

## **An Analysis of the Southern Gothic Genre in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"**

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**Abstract.** This study analyzes the Southern Gothic genre in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." This study is developed based on the gaps in several previous studies, which primarily emphasized the structure and narrative impacts on readers' comprehension, the values and societal structure, Faulkner's linguistic choice, Emily's contrasting identity, and the psychological factors that influenced Emily's behavior. This study aims to identify the Southern Gothic elements, themes, and symbols in "A Rose for Emily" based on Smith's, Harris', and Lloyd-Smith's concepts of Southern Gothic literature. This qualitative study employs a textual analysis method with a close reading approach. The primary data for this study is a short story entitled "A Rose for Emily." The data was collected through a series of steps and then subjected to analysis and interpretation. The findings demonstrate that the short story incorporates a range of Southern Gothic elements, including depictions of environmental decay, horror, and the exploration of mental illness. The reflection of thematic elements of Southern Gothic is in Emily's isolation and seclusion, Emily's resistance to the changes, death, and the macabre. Ultimately, certain symbols are reflected, such as Emily's house representing the grotesque, the dust and arsenic symbolizing death, the unpleasant smell representing the decaying life of Emily, and the color of the rose symbolizing her tragic and unrealistic love. This study can contribute to a broader understanding of Southern Gothic literature and how Faulkner portrays the elements of the Gothic in his work. In conclusion, this short story is an example of a Gothic tale, as it is replete with elements of Gothic tradition, themes, and symbols.

**Keywords:** *Gothic, Grotesque, Horror, Macabre, Necrophilia*

## INTRODUCTION

The Southern Gothic is a subset of Gothic literature. The genre of Southern Gothic literature emerged in the early nineteenth century as a distinct form, evolving from the Gothic literature that originated in England and the Northeast of the United States (UMD Libraries, 2024). The Southern Gothic genre has been prevalent in literature since the early nineteenth century. The defining characteristics of Southern Gothic literature are irrational and transgressive thoughts, desires, and impulses, grotesque characters, and a pervasive sense of alienation and anguish, which is with dark humor (Bjerre, 2017). The Southern Gothic genre addresses the South's somber and troubled history, including racial social tension and deviations from the norm (Harris, 2022). Furthermore, the genre incorporates traditional Southern tropes alongside its characteristic Gothic elements with a sense of the supernatural (Harris, 2022).

Punter and Byron (2004) in Psilopoulou (2021) describe the Southern Gothic as an exploration of the psychological and emotional effects of societal decline, the persistence of traumatic experiences, and the impact of historical injustices on the present. They argue that this genre is concerned with the legacy of a dispossessed Southern aristocracy and the enduring tensions surrounding racial conflict. One subgenre of Southern Gothic is the grotesque, also known as the Southern Grotesque (Bjerre, 2017; Altındış, 2019). In his analysis, Thomson (1972, pp. 20-28) identifies several key elements that define the grotesque. The following elements are the characteristics of the grotesque, such as disharmony (conflicts, unresolved), the comic (vulgarly funny), the terrifying (uncanny, supernatural, disgusting, and repulsive), extravagance and exaggeration (extremeness), abnormality (such as physical features), and the satiric and playful. Furthermore, Poggi (2020) states that the grotesque emphasizes the sociological and cultural dimensions of social reality while relegating the more individualistic and psychological aspects characteristic of classical Gothic horror to a less prominent position.

According to Bjerre (2017), Southern Gothic is a literary genre that draws from the English and American Gothic traditions. However, it is known for its unique geographical roots in distinctive historical, cultural, and social tensions and aberrations. While the United States lacks the traditional architectural settings of Gothic romances, the post-Civil War South offers a unique backdrop for such narratives. The numerous ruined or decaying plantations and mansions provide a compelling setting for stories exploring the haunting history of the South and the sins, secrets, and other unsettling elements that define the region's past (Bjerre, 2017). According to Goddu (2014) in Psilopoulou (2021), the South is often associated with Gothic doom and gloom and is viewed as the other of the nation. It is a repository for aspects that the country wishes to disassociate itself from, including a perceived benighted landscape, a history of slavery, and a legacy of racial injustice.

