

11

CRITICAL CONTEXTS: A FICTION
CASEBOOK

We have already seen that, although stories may be read as if they stand alone, they are enriched by being situated in authorial, literary, or cultural and historical contexts. Once a work has earned a place in the canon of literature, it has already become surrounded by a critical context—readers who write about the work and others who engage those readers or critics in dialogue about that work. To write critically about a work of literature is to engage not only the text, but also those who have written about the text. It is always advisable, however, to read and reread the story several times until you have come to terms with it—that is, settled in your own mind what you think about the story and how you interpret it. Only then should you go to other critics—“secondary sources”—to expand or corroborate or reconsider your reading of the story. Often when you read criticism before you have made up your own mind, *all* the critics seem “right” (and the most recently read seem the “most clearly right”), and your own responses are dulled or deflected. On the other hand, when you have settled on your own responses to the story, you can read critics and pick up *additional* information or insights that can enhance rather than erase your own response and judgment. Reading criticism will not rob you of, or substitute for, your individual response. Rather, in addition to being informative in various ways, it may provide you with the means to convince someone else to share your opinion of the work.

The story that stands here in the middle of critical discussion is William Faulkner’s popular, classic, and controversial tale “A Rose for Emily.” It is followed by four published analyses of the story and a student essay. There are hundreds of critical essays and commentaries on “A Rose for Emily”—a recent online search of the Modern Language Association bibliography yielded eighty-five studies of the story published just since 1963, published as far away as Costa Rica and Turkey, and in languages as varied as German and Japanese. It is virtually impossible, then, to fully “report” the history of the critical discussion of this fascinating story. The four critical pieces reprinted here are not necessarily the best (and not necessarily not the best), nor do they fully represent the spectrum of comment and argument about the story. They do, instead, suggest the range of approaches that have been applied to the story as well as some of the story’s aspects that have often been singled out for analysis, response, and judgment.

Lawrence R. Rodgers’s “‘We all said, ‘She will kill herself’’: The Narrator/Detective in William Faulkner’s ‘A Rose for Emily,’” situates Faulkner’s story in a literary subgenre, the detective story, matching details of the story to generally accepted definitions of the ingredients of detective fiction.

A writer is congenitally unable to tell the truth and that is why we call what he writes fiction.

—WILLIAM FAULKNER

George L. Dillon's "Styles of Reading," though it first appeared in a highly theoretical professional journal, groups a variety of actual student responses into three categories, and many students who have read this essay agree that it represents the way they read and the kinds of questions they ask of a text. The essay is abbreviated here (ellipses indicate our deletions); in its original form it used long passages from other critics to demonstrate that student approaches were analogous to professional critical readings. Its purpose here is to represent various ways that students and professional critics alike read this—or any—story, and to make you more conscious of what you and your classmates are doing and what you might do in reading fiction.

The third piece, Judith Fetterley's "A Rose for 'A Rose for Emily,'" is adapted from her book *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*. It suggests that what Emily has done seems grotesque primarily because she is a woman—indeed, a lady—in a society with restrictive standards for what a lady might properly do. Faulkner, she says, sees Emily as "a woman victimized and betrayed by the system of sexual politics, who nevertheless has discovered, within the structures that victimize her, sources of power for herself." Faulkner himself has implied this, she says, alluding to (but not quoting) occasional comments of his.

The writer's only responsibility is to his art. He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one.

—WILLIAM FAULKNER

Actual statements from Faulkner interviews, however, scarcely identify him as a feminist. Two such quotations appear, for example, in *The Paris Review Interviews: Writers at Work*, first series (Baltimore: Penguin, 1958). The first of these wryly claims that "the perfect milieu for the artist to work in" is a

brothel. The house is quiet in the mornings—the best time to write—the work is easy, and the pay adequate; the job offers him whatever social life he wants, "gives him a certain standing in his society," and "all the inmates of the house are female and would defer to him and call him 'sir'" (124). The second statement is even more provocative: "Success is feminine and like a woman; if you cringe before her, she will override you. So the way to treat her is to show her the back of your hand" (125). This is not to discount Fetterley's feminist reading of the story, but only to make you wary of trusting what an author says about his or her own work—we should trust the tale, not the teller. After all, evidence in Faulkner's stories, letters, and life can support the view that he was a stereotypical Mississippi white racist or, conversely, that he empathized with African Americans and deplored racism. We naturally and properly read stories as if they are communications from another human mind and experience that we are trying to understand (reading, as one critic has suggested, as a member of the "authorial audience"). All readings must begin with this intention. But even our friends sometimes tell us things about themselves, their attitudes and actions, that they do not know they are revealing, and sometimes they claim intentions or accomplishments that we know not to be "true." We must be alert to the possibility that even authors cannot always distinguish between what they mean and what they have said. We must, then, see a work, another critic has said, "as it cannot see itself." It is only proper to acknowledge the profundity and power of an author's vision and art but probably not a good idea to claim to know fully the author's "intention" (even if you can cite a quotation by the author that purports to define that intention).

When a work has engaged a number of critics, and especially when something in the work is difficult or controversial, subsequent commentaries need to acknowledge the previous readings and, by contradicting or modifying their conclusions with new evidence or more persuasive argument, justify still another essay on the oft-debated topic. Gene M. Moore's "Of Time and Its Mathematical Progression: Problems of Chronology in Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily'" is just such an essay. It addresses once again perhaps the most frequently discussed aspect of Faulkner's story: the precise timing of the events (including Emily's dates of birth and death). Moore cuts some knots and tightens others, establishes a new chronology, and, while admitting residual inconsistencies, offers an explanation of how these came about. It serves here as an exemplary critical argument—engaging both the story and its commentators.

Time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life.

