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# Narrator as Collective 'We': The Narrative Structure of "A Rose for Emily"[1]

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This study purposes to explore the narrative of fictional events complicated by a specific narrator, taking notice of his/her role as an internal focalizer as well as an external participant. In William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," the story of an eccentric spinster, Emily Grierson, is focalized and narrated by a townsperson, apparently an individual, but one who always speaks as 'we.' This tale-teller, as a first-hand witness of the events in the story, details the strange circumstances of Emily's life and her odd relationships with her father, her lover, the community, and even the horrible secret hidden to the climactic moment at the end. The narrative 'we' has surely watched Emily for many years with a considerable interest but also with a respectful distance. Being left unidentified on purpose, this narrative agent, in spite of his/her vagueness, definitely knows more than others do and acts undoubtedly as a pivotal role in this tale of grotesque love. Seamlessly juxtaposing the present and the past, the collective 'we' suggests an important subject that the distinction between the past and the present is blurred out for Emily, for whom the indiscernibleness of time flow proves to be her *hamartia*. The focalizer-narrator describes Miss Emily in the same manner as he/she describes the South whose old ways have passed on by time. Like the Old South, Emily is desperately trapped in the past, since she has not been able to adjust to the changes brought on by time. In the end, the tragic story of Emily Grierson which takes place in Jefferson plainly seems to serve as an introduction to mature Faulkner.

**[participant narrator/focalizer vs. narrator/collective 'we'/narrative structure]**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In a narrative text, a story is usually presented by a person, who narrates exactly through the mediation of some perspective, verbalized by him/her though not necessarily his/her perspective. Although ordinary readers are likely to associate the perspective with the more familiar term 'point of view,' the mediation is reasonably called 'focalization' by some narrative scholars.[2] The term 'focalization' not only contains visual connotations of viewpoint but includes cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation. The focalizer and the narrator are not always the same, for a person who sees and a person who speaks may be either same or different.

"A Rose for Emily" which evokes various questions in regard to the narrative agent is William Faulkner's first short story recognized by thousands of readers.[3] The whole text is focalized and narrated by a townsperson who is using the narrative 'we,' as the feelings conveyed are reflective of the general sentiment of the town, Jefferson. Since nobody has given permission to enter Emily's house for years, the focalizer perceives its interior only when he/she accompanies other intruders, and later recollects and narrates, as a storyteller, what he/she then noticed. Although the focalizer and the narrator in a story do not necessarily the same person, the focal character and the main narrator in this story are the same person, who is capable of both seeing and speaking the same things at different times. As it may appear strange or confusing that the same person has different labels, I will call him/her the more common term 'narrator' for convenience except when he/she needs to be split into separate agents.

The style of "A Rose for Emily" seems to be ordinary for Faulkner. There are neither elaborate recurrent sentences nor tangled stream-of-consciousness narration. However, the simple and direct style ironically reflects something peculiar of the narrator Faulkner adopts to tell the story. The narrative of Emily Grierson is strikingly told from the viewpoint of several members in the town, with perhaps one unified voice, representing Southern white society. The narrator who uses the collective pronoun in the plural first-person perspective is certainly an inhabitant of Emily's town, and the characters specific to his/her use of the words 'we,' 'our,' and 'us' also refer to the townspeople of Jefferson. It is in that connection that Hans H. Skei calls "A Rose for Emily" the "first story about Faulkner's townspeople in any real sense" (51). In a way, the narrator of the story, as the spokesman of the community, is analogous to the town itself.

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[2] On focalization see Genette 189-94 and Rimmon-Kenan 71-85.

[3] According to Diane Jones, when "A Rose for Emily" first appeared in the April 1930 issue of *Forum*, a national magazine, Faulkner was already "a published poet and novelist," but his work in short fiction to this time included "only the New Orleans sketches and two stories that had appeared in a student newspaper, 'Landing in Luck' and 'The Hill'" (87).

