



# The Analysis of the “Rose” in William Faulkner’s *A Rose for Emily* from a rhetorical perspective

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**Abstract.** This dissertation would be mainly discussing the rhetorical meaning of the “rose” in William Faulkner’s preeminent works, *A Rose for Emily*. William Faulkner has always been renowned for its virtuoso in describing the mentioned matter from multiple perspectives, in resorting to stream of consciousness, in symbolizing the heroes and heroines using rhetorical devices. While in this dissertation, much more analysis would be falling onto the rhetorical meaning of a particular image, namely, the rose. Firstly, this dissertation would be touching on the superficial as well as the denotative meaning of the “rose”, and then its connotative meaning in the mentioned works, ultimately, its connotative meaning in the related works which would be largely open for future forthcoming scholaristic studies.

**Keywords:** *A Rose for Emily*; William Faulkner; rhetorical analysis

## 1 Introduction: The background of *A Rose for Emily*

William Faulkner was born into a fallen southern aristocratic family, nearly the identical situation with his heroine, Emily. Namely, Emily was also among the most sacred names during that era. Thus, to some degree, the author might be narrating the mysterious story of a particular group which is the fallen southern aristocratic family. This is where the sympathetic feelings of the sentimental author should be setting in, whereas the readers don’t really sense such feelings from William Faulkner. All that was resorted to by William remained a seemingly-objective, emotionless word “rose”, or more precisely, a conduct, that is, “a rose for her”.

As far as such point is concerned, the author is actually condensing all feelings to be included in one single word, be it sorrowful or even apathetic. From this point, we put up the image of the author or myriads of readers dropping by the tomb of the Ms. Emily, tranquilly presenting a rose for her, in order that they can demonstrate the deep profound feelings for her.

By its origin, the rose (*Rosa*) flower occurred before humankind evolved. Fossils found in Colorado have been dated to 35 million years of age<sup>[2]</sup> (Seal, 2021). And even more mysteriously, by its definition the rose was a privileged symbol for Mary, Queen of heaven and earth. By the twelfth century, the red rose had come to represent Christ’s

passion, and the blood of the martyrs. The most common association of the rose is with the Virgin Mary. Thus, it is not so obscure when we come to the meaning of rose, it is superficially a plant, while it at the same time bears the meaning faith, loyalty, felicity, to name but a few, others positive feelings alike.

## 2 Check into “rose” from a connotative sense

To check the meaning of rose from a more connotative sense, we may easily associate this word with pureness of love as well as the loyalty of a relationship, or maybe even the pursuit of sexual or sentimental fulfillment [1] (Zhang, 2019). For the rose bears thorns all over its cane, thus rendered people excited and spurred especially when hurt by it. The riskier it is, the more likely people would be fascinated about. This might be the innate desire of people. Precisely, when catching the sight of such a bright color, be it crimson or faint pink, people would feel greatly invigorated, or even riskier to say that people feel panicked and also excited at the sight of blood no matter it was the imagined association of blood or simply the blood of he himself from the spurring of the thorns.

Retrospectively, the rose has always been associated with the plants, to some degree, a botanical term. There has always been a heated discussion on what criterion should be resorted to when it comes to different kinds of rose-related plants, more precisely, their individual names in highly professional nomenclatural domain. Take distinctive rose-related plants in China as an example, we have rosebush (interpreted as “qiangwei” in Chinese), China pink (interpreted as “yueji” in Chinese), as well as the most ordinary sort of rose (interpreted as “meigui” in most cases).

However, as is described in some of the ancient works, like the *Exaggeration of Master Xu from Chu Domain* has genuinely got a say in the rose as a specific stone [5] (Xu, 2003). The original excerpt was going like this, “When we are going to count down the jades in Chu Domain, Ruby and Rose are listed as the first and foremost, then the pretty beautiful crystals are also needless to say, ultimately, the slightly inferior jades and some precious basaltic stones are just to name but a few.” From the descriptions given by the embarrassing ambassador, Master Xu from Chu Domain, we may even draw the conclusion that rose should bear the meaning as stones, crystals and even some precious jades.

## 3 Check into “rose” from a context-dependent perspective

It is universally acknowledged that the rose, as a frequently-resorted image in literature works, often bears the meaning of the love flow of the characters. Furthermore, just as Robert Burns explained in *A Red Red Rose*, the rose represents the vivid youth and pure beauty of his loved one, Jean Armour [3] (Xu, 2019). And to our utmost excitement, such youth and beauty coming from within a fair lady can even be greatly amplified to the highest level when such relationship was intercepted by his father and other religious authorities among his predecessors. Under such circumstance, the mentioned attraction coming from two lovers has more and more been transforming to be untouchable and ultimately unattainable. Thus, the image carrying the qualities of

loved ones in the first place gradually transmuted to be unattainable connections between lovers, rendering this literature image more than spurring and alluring for people to approach.

Interestingly enough, from the analysis of Tie Ning's works, the Arc of Rose, rose is interpreted as the symbol of Su Mei, one of the major protagonists. During the special ten-year revolutionary period, rose has been explained to be the rise of female consciousness [4] (Yu, 2019), as is presented in this novel by Su Mei and "their" struggles with male characters and with this specific era. Ultimately, such arousing of female awareness would drag these females out of the mire created by the crises at a specific era or by a specific group of people. Just as is explained by Virginia Woolf in *Professions for Women*, once the room being our own, all that is left for us is to decorate and decide with whom we are going to share this room. Apparently, a spacious and respectively comfortable room can be create only after the glass ceiling officially broken.