Gothic narratives concentrate on the psychological aspects of the human mind, exploring the concept of the isolated self and the emotional experiences associated with horror. Gothic novels prompt readers to engage in self-directed fear and emotional connectedness with the characters (Smith, 2007). In terms of the main elements of Gothic literature, Harris (2023) and Lloyd-Smith (2004) categorize them into numerous main features, such as "a desolate haunted setting, dark and

mysterious atmosphere, affiliation with supernatural forces, emotional extremes, the protagonist as the anti-hero, women as victims, curses and portents, visions and nightmares, frightening tone, the hostility of weather, religious concerns, psychological instability, good versus evil, the touch of romance, extreme circumstances of terror, oppression, persecution, darkness and obscurity setting, and innocence betrayed."

The objectives are to identify Southern Gothic elements, explore the theme, and identify specific symbols associated with Southern Gothic aspects in "A Rose for Emily". Despite the plethora of studies on this short story, a paucity of research on Gothic issues in "A Rose for Emily" explores specific elements, themes, and symbols of the Gothic. The following is a review of several studies on "A Rose for Emily" that have previously been conducted and explore various issues.

In his study, Dos Santos (1988) employs the sign theory developed by C. S. Peirce and Lacan's psychoanalytic theory to elucidate the process of reading and interpreting Faulkner's short story, "A Rose for Emily". In particular, she examines the impact of temporal structure, narrative perspective, and the theme of absence on the reader's comprehension of the story and its characters, focusing on Miss Emily Grierson. Subsequently, Agustini (2012) examines the character of Emily as a representation of the traditional values of Southern society and the burden of expectations placed upon her by the townspeople. Emily represents the hope for the maintenance of conventional behaviors, and the instability of her position ultimately leads to her tragic actions. This analysis is within the historical context of the American South's transition following the Civil War and the impact of modernization on the region's values and social structures.

Liu (2015) discusses the application of foregrounding theory to the analysis of stylistic features and thematic elements in "A Rose for Emily." He examines how Faulkner's linguistic choices, narrative strategies, and symbolism facilitate the reader's comprehension of the intricate themes present in the narrative, particularly those on tradition, isolation, and the emotional ramifications of societal transformation. Following that, Schweizer (2018) examines how Faulkner portrays the character of Emily through his distinctive narrative style. The result demonstrates that the character Emily is between many contrasting identities, including gender, temporality, passivity, and agency.

Subsequently, Qing (2021) examines how Faulkner depicts the style and sensibility of the Gothic in "A Rose for Emily." However, the study does not analyze the specific symbols and imagery associated with Gothic elements in the narrative. The most recent study is by Zahin (2022), who investigates the psychoanalytical factors that contribute to Miss Emily's necrophilia and the psychological conflicts that underpin her actions, particularly within the context of capitalist patriarchal oppression. The research examines how these factors contribute to the formation of a distorted psyche, which in turn gives rise to the murderous act and other manifestations of psychopathology.

The studies mentioned above do not comprehensively discuss the Gothic elements, themes, and symbols in the short story "A Rose for Emily". The previous studies emphasize the impact of structure and narrative on comprehension, the values and societal structure, Faulkner's linguistic choices, Emily's contrasting identity, and the psychological factors that influenced Emily's behavior. Therefore,

this study seeks to address the shortcomings of previous research by focusing on Southern Gothic aspects in “A Rose for Emily” that have not been the focus. Three research questions have been formulated: (1) What Southern Gothic elements are presented in “A Rose for Emily”? (2) What theme of Southern Gothic is presented in “A Rose for Emily”? and (3) What symbols are associated with Southern Gothic literature presented in “A Rose for Emily”? Based on Smith, Harris, and Lloyd-Smith's concept of Southern Gothic literature.

