

An Analysis of Emily's Characters in *A Rose for Emily* from the Perspective of Narration

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Abstract—William Faulkner, once won the Nobel Prize in 1950 presentation speech, is considered as one of the grandest Southern American novelists, because he is seemingly the "unrivaled master of all living British and American novelists". *A Rose for Emily* is one of Faulkner's most excellent short novels. Besides, the narrative of spaces in this novel is changeable and subtle, and the research on it has always been both difficult and hot. This paper attempts to interpret *A Rose for Emily* from a narrative style, to explore how Faulkner constructed the narrative of the novel, and then to analyze the characters of Emily in the novel.

Index Terms—*A Rose for Emily*, narrative style, narrative perspective, female image

I. INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950, is one of the 20th century American literary giants and the representative of stream of consciousness literature in America. During his life, he wrote 19 novels and more than 120 short stories and articles. Many of his works are considered as treasures of the history of American novel literature and have a great impact on the western literary world. European novels had special spirits and particular forms, and had an absolute advantage in that time until Faulkner had raised a trend of new novel innovation in American literature.^[9] William Faulkner is also regarded as a new symbol in that his novel is unique, full of distinctive local flavor and sense of place are also important characteristics of his novels. What's more, Faulkner has many innovations in the writing form, skills, narrative methods and so on. He can skillfully use stream of consciousness, reversal of time sequence, metaphor symbolism and other ways to fulfill ups and downs of novels. After his death, the United States and other countries in the world recommended him very highly, and researches on his literary works gradually have become a scholarship.

A Rose for Emily, as Faulkner's most distinguished short story, is also Faulkner's masterpiece of absurdity, belongs to Faulkner's York series of novels and can be regarded as a masterpiece of American Southern Gothic novels^[10] Besides, it reflects the Southern life under the historical background of the strong conflict between the old and the new order, as well as the psychological state of depression, contradiction and pain of the southerners through Faulkner's huge distinctive local flavor and sense of place.

By showing a series of events that are not arranged according to a narrative time sequence, the novel vividly depicted readers the decline of an old era and showed readers the extremely miserable life of a noble and prominent Southern lady, Emily, who is struggling for herself during her whole life under the patriarchal system and identity background. Emily, the heroine of the novel, though noble and beautiful, behaves strangely and has an aloof personality. When Miss Emily was young, she lived in the shadow of her father who had a strong desire for control and possession. In order to maintain the noble family, her father drove out Emily's suitors. Under the excessive control of her father, she can only peep into the outside world and imagine fantasy love. After her father's death, Emily fell in love with "Yankee" Homer but caused the severe criticisms from people. At last, Emily poisoned her lover due to his abandonment and she has taken up the corpse for 40 years. It wasn't until Miss Emily's death that people in the Jefferson opened her bedroom that the truth was uncovered.

With a quirky twist, this novel is full of doubts and symbols, and the root lies in the ingenious design of the narrative structure of the novel. In this short story, Faulkner skillfully uses the writing techniques such as reversal of time sequence, Gothic suspense and so on, which made his novel to be studied and discussed by many critics constantly, is absolutely enough to illustrate its unique charm and important position. In this paper, it illustrates and analyzes the characters of Miss Emily from the perspective of narration which including the aspects of narrative time, narrative perspective and symbolic metaphor.

II. ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE TIME

Abbott, H.P. explains the relationship between narrative and time, and on this basis, distinguishes the leading concepts of "clock time" and "narrative time".(Abbott, H. P.,2004). In this novel, the most amazing thing is the application of anachrony. Thus, when reading "*A Rose for Emily*" for the first time, readers often feel scattered and confused by the disordered narrative time and complicated time network because Faulkner employed the technique of anachrony subtly in the novel to trace Emily who lived in past and pondered with psychological time, which covers the novel with mystery and doubts.

Genette, a French literary critic once defined the concept and relationship of "story time" and "discourse time", and put forward several patterns of time sequence, such as narration and pre-narration, which fulfill the narrative time a systematic concept. Meanwhile, he divided the narrative time sequence into two categories: narrative time and story time. (Genette Gerard,1983). Narrative time refers to the time state of the story content in the narrative text, namely, the process of narrative story. It's changeable, unpredictable and subjective according to the author's intention. It is designed to promote the development of plot, to show the characters' psychology and to reflect the purpose of writing. However, the story time sequence refers to the natural time sequence from the beginning to the end of a story, that is, the process of the development of the "story" content. It's given, unchangeable and objective. The inconsistency between the narrative time and story time is called anachrony, which is a subtle narrative style in the narrative time.

