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## A Freudian Reading Of Faulkner's A Rose For Emily

William Faulkner was a well-known American author who wrote a lot of books as well as short stories set in the American south including "A Rose for Emily". His stories often centered around southern morality and its impact. Which is something he knew a lot about having grown up and lived in Mississippi his entire life. This is no different in "A Rose for Emily", it is a story about an overprotective and controlling society and father who cause his daughter to develop severe psychological problems. The presence of an unresolved Oedipal complex in Emily Grierson is the almost never understood central theme to the story.

"A Rose for Emily" first saw the world when on April 30th, 1930 it was published in a magazine by William Faulkner. Faulkner was an incredible author who ended up winning Nobel prizes for his work, he who wrote novels, short stories, poetry, essays, and even a play. He is the only Nobel prize winner in literature to come out of Mississippi. Faulkner set many of his stories in the fictional Yoknapatawpha county which he created from the real Lafayette county a place where he was intimately familiar with as he spent most of his life there. "A Rose for Emily" takes place in Yoknapatawpha county and reflects decaying of social tenants in the south in the 1930s.

Another important part of the historical context that helps us to understand "A Rose for Emily" is the works Faulkner published near it chronologically. They give us a window into Faulkner's mind at the time to give us perspective on some of the more ambiguous parts of the story. "Sound and the Fury" was one of Faulkner's most famous works and it was published six months prior to "A Rose for Emily" and many of the themes from it carry into and are touched on again in "A Rose for Emily". The most important of these themes to this paper and even to the main theme and plot is the occurrence of Oedipal fixation in Emily's life. To understand how the Freudian concepts of fixation and the Oedipus complex impact both the "Sound and the Fury" and "A Rose for Emily" we first need to understand what they are.

The Oedipus complex was a Freudian concept that he introduced in his Interpretation of Dreams book from 1899. It is a desire to be sexually involved with the parent of the opposite sex. Usually this stage is experienced by young children ages 3-6. If the children are the recipients of loving and positive parental influences the stage will pass as the child begins to identify with their same sex parent. However, if Oedipal complex is not resolved due to conflict in this stage of development the child develops mother-fixation if they are female and father-fixation if they are male (Quinindoz).

Fixation is another Freudian theory. It describes when the libido is fixed to people or things and generally refers to when this happens in childhood and yet continues into that person's adult life. Freud thought that people may have psychological fixation either because they had lack of proper satisfaction while in one of the psychosexual stages of development. Or because some person made a very strong impression on them during one of these stages. Which resulted in that person's personality reflecting that stage throughout their entire life.

Kathleen Moore writes about Jason Compson from the "Sound and the Fury" and his mother-fixation (Moore). She acknowledges the commonly accepted belief that Jason is the antagonist

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in the story, then she takes that further questioning why he displays such mean spirited, sadistic, and inhuman characteristics. Moore points to how Jason and his mother seem to have an unusual and important tie supported by many textual examples. She talks about how Jason exhibits an extreme likeness to his mother, which is a concept Freud talks about where it is possible to model one's ego onto the object of one's sexual desire. Moore also points to how "all the other women in Jason's life are mother surrogates for him" (Moore). Each of them is a substitute who in a different manner allow for the portrayal of parts of his mother fixation. Moore makes a very solid case for the presence of an unresolved Oedipal complex and mother fixation in the "Sound and the Fury". At the very least the close chronological proximity to "A Rose for Emily" means Faulkner was aware of and thinking of these themes and I believe he based the story around them.

The story "A Rose for Emily" is told in five parts by a narrator who seems to be a townspeople of Jefferson near in age to Emily. However, the story that the narrator tells is scrambled and confusing at best. He uses the first-person plural almost 50 times over the course of the novel and most commentators seem to agree that he speaks not just for himself but for the culture at large (Dilworth). The narrator is at least as important to the story as Emily's former lover Homer Barron. He impacts the way we perceive events that he relays to us. The relationship between Emily, the narrator, and the society that he represents is central the story and it seems in many ways that "the narrator and Emily are foils for each other" (Dilworth). By having an affair with Homer, Emily rebels against the south and its values and then by ending her relationship with him she seems to conform to their morals. She killed Homer at least partially because she wanted to placate society. It would not be outlandish to suggest that the reason the narrator tells what could be a far simpler story in such a convoluted way is because he is trying to direct away from his and his neighbors guilt in the killing of Homer Barron.

The narrator and the town at large could not have known about the killing of Homer prior to the murder, but they did in part supply the motive (Dilworth). And after the murder had taken place, they should have put the pieces together and at least investigated Emily for Homers disappearance. The townspeople both idealized Emily as a standard of exclusive white southern womanhood and use her as a scapegoat for the murder of Homer (Dilworth). They knew of Emily's purchase of poison, they were always watching her house and never saw Homer leave, they smelled the stench of his decaying corpse near her house, they knew when they finally enter her house after her death what is in her bedroom (Dilworth). And yet they never begin an investigation into his disappearance, they turn a blind eye to his murder because it appeases their morality by ending the affair.