In "A Rose for Emily," the narrator, who is completely familiar with the town and its people, living and dead, must be Emily's neighbor somehow to know what goes on through the whole of her life. Everything we know of Emily is derived from the narrator, who, also as a focalizer, has kept his/her eyes and ears open for details about her. The narrator mixes his/her own observations with the town's gossips to provide a seemingly reliable view with reference to Jefferson’s opinion of Miss Emily. As an accumulative voice for what has occurred in the town, the narrator does not give one set opinion but represents the communal opinion of the collective group. It is rare in literature to have many voices distilled into one.

Remarkably enough, Faulkner never provides the narrator's age, name, gender, or occupation.[4] Even though the narrator does not identify himself/herself, a strong sense of personality emerges from him/her. The narrator not only offers an objective reporting of some facts, but plays as a participant in the action. As a result, the narrator should be admittedly "a central and important character in 'A Rose for Emily'" (Burduck 209). Colonel Sartoris who is usually regarded as a symbol of the Old South is no longer the most important representative of the Jefferson community, whether he helps or hurts Emily. According to Diane Jones, "that honor goes to the narrator" (115), who continues to rival Emily for our attention throughout the story.

In "A Rose for Emily," what does the narrator contribute to the narrative of Emily Grierson, and why is he/she an effective point of view? This has been a much debated question in the story. Although how little is actually known about the narrator, a significant amount of efforts has been expended to identify this individual character. Nikolaus Happel investigates the narrator's role in an attempt to explain the 'we' to which the narrator belongs, examining closely the pronoun usage and references (68-72). Ruth Sullivan sees the narrator as a major character of the story, finding it erroneous to assume the teller's impartiality. Applying a psychoanalytic interpretation to the somewhat unsavory qualities of the narrator, Sullivan notes that the narrator group watches Emily for fifty or sixty years, demonstrating a consistent curiosity but an ambivalent mix of affection for and revulsion against her (159-178). Even though the story of Miss Emily is thoroughly implausible in many respects, Gene M. Moore emphasizes the role of the narrator as a settler of troubles, seeing it difficult to visualize the narrator's comments, and manages skillfully to dramatize them through the reactions of others (87-94). From a slightly different perspective, Terry Heller suggests that the

[4] Nonetheless, there are some critics who have tried to define the narrator: Cleanth Brooks sees the narrator as "a man in his fifties or sixties at the time of Emily's death" (159); Jack Scherting contends that the narrator is most likely a "naïve reconteur" in his/her failure to explain Emily's derangement or motive for murder (397); Michael Burduck argues that the narrator is a "woman" who with other women of the community makes up the "we" that push the men of the community into action as Emily's behavior runs counter to local norms (210).

narrator is distinguished from the rest of the community as the story unfolds because he/she treats Emily with a sympathy which is totally absent from the community at large (301-318).

It occurs to me that these Faulkner critics tend to focus on the narrator's role chiefly as a tale-teller. The main interest of my study, however, is in the narrative of fictional events complicated by the narrator, taking notice of his/her role as an internal focalizer as well as an external participant. In the text of "A Rose for Emily," the events do not necessarily appear in a chronological order, the characteristics of the participants are dispersed throughout, and all the items of the narrative content are filtered through the narrator's perspective. I would like to describe the unraveling of the complicated series of events. And also I hope to indicate Faulkner's narrative strategy that the tone and the manner of the narrator are informed but detached, shaping the story in an almost unique way. This study bases on the premise that the story would be radically different if it were described either from the objective third-person viewpoint or from the subjective first-person perspective.

## II. BODY

In the story of Emily Grierson, initially invented by the author himself,[5] Faulkner does not follow a conventional plot structure because he uses flashbacks many times throughout the story. The anonymous narrator goes back and forth in time telling the story of Emily's life. The disjointed chronology manipulated remarkably by the narrator helps produce suspense and increase effects of mystery, making it difficult for the reader to detect the causal links of events and predict the ending. Both the presence of the unique narrator and the intricate structure contribute much to adding artistic merits to the story. If "A Rose for Emily" is "a very successful Faulknerian shocker" (Thompson 10), it is mainly owing to "combining a sophisticated structure with compelling characterization and plot" (Bloom 14).