In the novel *A Rose for Emily*, there are some important events listed according to the narrative time: 1.Emily's funeral; 2.Old mayors remitted taxes; 3.New mayors visiting for tax; 4The strange smell; 5.Father's death; 6. Lover's deserted;7.Sprinkle lime;8.Father drove young man away;9.Fell in love with Homer ;10.Bought poison;11.Homer's back;12.Homer's corpse. In the novel, story time which reflects the whole story as follows: 8, 5,9,6,11,10,4,7,2,3,1,12. (SHEN Danyan, ZHAO Haiping, 2018)

From this chart, it's clear to find that Faulkner's narrative style of dislocation of time in his novels is incisively and vividly used. The novel completely forms a narrative circle. It begins with Emily's funeral and also ends with Emily's funeral. Time traces to the past from present, then to the past, finally returns to the present, thus forming a complete narrative circle. The whole story is closely linked, which attracts readers to conduct in-depth excavation, to find out the root cause of Emily's tragedy.

Besides, the death of Emily's father is the turning point of the novel. Starting from Emily's funeral, the author recounts the event of the delegation's tax collection which is before Emily's death. Then, the author goes back to the past again, tells the reason why Emily's family had no tax to pay in Jefferson, which explained the noble and prominent background of the past Southern aristocracy. Next, the author tells Emily's father's death and it also reveals her father's huge influence on Miss Emily. So far, the author has adopted several flashbacks, which forms the first half of the novel. The latter half of the novel starts from the death of Emily's father and ends with Emily's funeral. Finally, the whole story ends abruptly with the discovery of the corpse.

In short, the narrative order of the novel is generally from the present to the past, and then from the past to the present. The beginning of the story echoes the ending page, which forms a closed ring structure. In the novel, each part seems to be ataxic and isolated, but after readers' careful consideration, the past and the present are intertwined with each others, which reveals the exquisite conception and layout of the author. As the story wane to the close, all kinds of suspense and mysteries are revealed and disclosed one after another. Besides, the meticulously designed structure and subtle plot are presented one by one, which made readers cathartic and hearty. Readers can not only immerse themselves in the tragic plots presented in the novel, but also feel strong psychological collision and spiritual shock.

At the same time, some profound elements in this novel such as society, social system, human psychology and spirit are also displayed in the novel, which makes the readers feel that the author has been trying to reconstruct the past in the intersection of reality and the past, and return to the former glory of the south that most southerners are addicted to. Emily is deeply immersed in the past constantly, whether the privilege of the southern aristocracy or the refusal to accept her father's death or the occupation of the corpse to retain love. She is so hateful and pitiful that although she hopes to maintain the glory of the past and looks forward to loving, she is trapped by the shackles of social morality and patriarchy and finally cannot get rid of the tragic fate.

With the use of the narrative style of the dislocation of time, the novel reflects the disordered and morbid psychological changes and spiritual world of Emily, and further embodies the profound tragedy of the protagonist and the author's lament for the social facts that caused the tragedy in highlighting the time theme.(XIAO Huangyang,2018)

III. THE ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

This story adopts the first person narrative, also known as "subjective narrative point of view", which is considered as "limited character narrative perspective". In this story, the author records the important events of Miss Emily's life with "our" eyes, narrates her life to the readers in the identity and perspective of "us", and presents Emily's tragedy to the readers by "our" acts.

At first, the novel mentioned that Miss Emily had died and the whole town went to the funeral. We regarded Emily as "Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town". (William Faulkner, 1990)

After her death, people "through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument". (William Faulkner, 1990).

After her father's death, we feel sorry and regret for Miss Emily's loneliness and lament "Poor Emily". People respect Emily and sympathize with Emily. She doesn't even have to pay taxes in Jefferson, because she was once a noble in the south. Even if the new mayor comes, when they ask Miss Emily to pay taxes, they are always polite and generous.

When the strange smell came out of her house, the Judge thought "it is indecent to accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad"(William Faulkner, 1990), so they sneaked into Emily's yard in the dark and sprinkled lime instead of blaming her. Besides, to reader's surprise, Miss Emily was able to buy the arsenic to kill Homer even though she refused to give a reason.

From the perspective of the first person narrative, it shows people's respect and admiration for Miss Emily's identity and status, but not for herself. Miss Emily has a strange and peculiar personality. She lives lonely in her lonely mansion and never deals with others, but her legendary life must be told by an observant insider. The narrator "we", who is familiar with the local customs and also knows the southern traditions as well, represents the residents of Jefferson town and is an ideal narrator. So her stories are all told by "we", because "we" are in curiosity and always peep at her, and peep at her life changes from a distance.(ZHANG Yi,2017).