—WILLIAM FAULKNER

A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION

Alert readers will notice that these commentaries use different forms of documentation. Dillon's essay was published in 1982, Fetterley's book in 1978. Both cite their references in notes at the end of their article—for example, "1. Brooke-Rose, 'The Readerhood of Man,' in *The Reader in the Text*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 120–48" (Dillon); "See *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia 1957–1958*, edited by Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1959), 87–88; *Faulkner at Nagano*, edited by Robert A. Jelliffe (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1956), 71" (Fetterley)—and neither gives a bibliography or a list of "works cited." The essays of Rodgers and Moore—published in 1995 and 1992, respectively—give such a list and interpolate the references with the page number(s) in the text parenthetically—for example, "(Going 53)," "(Wilson 56)." The suggested standard form for literary essays and books is set by the Modern Language Association; between the publication of the earlier and the later essays, the MLA changed the form it recommended. Not everyone uses the newer form. But it is not only for that reason that the older form has been left here in the older essays: whenever you do literary research in books and articles from earlier decades, you will run into this earlier form, so it is just as well to be familiar with it. Note that while this documentation is standard for *literary* commentary, critical and scholarly works in other disciplines—psychology, chemistry, and so forth—use other forms. (For more on documentation, see chapters 28–33, "Writing about Literature.")

WILLIAM FAULKNER



A Rose for Emily

I

When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old man-

servant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies,¹ set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores. And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor—he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply. They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply 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. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

- 5 They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china-painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell. The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father.

They rose when she entered—a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

1. The 1870s, the decade following the Civil War between the "Union and Confederate soldiers" mentioned at the end of the paragraph.

She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.

Her voice was dry and cold. "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."

"But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn't you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?"

"I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said. "Perhaps he considers himself the 10 sheriff. . . . I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We must go by the—"

"See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But, Miss Emily—"

"See Colonel Sartoris." (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.) "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobel!" The Negro appeared. "Show these gentlemen out."

II

So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers 15 thirty years before about the smell. That was two years after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart—the one we believed would marry her—had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man—a young man then—going in and out with a market basket.

"Just as if a man—any man—could keep a kitchen properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons.

A neighbor, a woman, complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, eighty years old.

"But what will you have me do about it, madam?" he said.

"Why, send her word to stop it," the woman said. "Isn't there a law?"

"I'm sure that won't be necessary," Judge Stevens said. "It's probably just a 20 snake or a rat that nigger of hers killed in the yard. I'll speak to him about it."

The next day he received two more complaints, one from a man who came in diffident deprecation. "We really must do something about it, Judge. I'd be the last one in the world to bother Miss Emily, but we've got to do something." That night the Board of Aldermen met—three gray-beards and one younger man, a member of the rising generation.

"It's simple enough," he said. "Send her word to have her place cleaned up. Give her a certain time to do it in, and if she don't . . ."

"Dammit, sir," Judge Stevens said, "will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?"

So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brickwork and at the cellar openings while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his shoulder. They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the outbuildings. As they recrossed the

lawn, a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol. They crept quietly across the lawn and into the shadow of the locusts that lined the street. After a week or two the smell went away.

- 25 That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town, remembering how old lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that the Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such. We had long thought of them as a tableau; 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. So when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated; even with insanity in the family she wouldn't have turned down all of her chances if they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized. Now she too would know the old thrill and the old despair of a penny more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom. Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.

III

She was sick for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows—sort of tragic and serene.

- 30 The town had just let the contracts for paving the sidewalks, and in the summer after her father's death they began to work. The construction company came with niggers and mules and machinery, and a foreman named Homer Barron, a Yankee—a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. The little boys would follow in groups to hear him cuss the niggers, and the niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks. Pretty soon he knew everybody in town. Whenever you heard a lot of laughing anywhere about the square, Homer Barron would be in the center of the group. Presently we began to see him and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable.

At first we were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest, because the ladies all said, "Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer." But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget *noblesse oblige*—without calling it *noblesse*

oblige.² They just said, "Poor Emily. Her kinsfolk should come to her." She had some kin in Alabama; but years ago her father had fallen out with them over the estate of old lady Wyatt, the crazy woman, and there was no communication between the two families. They had not even been represented at the funeral.

And as soon as the old people said, "Poor Emily," the whispering began. "Do you suppose it's really so?" they said to one another. "Of course it is. What else could . . ." This behind their hands; rustling of craned silk and satin behind jalousies³ closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily."

She carried her head high enough—even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperiousness. Like when she bought the rat poison, the arsenic. That was over a year after they had begun to say "Poor Emily," and while the two female cousins were visiting her.

"I want some poison," she said to the druggist. She was over thirty then, still a slight woman, though thinner than usual, with cold, haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which was strained across the temples and about the eyesockets as you imagine a lighthouse-keeper's face ought to look. "I want some poison," she said.

"Yes, Miss Emily. What kind? For rats and such? I'd recom—" 35

"I want the best you have. I don't care what kind."

The druggist named several. "They'll kill anything up to an elephant. But what you want is—"

"Arsenic," Miss Emily said. "Is that a good one?"

"Is . . . arsenic? Yes ma'am. But what you want—"

"I want arsenic." 40

The druggist looked down at her. She looked back at him, erect, her face like a strained flag. "Why, of course," the druggist said. "If that's what you want. But the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for."

Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up. The Negro delivery boy brought her the package; the druggist didn't come back. When she opened the package at home there was written on the box, under the skull and bones: "For rats."

IV

So the next day we all said, "She will kill herself"; and we said it would be the best thing. When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, "She will marry him." Then we said, "She will persuade him yet," because Homer himself had remarked—he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elk's Club—that he was not a marrying man. Later we said, "Poor Emily," behind the jalousies as they passed on Sunday afternoon in the glittering buggy, Miss Emily with her head high and Homer Barron with his hat cocked and a cigar in his teeth, reins and whip in a yellow glove.

2. The obligation, coming with noble or upper-class birth, to behave with honor and generosity toward those less privileged.

3. Window blinds made of adjustable horizontal slats.

Then some of the ladies began to say that it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people. The men did not want to interfere, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister—Miss Emily's people were Episcopal—to call upon her. He would never divulge what happened during that interview, but he refused to go back again. The next Sunday they again drove about the streets, and the following day the minister's wife wrote to Miss Emily's relations in Alabama.