In ''A Rose for Emily,'' death is prevalent, both literally and figuratively. Appropriately, the story begins with death. The five actual deaths are considered or

[5] Faulkner affirmed that "A Rose for Emily" was a story of "all fiction," originated with "a picture of a strand of hair on the pillow in the abandoned house" (*Faulkner in the University* 199, 26). His statements, however, have not deterred speculations about the source of the Emily story. For instance, John Cullen and Floyd Watkins indicate that a model for Emily and her relationship with Homer Barron existed in the courting of Mary Louis Neilson, a young Oxford woman, by Captain Jack Hume, a New Englander who was employed for the W.G. Lassiter Paving Company to pave the streets in Oxford. Neilson and Hume married despite her family's objections (Cullen and Watkins 70-71).

mentioned in passing,[6] and there are obviously frequent references to death all the way through the story. The first paragraph, of course, opens with the narrator's recollections of Emily's funeral. Faulkner's narrator readily sets the tone of how the citizens of Jefferson felt about Emily: "When *Miss Emily* Grierson died, our whole town went to the 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"[7] (italics here and hereafter mine). In the opening scene, we hear that the men went to Emily's funeral out of respect and the women showed up to see her house out of curiosity. No matter how precisely the motivation of the townspeople splits between sexes, there is something quite wonderful about the town catering to her and calling her 'Miss Emily.' Firmly believing Emily as an epitome of the Southern tradition, the narrator refers her death to 'a fallen monument.'

Then, the narrator describes the old Grierson house in Jefferson, and subtly compares it to its spinster. Immediately after informing Miss Emily's death, the narrator catches a glimpse of "her dwelling, itself a reflection of its late owner" (Knickerbocker 1). Being fallen into disrepair over the years, the house lifts "its stubborn and coquettish decay" above modern machinery such as "wagons" and "gasoline pumps," and becomes "an eyesore among eyesores" (433). Descriptions of the decaying house symbolize Emily's physical and emotional decay as well as her mental disorder. Just as the house seems to reject progress and updating, so does Emily, until both of them become dying symbols of the past generations. The house, like Emily herself, also represents the 'Old South,' as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan interprets: "The heroine's house . . . is described as decaying in order to evoke the degeneration of the South" (125). Even though the house now does not pride itself on its appearance, we can assume from the narrator's implication of the house's antique value that Emily's origin is of upper-class status, which later leads to issues with her and her father.

Suddenly from the present moment of Emily's funeral, the narrator skips back to the narrative past, to the time in 1894, when, during the lifetime of Emily, the mayor of the town remitted her taxes out of pity for her poverty.[8] Emily's privilege has caused some little dissatisfaction for the next generation and finally leads to the episode of the

[6] Deaths of Emily, her father, Homer Barron, Colonel Sartoris, and Union & Confederate soldiers.

[7] William Faulkner. (1981), "A Rose for Emily." In Malcolm Cowley (Ed.), *The portable Faulkner* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 433. Further page references will be given parenthetically in the text.

[8] Even if passing time is an important matter in the story, the only specific date in the text is the year 1894, when Colonel Sartoris, as the mayor, remitted Emily's taxes. Despite the lack of specificity, a number of critics have sought to establish a precise chronology: Robert Woodward does not hesitate to date Emily's death after 1930, the actual year of the story's publication (85). Cleanth Brooks estimates that Emily lived from 1852 to 1926 (383-384), whereas William Hunter finds a possibility that Emily lived from 1846 to 1920 (Item 18).

aldermen attempting to collect taxes from her. But she stately confronts the tax delegation. After the spokesman awkwardly explains the reason for their visit, Emily repeatedly insists that she has no taxes in Jefferson and turns down their request by decidedly declaring to see Colonel Sartoris. As the narrator's additional comment, "Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years ago" (435) suggests, Sartoris is apparently still alive for Emily Grierson.[9] It becomes obvious early in the story that the distinction between the present and the past is blurred out for her. Faulkner's technique of intervening the past with the present focuses the reader's attention on time itself, emphasizing how closely interwoven now and then are, and how hopeless a quest it is to live in the past.