This study contributes to a broader understanding of Southern Gothic literature and how Faulkner portrays the South's ongoing confrontation with its historical past. Furthermore, readers comprehend the elements, themes, and symbols of the Gothic in a narrative.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a textual analysis approach and utilizes close reading techniques. In close reading, we scrutinize a text; it is the core element of close reading (Catterson & Pearson, 2017). Therefore, we can gain an in-depth comprehension of the text being read (Saccomano, 2014). The primary data source is the short story entitled “A Rose for Emily” (1930) by William Faulkner. The data followed several steps. The initial step involves a comprehensive reading to gain the underlying themes. It entails identifying and analyzing key elements within the narrative, including the setting, characters, and plot. Subsequently, the researchers formulate research questions. Thereafter, the researchers apply close reading techniques to identify words and sentences related to the Gothic elements through dialogue, literary devices, and events in the short story, and then summarize the short story to understand the structure and key events of the narrative. Then, the data is organized into a set and extracted to gain the data needed to answer the research questions. Smith's (2007), Harris' (2023), and Lloyd-Smith's (2004) Gothic literature applied to the primary data. Finally, the data is analyzed and interpreted to present conclusions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To address the research questions and objectives of the study, this section discusses the Southern Gothic elements, Gothic themes, and symbols in “A Rose for Emily” associated with the Southern Gothic genre. The researchers identified several Gothic elements, including environmental decay and horror, grotesque characters, mental illness, and murder. The thematic elements of the Gothic genre encompass themes such as isolation, resistance, and the macabre. Additionally, symbols linked to the Southern Gothic genre include the house, dust, smell, arsenic, and rose, as delineated in the works of Smith, Harris, and Lloyd-Smith regarding Southern Gothic literature.

### ***A. Southern Gothic elements in “A Rose for Emily”***

Gothic elements are a pervasive feature of numerous works of fiction. Such elements include descriptions of fierce characters, ghosts, decaying corpses, acts of brutality, killing, castration, incest, and other similarly disturbing phenomena (Gray, 2016 in Street & Crow, 2016). The term “Southern Gothic” describes a subgenre of

Gothic literature that substitutes the conventional spooky medieval atmosphere of the Gothic genre for the ambiance of the southern United States. Furthermore, this genre emphasizes sociological elements and cultural contradictions inherent in social reality, whereas classical Gothic horror is more individualistic and psychological (Poggi, 2020). The short story "A Rose for Emily" exemplifies several Southern Gothic elements, including the physical deterioration of Emily's residence and the town of Jefferson, the grotesque portrayal of characters, the act of killing, and the decaying corpse of Emily's father and Homer Barron.

*Environmental decay and secret horror*

The physical deterioration in this narrative is in the changing appearance of Emily's house and the surrounding town of Jefferson. Emily's house is notable for its square form and considerable size, which indicates that she hails from a wealthy and aristocratic family. However, the color has now faded due to weathering and a lack of maintenance. The house is distinctive, exhibiting characteristics reminiscent of buildings constructed in the 1970s, including cupolas, spires, and scrolled balconies. The residence is in a strategic location on the primary thoroughfare. Typically, this location is for individuals of high social status and prominence within the community. Emily's father is a wealthy and prominent member of the Jefferson community. However, the American Reconstruction altered the socio-political landscape of this town. The construction of garages and cotton gins has destroyed urban and neighborhood structures. The remaining structure associated with Emily is still in its original form; it presents an unappealing appearance. The interior furnishings of the residence are antiquated and encrusted with dust. The house has a musty odor and a distinct, pungent scent. The leather-covered the furniture and cracked windows. Upon the Board of Aldermen's arrival at the residence, a subtle dust cloud formed around them, "spinning with slow motes in the single sun ray" (Faulkner, 1990, p. 2).

Furthermore, the crayon painting of Emily's father on a tarnished gilt easel contributes to the grotesque that pervades Emily's dilapidated house. Meanwhile, the area in front of her house has been deliberately allowed to fall into disrepair. The narrator states that when the town began offering free postal delivery, Miss Emily was the only resident who declined to allow the installation of a metal number above her door and the attachment of a mailbox (Faulkner, 1990, p. 8). The only indication of human activity in the area was a young African American man entering and exiting the premises with a market basket (Faulkner, 1990, p. 3). This environmental decay creates an atmosphere of horror and enriches the sense of horror as Gothic in the narrative (Hu & Zhong, 2022). Moreover, the intertwined histories of politics and religion have invariably influenced life in the American South. The defeat in the Civil War led to economic paralysis, agricultural depression, and the subsequent extinction crisis. This phenomenon engendered a pervasive sense of failure, guilt, frustration, and loss among the Southerners, culminating in grotesque deformity and profound loneliness. Moreover, the tradition of Christian culture has contributed significantly to the grotesque elements found in Southern Gothic. A significant proportion of the early immigrants were Puritans. The doctrine accentuates the concepts of original sin and human nature, which posits that individuals are inherently incapable of self-improvement. The philosophy is a

reluctance to embrace change and progress in society, manifesting in a skeptical, boycotting, and oppositional stance toward novel concepts (Hu & Zhong, 2022).