45 So she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments. At first nothing happened. Then we were sure that they were to be married. We learned that Miss Emily had been to the jeweler's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H. B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing, including a nightshirt, and we said, "They are married." We were really glad. We were glad because the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been.

So we were not surprised when Homer Barron—the streets had been finished some time since—was gone. We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off, but we believed that he had gone on to prepare for Miss Emily's coming, or to give her a chance to get rid of the cousins. (By that time it was a cabal, and we were all Miss Emily's allies to help circumvent the cousins.) Sure enough, after another week they departed. And, as we had expected all along, within three days Homer Barron was back in town. A neighbor saw the Negro man admit him at the kitchen door at dusk one evening.

And that was the last we saw of Homer Barron. And of Miss Emily for some time. The Negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed. Now and then we would see her at a window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear on the streets. Then we knew that this was to be expected too; as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die.

When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning gray. During the next few years it grew grayer and grayer until it attained an even pepper-and-salt iron-gray, when it ceased turning. Up to the day of her death at seventy-four it was still that vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man.

From that time on her front door remained closed, save for a period of six or seven years, when she was about forty, during which she gave lessons in china-painting. She fitted up a studio in one of the downstairs rooms, where the daughters and grand-daughters of Colonel Sartoris' contemporaries were sent to her with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent on Sundays with a twenty-five cent piece for the collection plate. Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted.

50 Then the newer generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town, and the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of color and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. The front door closed upon the last one and remained closed for good. When the town got free postal delivery Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them.

Daily, monthly, yearly we watched the Negro grow grayer and more stooped, going in and out with the market basket. Each December we sent her a tax notice, which would be returned by the post office a week later, unclaimed. Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows—she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house—like the carven torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from generation to generation—dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.

And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering Negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the Negro. He talked to no one, probably not even to her, for his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse.

She died 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.

V

The Negro met the first of the ladies at the front door and let them in, with their hushed, sibilant voices and their quick, curious glances, and then he disappeared. He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again.

The two female cousins came at once. They held the funeral on the second 55 day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers, with the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and macabre; and the very old men—some in their brushed Confederate uniforms—on the porch and the lawn, talking of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her perhaps, confusing time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road, but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottleneck of the most recent decade of years.

Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it.

The violence of breaking down the door seemed to fill this room with pervading dust. A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. Among them lay a collar and tie, as if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left upon the surface a pale crescent in the dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks.

The man himself lay in the bed.

For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him

and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and bidding dust.

60 Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair.

1931

LAWRENCE R. RODGERS

*“We all said, ‘She will kill herself’”: The Narrator/
Detective in William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily”**

William Faulkner’s most famous short story, “A Rose for Emily,” is a classic expression of American gothicism. Rich in interpretive possibility and long a critical favorite, this 1929 story is a dark parable of the decline of southern sensibility. Its impact relies on a slow accretion of atmospheric detail, with each new detail further illuminating the many mysteries surrounding the life of confederate matriarch Emily Grierson. The story also may be read within the framework of a related popular genre, the classical detective story, whose American origins are traced to Edgar Allan Poe. It is commonly known that Faulkner learned much about genre-writing from his fellow southerner. He capitalized on Poe’s legacy in novels such as *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) and *Knight’s Gambit* (1949) as well as in “An Error in Chemistry,” his 1946 short story published in *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*. Faulkner’s ability to expand and rework the devices of the detective story in these later works makes him a worthy successor to Poe.¹ But it is in the earlier, less straightforward story of detection, “A Rose for Emily,” that Faulkner’s lifelong interest in shaping his fiction around the theme of detection can be observed in its nascent form, and the important presence of the detective figure throughout his fiction can begin to be more fully appreciated.

While it might initially seem surprising that 20th-century America’s premier novelist would draw so freely from the conventions of formula fiction, Faulkner was, to his frustration, well-versed with the necessities of writing with mass publication in mind. Any number of his works betray his willingness to annex popular conventions. His sixth novel, *Sanctuary*, is a case in point.² Frustrated by a mounting stack of what he considered brilliant fiction with no press to publish it, he sat down in late January of 1929 and in four months completed the sensational *Sanctuary*, which would remain his bleakest, most unrelentingly ruthless examination of the modern world. As he would later tell an audience, the novel was “basely conceived . . . I thought of the most horrific idea I could think of and wrote it” with the goal of making money (qtd. in Minter 107). Shortly after *Sanctuary*’s acceptance, in April 1930, while the near-broke writer was still awaiting royalties, “A Rose for Emily” appeared in *The Forum*. Having already had it rejected by *Scribner*’s, Faulkner was thrilled to receive his first short story publication, less for the honor than for the fact that he desperately needed money to

* From *Clues: A Journal of Detection* 16 (1995): 117–29.

pay mounting medical costs and back bills for materials used in restoring his home, Rowen Oak.

Following the example of "A Rose for Emily," the bulk of Faulkner's short fiction was produced in assembly-line spurts of productivity and aimed toward quick publication in national magazines, which, in turn, helped finance the slower pace of his more involved, less marketable novels. Biographer Frederick Karl notes that Faulkner earned more from selling four short stories to *Saturday Evening Post* than from the combined royalties of his first four novels (401). Nonetheless, the shy southerner much preferred to don the guise of the solitary romantic artist laboring purely for the sake of his craft. But in light of his lifelong financial difficulties, such a pose merely placated his ongoing taste for self-invention. However much he scorned the popular marketplace in favor of writing what he viewed as Art with a capital A, he always maintained close contact with a broad-based, "nonliterary" readership.³