At last, the tax representatives cannot help going back without any desired result, which the narrator represents as a triumph of Emily's will and tongue over the town's futile efforts to control her: "So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell" (435). Emily's victorious expulsion of the tax delegation recalls another case of her triumph over their fathers thirty years before. The event refers to a terrible smell that permeated her house shortly after her lover, Homer Barron, had vanished from the town. At that time, several people complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, requesting that he adopt drastic measures about the odor. But the mayor refused, retorting "Will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?" (436) At last, a few of the townspeople sneaked in at midnight and sprinkled lime in the cellar and around the house. It was “after a week or two” (437) that the smell faded away.

As Harold Bloom aptly elucidates, the famous 'smell' episode significantly achieves two functions: "One is to foreshadow the final scene, in which the townspeople discover that the smell arose from a rotting corpse. The other is to bring attention to the privileged position that Emily occupies" (15). The smell itself is a significant element in this story of horror, which intensifies suspense and mystery. And Emily's non-compliance with the town's request explicitly strengthens her pride and isolation which result as serious characteristic flaws in her tragedy. The privilege accorded her by the social order acts only to isolate her and contort justice. Both as a member of the aristocracy and as a woman, Emily decides reluctantly to live for so many years as a recluse.

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[9] The introduction of Colonel Sartoris shows the intertextual relationship between this story and Faulkner's other novel *Sartoris*. The Griersons support the standard of Sartoris who issues "the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron" (433). Yet an error of chronology is immediately detected: Colonel Sartoris in the novel *Sartori*s dies in 1876, but in "A Rose for Emily," he is still living in 1894. This mistake, however, seems to be made through Faulkner's deliberate strategy in order to demonstrate Emily's distortion of time rather than through an unintentional oversight.

While the narrator perceives and reports many things about Emily’s history and personality, most readers come to understand without difficulty several important factors affecting her. First of all, Miss Emily’s father is largely to blame for her life as a recluse. The narrator introduces the father in connection with the origin of Emily's self-inflicted isolation. Emily’s life is marked by her father's excessively negative influence during her young age. She grew up under the obsessive protection of her father who had her under his thumb, dominating her life and robbing her of many of life's necessities. Her father—a tyrannical figure, proud of his Southern heritage and of his family's status in Jefferson—has constantly interposed himself between Emily and any male interested in courting her. The narrator displays the relationship between Emily and her father by presenting a simile of a tableau: "Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door" (437). This picture of Emily with her father clearly reflects his domination of her. In actuality, Emily's father has really run off all potential suitors of his daughter with a horsewhip.

Because of her father's oppressive watchfulness over her, Emily has been prevented from forming an attachment to a person other than her father. When such a father dies, Emily denies his death either in a retreat from reality or in a regression into childhood, and refuses to the townspeople to admit that he is dead, fending off all condolences and visits from the doctors and ministers. Emily's confusion between the past and the present as mentioned above means "the lapse of the distinction between illusion and reality, between life and death" (Brooks and Warren 351). Not acknowledging this lapse, she insists on keeping his corpse in her house until she breaks down three days later. While her father was alive, Emily was not allowed to have any friends. And after the death of her father she is left alone by the community in her big house without any support.

When Emily has recently recovered from the illness following her breakdown, Homer Barron comes to Jefferson as the foreman of a construction crew from the North to build sidewalks throughout the town. A Yankee, Homer is a big, friendly man who likes to drink and have fun. He strikes up a companionship with Miss Emily and takes her out for drives on Sunday afternoons. However, he has told several people that he is not the marrying type. The town gossips are glad that she has an interest in man, although they assume that "a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer" (438). Emily seems to be starved for affection and emotionally desperate enough to risk censure from the town when she takes Homer Barron as her lover.