#### *Grotesque character*

Additionally, Miss Emily's physical appearance refers to Southern Gothic elements. Faulkner describes Miss Emily as "a small, corpulent woman...with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing to her belt" (Faulkner, 1990, p. 5). It emphasizes the sense of a monstrous creature, the devil in the house (Zouari, 2021). He further characterizes her as "bloated," with a pallid complexion, as though she had been in motionless water for an extended period. From her lurid face, the reader can visualize her as a lifeless creature (Hu & Zhong, 2022). Her eyes, situated within the fatty ridges of her face, resembled two diminutive pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they traversed from one face to another while the visitors articulated their purpose (Faulkner, 1990, p. 2). Her sartorial choices reflect an adherence to an anachronistic style reminiscent of the traditional Southern aristocratic mode of dress. Subsequently, following a prolonged period of illness, she underwent a haircut that resulted in a youthful appearance despite her actual age being in her thirties. The narrator characterizes her as a woman with a "vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows—sort of tragic and serene" (Faulkner, 1990, p. 5). Miss Emily's physical appearance enhances the prevailing atmosphere of gloom and terror in the narrative (Hu & Zhong, 2022). Furthermore, Miss Emily's mental illness and the act of killing Homer Barron serve to reinforce the grotesque aspects of her character.

#### *Mental illness*

Emily belongs to an aristocratic family that adheres to the principles of the Old South tenaciously. Her father is a domineering and demanding individual. Therefore, her father rejected numerous young men who attempted to establish a relationship with her. Consequently, despite reaching her thirties, Emily remains unmarried. The Griersons held themselves too high for what they were (Faulkner, 1990, p. 4). It is further substantiated by how this family treats Lady Wyatt, her great aunt, who becomes mentally unstable as a result of the adherence to an anachronistic system. The upbringing model shapes her behavior. This tendency shows her resemblance to her father, who is possessive and inclined to exert control over others. Her domineering trait is apparent in her response to the authorities for tax payment. Emily states, "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves. See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson." (Faulkner, 1990, p. 2) The way Mr. Grierson raises Miss Emily results in her becoming dependent. Zhang (2021) posits that Emily has been unable to establish a relationship based on mutual love since the inception of her romantic involvement. Moreover, her father exerts significant control over her life. Consequently, Emily is an object within the influence of her father, and her individuality and autonomy are significantly constrained. She appears incapable of functioning without the presence of her father. Upon the demise of her father, she exhibits no outward indication of sorrow.

When individuals arrive to express their condolences, she is attired in her customary attire and exhibits no outward indication of grief. She retained her

father's corpse for three days until the minister and the doctor advised her that her father had passed away and that the funeral should commence without delay. At this point, she permitted the funeral to proceed. Her murder of her lover, Homer Barron, perpetrated with arsenic poisoning, marks the zenith of her mental illness. She maintains the corpse of Homer Barron for forty-four years.

Emily exhibits psychotic behavior; she not only kills Homer Barron, her intended spouse but also engages in sexual intercourse with his corpse. Zahin (2022) asserts that Emily's actions refer to necrophilia or sexual activity involving a deceased individual. The practices of necrophilia encompass a range of sexual activities, including anal and vaginal intercourse, as well as other forms of sexual contact, such as biting, fondling, or sucking of breasts. Furthermore, these practices may entail physical contact, such as hugging or sleeping close to the body (Vasudevan, Dharma, & L., 2019). Faulkner stated that the body had once lain in the attitude of an embrace (Faulkner, 1990, p. 9). Zahin (2022) posits that the psychological phenomenon of necrophilia in Emily is because of prolonged repression. Miss Emily serves as an exemplar of an individual who succumbs to a psychic disorder as a consequence of prolonged and pervasive psychological torment. This oppression is a result of her father's restrictive upbringing.