However, when Emily fell in love with a construction Yankee and wanted to marry him, our attitude changed. All the people in the town think it's immoral, and women begin to say that "it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people".(William Faulkner,1990) When she bought poison, people even thought "it would be the best thing".(William Faulkner, 1990)At this moment, the narrator "we" has become the representative of Southern morality and social order in the late 19th century and the early 20th century. On the one hand, "we" regard Emily as a belief, so her words and deeds must conform to the standards of the aristocracy. If she violates this standard, she is the opposite of the standard. What "we" are? We are not only the residents of the town, but also the social shackles of Miss Emily.

A Rose for Emily seems eerie, scary and unbelievable, but it's much more reliable from residents' words. It's easy and clear for readers to feel the change of the attitude of the town residents towards Emily at a glance. People in the town never care about Emily's life, marriage and happiness at all. The indifference is expressed vividly through the first person narrative perspective. Thus, it tells the readers that the root of Emily's tragedy is not herself, but "us", which represents the southern Puritan society.

By using the first person narrative perspective, not only does the author narrate Emily's story, but also narrates the indifferent social background. Through the attitude of the town residents towards Emily, Faulkner strongly criticized the intolerance and vulgarity of southern society.

IV. SYMBOLIC METAPHOR

Metaphor is a kind of literary phenomenon, which is a kind of creation of language. The metaphor in literary works is different from the implication, but it is a kind of language expression combined with the background of the works, the life of the author, the plot of the characters in the works and so on and it's the deep connotation of literary works. Symbolism and metaphor are closely related in that metaphor is the basis of symbolism, whether in the form of means of expression or ultimate meaning, and in specific works, symbols and metaphor often exist at the same time, because the expression of symbol is the most important means of metaphor.

A. *The Symbolic Metaphor of Jefferson Town*

A Rose for Emily is a series of stories about Miss Emily, a noble who lived in Jefferson town after the outbreak of the civil war in the United States. The main plots of the story are all in Jefferson town, which show the tortuous process of the capital system replacing the Southern plantation system in the United States and the traditional culture of the South and the northern culture. Meanwhile, the values have experienced tremendous impact and transformation, and the new and old systems have been in constant conflict and struggle. Jefferson town is just like a closed container, which is the epitome of the complex society in the transformation period of the United States. It is closed by various figures representing the new and old systems, and constantly presents the story of the conflict between the culture and values of the north and the south.

B. *The Symbolic Metaphor of the House*

The house, which is dark and shabby, is the heritage left to Emily by the declining gradually aristocratic family, which witnessed the gradual decline of glory and then became also a cage left by her father and her family and imprison Emily's spirit and body. Emily's house not only symbolizes the downfall of noble families after their past glory but also does symbolize the decline of the old southern tradition of sin, decay and decline, meanwhile, this house is a cage, which imprisons the happiness of her whole life.

When Emily's father was alive, he prevented all men who attempted to pursue and marry his daughter and stopped his daughter from escaping their house, the cage. Father's excessive desire for control filled the whole house until it opened briefly after the appearance of the northern man, Homer. Emily rushed out of the cage recklessly and fell in love with the northern man suddenly. However, Emily found that Homer did not intend to marry her. Their love and her freedom instantly destructed, so she poisoned her lover and accompanied her body for 40 years. When Emily poisoned and killed her lover, the cage of the white wooden house was finally closed. With this closed space, she can stick to her traditional ideas, life style and stubborn Love. The white wooden house is just like a cage built by the rotten plantation

system, which isolates Emily from the emerging industrial civilization outside, which means that the aristocracy's morbid maintenance of social status. This cage forever trapped her lover with her love and the noble thoughts she maintains, but at the same time, it always locks her soul.

C. *The Symbolic Metaphor of the Rose*

Rose originally symbolizes happiness, love and all good things in western culture. But in this Gothic Novel which is full of quirks and mysteries, readers cannot find a rose except in the end of the novel "the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights"(William Faulkner,1990) are used. So, what kind of rose is this? What's the symbolism of "rose". Although the "Rose" has never appeared, it symbolizes the pursuit and attachment of good things in people's hearts. May Emily once met love, but it was just like a flower that was fleeting and suddenly lost its color. This title in fact was an open title which the author showed sympathy for Emily and wished a Rise for Emily.

The eager for love, which had been suppressed in her heart for a long time, not only did not dissipate with the passage of time, but became intenser, she had to take her only and extreme way to keep her lover -- poisoning him and keeping his body. Many people accuse her of cruel and abnormal behavior, but when we read that "upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver....."(William Faulkner, 1990), we can not only feel her deep feeling, her persistence and her pain and the deep and twisted love.

Emily has never stopped fighting against her fate and the cage which trapped her whole life, though she has been hesitating and despairing, she has become a symbol of spiritual strength, patience and tenacity in Faulkner's works. Faulkner deeply sympathizes with her. Miss Emily finally broke away from the shackles of time and space, and won the memory of a rose, that is, this well-known novel. And she, with extreme restraint and perseverance, lights up human nature, just like the rose blooming in the hearts of the author and readers.