Emily actively seeks out her fate by keeping up the relationship with Homer and then visiting the drugstore where she wants to purchase arsenic. The druggist asks her what the poison is for, since it is required of him to ask by law. But she does not respond and coldly glowers at him until he finds it unbearable: "Miss Emily just stared at him, her

head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up." Finally, an African American delivery boy returns and gives her the arsenic. When Emily opens the package at home, underneath the skull and bones sign is written, "For rats" (439). The townspeople think that Emily needs the poison to kill herself out of shame for having an affair with an inferior man. The potential suicide does not perturb them; in fact, they judge it would be best for her. She does not die, though, and the ladies of the town complain that she is setting a bad example by riding out with Homer. Soon it seems that the couple will marry, since Emily orders a set of clothes and a toilet set for him.

Homer is last seen entering Emily's house and then never seen again. When the man goes away, on the one hand the community seems happy on account of the end of their adulterous relationship, but on the other it is sad for seeing her alone again. Emily after that keeps herself away from the community and stays in the shadowy darkness of her house closed to everybody. She refuses the new, home postal delivery and the tax notice without exposing herself through the ages. Her long incarceration is thus tantamount to a self-imposed life sentence of solitary confinement without any possibility of appeal. Yet even Emily cannot truly withstand the pressures of time with its inevitable aging and death. After Homer's disappearance, Emily becomes ever more obese and withdrawn from the town, and her hair turns iron-gray. These physical symptoms are apparently evidence that she struggles to deny the effects of time and change. She cannot live entirely in her own macabre fantasy world and eventually passes away.

In the final section, the narrator returns to the initial scene of Emily's funeral. Being able to survey her lifetime of seventy-four years with superhuman longevity and authority, the narrator is seemingly ignorant of Emily's crime until the very end of the story. Among the many narratological cruxes in this story is the narrator's sudden declaration: "*Already* we know that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced" (443). How could 'we' possibly know this 'already'? How did 'we' learn it, and for how long have 'we' known it?

In addition to the knowledge of the sealed room unentered for many years, the narrative 'we' has revealed some pieces of information concerning the mourners' motivation and the label on the arsenic. It appears to be difficult to explain how the narrator would know these. This difficulty can be solved by the fact that the story of Emily is focalized not only by the narrator privately but by the townspeople collectively. Nevertheless, the narrator does not know everything: he/she is ignorant of what happened at the Baptist minister’s meeting with Emily, which is enough to prove that the viewpoint of the story is never omniscient.

The townspeople somehow sense the upstairs room contains a horror that must be faced, but do not dash there altogether: "*They* waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before *they* opened it." When Emily has been finally buried, they open the door by force and discover the dusty room strangely decorated as a bridal bedroom. The room contains a man's tie, suit and shoes, and a silver toilet set which Emily purchased for Homer before his vanishing. Then the townspeople look down at the dead body lying in the bed: "For a long while *we* just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin" (443). Next to him is an impression of a head on a pillow where someone lifts “a long strand of iron-gray hair” (444). In this final scene, why does Faulkner arranges the prescient 'we,' as against the considerate 'they'? The distinction between 'we' and 'they' separates the narrator from other members of the community. At the story’s conclusion, the narrator once joins the group ('they') who break down the door to the upstairs room that was Emily’s bedroom. A moment later, however, the narrator resorts to the 'we' to examine the interior carefully and indicate that he/she has been an actual first-hand observer of the scene of decay which the townspeople discover on Emily’s bed. Nikolaus Happel concludes that the "depicted reality and the world of the narrator coalesce" (70), even though 'we' is obscure.

