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A Rose for Emily

“A Rose for Emily” is a short story composed in a poetic metre (Faulkner 3). It is one of the most widely read novels of all time. In this novel, Faulkner attempts to illustrate the complexities in the transforming world after the civil war that brought tension between the South and North American states. Along with the large-scale reconstruction events occurring in the country, changing individual feelings regarding the changing world are clearly exhibited in the story. “A Rose for Emily” also manages to show the conflicts between tradition, need for change and death in a clear manner. In addition, it also shows that a single person’s dogmatic refusal for change can affect the entire community in an adverse manner.

Faulkner conveys the essence of the conflict between tradition and change through the character of Emily Grierson. In her mysterious nature, she is not willing to come to the terms and conditions of a changing world. Emily is a tradition by herself. She stays in a community that is changing rapidly but doesn’t adopt any change herself. She firmly lives the same life - changeless vacuum - over the years. She is the model for a traditional community, someone who refuses to alter herself to the changing needs of the society. However, she is seen as a burden and is entirely excommunicated from the rest of the community due to her eccentric behaviour. Hers is the only house without a metallic number plate affixed in the whole town while the others accept modern mail services (Faulkner 518). She is not ready to receive the reality as it is. Instead, she threatens to go beyond legal limits. That is evident when colonel

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Sartoris and Emily forge taxes. At Emily's funeral, aged men in united uniforms gather to give their last respect to the dead. According to them, they understand time as being relative, and the past is forever a present, perfect realm of today (Faulkner 20). Emily's macabre secret chamber is an intense attempt to prevent change and in so doing it comes with sacrifice of human life.

Death transpires in "A Rose for Emily," right from the start when the narrator mentions Emily's death-haunted life as a traditionalist in the face of new changes (Faulkner 22). Emily, an object in the community gradually gives in to death. The narrator likens her to a woman who has died by drowning – "a pale and bloated figure left too long in the water" (Faulkner 21). In the description, she is seen as a walking corpse – "practically dead on her feet" (Faulkner 519). Emily is the ultimate old south stereotype; an outstanding lady, whose respect gradually declines through years, as well as the good name of Grierson's family, is soiled with time. The struggle between the modern changes and the old social order will continue for some time (Faulkner 24), but the old ways will finally succumb to death despite many towns' people being true to it.

Emily comes to reject death itself by believing that she has powers to better it. Her necrophilic deeds are evident in her weird relationships with the dead bodies of men that she loved, and this is discovered for the first time when her father dies (Faulkner 26). Emily believes her father to still be alive and only after much deliberation and after three days does she give up his body unwillingly. Homer who brings a little bit of life in Emily's existence by visiting her on Sundays in his buggy also dies one day when he enters Emily's house and never returns. Even though she is responsible for his death by poisoning with arsenic she does not admit to his death once again. She does this bizarre act because she is worried that Homer might leave her. There is a bad smell around her house and this is clear evidence that Emily did this cruel act. By killing him, Emily attempts to keep him constantly by her side, without

realizing that she has distanced him from her forever. This nasty incident makes the town to reject Emily because they no longer trust her with their children. She is completely cut off from the rest of the townspeople. Emily completely withdraws herself from the face of the public and keeps her to herself in her home. The killing of Homer is a great blow on her life. Their grotesque marriage exposes Emily's internal conflict to meld death and life (Faulkner 32). However, death eventually triumphs and she dies due to natural causes (Faulkner 521).

In conclusion, "A Rose for Emily" tries to show the powerlessness of the community in handling the conflicts between tradition and change and how death can be used as a gateway to overcome these changes in life. While the townspeople are all ready to embrace modernity, they can do nothing to change Emily from her illness and have to wait for her death to progress further.

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Works Cited

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