In his well-known discussion of detective story conventions in *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, John Cawelti provides a useful, simple litmus test for establishing whether a text follows the classical detective formula. In his scheme, there are three conditions that must be met: 1) the story must have a mystery that needs solving; 2) there must be concealed facts that a detective has to explore; and 3) these facts must become clear in the end (132). "A Rose for Emily" easily satisfies these conditions. Homer Barron, a laborer from the North, comes to work in the tightly knit community of Jefferson, Mississippi. After he is seen in the company of Emily, the eccentric daughter of one of Jefferson's finest families, Homer's courtship fuels town gossip. Various loosely related details soon mount up to suggest something is seriously amiss. Homer mysteriously disappears, reappears and then disappears again not long after Miss Emily purchases rat poison. A foul smell emanates from her old home, causing some men from the town to sneak into her yard to sprinkle it with lime. Emily herself goes through profound physical changes, growing fat and grey-headed. Finally, after her death, Homer's disappearance is solved in what Irving Howe has wryly noted makes for a hair-raising conclusion (265). Miss Emily, aware of the town's penchant for judgment, ruled by the codes of etiquette of a once-proud lineage, and unable to fathom the changing conditions of the new South, has indeed poisoned Homer and retreated (with his corpse) into the recesses of her attic, where, liberated from prying eyes, she has been allowed to carry on her illicit love affair in post-mortem privacy. The evidence betraying her necrophilia is a single strand of iron-grey hair lying on a head-shaped indentation next to the corpse, which, much like the values that Emily tried to uphold by removing her affairs from public view, has become a grotesque, rotted perversion of its former self.

In light of all the praise given over to the originality, ambiguity, technical merit, and skillful manipulation of discontinuous, fragmentary narrative time in "A Rose for Emily," it is, within these considerations, an interestingly conventional detective tale. Its pattern of action is ordered around the basic elements of the popular genre: a southern setting circumscribing an eerie, decaying mansion; a curious disappearance; portents of a murder, in this case a poisoning; an unlikely, peculiar suspect, and a mysterious locked room whose assortment of clues turns up a corpse, a murderer and, finally, a solution to a macabre but oddly plausible crime. What appears to be missing here is the detective, the detached figure whose analytic insight allows him (or, more rarely, her) to solve

the crime and thus restore rationality and a sense of order to a world of uncertainty.

However, on examination, we find that Faulkner (who made a career of stretching the boundaries of convention, literary and otherwise, to suit his own needs) provides a kind of detective, but with an inventive twist. Cawelti notes that a detective story need not contain a professional crime solver like a Maigret, a Dupin or a Holmes as long as some character “performs the role of successful inquirer” (132).

In “A Rose for Emily” the unnamed narrator that pieces together the fragmented decline of the Grierson lineage plays just such a role. More originally, this narrator/detective is also an unknowing driving force behind Emily’s crime. Speaking in the “we” voice, the narrator, an overwhelming presence throughout the narrative, embodies the town’s shared sentiments toward Emily. Having spent years not only observing but also commenting and rendering judgment upon the woman described as “a tradition, a duty, and a care,”⁴ this *vox populi* is so persistent in assuming its natural right to intrude on Emily’s life, that she—obsessively mindful of the need to honor the town’s, and her father’s, rigid code of genteel behavior—chooses murder rather than a public flouting of the town’s values. The dramatic distance on display here provides an ironic layer to the narrative. As the observers of the conflict between the teller-of-tale’s desire to solve the curious mysteries that surround Emily’s life—indeed, his complicity in shaping them—and his undetective-like detachment from her crimes, readers occupy the tantalizing position of having insight into unraveling the mystery which the narrator lacks.

A classical detective story, quite simply, begins with an unsolved crime and moves toward its solution. Introduced into a world of ambiguity, mystery, and multiple possibilities, the reader is steadily made aware of key details that eventually allow a series of events to be placed into a comprehensible order. In “A Rose for Emily” the air of mystery commences with the first sentence: “When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant . . . had seen in at least ten years” (119). Playing off the detective convention of entering a locked room and delaying the revelation of its contents until the story’s conclusion, this teasing beginning invites the reader to participate in unraveling the mysteries that have led up to Emily’s funeral. However, making order out of Emily’s life is a complicated matter, since the narrator recalls the details through a non-linear filter.

Cloaking an additional layer of mystery on Emily’s story, the narrator’s disjointed, associational recollection of details has led readers and critics to become the surrogate detectives of Faulkner’s world. They have tried to “unscramble” the chronology and thus “solve” the structural ambiguities of the story by reconstructing Faulkner’s calendar.⁵ With evidence sparse and at times contradictory, these attempts, relying on close reading, conjecture, and extra-textual evidence, have yielded several slightly different time-lines. Although these time-lines claim to be pedagogically useful in allowing students to grasp “the elusive, illusive quality of time that lies at the heart of the story” (Going 53), their more immediate appeal is as a kind of armchair detective’s game. They offer the challenge of taking the story’s one exact reference to time (the remitting of Colonel Sar-

toris, taxes "in 1894") and combining it with the two dozen or so more approximate references to come up with a set of dates corresponding to the major events of Emily's life. Since the temporal world of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County remains relatively consistent (if inexact) throughout his entire corpus, other texts besides "A Rose for Emily," like his 1929 novel *Sartoris*, also help provide clues. Thus the more familiar the detective-critic becomes with the entire Faulkner corpus, the more equipped he or she is to place the events of Emily's life in the context of Yoknapatawpha County's overall pattern of myth.

But beyond offering superficial clarification about the plot, an exact chronology hardly seems to matter. As is invariably the case with Faulkner, appreciating the text's brilliance only begins with comprehending the plot, however ordered. Reduced to its basic situation, "A Rose for Emily" is fairly standard melodrama, probably loosely based on a conflation of actual odd events that occurred around Oxford in the 1920s (cf. Cullen and Watkins 70–71). Faulkner's plots can be brilliantly imagined, but what infuses this particular story with its force is the *manner* in which the plot is related to us by the purportedly innocuous observer of Emily's life. In other words, Faulkner conceives of "A Rose for Emily" quite cunningly by bending the traditional presentation of the detective. The narrative's overwhelming presence is the narrator himself, speaking as a representative voice of Jefferson (or, in using the "we" pronoun throughout, perhaps even as the collective voice of the town). In culling the data of Emily's life, the narrator/detective's favored posture is, in the classic mode of the genre, one of surveillance and, less classically, one of judgment. From the initial sentence, the narrator demands not just to retell the events of Emily's life, but to relish the manner in which the town intrudes upon them. Town members try to collect her taxes, insist on burying her father, attempt to rid her house of its odor, force the Baptist minister and her Alabama relatives into her home, and, after her death, eagerly break into her mysterious upstairs room.