In the end, the narrator undergoes a complete change as 'we,' and takes notice of the homicide scene. What is even more horrific than the murder or even the preserved corpse is the long gray hair that 'we' watch on the pillow next to the skeletal head. The hair may suggests that Emily slept next to, possibly even embraced. Seeing the vivid scene of murder, the narrator suspects that Emily feared that Homer would leave her, and she was determined not to let him go. In order to keep him by her side forever, Emily evidently killed Homer with the arsenic no matter whether she had slept with him or not.[10]

At last, the most mysterious issue comes to be resolved. It is plainly made known that the cause of the terrible smell so many years ago was the rotting body of Homer Barron instead of a killed animal. The corrupting 'smell,' clearly different from the residual smell within the house,[11] is "one of the most implausible aspects in the story" (Moore 91). The lime sprinkled around Miss Emily's house has no effect at all on the body

[10] It is never quite clear that Miss Emily and her Yankee lover actually had lied together before the murder was committed, considering the cousins from Alabama stayed in Emily's house from shortly after she bought the poison until just three days before the evening when Homer Barron was last seen at the kitchen door.

[11] Emily's house is filled with the residual smell all through the story. We know it for the first time from the tax delegation scene: "It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell" (434). And then this image is recalled without olfactory emphasis when the narrator tells us both that Miss Emily "Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows" and that "She died . . . with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight" (442).

upstairs, although it might well damage the acid soil needed by Miss Emily's azaleas and rhododendrons. Moreover, the narrator's "a week or two" should be too short a time for the smell to vanish. As Helen Nebeker rather strangely puts it, "Anyone familiar with decomposing bodies knows that it takes several weeks for the smell of decaying flesh to dissipate" (472). The lessening of time, therefore, seems to be Faulkner's strategy to heighten the effects of brevity and condensation that characterize a short story.

Eventually, Faulkner's play with time, his gradual unfolding of the plot, and his slowly building of suspense, all work to form both an enigmatic structure and a shocking ending. When the narrator jumps back and forth in chronology, the shifts in time help embody the principal themes. The first concerns the relationship between generations: a contrast or conflict between past time and present time. The past is represented in Emily herself, in Colonel Sartoris, in Tobe, the old Negro servant, and in the board of aldermen who rescinded Emily's taxes; the present represented in the unnamed narrator, in the new aldermen who tax Emily, in Homer Barron, and in what is called "the next generation, with its more modern ideas" (434). In brief, these characters emphasize the interplay of the past and the present within the story.

Emily is the town's aristocrat—a monument of Southern gentility. Emily's archaic strengths doom her to maintain an outmoded, destructive way of life even after it has become defunct. The conflict in the story is manifested particularly in the changes of Emily's appearance and behavior. Emily does not always resist, but she is constantly thwarted, first by her father, then by Homer Barron, so that she finally denies the present. When she is threatened with desertion and disgrace, Emily tries not only to take refuge in the past, but to take Homer with her.

In "A Rose for Emily," the confused mix of the past and the present produces a distorted atmosphere of reality. Through Emily and her house, the story shows the past as a repository of great human effort and integrity. On the one, the past has a romantic pull with a sense of nostalgia, but on the other hand, the past is a source of evil such as Emily's imperious father and slavery. Pushing off any possibilities of the present and the future, the past bears extremely a form of death, from which we see in the horrifying discovery that Emily has been sleeping with the dead Homer for so long to preserve the past. Thus the narrator moving back and forth in time signifies the push and pull of the past.

The next primary theme is the struggle of the individual will against the pressures of time and change. Proud and aristocratic, Miss Emily refuses to acknowledge any change in her life, including the passage of time and the deaths of her father and lover. Immediately after Mr. Grierson's death, Emily has struggled to deny his death, but in subsequent years she assumes his role. Her allegiance to her father drives her to kill Homer so that he will resemble the dead father she can never forget. Just as she attempts

to keep her father's dead body near her, so will she retain the body of her dead lover in an effort to prevent him from leaving her. Emily's trying to keep Homer's body parallels her earlier attempt to keep her father's body in the house. In both cases she tries to impose her own idiosyncratic notions of reality and time in the presence of death. Emily is a victim of her father's possessiveness, yet she victimizes Homer by killing him in order to possess him. The tableau of the living person next to the dead one in the bed closely resembles the above-mentioned tableau of Emily hidden in the shadows behind her father. In the present picture, the positions become reversed, and the woman takes control of the man lying back passively.

