

Analysis of *A Rose for Emily* from Feminist Perspective

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ABSTRACT

A Rose for Emily is one of the representative works of Southern literature in America, which portrays the tragic life of a traditional Southern noble woman. After suffering from the destruction of traditional customs and patriarchy in the South, the protagonist wakes up to fight against feudal thoughts and finally fails miserably. This paper analyzes the protagonist Emily's powerlessness and struggle in the face of social changes and other people's satirical comments under the education and influence of patriarchy from the perspective of feminism, as well as the distorted human nature of pursuing good love and even murdering her lover. At the same time, it also makes a detailed analysis of the social environment from this perspective, so that we can find more information about the current situation of social feminism at that time. In the end, we can reveal the tragic life of the women represented by Emily, who became deformed, humble and helpless in the American Southern society under the oppression of the old tradition, the puritan view of women's morality, the patriarchal family and the decadent Southern marriage system. This paper aims to alert the world to learn and promote feminism and establish a harmonious society with equality between men and women. Only in this way can we promote the establishment of a free, equal and harmonious society.

Keywords: *A Rose for Emily*, Patriarchy, Feminism, Southern Aristocracy, Tragedy

1. INTRODUCTION

A Rose for Emily describes a noble girl's miserable growth experience and infatuated love and marriage process. It describes the social status quo and people's feudal ideology, male superiority. Through this novel, Faulkner expresses his thoughts and complex feelings for the Southern tradition and hometown. This is a novel of comprehensive reasoning, love and historical changes.

2. FEMINISM

Feminism is also called equality between men and women. Definition refers to the social theory and political movement to promote the equality of sexual class, which is established to end sexism, sexual exploitation, sexual oppression, and not only criticizes social relations, but also focuses on the analysis of gender inequality and the rights, interests and issues at the bottom of sex.

The purpose of feminist theory is to understand the nature of inequality and to focus on sexual politics, power relations and sexuality.[1] Feminism holds that modern society is based on the patriarchal system with men as the center. On the issues of reproductive rights, education rights, equal pay, voting rights, gender discrimination and sexual violence, the public should stand on the side of women's perspective and protect women from fair and peaceful treatment in social rules. Therefore, in order to protect women's rights, there is a feminist movement -- a social movement across class and race boundaries.

3. FEMINISM EMBODIED BY EMILY

3.1 *Emily under Patriarchy*

Emily, who grew up in the patriarchal society, was recognized as a noble lady, the most perfect female benchmark in the traditional society, and also the representative of the majority of women. Because of the patriarchal rule, the men were superior to women, which

was followed by the society at that time. Women also thought it was natural and inviolable. They relied on the men and obeyed them, and wiped out their own nature and thoughts. Therefore, under the long-term oppression, it is inevitable that women begin to resist, and the awakening of women's rights awareness is expected.

3.1.1 Patriarchy in the United States

Patriarchy was first put forward by Kate Millett in her book *Sexual Politics* in 1970 and introduced into feminist theory. The core content is that the patriarchy gives the father the absolute right to his wife and children, including the right to physical destruction, and even often the right to kill and sell.[2] Patriarchy is considered to be the main cause of inequality between the sexes. In patriarchal society, women became male appendages and slaves. In the patriarchal society dominated by men, women are in a weak and subordinate position, and are regarded as redundant ribs. The persecution of patriarchy to women is also reflected in the dominant position of men on sex. Women become the object of male sexual desire, and are portrayed as the existence of sexuality.

3.1.2 The Social Status of Femininity Represented by Emily

In the article, Emily was born in a declining aristocratic family in the South. She was dependent on her father, Grison, when she was young. Due to her father's insistence on Puritanism, Emily became the "Southern lady" under the ideological education of patriarchal society. There is such a description in the novel: "for a long time, we have regarded the family as the characters in a painting: Miss Emily, who is slim and dressed in white, stands in the back, her father's profile with his feet spread out in front of her, his back to Emily, a whip in his hand, and a back door just embedded their figures".[3] This painting vividly reflects "patriarchy" and Emily's status as a noble woman in the family. Emily can only live in the shadow of her father forever, standing in the land blocked by her father, completely losing the right to speak as an independent person, which makes her unable to control her marriage happiness normally.

However, after Grison died, "She told them that her father was not dead". "The whole town ran to see Miss Emily's body covered with flowers." [3] It can be seen that the long-term control over her father led to Emily losing her independence and normal thinking. She was deeply persecuted by patriarchy and fundamentally accepted the unfair status of the patriarchal society. She even took it as her own belief to abide by and protect it with her whole life. Although she tried to defend her rights in her old age, she could not get rid of her father's control and restraint, that is, the rule of patriarchal society.

