

The Necromance of Emily

A commentary of 'A Rose for Emily' by William Faulkner



Bunny Sandefur

Mr. Abdallah Boumarate

English Composition II

Fall 2007

Miss Emily is absolutely my favorite of Faulkner's characters. She's a southern eccentric who plays the game of life by her own rules. She was a staple of the town, a sort of symbol of her time, which was fast fleeting as the dawn of the new era was coming about. She embodied the southern mind, treating her public affairs with etiquette, and keeping her private affairs behind the heaviest of closed doors. For this they did not see her as mad, for it was common during that time for similar behavior. I dare say that most southern townships had an Emily Grierson. Someone who marched to the beat of their own drum, but in no way flaunted it to the outside world. Emily in fact never 'let her freak flag fly', as the expression goes. Although she was certainly strange, she did not make a point of making it knowledge to anyone in particular. In fact it is most custom in the south to gossip, and that is what the narrator refers to most in discussion of the late Emily.

Faulkner definitely leaves a lot of big gaping windows open for personal interpretation. It starts with Colonel Sartoris remitting Emily's taxes. Faulkner clearly states that Sartoris made up a lie to satisfy his own agenda of accommodating Miss Emily. However, he never states why exactly he did this. I presume it has something to do with either an affair between the two, or at the least an indirect courtship effort on Sartoris' part to woo Emily with his lawmaking powers. Whether or not Emily was exactly all there when she told the officials to "See Colonel Sartoris" (469) is debatable. She could have been egging them on, knowing very well that the Colonel had been dead for almost ten years. Or it could have been a clear sign of her madness, unwilling to acknowledge the deceased as gone. However, though such an instance was mentioned for

the first time with the Colonel in the story, we must take note that events are unfolding in a backwards fashion.

The first evidence of her madness/obsession was with her father's death, when she refused to acknowledge his passing, and kept his body locked up in their home for three days. However, even though the town speculated madness, they didn't quite paint the label on her just then due to circumstance. While anyone clinging to the body of the deceased is very strange, the fact that it was her father and seemingly sole benefactor made the case almost dismissible. People more than likely chalked it up to be a reaction driven by overwhelming grief and depression. It would have most likely been a very difficult pill to swallow back then to perceive the idea of necrophilia or anything of the like.

Emily kept up appearances during her courtship with Homer Barron, the Yankee. However, the town obviously did not wish for someone like Homer to stay, as northerners were seen as vile and unkempt creatures. The idea of the two dating was held in disbelief to some who felt that a person of Emily's class wouldn't stoop so low. While they may have thought she was a bit off her rocker, they still recognized her for her lineage. She also seemed to keep up appearances in public, so despite the gossip, there was no reason to believe that she had fallen from the social pedestal in which her sir name had acquired her. Asides from being a northerner, Faulkner also clearly states without judgment or subtlety, that Homer liked men. Two strikes against him, making Homer a most unfortunate claim for those even with the most southern hospitality. This

was not someone the town wanted hanging around, nor was it someone in which Emily should be taking up with.

Perhaps it was a romantic mix of madness and southern custom that drove Emily to do what she did. She more than likely knew that despite her attraction for Homer, it was simply not proper for southern upper class to mingle with Yankee working-class. I doubt that she killed him because he was unwilling to stay. Despite the fact that he was not a marrying man, and liked men himself (471) did not mean that he did not enjoy Emily's company as well. He did, after all, spend a great deal of time with her, much to the local's dismay. When he did finally disappear, no one cared to question where the oafish Yankee went, for his absence was for the better.

I believe that Emily killed Homer because she wished him to stay with her in secrecy. Whether or not he was willing to stay is indeed questionable. However, a breathing man certainly would not agree to living conditions in which he would not be seen about town. Certainly Homer would not have remained with Emily if he were to be treated as a rat in a box. And so she kept him with her regardless, locked in their bedroom where she could use him as she pleased. The fact that her "negro" (468) servant had never said a word and remained loyal to Miss Emily was wonderful icing on the cake. In fact, my favorite part is after Emily dies and he opens the door for visitors to pay their respects, and then "walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again." (473) This made me laugh so hard that it shook me took the core, because it was as if the guy politely fled after opening up a giant, unsightly can of worms. Kind of as if

to say “Here you are. Now I’m getting the hell out of here before you people figure out what’s going on.”

Indeed the way that Faulkner describes how Homer’s remains were found sounds as if he willingly put on the gown and went to bed with Emily after ingesting the arsenic. However, who really knows. Perhaps she drugged him and her servant helped her dress him and put him to bed. These details are not quite of great importance. What is important was Emily’s iron-will, which dictated that she would do whatever she damn well please. This was accompanied by her well-maintained southern image, preventing anyone from second-guessing or questioning her actions. Regardless of what you think of what she did, it’s hard not to respect Emily’s ability to pull off such a task and then proceed to keep her taboo love affair secret for several decades, until death. For crying out loud, the woman held china-painting lessons with children in the very same house in which she kept her dead lover! How incredibly bold! In my eyes, Emily Grierson is a true heroine of her era in the very sense of the word, which defines a woman of distinguished courage or ability. From this reader’s point of view, Emily Grierson, insane or not, possessed testicular fortitude of titanium!