Emily is motivated above all by a refusal to accept change. Her life teaches her that change brings loss. She fails to adjust to a world almost completely transformed during her lifetime. In such a world, she succeeds only by seclusion. Her solution is ultimately unworkable because isolation and withdrawal offer no life. After all, Emily as a fallen monument is like a living dead person. In linear time, just as Emily changes, so does the town's attitude toward her. The town finally gives tribute to such a woman who strives to dominate time, though she inevitably fails to achieve it.

The narrator refers to Emily Grierson as "Miss" nearly all through the text, although she becomes "Poor Emily" for some time during the courtship with Homer Barron because by consorting with a Yankee laborer, she forfeits the town's respect and instead evokes some pity. But Faulkner omits the 'Miss' and refers to her only as "Emily" for the title of the short story. "Miss Emily" is typically used in references that recognize her status as a Grierson, but the use of her first name undermines the town's respect with its implication of her childhood. At the same time, Faulkner's omission of the ‘Miss’ from her name for the story title affirms her humanity. She becomes just plain Emily, finally released from the obligations conferred by the ‘Miss’ title. The story title without the 'Miss' also suggests that Faulkner's narrator frees Emily from the past by telling her story and explaining it in the present.

Yet the narrator still preserves some of the beauty of the past by giving Emily a 'rose' as a symbol of sympathy as well as respect. As the representative of the town, the narrator perhaps wants to dedicate a rose to Emily at her funeral as a tribute to her efforts to triumph over time. One popular point of inquiry over the years has been the relationship of the title 'A Rose for Emily' to the text. Faulkner himself minimized the significance of the title: "Oh, it's simply the poor woman had had no life at all. Her father kept her more or less locked up and then she had a lover who was about to quit her, she had to murder him" (*Faulkner in the University* 87-88). Faulkner’s comment indicates that the title simply reflects Emily's lack of a fulfilling life, since she has a static, inactive life due to her self-imposed solitary confinement.

Although the noun 'rose' is never directly referred in the body of the text, the upstairs bedroom has a rose hue and the coffin of Emily is placed "beneath a mass of bought flowers." The newly-wedded bedroom was once decorated with the "curtains of faded rose color" and the "rose-shaded lights" (442). Inserting a "rose" in the title, Faulkner's narrator possibly wants to emphasize paradoxically Homer's failure to present a rose to Emily as a part of courtship ritual. The "bought flowers" decorated recently for the funeral fail to express sincerely either respect or sympathy for Emily, and if linked to the flower of the title, they must be construed as an irony expressing the lack of sympathy of the townspeople. The narrator's recognition of their lack of sympathy paradoxically demonstrates the genuineness of his/her own sympathy for Emily. In this way, the "rose" in the title shows the narrator's sense of sympathy for her.

On the other hand, the "rose" for Emily in the title expresses the community's respect for her pride, her independence, and her iron will. She cannot be dejected under any pressures exerted upon her. Emily Grierson never gives in. She insists on choosing a lover in spite of the criticism of the town. Emily continues to live in seclusion that is at least partially self-imposed, but she does not live in a vacuum. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren contend that the story obtains significance in the interplay between Emily and the community for which she functions as "a combination of idol and scapegoat" (353). The community admires her as a representative of its past. Related to this notion of Emily as heroic is the warrior metaphor by which she defeats the other party. The narrator describes her actions with such words as *vanquished* (435), *demanded* (439), and *conquers* (443). Thus, as a romantic heroine, Emily deserves to receive a tributary rose. In other words, Emily is "the rose herself, a treasured memory" (Going 435).