The women that Emily represented were miserable and sympathetic at that time. In the American society at that time, women's status was low, even second only to black slaves. In life, women have no voice, they need to listen to any decision of their father, husband or son; in the society, women have no right to education, let alone the opportunity to cross the class and participate in political activities. What's more, they have never questioned or considered themselves miserable. After generations of baptism of male chauvinism and imprisonment of traditional culture, they have never thought of their own value and rights, as well as they will not choose to stand up and fight against the men. Instead, they are used to taking this traditional concept as their own lofty belief, abiding by it all the time and inheriting it from generation to generation.

3.2 American Southern Aristocrat Emily

3.2.1 The Social and Cultural Background of the American South

During the Colonial Period, the North of the United States devoted to the development of industry and commerce, while the South established an agricultural society centered on the plantation economy. Until the 1930s, the South was still a closed agricultural society, living a traditional and conservative life. This is the social background of this paper. This typical closed agricultural society and traditional way of life are the roots of conservatism in Southern culture and Southern people's character. For this reason, Southerners seem to have an instinctive aversion to modernization and capitalist industrial and commercial civilization.

The Southerners are the extreme romantics. Especially on the issue of slavery, in order to get rid of the situation of being condemned and attacked, Southerners defended the area from all aspects, beautifying a tumor of modern society as a kind master who looked after the helpless slaves like a kind father, while the slaves were grateful and loyal to their masters. In this article, the black slave Tobe appeared in such an image, which symbolized the slavery situation in the society at that time. In addition, the failure of the Civil War stimulated their imagination and strengthened their romantic complex towards the old South. At the same time, a group of writers with Southern complex appeared in the field of literature, who are full of nostalgia for the traditional society of the South.

3.2.2 The Southern Aristocracy Represented by Emily

The aristocrats in the old South advocated chivalry and lady morality, and regarded women's virtue and chastity as important as life. Emily, the descendant of the declining aristocracy, is a typical woman growing up

in this environment. In the eyes of people, Emily is the “monument” of Southern nobles. In the novel, it is mentioned twice that she looks like a “statue”; when she is upstairs, her “upper body is motionless, like a statue”; when she is downstairs, she “looks like a statue in a niche, whether she is looking at us or not, we can’t know.” [3] These two descriptions make her like the incarnation of a living god. Emily is not only the representative of the Southern aristocracy, but also the symbol of the old South. In the face of the impact of the Northern modernization era, Emily tried her best to resist foreign things and deceive herself. For example, ignoring the government’s tax notice, even if the councillor came to collect it in person, she insisted that Colonel Sartorius had exempted their aristocratic family from taxes. In addition, she is also extremely exclusive of modern postal facilities. She is not allowed to set up a door number in front of her home, let alone hang up a post office box. Because she couldn’t escape, she could only hide in the old house, like a nutrient deficient rose, and finally withered.

Emily fall in love with Homer, a Northerner. However, her efforts were opposed by the villagers in the small town, because we all know that Emily’s “hidden lust shakes not only the integrity of the old girl, but also the whole foundation of Southern history and class”. [4] Her behavior was considered “a shame for the whole town and a bad example for the young people”. [1] In people’s eyes, Emily is absolutely not allowed to be trampled on. People have worshiped her as a textbook figure, and maintained the traditional form of the old Southern society by maintaining her noble image. For this reason, Emily became the victim of the fierce struggle against the old culture in the South.

3.3 *Emily’s Awakening of Female Consciousness*

3.3.1 *The Performance of Emily’s Female Consciousness Awakening*

Emily, a noble descendant, also represents the gradual emergence of American feminism after the Civil War. This can be confirmed by what she has done in her 74 year career. Although she never left Jefferson Town and was respected by the whole town, she never accepted the decision of the town and their values. She was not willing to be a delicate woman and insisted on facing the world in her own way.

After her father died, Emily appeared as a new image of “short hair” after her serious illness recovered. She wanted to start a new life with her own personality and consciousness. At this time, Emily was born again. She temporarily got rid of the patriarchal oppression and the shackles of external traditional customs, because her inner female consciousness began to revive. She soberly realized that without bold pursuit, it is impossible to

have sincere love, let alone a happy family. When the people represented by the old Southern tradition slandered her love with Homer, Emily fought against this group stubbornly and bravely. In the end, she had to keep Homer in an absurd and cruel way.

From Emily, we can see Emily’s brave side of rebelling against the secular world, fearing the powerful, indomitable, pursuing freedom and love. The awakening of female self-consciousness and female equality consciousness encourages Emily to pursue self-reliance, the rights that women should enjoy and the social responsibilities that women should undertake.