#### *The killing of Homer Barron*

Homer Barron is the foreman overseeing the construction of sidewalks in Jefferson. The construction project commenced following the demise of Miss Emily's father. Homer is friendly and becomes acquainted with the residents of Jefferson in a relatively short time. He appears to be closely associated with Miss Emily and to have a distinctive relationship with her. The narrator states, "We began to observe them on Sunday afternoons, driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy" (Faulkner, 1990, p. 5). Subsequently, it shows that Miss Emily has purchased "a men's toilet set in silver, a complete set of men's clothing, including a nightshirt" (Faulkner, 1990, p. 7). The public assumes that the two would have married; however, this assumption is not borne out by the evidence, as there is no public indication that they were engaged. Homer enters Miss Emily's house one evening through the kitchen door. It marks the beginning of the mystery. Individuals cease seeing Homer, while Miss Emily is seldom in public. It appears that the disappearance of Homer Barron may have been the result of Miss Emily's actions, potentially indicating that she was responsible for his demise.

Agustini (2012) asserts that the townspeople pressed Emily to marry an aristocrat, as is expected of her class. Her affair with a poor Yankee man, therefore, represented her inability to meet these expectations. Moreover, the man indicates his intention to disengage from the relationship. In an act of desperation, Emily resorts to murder to maintain her relationship with the man, disposing of his corpse in the process. It would appear that Homer Barron is not genuinely interested in pursuing a romantic relationship with Emily; she serves as merely a transient figure in his life, a brief respite from the challenges and demands of the road construction project underway in Jefferson. However, Blythe (1989) in Towner & Carothers (2006, p. 63) posits that Homer Barron is homosexual, and Emily kills him to salvage her reputation. This supposition is from the narrator's account, which states that Homer himself had remarked that he was not inclined towards marriage, given his preference for men and his association with younger men at the Elks' Club

(Faulkner, 1990, p. 6). Towner and Carothers (2006) posit that Emily's act of killing Homer was an act of desperate revenge against her father, who had "thwarted her woman's life so many times" (Faulkner, 1990, p. 7). Her father's actions influence the development of her personality and her attitude towards love. She views human life as the sole means of maintaining eternal love (He & Tang, 2016).

### ***B. Southern Gothic themes in "A Rose for Emily"***

The themes or central ideas present in Gothic fiction are numerous and diverse, encompassing a vast array of subjects, including horror, the grotesque, the macabre, ghosts, and a plethora of other themes. American Gothic narratives are typically imbued with a sense of unease and distress, often evoking the traumatic legacy of slavery and racial conflict in the United States (Bjerre, 2017). In Southern Gothic literature, themes such as the grotesque, the uncanny, abnormality, and the terrifying are pervasive (Thomson, 1972). The short story presents several themes: seclusion, resistance, death, and the macabre.

#### *Isolation and seclusion*

The short story "A Rose for Emily" presents central ideas, including isolation and seclusion. It shows the minimal interaction between Miss Emily's family and the surrounding neighborhood. Emily is rarely in public. Furthermore, following the death of her father and the clandestine murder of Homer Barron, she maintains a distinct separation from the general public. The only person who interacts with Miss Emily is her servant, a black man who delivers food from the market.

#### *Resistance to change*

Another theme that emerges from this short story is the resistance to change. The narrative reveals that Miss Emily is firmly committed to traditional values and practices. Faulkner states that "Miss Emily had become a tradition, a duty, and a care, a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town" (Faulkner, 1990, p. 1). The narrative is situated in the post-Civil War era and explores the decline of economic, cultural, and social values in the South. The character of Miss Emily serves as a representation of the challenging transitions occurring within society (Agustini, 2012). In this way, Miss Emily is a symbol of the old order's resistance to modernism. Some scenes in the plot illustrate Miss Emily's resistance to the policies of the new authorities in Jefferson. For example, she declines to pay the tax because Colonel Sartoris, the former mayor of Jefferson, had forgiven the Grierson family's tax debt due to her father's financial contributions to the town. Even though the new authorities have sent her a tax notice and visited her house, Emily remains adamant in her refusal to pay the tax. Miss Emily states, "I have no taxes in Jefferson." Colonel Sartoris elucidated the matter to me. "Perhaps one of you could gain access to the city records and verify this information for yourselves" (Faulkner, 1990, p. 2). The subsequent scene that illustrates Miss Emily's rejection of the aforementioned change is when the town offers a free postal delivery service, which Miss Emily declines by refusing a mailbox that is to be attached to her door. Miss Emily shows stubbornness and unwillingness to be ruled by anyone. Consequently, upon her death, Faulkner referred to her as "a fallen monument" (Faulkner, 1990, p. 1). Miss Emily represents an old tradition of the South.



