

An Analysis Of Symbols In “A Rose For Emily”

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The following paper analyzes the significance of symbolism in the context of the short story “A Rose for Emily.” The subject short story was written by William Faulkner and first published in 1930. A literary content employs multiple literary devices to augment the efficacy of the interwoven message of the piece. Symbolism is one of the most effective literary tools, which portray a profound and different essence of the story. Symbology depicts the quality of the author’s aesthetics; evidently, a story can feature various symbols. Likewise, “A Rose for Emily” has several symbols that are incorporated throughout the story and demonstrate a deeper meaning of the overall plot. In the following, a few symbols from the short story are discussed, including Emily’s house, death, rose, and hair.

Emily’s house is the most significant symbol that demonstrates her inner state. Emily lives in her house with her father. And it is evident that her home is fresh, lively, and tidy and features white walls. Like her house, Emily too has a lively and vigorous personality, and she is pious and pure like the white of her home’s walls. Through the retrospect provided in the subject story, it becomes clear that her father guards her purity and piety by keeping her away from men. Her father measures up all the suitors and rejects them because, according to him, all of them are lower than Emily’s standards. However, as the story progresses, the condition of the house becomes tarnished. The story says, “squarish frame house that had once been white.” (Faulkner, p.1) Emily’s house turns into an untidy, foul-smelling, dirty resident. Likewise, Emily grows old, and her spirit and livelihood suffer. Consequently, she loses her sanity, kills her fiancé and sleeps with the dead body.

Death is also implicated throughout the story to symbolize the end of Emily’s life as well as the traditional life of the old South. Chronically, the old South encountered a defeat at the end of the Civil War, and Emily’s life also depicts disappointment and loss. Emily became a memory, and compared to the plantation life of the old South, that too turned into a thing of the past. Emily lives an empty life that has no meaning at all. Through the harshness of her consequences, she feels affection for the dead and resists the burial ceremony of her father. The story tells that “she told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days. We did not say she was crazy then.” (Faulkner, p.4) Emily’s demeanour asserts that she has turned into a necrophiliac. Nevertheless, Emily tries to go with the flow of life and establishes a romantic relationship with Homer Barron, but she again confronts death because she is afraid of his departure, and therefore, she kills Barron. Moreover, she sleeps next to the corpse of Barron for several years. All of these gestures point out the absurdness and impracticality of staying with dead rituals and traditions and highlight the vitality of moving on in life.

Interestingly, the story never talks about any rose for Emily because the title itself is a symbol and

carries deeper meanings. Apparently, the notion of a rose is implied in the story as a token of love as young lovers practice giving roses to each other to show their romantic expressions. The story says that in her young years, Emily had a wide variety of suitors, and any one of them could easily give her a rose, but unfortunately, the strict conditions of her father ruined her youthful years. Consequently, after the death of her father, when Emily finally meets the true love of her life in the form of Homer, she preserves him like a rose. People preserve roses by placing them among the leaves of a book. Likewise, Emily preserves the memory of her love in the form of Homer's dead body and her wedding attire. The story says, "Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks." (Faulkner, 9)

Throughout the story, Emily's hair represents the sexuality and spiritual age matters of Emily. When Emily's father dies, she adopts a shorter haircut. At this point, she opts to be like a young girl, although she is already in her thirties. Through her short haircut, Emily tends to depict sexual immaturity. Emily's father had snatched all her chances to get married, and therefore, the immaturity was subject to linger in her life forever. However, when after a few years, Homer comes in her life and disappears (as Emily killed him) her chances of wedding vanished in their entirety. And at this point, Emily's hair turns grey and demonstrates the demise of her sexuality. Evidently, townspeople found a grey strand of Emily's hair from the marriage bed of Emily and Homer. At this point, the story tells that townspeople "saw a long strand of iron-grey hair." (Faulkner, p.9)

By analyzing the above-given evaluation of symbology in the context of "A Rose for Emily," it becomes apparent that symbols play a critical role in developing and concluding a plot. Without symbols, a story would have a low impact and shallow meanings. A famous poet, William Butler Yeats, once said, "What is literature but the expression of moods by the vehicle of symbols and incidents?" There is no doubt that he defines the symbolism in its most real form.

Work Cited

Faulkner, William, and M. Thomas Inge. *A Rose for Emily*. Merrill, 1970.