Fully in keeping with the town's invasive aesthetic of observation, the narrator/detective's willingness to pass judgment on all he witnesses so completely overturns the illusion of objectivity that he speaks, if you will, not as the detached soloist of a Greek chorus, but as a prime participant in the tragic drama he relates. The ways of interpreting Emily's decision to murder Homer are numerous, as the many critical pieces on the story bear out. For simple clarification, they can be summarized along two lines. One group finds the murder growing out of Emily's demented attempt to forestall the inevitable passage of time—toward her abandonment by Homer, toward her own death, and toward the steady encroachment of the North and the New South on something loosely defined as the "tradition" of the Old South. Another view sees the murder in more psychological terms. It grows out of Emily's complex relationship to her father, who, by elevating her above all of the eligible men of Jefferson, insured that to yield to what one commentator called the "normal emotions" associated with desire, his daughter had to "retreat into a marginal world, into fantasy" (O'Connor 184).

These lines of interpretation complement more than critique each other, and collectively they offer an interesting range of views on the story. Together, they de-emphasize the element of detection, viewing the murder and its solution not as the central action but as manifestations of the principal element, the decline of the Grierson lineage and all it represents. Recognizing the way in which the

story makes use of the detective genre, however, adds another interpretive layer to the story by making the narrator—or more precisely, the collective sensibility the narrator represents—a central player in the pattern of action. Detective stories typically place less emphasis on the crime, the criminal, and the victim than on the detective. Detectives such as Dupin, Holmes, Poirot, Sergeant Cuff, Dr. Gideon Fell, and Nero Wolfe may be detached from the society they observe but they still rest at the center of the author's narrative world. Faulkner bends his narrator/detective in some obvious ways away from these more traditional examples. Strictly speaking, his detective is no nearer Poe's Dupin than Emily is a re-creation of Minister D, the master criminal of "The Purloined Letter." But the narrative is an ongoing investigation of Emily's life and the narrator is the principal detective in this investigation.

Much of the story's action is centered around the combination of Emily's desire to remain isolated and the narrator and his fellow townsfolk's refusal to honor that desire. Consider, among many examples, the language of intrusion and judgment implied in the following passages.

They were not surprised when the smell developed.

That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town . . . believed that the Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were.

So when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that.

As soon as the old people said, "Poor Emily," the whispering began.

She carried her head high enough—even when we believed that she was fallen.

And finally, the story's most startling and significant statement made shortly after Emily purchases rat poison: "So the next day we all said, 'she will kill herself'; and *we said it would be the best thing*" (my emphasis, 121–26). The town, it is evident, has made Emily its obsession, with every detail of her life subject to discussion, speculation and assessment. Without means by which to carry on her affair in public (and a noticeably diminishing lack of interest on Homer's part, since he "liked men" and was not ready to settle down), Emily insures her isolation in a cunningly ironic and comic verbal reversal on the town's recommendation of suicide; she herself kills Homer Barron, and from the town's point of view, it was the best thing.

"The detective novel features two expulsions of 'bad' or socially unfit characters: the victim and the murderer" (Grella 49). In the context of the genre, as George Grella describes it, Homer is a classic victim because he is guilty of an unpardonable crime against the community. He was born in the North, which in the world of Jefferson, Mississippi, since the days of the Civil War, has been a capital offense. After he disappears, no more attention is paid to him ("that was the last we saw of Homer Barron" [127]). The town's purported lack of interest can be formally explained as a crafty plotting device of Faulkner's to draw sus-

picion away from the existence of the murder (which is further obscured by the temporal shifts in the narrative). To this end, the narrator casually mentions Homer for the first time in the story as the "sweetheart" who "deserted" Emily. But it is also significant that as a northerner—as well as a common day-laborer—Homer represents the kind of unwelcomed resident and ineligible mate the town wants to repel if it is to preserve its traditional arrangements. His very proximity to Emily is, according to Jefferson's ladies, "a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people" (126). Homer is, to echo Grella's apt phrase, "an exceptionally murderable man" (49)—a victim whose disappearance invites a conspiracy of silence.

The very failure of the narrator and the town to "solve" the crime until the murderer herself has died indicates much about the true nature of the society in which the murder occurred. If we assume that the narrator/detective and other townsfolk know about the crime (although the textual evidence for this can only be ambiguously inferred), we also realize that for the town to reveal Emily's crime and indicate what it will do in response is far more complicated than silently ignoring the entire matter. For the people of Jefferson, the illusion of *noblesse oblige* is to be preserved at all costs, whether it means remitting Emily's taxes, inviting her Alabama kinfolk to come to Jefferson and regulate her embarrassing courtship, or ignoring a murder by passing off the foul smell emanating from her house shortly after Homer's disappearance as "probably just a snake or a rat."

This conveniently evasive speculation comes from Judge Stevens (whose son is likely Gavin Stevens, the detective/lawyer/chess aficionado in *Knight's Gambit*). The statement can be read several ways. It emphasizes Emily's status as a Poe-like "least-likely" criminal, a misfit so unsuited for the role of murderer that the town's leading citizen does not suspect her. In this light, the Judge's pronouncement is not a red herring, but its opposite, a statement that has the effect of allowing a very real clue to be introduced before allowing a purportedly disinterested observer to shift the narrative's emphasis away from the crime. However, it can also be suggested that, given the facts at hand (e.g., Emily's resistance to allowing her father to be buried and Stevens' reluctance to accuse a "lady" of smelling bad), Stevens' statement is not the naive observation of a casual onlooker but a conveniently calculating means on his part of preserving order, glossing over the rather obvious fact that a well-known citizen has a murder victim rotting inside her house. Where the reader stands in relation to the very tangible clue of the smell depends on his or her willingness to accept the judge's explanation at face value. Like the best detective writers, Faulkner is able to offer pieces of information about the crime, thus putting the careful reader on equal footing with characters in the story, but to do so in such a way as to delay the obvious solution until more substantial proof of the murder comes forth.