Faulkner deliberately and skillfully inserts Oedipal fixation into Emily's character and that hidden secret is the theme of the story. Emily Grierson had an unresolved Oedipal complex that upon her father's death was transferred onto Homer Barron. We do not have to superimpose this theory onto Emily as there is plenty of proof, both internal and external, that Faulkner deliberately inserted Oedipal motif into the composition of the story.

Sigmund Freud's theories on sex had permeated by April of 1930 when "A Rose for Emily" was published. We can be sure that Faulkner knew of and was influenced by Freud's thinking like many other American authors, and there is even evidence of fixation and the Oedipal complex in his other works. Because of this it is strange that Emily's relationship with her dad has not received much scrutiny. Even Faulkner himself told us the significance of their relationship when he used the Freudian concept of repression. He remarks "In this case there was a young girl

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with a young girl's normal aspirations to find love and then a husband and family, who was browbeaten and kept down by her father, a selfish man who didn't want her to leave home because he wanted a housekeeper, and it was a natural instinct of -repressed which- you can't repress it- you can mash it down but it comes up somewhere else and very likely in a tragic form,...

(Scherting)"

William Faulkner's comments should be given careful consideration when analyzing the story because he wrote it. He says Emily's dad repressed her from maturing sexually in the normal way. Because of this her sexual drive emerges in a strange, tragic, and very weird way. Her affair with Homer is illicit but would Faulkner have described it as tragic? No, what then is Faulkner calling tragic? It appears that Homer and Emily's relationship is normal but if we remember that Emily's oppressive father prevented her from moving on from her Oedipal attachment to him and Homer has become a substitute for her dad. If that is the case their relationship is indeed strange and unnatural. And we can find further evidence for this Oedipal motif within the text itself.

Emily's father was a man who was very proud of his family's standing in Jefferson as well as their southern heritage. We see him repressing Emily as Schwab points out "He had constantly imposed himself between Emily and any male interested in courting her" (Schwab). "Her father had prevented her from transferring her libido to an outside object, intensifying her libidinal dependence on him" (Scherting). It is no surprise that her father's death had such an impact on her. So much that she was unable to cope with it and even denied for three days that it had happened while his corpse remained in her house (Schwab).

After her father's death Emily went back into her childhood. This explains why she cut her hair short "making her look like a girl". Emily became an emotional orphan searching for her father. Emily met Homer Barron in the summer following her father's death while he was in the town for work. Much to the surprise and the chagrin of the townsfolk she began an affair with him that lasted for two years. The town could not understand why she the idealized southern woman would have a relationship with this commoner who was also a Yankee. This apparently incomprehensible behavior is understandable if we realize that she had replaced her father with Homer. "Her deceased father was the subject of her desire; Homer was merely the object on which that desire had been fixed" (Scherting).

Faulkner hints at this parallel between Homer and Mr. Grierson within the story. Both are described as strong-willed men, and in different scenes both are depicted holding a horse whip. Yet most importantly is the fact that Emily uses Homer's corpse to replace the corpse of her father which the townspeople took from her. Faulkner later reinforces this parallel by using specific language in the final scene. He first uses the word profound while describing both men to suggest a connection between them. At Emily's funeral there is a painting of her father "musing profoundly" by her coffin, then later the people who gazed upon Homer's remains were confronted with a "profound and fleshless grin". Homer was not just someone like her father to Emily; he had become her father to her and was the object of her unresolved Oedipal complex.

The title of the story has long been debated and yet like every part of the story it is carefully chosen to match the main point of the story. Scherting says "Roses had a definite symbolic meaning for couples and were offered as pledges of fidelity in passion" (Scherting). Although Emily had an affair with Homer, she was in a very sad way powerless to be unfaithful to her father. "In ancient Rome, a rose suspended in a room signified that nothing that transpired sub

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rosa was not to be divulged to the world” (Scherting) just as the Oedipal desires expressed through Emily’s relationship with Homer were never noticed by the townspeople. Everything that happened in Emily’s rose-colored room was kept undisclosed until her death. Emily’s father-fixation is the secret that must be disclosed to fully appreciate the true meaning of the story.

Emily Grierson had severe psychological issues. And yet she is not the only one to blame for Homer Barron’s murder. The town and society that let her get away with it is also responsible. As is her father who through extreme over protectiveness and a belief that no one was good enough for his daughter stunted her sexual growth permanently imprisoning her as a child obsessed with him. “A Rose for Emily” is a cultural commentary on the problems with old southern morality and the damage it can cause. Emily’s messed up psych is not just a small part of the story; it is the main theme of the story.

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