## 4 Check into "rose" from a rhetorical sense: symbolism

Symbolism, as a significant writing technique has always been getting an important say in Mr. Faulkner's novel. There are obviously much more symbolisms using in this novel, the old male servant of color, the Satoris, Homer Baron, Emily, and ultimately, the most important, being the rose. After the analyses of rose's meaning from a denotative, connotative and a respectively context-reliant sense, it laid a solid foundation for the interpretation of rose's meaning pertaining A Rose for Emily.

Even certain behaviors of Ms. Emily have been the author's whim in symbolism. For instance, when everyone in town thought Emily was going downhill, Ms. Emily was still holding her head highly and proudly, firmly and faithfully, even with her so-called love one, Homer Baron, which is actually the demonstration of Emily's glorious tradition, echoing with the beginning of the whole novel saying that Ms. Emily alive, had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town <sup>[6]</sup> (Li, 2007).

### 4.1 A red rose being the symbol of Emily herself

Emily, a seemingly meek female without the protection from her father, was instead an idiosyncratic and eccentric lady who was in love with human corpse. For instance, she won't let others bury her father, lingering beside him for a weird long time, being stubbornly unwilling confront herself with possible changes. Even more horribly, she has been sleeping with the corpse of Homer Baron for nearly forty years. All these mentioned deeds rendered her thorny, in spite of being a so-called aristocratic fair lady. Namely, her sacred status rendered her a rose, while her idiosyncracies that doesn't go along with that specific era being the thorns scattering the cane of the rose.

When it comes to the issue of feminism, rose, back to our sight, has been firsthand bearing the meaning of pretty yet strong women. As is presented in many female-tribute-like works, we may easily found the trace of the faithful risings of women. Whether it be the Elizabeth in *Pride and prejudice* from Jane Austin, or the

Jane Eyre from Charlotte Brontë, all women portrayed in these novels perspectively actually displayed the rise of feminism, just exactly as is connotes by "a single rose".

Its delicate pedals and even dew hanging on them represent the courtesy and attractiveness of females, while its thorns, on the other hand, represent the strong faith and painstaking struggle from women. Take the heroine in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth as one of the four girls whose filial heredity is going to be inherited by a newly-met in-law, most notably, as a stubborn girl, she has naturally got some prejudice towards Mr. Darcy. This prejudice could be viewed as the vivid description of the sharp thorns. What's more, on viewing the three waves of feminisms, we may apply this trope into this range mentioned above.

#### **4.2 A red rose being a pitiful eulogy flowing around Emily's tomb**

Rose, as is discussed in the previous paragraphs, is the representation for even mania-like love. Namely, rose, being the symbol of a romantic relationship, is frequently resorted to be tantamount with the "success" of a loving couple. While Ms. Emily, who was in deep love with the Yankee guy named Homer Baron, has never "succeeded" in attaining such love in return. As a lady who was only keeping to herself under the control of an authoritative parent, she undoubtedly aspired to be loved back, to be kept in accompany with, and most importantly, to be healed eventually. However, when catching sight of such a ready, skillful young man, Ms. Emily acted as if she were snatching at the last call of her life, firmly believing that this northern black man would marry her.

Sorrowfully enough, the pathetic lady was failed by her own determination. It turned out that she didn't really get a rose from him 'till his death. Thus, the author, on behalf of all pitiful readers, presenting poor Emily a rose to fulfill her wish, showing their mourning feelings. Even if it was just an embedded word in a title given by the author, it created a scene which is as if a mourning passer-by dropping a flower in front of Ms. Emily's tomb, which is largely in line with William Faulkner's writing techniques including complexity as well as stream of consciousness.

### **5 Conclusion**

William Faulkner has always been noted for its virtuoso in great writing techniques featured by complexity and the stream of consciousness, which, if you'd care to check, may also include the time horizon of Ms. Emily's life span, the eccentric trace of the pharmacist as well as the strange behavior of the senile servant of color. Take the trace of the pharmacist as an example, ever since Ms. Emily asked him for the toxic arsenic, he didn't appear for good, just as is described in the novel, people never see him again.

Other gruesome detail may also include the trace of the male servant. As is mysteriously expounded by William Faulkner, this male servant has been sending in and out carrying a basket one after another. All those terrible details don't seem to be that horrifying in the first place, whereas when the truth came out and it dawned on people

that the smell was given off by a piece of corpse, all these eccentric details began to match with each other. Thus, this matching has been creating the enchanting effect to the effect that all these mentioned above are actually the author's whimsical intentions. Namely, the dominant features of Gothic literatures. Major works in this domain include the *Black Cat* from Edgar Allan Poe.

And right in this dissertation, this study extracted an image appeared first and foremost in the title, by analyzing the papers in this specific subject, and with the method of combining what has been proposed by the author implicitly with what has been contemplated explicitly, drawing a primary conclusion mainly from two perspectives, which includes the rose connotes Emily she herself to be a thorny woman, as well as, most importantly, a pitiful eulogy offered by the author on behalf of all of the readers.

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