That proof comes in the story's final three paragraphs, beginning with the one-sentence paragraph: "The man himself lay in the bed." The crime is both confirmed and solved; the detective pattern is compressed into one climactic scene, which inventively re-imagines a version of Poe's "locked room" mystery, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." In the classic locked-room story, Dupin unravels the story behind a mother and daughter's murder, which has occurred in an apartment where all the windows and doors are sealed from the inside. In Faulkner's version, a victim's body is similarly discovered inside a mysterious

upstairs room, whose door has to be broken down to gain admittance. But since the killer's identity and the mechanism of the murder are readily apparent, the narrator's puzzle is not solved simply by answering "who done it" and "how she done it." The narrator has the more challenging goal of comprehending the gruesome spectacle in the context of the town's obsession with Emily's entire life. This is accomplished with the minuscule clue of a single strand of hair, a temporarily "hidden object" that once detected sets Emily's disturbed mind state into stark relief and provides the town with just the kind of hindsight evidence it needs to justify all of the attention it paid to her over the years.

Finally, in a single sentence, Faulkner skillfully brings the mystery to a close and leaves the reader to reflect upon the narrator/detective's involvement in Emily's deranged decision to murder Homer Barron. As an inventive precursor to Faulkner's own later detective characters, this narrator is an example of how the author, rather than simply mimicking other detective stories, re-worked the classical devices of detection to suit his own ends. "A Rose for Emily" is a notable example of Faulkner's talent for taking the raw materials of his surroundings and working them into original forms—whether this meant drawing from his literary antecedents, re-configuring actual events, or delving into his own considerable imagination. John T. Irwin, in his discussion of *Knight's Gambit*, sets Faulkner next to Poe as a "worthy successor" and a "formidable competitor to the [detective] genre's originator" (173). When viewed as a detective story, "A Rose for Emily" helps buttress this claim and thereby furthers our appreciation of Faulkner's lifelong interest in laying out and then solving the many curious mysteries of what he famously termed his "own little postage stamp of native soil" (qtd. in Minter 76).

NOTES

1. For discussions of Faulkner's debt to Poe, see especially Cawelti, 134; Irwin; and Stronks, 11.
2. *Sanctuary* exhibits its own interesting connections to the classical detective story. In his famous 1933 preface to the novel, French novelist André Malraux remarked that *Sanctuary* was "a novel with a detective-story atmosphere but without detectives"; qtd. in Sundquist, 47.
3. For a thorough discussion of Faulkner and popular short fiction see Matthews, 3–37.
4. All subsequent quotes from the primary text are from *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, 119–30, and will be cited internally by page number.
5. In the Merrill Literary Casebook series for "A Rose for Emily," editor M. Thomas Inge reprints four articles that posit slightly different time-lines, all of which focus on the story's chronology: see 34, 50–53, 83, 84–86, 90–92.

WORKS CITED

- Cawelti, John G. *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976.
- Cullen, John B., and Floyd C. Watkins. *Old Times in the Faulkner Country*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1961.
- Faulkner, William. *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*. New York: Vintage, 1977.

- Going, William T. "Chronology in Teaching 'A Rose for Emily.'" *A Rose for Emily*. Ed. M. Thomas Inge. Columbus: Merrill, 1970. 50-53.
- Grella, George. "Murder and Manners: The Formal Detective Novel." *Dimensions of Detective Fiction*. Ed. Larry N. Landrum, Pat Browne, and Ray B. Browne. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1976. 37-57.
- Howe, Irving. *William Faulkner: A Critical Study*. New York: Vintage, 1962.
- Inge, M. Thomas, ed. *A Rose for Emily*. Columbus: Merrill, 1970.
- Irwin, John T. "Knight's Gambit: Poe, Faulkner, and the Tradition of the Detective Story." *Faulkner and the Short Story*. Ed. Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1992. 149-73.
- Karl, Frederick R. *William Faulkner: An American Writer*. New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989.
- Matthews, John T. "Shortened Stories: Faulkner and the Market." *Faulkner and the Short Story*. Ed. Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi. 3-37.
- Minter, David. *William Faulkner: His Life and Work*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980.
- O'Connor, William. "The State of Faulkner Criticism." *Sewanee Review* 60 (1952): 184.
- Stronks, James. "A Poe Source for Faulkner? 'To Helen' and 'A Rose for Emily.'" *Poe Newsletter* I (Apr. 1968): 11.
- Sundquist, Eric. *Faulkner: The House Divided*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983.

GEORGE L. DILLON

*Styles of Reading**

One of the things readers do with stories is to talk about them. These stories have not said it all, and readers derive evident pleasure from completing them, commenting on them, making them their own in various ways. Christine Brooke-Rose has recently called attention to the strategic incompleteness of good stories—spelling everything out treats the reader as stupid—and has suggested a classification of stories according to the tasks they leave to readers, or in which they entangle readers.¹ If we look at actual, published discussions of a story, however, we find no two of them answering the same set of questions, which suggests that we should look for questions (pre)inscribed in the reader as well as the text—the text, it is a matter of fact, has not very narrowly constrained the set of questions the readers have posed. As soon as we raise the matter of the actual performance of readers, however, we encounter a plethora of variables, and it has become something of a fashion in discussions of reading to enumerate them, often, it seems, to frighten scholars back to the study of narrative competence and the ways texts constrain, or should constrain interpretations. . . . If we are concerned with how people actually do read stories, however, these lists outline an area for research. . . . Perhaps there are underlying regularities which

* From *Poetics Today* 3.2 (1982): 77-88. Copyright 1982 by The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University. Reprinted by permission.

in fact shape readers' performances; perhaps there are none. In this article, I will examine readings of Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," and focus initially on one area of variation—the answers readers have given to questions about the chronological sequence, or "event chain," of the story—to see how wild the variation is and what hope there may be of identifying regularities of performance.