V. ANALYSIS OF EMILY'S CHARACTERS

The novel is a kind of literary genre which focuses on portraying characters, reflects social life through complete plot and specific environment description, or reflects social life through plot expansion and the environment rendering. (Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith, 2002) Thus, the center of the novel lies in describing characters and narrating stories and reveals some essence of social life by shaping typical characters, so as to express the theme to be reflected. It is the way to express the theme to create the character image. The civil war is the specific historical scene of the narrative main line and suggested to the readers that Emily's misfortune should be attributed more to the whole southern society at that time than to herself. (YUAN Xiuping, 2014)

The dexterous narration of the heroine's image is one of the essential highlights in the success of this novel. Emily is not only a bright spot in this novel, but also a contradictory existence. Instead of being the traditional female mode of humility, forbearance, gentleness and selflessness, she is aloof, rebellious, conceited and stubborn. She is indifferent, estranged, and isolated and abides by the southern lady etiquette. Miss Emily lives by clinging to her conviction and she ignores successfully in her life all the testimony of her senses. She refuses to pay the taxes because she is convinced that Colonel Sartoris is still alive. (CHANG Wenge, CHE Qianqian, 2016) She refuses to bury her father because she believes that he is not dead. She accepts the advances of Homer Barron perhaps because she thinks he truly loves her. She kills Homer Barron maybe because she judges it the best way to ensure a faithful and lasting marriage. And she sleeps beside the dead Barron because to her he is still living. She must have been lonely, helpless and despairing. What the author showed us is always Emily who is arrogant and hard to get close to because she did not confide or vent to anyone, she was a dignified lady in the south, and she wanted to protect her image and family honor.

However, from the time circle, her father's death is the turning point of the whole story and the whole story has been reconstructing the past. The future of this story is empty in the story as well as Emily's future. Before her father died, she was forced to stay in the mansion, her father drove away all the pursuers. Grown up without mother, Emily regarded her sturdy father as her only guardian and emotional reliance. According to Freud, a famous psychologist, such stable reliance once broke, girls will be in great depression and feel being abandoned. So when her father died, Emily didn't allow her father buried, believing that he was still alive. For Emily, father was everything. The death of father drove away all her hope, belief and attachment to southern civilization. In this extremely lonely environment, Emily had a morbid value for her father's company, so she thought that her father didn't die, she would not let go of the past. That may help explain the reason why she murdered Homer Barron. Loving with Homer means a betrayal of southern civilization which her father valued most. Emily chosen to poison her lover in order to stick to southern values and make her love towards Homer permanent just like her attachment towards father. In the face of love, Emily also despises social class and moral concepts, shows a strong sense of self and autonomy in love, which makes her abandon the duties and responsibilities she always believed in, even the family honor but the price of love is heavy and sorrow.

She would not pay taxes because she didn't at past; she slept with the corpse, which indicated a freak attachment to the past. People never conquer time in any way, but Emily tries to conquer time, and she extricate herself to stay in the past world, which shows the strong nostalgia of the hero for the past and the vanity that she wants to keep the past, she wants to control the time and hold the beauty she might have gotten, but finally she lost sense of linear time, living in subjective time and getting trapped in timeless black hole.

Since her father's death is the turning point of the whole time circle, Emily's tragedy still lies in her ruthless father.

Emily's father is a loyal defender of traditional southern morality and a firm executor of Lady education. "Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door." (William Faulkner, 1990) clearly shows her and her father's connection.

Emily's high-ranking father thought that her daughter was the purest lady, and what kind of young man was not worthy of her noble daughter. Thus, he drove away all the suitors with a whip, cut off Emily's love bud, put on the shackles of the old southern traditional morality for Emily, stubbornly tied her daughter to her side, and became her only dependence. After his death, all the property he left to his daughter was a house symbolizing family status, and he continued to control her spirit. That is to say, this house has trapped Emily all her life, deprived Emily of the nutrient she needs for her growth - social connection, leaving her with nothing in mind. Emily's father personally buried the happiness of her daughter's life, driving her daughter in despair to madness and destruction step by step. As Faulkner said, "her life is likely to be destroyed by a selfish father." (William Faulkner, 1990)

VI. CONCLUSION

From the narrative point of view, this paper makes a brief analysis of the plot and characters of the short novel *A Rose for Emily*, which enables readers to interpret morality and humanity in a specific way. Readers are more capable of understanding the text and how the reading process participates in the formation of meaning thanks to the reader-response theory. *A Rose for Emily* is not a conventional text that explicitly expresses its ideas, and even more unorthodox that readers have to participate in the reading process and produce their own understanding based on these segments written by William Faulkner.

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