## III. CONCLUSION

In "A Rose for Emily," the story revolves around Emily Grierson, the last known heir to a once-prosperous Southern family. The narrator tells the story as a detached spokesman of the community, and at the same time, participates in the story as a close neighbor of Emily's. During the whole of the story, the narrator does not disclose his/her identity, but reveals everything about the protagonist as a lonely and impoverished woman left penniless by her father. Collecting and acquiring odd bits of information rapidly and fully about Emily's life, the narrator tells them in the “we” voice to the

townspeople. Even though the narrative 'we' reports rumors and misapprehensions about Emily, it seems clear that Faulkner intends that these materials be taken as true.

The gradual revelation of information prepares for the abrupt end and proves Faulkner's most effective use of suspense, which is retrogressively growing from an incident that has already occurred but that has not yet been disclosed. The order of retelling is according to the narrator's arrangement, though he/she has already participated in finding the corpse in the bedroom. The narrator already knows the ending when he/she starts the narration, but he/she "chooses not to divulge his[/her] retrospective understanding" (Rimmon-Kenan 78). By keeping the murder hidden and protected all those years, the narrative 'we' preserves the honor and myth of the South, but when the murder is exposed, he/she offers frightening comment on the moral fabric of the Southern social structure. Consequently, Faulkner emphasizes the importance of the historical dimension. Although man tries to deny time and its concomitant uncertainty and unpredictability, change is inevitable. Man must come to terms both with the past and the present; for to ignore the latter is to become monstrous and inhuman, above all to betray an excessive pride such as Emily Grierson's before the humbling fact of death. The total story says that man's plight is tragic, but that there is heroism in an attempt to rise above it.

The narrator is distinguished from the rest of the community as the story unfolds because he/she treats Emily with sympathy that is absent from the community at large. In brief, the narrator is a naive raconteur in his/her failure to explain Emily's derangement or motive for murder. Even at the end of the story, the reader is still left with more mystery, knowing little about Emily. Yet the reader develops sympathy for her, recognizing her victimization by a close-minded community. At the same time, the community is criticized for its presumption of knowledge as well as lack of sympathy.

The narrator never spells out what Emily's story means to him/her or to the town, but provides a very illuminating simile. He/She tells us that Miss Emily's face with "cold, haughty black eyes" and with "the flesh strained across the temples and about the eye-sockets" is similar to "a lighthouse-keeper's face" (439). A lighthouse provides a beacon for other people, not for the keeper of the light who looks out into darkness. A lighthouse-keeper, whose job is to warn others from being wrecked on dangerous rocks on which the lighthouse is built, serves others but lives entirely in solitude. The simile really answers to Emily's condition very well, for her story constitutes a warning against the sin of pride, heroic isolation pushed too far in homicidal madness.

The presence of an unidentified narrator gives an opportunity of comparison with other storytellers in the canon of Faulkner. Lots of critics seek to find any traces of mature Faulkner from the narrator of "A Rose for Emily."[12] The efficient use of the communal 'we' as narrator[13] in this short story is closely related to the author's accomplishment as a novelist. Given that the tragic story of Emily Grierson takes place in Jefferson, the county seat of Yoknapatawpha, and that Faulkner often used short stories to flesh out his fictional kingdom there, "A Rose for Emily" certainly serves as an introduction to mature Faulkner. There is beyond doubt that the story stands as a touchstone in Faulkner's narrative technique. The Emily story is not subordinate to his novels, but rather in a class by itself, specifically with its appeal for the empathetic participation of the reader. "A Rose for Emily" both deserves extensive treatment in its own right and elucidates interpretive problems in connection with Faulkner's novels. Consequently, it has received more critical attention than any other story by Faulkner, and has been also more frequently anthologized. It is thus Faulkner's best known story, though by no means his best.

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[12] For examples, Michael Millgate suggests a resemblance between this narrator and Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* (29), and Joseph Reed, in his *Faulkner's Narrative*, compares the narrator's role in this text with those of such novels as *As I Lay Dying* and *Light in August* (87-89, 117).

[13] Some critics like Louis Brodsky find a forerunner of the narrator in the early Faulkner poem "Elder Watson in Heaven," who also functions as a "collective, communal 'we'" similar to that found in "A Rose for Emily" (Brodsky 47).

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