One reason for focusing on event chains is that these have been among the most intensively studied of the many aspects of story comprehension. . . . Readers employ two basic operations in building event chains: connection and inference. No story I know of spells out all of the terms and connections in an event chain (Miss Emily's motive for murdering Homer Barron, for example, is left for the reader to infer, as is the connection of the arsenic to the murder), and a story that did spell them all out would treat the reader as inconceivably stupid. Two distinctions are in order here: event chains are not precisely chronological, though I think they do correspond closely to . . . chronological sequences, that is, a certain sequentiality is implicit in the notions of motive, action, cause, response, and consequence, but not necessarily clock or calendar time, nor do pieces of the overall chain have to be strictly ordered; different sequences may overlap. This point is quite clear in regard to "A Rose for Emily": it seems possible to establish a chronology of the story that orders all of its major incidents, though it is very difficult to do so,² and it is not necessary to have worked out such a time scheme in order to get major portions of the event chain straight. Second, event chains are not "plots." . . . That is, they are shapeless and open-ended; they do not account for any sense of beginning, climax, or conclusion. . . . [E]vent chains are part of the comprehension of all narratives; indeed, of all happenings, not just stories. . . .

When we survey the published criticism of "A Rose for Emily," we find a large and bewildering array of questions about the event chain that have been answered. These include:

1. Why weren't there suitable suitors for Emily?
2. How does Emily respond to being denied suitors?
3. Why does Emily take up with Homer Barron?
4. What happened when he left? Did he abandon her? Why did he come back?
5. Why did she kill him?
6. Why did the smell disappear after only one week?
7. What did Miss Emily think of the men scattering lime around her house?
8. How did the hair come to be on the pillow? How much hair is a *Strand*?
9. What was her relationship to Tobe?
10. Did she lie beside the corpse? How often, for what period of years?
11. Why did she not leave the house for the last decade of her life?
12. Did she not know Colonel Sartoris had been dead ten years when she faced down the Aldermen?
13. How crazy was she (unable to distinguish fantasy from reality)?
14. Why does she allow so much dust in her house?

There is also one question that has been asked but not answered, as far as I know: What transpired when the Baptist minister visited her? As the specialists in story comprehension have noted, once we realize that a Story Comprehender must have the power to carry out inferences in order to comprehend even the simplest story and give it that power, the problem becomes one of limiting the

inferences drawn to some “relevant” subset of the possible ones. . . . [B]ut it is not clear how to apply this principle [of relevance] to the fourteen questions and answers, since every one of those questions was answered by at least one critic who felt the answer was relevant to the interpretation of the story—relevant to determining her motives, naming her actions, and so on. Of course, some of these event-chain inferences are stimulated by the particular interpretation a critic is putting forth, but there does not seem to be any basis on which to separate those inferences that are made independent of an interpretation from those which are not. . . . People do not agree on the story to then disagree on the interpretation. It is simply not true that, as Wolfgang Iser claims, “On the level of plot, then, there is a high degree of intersubjective consensus,” with subjective variation arising at the level of significance.³ In fact, when we look at the list of questions that have been answered, the construction of event chains seems wildly unconstrained.

If we look at whole readings, however, some system and pattern does emerge. There are two surveys of the criticism of this story, and both find it fairly easy to group the readings into three classes (though the classes are somewhat differently defined).⁴ We could group the readings according to what one might call “approaches,” suggesting by that term some set of general questions readers taking a particular approach tend to pose of texts they read. This notion can be pushed in two, opposite directions. Taking it one way, we could argue that the variation considered so far does not directly reflect the way readers read but the way critics write about stories when they have an eye toward publication. . . . Taken the other way, these approaches could be viewed as personal styles or preferences in reading that happen to have acquired some public sanction. We generally have some style of reading before we know much about “approaches,” after all, though we may learn other questions to ask when we study literature. In any case, one must have learned the approach in order to use it. . . . Some light on the matter is shed, I think, by the very copious transcripts of interviews with undergraduate English majors about “A Rose for Emily” published by Norman Holland in *5 Readers Reading*.

Holland’s students also show three distinct approaches, and these approaches match up with the types of approaches in the published criticism[, t]hough . . . they do seem to be giving what they feel are their own responses and to be responding in somewhat original—but consistent—ways to his questions. Also, . . . the criticism they chose to be influenced by as much reflects their cognitive styles as it determines them. Holland’s study strongly suggests that there are styles of reading stories, characteristic ways that readers interrogate texts, and that the “approaches” in the criticism are indeed rooted in the critics’ own styles of reading and appeal to like-minded readers. I will illustrate this correspondence for three basic styles, which I will call the Character-Action-Moral (CAM) style, the Digger for Secrets style, and the Anthropologist style.

The CAM style differs markedly from the other two in treating the meaning (or significance) as more or less evident in the story: the reader makes the text his own, and makes the reading more apparent, by elaborating the event chain in the direction of the main character’s traits, motives, thoughts, responses, and choices. To do this, CAM readers treat the world of the text as an extension or portion of the real world, the characters as real persons, so that we will recognize the experience of characters as being like our own experience; hence it can be

understood or explained just as we would understand our own experience. Thus, the inferences they draw are based on commonsense notions of the way the world is, people are, etc. The other two styles appropriate the text not by immersion, but by analytic distance, probing and abstracting behind what is said; they assume that the world of the text is an edited version of our world—a *structure* rather than a glimpse or fragment. The CAM reader works by amalgamating the story into the body of his own beliefs and practical axioms about how life is or should be, the analytic styles by postulating the otherness or strangeness of the text.

