built to withstand persuasion mixed with law and force all during her time of grief. She might have broken down, but the text does not offer the exact dialogue which specifies that Emily gave them permission to take her father's body. Society forces their ideals on Emily then excused these actions by implying that Emily was falling into madness though they never presented this idea out loud (411).

The new generation's consideration towards Emily has grown into disgust which not only bleeds through into their treatment of Emily but in their description of Emily's appearance. "She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough" (410). The narrator describes Emily using coal and dough as though Emily has become as common as these elements. They mean nothing to the community, and this is how Emily is viewed. These sentiments should be contrasted with a previous description of Emily before the disgust had arisen in the new generation. This description is filled with empathy and a feeling of sympathy from the narrator because Emily's father passed away none too shortly before. At this time, the people see "her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows – sort of tragic and serene" (411). At this point Emily is a respected figure and still lovely, but she is slowly losing her luster as society questions her sanity because her values do not make sense to them.

As the community barges in on Emily with their opinions, the reader will recognize that Emily is holding them off by standing for what she believes, even if society does not approve. Emily stands firm while society bashes into her pressing upon her the idea that even her smallest decisions should be changed to fit what society expects. "When the town got free postal delivery, Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a

mailbox to it. She would not listen to them” (414). Emily could hold her own. She proved this as she told the doctors and ministers “no” concerning the burial of her father’s body for three days while she was grieving. This ability to withstand peer pressure in this type of state shows the strong Emily who held onto her values.

Emily stood for tradition as she stayed in her old house “that had once been white” (409). Even when society changed its values, Emily stood firm as “garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily’s house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons” (409). Even where Emily was buried represented her traditional values as she “join[ed] the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery” (409). Emily was strong and did withstand for a long period of time, but this did not last.

Emily’s strength diminishes as is reflected in the decaying of her house and her actions. Her traditional values begin to falter as she follows the more exciting ones brought into existence by the new generation. Her first act is allowing society into her home willingly. “Presently, we began to see him [Homer Barron] and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable” (412). Homer Barron represents society. As the children follow him he becomes their leader to teach them the ways of the world. He willingly adjusts, upon his visits, to whatever standards the new society lives. His ever changing standards allow him to not only “[know] everybody in town” but “be in the center of the group” (412). Homer Barron was willing to be what society wanted and this, perhaps, may be the reason Emily fell for him. Homer acted as if he held similar beliefs about her standards.

As Emily and Homer became more comfortable, it is a natural assumption of the narrator to believe Emily has offered Homer her virtue. This is the downfall of Emily. As Emily goes

against the traditional values, upon which society still holds her but not themselves, she begins to decay. Emily turns to what society, with its ever changing standards, would deem an appropriate consequence—revenge. This idea of revenge would have been denied by the strong Emily, but Emily has lost her strength. She has become another player for society's team, and she is using the playbook society has written, a playbook with the lower standards of society and no mention of the traditional values by which Emily lived. This game leads Emily to the rat poison as an option for revenge. When Emily is seen in public, society quickly remarks on her appearance as "a slight woman, though thinner than usual, with cold haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which is strained across the temples about the eye-sockets as you imagine a lighthouse-keeper's face ought to look" (412). Society is right; Emily's appearance is fading just as her house and her traditional values. Though she might hold onto her values in small aspects, the larger picture is falling apart as she follows society's lead to forget her traditional values in favor of others.

Emily's traditional values might have sprung from her father or the time period in which she lived. As she outlived both the time and her father, she still lived by what they taught until society pushed her another way. Her father did not let her go out with gentlemen to learn the antics of nontraditional values, in consequence, Emily lived traditionally after her father died until the new generation emerged asking her to change.

Emily is a symbol for traditional values, which the new generation does not feel apply to them. The new generation, which may be referred to as society or the narrator, feel as if they are impervious to the consequences that change brings. This is not true. As Emily changes and follows the values of society, which are in constant motion, she slowly begins to decay. The decaying process is not only shown through her appearance but her house as well. The house is fine and grand while inhabited by people who lived traditional values, but once this habitation

changes from an owner living higher standards to one that chooses lower standards it begins to fall into disarray. When society enters into Emily's house with their low set of nontraditional values, they see the damage and toll these values have taken on Emily through the decay in her home.

The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window they could see the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs. (409)

Nothing about the house shows cleanliness, purity, or innocence. Instead, the house reeks of foul play. This foul deed was brought on by the lower set of standards Emily adopted.

Before Emily loses her father, she is considered an outsider from the world. Her father has not let her out of the house to be courted by men and this has led society to believe that Emily thought "none of the young men were quite good enough" (411). Keeping Emily away from society might have protected her values, but it damaged the view society had of her. Society thought she considered herself too good for them. Society's line of thinking that the "Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were" caused problems later on for Emily because society never viewed her as equal (411). She was an outcast. Emily does not have to suffer from the Oedipal complex as Sherting proposes to be strange, society has already willingly thrust her into this role even before she cracked the door to her home and contemplated entering society.

Not only does Emily have to face being an outcast, she has past family to contend with. "Old lady Wyatt, [Emily's] great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last" (411). Society viewed Emily as a person with the potential to go mad at any second. She was an unknown to them.

Emily was the person with an insane family and a mysterious childhood, and this made her hard to categorize. The difficulty in understanding Emily makes it easy for society to toss thoughts of her around unabashedly as they find faults in her person as is shown by the narrator's statement that, "So when [Emily] got to be thirty and was still single, we weren't pleased exactly, but vindicated" (411). The actions of others that Emily has no control over are seen as faults by this society.