### *Mortality and macabre*

The themes of this short story correspond to those typically explored in Southern Gothic literature, namely death, mortality, and the macabre. The narrative shows three instances of death in the presence of grotesque and eerie circumstances. The initial demise is that of Mr. Grierson, the father of Emily. After that, Homer Barron died, the lover of Miss Emily, and finally, Miss Emily demised. The death of her father evokes a sense of disquiet. It is not the manner of his demise that is the source of distress, but how Emily treats the corpse of her father. Firstly, Emily does not accept the reality. Consequently, she maintains the appearance of normalcy in her household, wearing her customary attire and exhibiting no outward signs of grief. She retained the corpse for three days. Fortunately, the minister and doctor were able to persuade her to allow the burial of the corpse. The circumstances surrounding the death of Homer Barron remain shrouded in mystery. The enigma surrounding his demise is before the reading of the narrative. After Miss Emily's death, a keen interest arises in the interior of the upstairs room in her house. To their astonishment, they discovered a disconcerting scene: the bed was by a skeleton in an attitude of embrace (Faulkner, 1990, p. 9). It shows that Homer Barron perished as a consequence of the arsenic poisoning administered by Miss Emily. Subsequently, forty years elapse without any sightings of Homer Barron until the demise of Emily. She died at the age of seventy. Faulkner states that Miss Emily passed away in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight (Faulkner, 1990, p. 8). The indentation of the pillow beside the skeleton of Homer Barron and a strand of gray hair on the pillow indicate that during her lifetime, Miss Emily slept beside the skeleton of Homer Barron.

### ***C. Symbols Associated with Southern Gothic***

Some symbols are regarded as natural symbols, acknowledged as representing a particular concept across cultural contexts. For example, rain refers to the concepts of fertility or the renewal of life. Similarly, a forest symbolizes mental darkness or chaos; a mountain represents stability; a valley signifies a secure place, and so on (Barnet et al., 2008, p. 683). Rahman (2015) proposes that a symbol is an entity that represents a concept or idea. The story employs Southern Gothic symbols and images.

### *The house*

Symbols are elements or literary devices used in a literary work. The use of literary devices enables authors to convey the underlying significance of their texts. In this study, the researchers will focus on several symbols that appear in "A Rose for Emily" and the broader context of Southern Gothic literature. One of the most common symbols found in Gothic literature is an old mansion or monastery (Abedini, 2022; Smith, 2007). In "A Rose for Emily," the residence of Miss Emily serves as a symbol of Gothic literature. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that the residence in which Emily resides is a structure of an antiquated architectural style, thereby symbolizing the historical South. It shows that the house is a large, square-frame dwelling painted white and situated in a prominent location adjacent to the main thoroughfare. However, the house is probably currently

uninhabited and neglected. The narrator states, “Only Miss Emily’s house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps eyesore among eyesores” (Faulkner, 1990, p. 1). Furthermore, the furnishings within the residence are antiquated, discolored, and soiled. Emily’s house is a symbol of her virtual prison, isolation, and seclusion (Zhao, 2018).

#### *The dust*

The dust symbolizes the processes of decay and death. The narrator states, “When they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs” (Faulkner, 1990, p. 2). Moreover, the atmosphere shows an odor of dust and disuse, described as “a close, dank smell” (Faulkner, 1990, p. 1). The excerpts illustrate the state of deterioration and disarray of the furniture in the house. Furthermore, the leather-covered furniture is in a state of disrepair, and the paper used to respond to the mayor’s missive is of an outdated variety. The narrator states that the mayor received “a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all” (Faulkner, 1990, p. 1). The house, its furnishings, and its residents are in an old-fashioned sensibility. Liu (2015, p. 78) posits that the presence of dust in Emily’s residence indicates that the house is a funerary space, with Emily herself symbolizing a mummified figure. The symbolism of dust, particularly within Gothic tradition, is associated with concepts of decay, mortality, and the passing of time. All things will inevitably succumb to the forces of decay, their ultimate dissolution into dust and disappearance.