3.3.2 *The Symbolic Significance of Emily’s Feminist Awakening*

From a lady to a devil, the process of Emily’s transformation is the oppression of human nature and the destruction of women by Puritanism in the patriarchal society and the old tradition. Her fate reflects the helplessness and psychological distortion of women in the patriarchal society. As Faulkner said: “*A Rose for Emily* is the story of a woman who was persecuted and betrayed by the sexual political system”. [3] Under the oppression of Puritanism, aristocratic culture and patriarchal system, Emily is struggling to survive. Although she has taken a big step bravely, under all kinds of pressure and struggling, Emily’s awakening female consciousness has become desperate and distorted, resulting in a shocking tragedy.

Nevertheless, her awakening of female consciousness brings new hope to women’s rights. As a representative of the feudal tradition in the South, there appeared the awakening of feminism. The purpose is to rebel, challenge the traditional ethics of the whole South, destroy the orthodoxy and norms in the hearts of those traditional defenders, advocate the new idea of equality between men and women, safeguard women’s rights, and let women have fair and free rights in society. The awakening of Emily’s feminism also profoundly indicates the historical track that the old Southern society is bound to die out and the new things will eventually replace the old things. It also indicates that the era of women’s getting rid of feudal ideology and patriarchal rule is coming.

3.4 *Emily with Abnormal Personality*

3.4.1 *The External Manifestation of Emily’s Resistance*

Emily is a lonely and miserable lady. She has lived a lonely and isolated life for more than 40 years. “She has lived through generation after generation -- noble, quiet, unable to escape, inaccessible, eccentric and perverse”. [3] Tragedy, is the destruction of beautiful things. The reason for Emily’s tragedy is that the

patriarchal society, the Southern view of women's morality with Puritanism as the core and her living environment make her fall into an invisible net. Her body and mind are oppressed for a long time, her spirit is destroyed, her soul is poisoned, and her human nature is twisted, in the atmosphere of terror, she struggled to live, and even created her abnormal character and crazy behavior.

The plot that best reflects Emily's distorted character is that she loves Homer. In order to get rid of the lonely life and get a happy life, Emily tried her best to keep the hard won love. Buying rat poison and arsenic is Emily's crazy behavior. People in the town thought she was going to commit suicide, but they didn't think of the real use of arsenic. When Emily is abandoned by her lover, "contradictions cannot be resolved in her heart. In order to seek self realization, she lets madness overcome reason, and finally has the most Gothic scene in the novel".[5] Emily's volcano, which had been repressed for a long time, finally found the vent. She finally took the way of poisoning to kill the only lover in her life. In other words, it is the Southern Puritan patriarchy that makes Emily psychopathic, crazy to the limit, even forced to poison him, but also "killed" herself, living a "walking corpse" life alone.

3.4.2 *The Significance of the Rise of American Feminism at that Time*

According to the theory of humanistic psychology, people have different levels of basic needs in the process of their healthy development. When the individual needs or desires cannot be met, people are very likely to find a way to vent, and eventually going crazy.

Emily is not the first crazy woman in her family. "People in the town think of Miss Emily's aunt, old lady Wyatt, who has finally become a complete lunatic", "Even if her family has crazy blood, if there is a chance to put it in front of her, she will not let it go".[3] From this point of view, the influence of family environment and social background is very far-reaching, Emily's crazy abnormal psychological behavior is "unavoidable". Emily is just one of many "crazy" women in the society. "Crazy" is Emily in the eyes of other people who believe in patriarchy in the town. However, readers examine Emily's words and deeds from the perspective of feminism, which also represents the field before the rise of feminism.

The rise of feminism at that time had the following four effects on American Society: First, promoting the rapid development of society. Second, improving the overall quality of the people. Third, in the later feminist

movement, the extreme view that men are subordinate to women is advocated. Either you enslave me or I enslave you. Fourth, praise of women's openness and freedom. However, we feel that we need to grasp this influence carefully and not completely forget the moral and ethical burden we should bear. It is also not the real purpose of feminism to show her personality in exchange for moral decay.

4. CONCLUSION

A Rose for Emily is a famous short story by William Faulkner. This novel is also written in Faulkner's "Yoknapatawpha genealogy". In the novel, Faulkner describes the tragic fate of Emily, a descendant of the aristocracy, reflects the tense relationship between men and women under the patriarchal rule, and accuses the war, industrial civilization, patriarchal culture and other adverse effects on human society. Emily's tragic fate reveals the wrong idea of human male centralism and calls for equal treatment of women and respect for nature.

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