When Emily's father dies, she is offered a chance by society to emerge and join them if she is willing to adopt their values. Society offers this chance because they see Emily as equal to them because "when her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left and alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized" (411). What Emily had to do to accept this invitation was "let them dispose of the body" (411). Society expects Emily to give up her father and the traditional values he held and taught to her. She refuses in the beginning, but Emily is alone at his point and she has fought a long battle with society to keep her father's body. Now all she has left is a Negro to attend to her and a house, this causes her to break down (411). After Emily loses her father, she suffers for a time in sickness (411). This time, perhaps, might be spent contemplating what to do for the rest of her life, and if she might follow the new generation's lead and find new values since hers have been buried.

Emily's life is now torn as she struggles to hold onto her father and his traditional values and mesh them with the new generation's values. Her first act shows which traditional value has been the most difficult for her as she meets "Homer Barron, a Yankee — a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face" and spends ample time with him as she could not with any man before (412). Society accepts this in this beginning, but acceptance reverses itself

into a conviction that Emily is not doing herself justice by associating with a Yankee man so often (412). The acceptance begins to twist as they begin to wonder where Emily's traditional values have gone. The standards society used to understand the new Emily have changed to the standards Emily use to live up to and they "were sure that they were to be married" when previously they "were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest" (412). Even as Emily tries to adopt the new generation's values, she is criticized by those who live by these new and ever changing values.

In time, readers will realize that society is playing with Emily. Society will never view her with respect no matter which values she holds as is shown by the line, "We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off" (413). When Emily went to purchase the rat poison and society had determined that she was going to commit suicide they did nothing (413). Society with its new values and acceptance were willing to watch Emily die and concluded "it would be the best thing" for her (413). Society did not see Emily as human at this point. They viewed Emily as a stranger to accept while secretly hating her and her high values and agreeing her death would be for the best if it happened to occur.

Emily understood she was being jilted not only by Homer, but by the new generation who had previously offered her acceptance. She had dropped her coat of traditional values and so nothing was preventing her heart to feel the chill of what had just occurred. Emily was not going to put the coat of values on when she was hurt, she was going to seek revenge towards those who had hurt her. She was going to kill society by using Homer Barron as proxy. She was going to show the new generation what its ever changing values will do to a person. Emily was going to show society the monster their values created. She was going to give them death.

According to the assumptions of the narrator, Emily Grierson murdered Homer Barron using rat poison and this was when Emily Grierson again picked up some of the smaller traditional values, but she let those of the new generation smolder in her house with the body of Homer Barron. Emily knew at one point society would find what had occurred, and then society would realize a new definition of horror. It was this time in her life that pushed her to living as a hermit and society invaded her life with their presumptions of how life should be lived. No one purposefully went to Emily to speak with her, and even society's children were no longer forced into Emily's presence as society "did not send their children to her" (414). Emily kept up this behavior through the generations as they passed, and their values continued to change. "And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering Negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the Negro" (414). Emily chose to give up her values for society, and society chose to let Emily die alone.

Finally society is granted their wish; they are given the opportunity to enter Emily's house and see how Emily lived. As Sullivan points out, society once again is invading Emily's house, pushing themselves on her even in death by "breaking down the door" and invading her private bed room "which no one had seen in forty years" (415). Society finally sees what the new generation's values have led to. "The man himself lay in the bed" and "what was left of him, rotten beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay" (415). What society sees next disgusts them even more as they realize the pillow next to the body has a silver hair lying in the indentation left from Emily's head (415). They finally see what Emily has become and how the ever-changing values of society will change a person if they choose to follow those values.

While Emily's neighbors are shocked at the scene before them, they have forgotten that at one point they had wished for Emily's death thinking it would be for the best. They do not see how Homer Barron's death is a reflection of a loss of traditional values in Emily's life. Emily chooses to take on the new values society offers and everything begins to decay in her life. Her house decays, her appearance decays, and society's approval of her decays. In the end, Homer Barron, the symbol for society and its values, decays as well. Nothing will withstand the decay that comes into play when traditional morals begin to falter in society.

Faulkner realizes the importance of traditional values and knows they have a place in society today. When society forgets its traditional values it will begin to decay. Society will become a scene of horror as lower standards and values begin to take hold. These low standards do not create equal and "humanized" people, they create people who play with others as toys and forcibly intrude upon others' lives in a false tone of concern (411). To combat this, Faulkner suggests it is time to respect and live the traditional values the "fallen monument" stood for and not watch as the monument falls (409). Faulkner is suggesting it is time for society to stop looking for the new and exciting values that demoralize and demean others and accept traditional values, which have the potential to stop decay, as a possible way of life.

Works Cited

- Charters, Ann. "William Faulkner." *The Story and Its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2011. 408. Print.
- Faulkner, William. "A Rose for Emily." *The Story and Its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction*. Ed. Ann Charters. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2011. 409-415. Print.
- Scherting, Jack. "Emily Grierson's Oedipus Complex: Motif, Motive, and Meaning In Faulkner's 'A Rose For Emily'." *Studies In Short Fiction* 17.4 (1980): 397. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 4 Apr. 2013.
- Skinner, John L. "'A Rose for Emily': Against Interpretation." *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 15.1 (1985): 42-51. JSTOR. Web 4 Apr. 2013.
- Sullivan, Ruth. "The Narrator in 'A Rose for Emily.'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 1.3 (1971): 159-178. JSTOR. Web 4 Apr. 2013.
- "William Faulkner – American Writer – Biography." egs.edu. 1997-2012. 4 Apr. 2013.
- "William Faulkner – Biography." Nobelprize.org. 4 Apr. 2013.