#### *Smell, arsenic, and rose*

The subsequent symbol is the unpleasant smell. The odor serves as a symbol of the repugnant nature of Miss Emily’s conduct towards her sweetheart, Homer Barron. Before the resolution of the circumstances surrounding Homer Barron’s demise, the residents of Jefferson, particularly Emily’s neighbor, began to perceive a pungent odor emanating from her residence. Subsequently, following multiple complaints from residents to Judge Stevens regarding the unpleasant smell, he orders the dispersion of lime in the vicinity of the residence. It occurred during the night, and approximately one or two weeks later, the offending smell dissipated. Smell is a symbol of the death and decay of Homer Barron, Emily’s fiancé. The tradition decays in the South. As posited by McCullers in Agelakis (2020), the smell is indicative of death, representing the passage of time and the loss of life.

Furthermore, the presence of arsenic in the narrative functions as a symbol of death (Hu & Zhong, 2022). The narrator states that upon opening the package at home, the following inscription was observed on the box, located beneath the image of a skull and bones: “For rats” (Faulkner, 1990, p. 6). As the narrative progresses, the narrator does not explicitly describe the circumstances surrounding Homer Barron’s demise. It suggests that Emily murdered Homer Barron with the use of poison. Initially, the residents of Jefferson hypothesize that Miss Emily will commit suicide with the poison. However, Homer is never present again, while Emily is seldom in public areas. Ultimately, they only discover Homer Barron’s skeleton on the rotting bed.

Another symbol utilized in the short story is the rose. It is a commonly held belief that a rose symbolizes love or a romantic relationship. Liu (2015, p. 80) posits that “A Rose for Emily” uses a rose as a metaphor for Emily’s life and a persistent sense

of suffering. Despite the presence of moments of joy and affection, these experiences are transient and ultimately ephemeral, akin to the natural cycle of a rose, which blooms and then fades. It shows that the withered rose serves as a metaphor for the tragic life and love of Miss Emily, the central character in the story.

## CONCLUSION

"A Rose for Emily" is a Gothic narrative that exemplifies the characteristics of Southern Gothic literature. The Southern Gothic elements are discernible through an analysis of the plot, the setting, and the characterization. The narrative contains examples of the physical decay and covert horror that characterize the Southern Gothic genre. The environmental decay is in the portrayal of Miss Emily's house, which appears to be withered. An additional element of Southern Gothic is in the narrative through the grotesque characters, most notably in the portrayal of Miss Emily's physical appearance and mental illness. Some have postulated that she may suffer from a mental disorder known as necrophilia, which involves a sexual relationship with a corpse.

The narrative also incorporates several themes associated with the Gothic genre, including isolation and seclusion, resistance to change, mortality, and a macabre fascination with the grotesque. The theme of isolation and seclusion is in the interactions between Emily and the town residents. Her resistance to change is in her response to tax payment and her subsequent rejection of the town authority. The theme of mortality is in the demise of Mr. Grierson, Emily's father, who contributes to the atmosphere of horror by allowing Emily to retain his corpse for three days, and the demise of Miss Emily's lover, Homer Barron, is similarly enigmatic. His death is only revealed at the end of the narrative after his skeleton is found on a rotting bed.

The narrative incorporates several symbols associated with Gothic elements, including the house, dust, smell, arsenic, and a rose. An aged, uninhabited, and deteriorated domicile serves as a symbol of the Southern Gothic genre. The dust in a dilapidated house contributes to the overall horror atmosphere of the narrative. The unpleasant smell symbolizes the nastiness of Emily's conduct in killing Homer Barron, and the arsenic poison symbolizes death. Finally, the rose serves as a symbolic representation of the tragic romantic relationship between Emily and Barron. He dies at the hands of his romantic interest.

This study focuses on Southern Gothic elements, themes, and symbols. Consequently, further research is necessary to explore Southern Gothic as a response to cultural and economic deterioration in the American South. "A Rose for Emily" is a case study in this regard. The implications of this study suggest that a thorough examination of "A Rose for Emily" reveals that the Southern Gothic genre employs grotesque imagery, dilapidated settings, and disturbed characters to criticize the social and moral deterioration of the American South. The genre's exploration of themes such as death, repression, seclusion, isolation, and macabre is the focus.

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