The standard CAM reading contains lists of traits that account for the actions of the main character in a straightforward evaluative fashion. . . . The actions are assumed to be pointers toward relatively permanent and pervasive characteristics, and one often finds “it could be otherwise” speculations in CAM readings (e.g., “A Rose for Emily” could have had a happy outcome if Homer Barron had been a marrying man—West;⁵ if another man had proposed to Emily after she finished with Homer, she would have declined the offer because she felt herself already married—Sam, in Holland [pp. 138–39]). That is, the notion of character seems to presuppose the freedom of individuals to choose their responses to their situations, and stories like “A Rose for Emily” are treated as collisions between characters and situations—as *tragedies*, in the traditional Butcher/Bradley sense:

Perhaps the horrible and the admirable aspects of Miss Emily’s final deed arise from the same basic fact of her character: she insists on meeting the world on her own terms. She never cringes, she never begs for sympathy, she refuses to shrink into an amiable old maid, she never accepts the community’s ordinary judgments or values. This independence of spirit and pride can, and does in her case, twist the individual into a sort of monster, but, at the same time, this refusal to accept the hero values carries with it a dignity and courage.^[6] . . .

. . . We can see here the way the common notion of tragedy directs the reading toward character analysis; it also introduces three other questions, namely, those of awareness, tragic flaw, and moral. The evoking or constructing of character seems to lead directly to inference o[f] the character’s thoughts. When done naïvely, the results are fairly obtrusive, as when Holland’s Sam says Emily has an awareness that “things were moving on, that things were changing, and yet, a similar awareness that she was unable to change along with them” (p. 137). More subtle is a partial merging of reader’s and character’s points of view. The reader talks about the character in terms the character himself might use: “She lost her honor, and what else could she do but keep him [Homer] forever, make him hers in the only way she possibly could?” (Sam. p. 137). . . .

This construction of an inner logic for the character is essential to the drawing of the moral: once we have realized the character’s viewpoint, we can see the fatal flaw, the impulses or tendencies in ourselves that we should not give in to. If this immersion and identification with the character (which is plainly the identification of the character with the reader, in terms of himself) fails, . . . the CAM reader must direct his attention away from the details that suggest Miss Emily is not “like us” (above all, the questions about sleeping next to the corpse).

In sum, then, the CAM style is not afraid to state the obvious; it does not try to be ingenious or clever, but solid and useful; it does not assume the author is

fashioning puzzles for us to solve, or playing tricks on us. The story conceals nothing—it is merely, of necessity, incomplete. For *Diggers for Secrets*, however, the story enwraps secrets, the narrator hides them[,] . . . and the reader must uncover them. The title of Edward Stone's *A Certain Morbidity* suggests how he will read "A Rose for Emily."⁷ *Diggers for Secrets* expect narrators to screen us from the "reality,"

But when, during her early spinsterhood, her father dies and she refuses for three days to hand his putrefying body over for burial, we are shocked by this irrational action, even though in keeping with his standpoint of noncommitment Faulkner tries to minimize it ("We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will"). (Stone, 96)

and expect the author only to give us clues:

For Faulkner, so far from withholding all clues to Homer Barron's whereabouts, scatters them with a precise prodigality; since his is a story primarily of character, it is to his purpose to saturate our awareness of Miss Emily's abnormality as he goes, so that the last six shocking words merely put the final touch on that purpose. (p. 65)

Sebastian, who is Holland's Digger, also comments on the evenhandedness of the narrator, whom he describes as switching sides (p. 177), and he too finds the maxim about holding on to that which robbed her a screen rather than an explanation: "Shouldn't have put that in, Bill," he says (p. 186). He even proposes to see through the author: "I wanted to see what unconscious things he would reveal about the South" (p. 186).

When *Diggers for Secrets* explain the psychology of characters, they employ the categories of depth and abnormal psychology . . . and frequently "diagnose" motives the characters would not be aware of and in terms they might well not accept. Sebastian uses the terms *sexuality*, *obsession*, and *necrophilia* heavily and confidently, but he still falls short, in eloquence at least, of . . . Edward Stone:

Her passionate, almost sexual relationship with her dead father forces her to distrust the living body of Homer and to kill him so that he will resemble the dead father she can never forget.

Not only does this obsessed spinster continue for some years to share a marriage bed with the body of the man she poisoned—she evidently derives either erotic gratification or spiritual sustenance (both?) from these ghastly nuptials. She becomes, in short, a necrophile or a veritable saprophytic organism; for we learn that the "slender figure in white" that was the young Miss Emily becomes, as though with the middle-aged propriety that the marriage customarily brings, fat! (Stone, 96)

. . . In a similar vein, Sebastian draws numerous inferences about the Negro servant Tobe's complicity in Emily's crime, about her "affair" with Homer, about the details of her sleeping with his corpse (how can a woman perform an act of necrophilia on a man?), and so on.

Symbolism being a ready avenue to non-obvious meanings, these readers find symbolic significances and secrets in details that the CAM readers either pass over or handle prosaically: Miss Emily's house for Stone is an isolated fortress, a forbidden, majestic stronghold; . . . for Sebastian, the title is richly ironic, "an

unforgiveable irony in one sense: 'A Rose by any other name would not smell half as sweet!' There's not much sweetness about *her* rose. So I think the title refers to the decomposition of living matter, and so I take it ironically" (p. 182). . . . One expects such ironies from an author presumed to conceal.

An interesting feature of "A Rose for Emily" is that it contains not only a literal hidden secret (which Sebastian objects to as a bit too overt) but a "reader" as well (the narrator). That is, people who habitually look for the dirty reality behind appearances are open to the charge of prurience, a charge that would be easy to level at these readers, and one that the story conveniently allows us to displace onto the narrator ("the community") instead. So the taint of corruption spreads to the town, all these readers say, but, of course, not to *us*.⁸ Thus in a sense, the abnormal becomes normal, and the story acquires the universality that raises it from case history to literature. The search for the abnormal and perverse finally leads back to the unacknowledged parts of our selves.

Though the Diggers for Secrets make use of abstractive codes that explain what is going on in the story, their interest in "what's really going on" does, as we have seen, lead to inferences elaborating the event chain. The third group, the Anthropologists, have much less to say about events than either of the first two groups. Their interest, rather, is in identifying the cultural norms and values that explain what characters indisputably do and say. Like Diggers for Secrets, these readers go beneath the surface and state things that are implicit and not said, though what they bring out is not a secret, but the general principles and values which the story illustrates as an example. To some degree, early readings that talk of a conflict in "A Rose for Emily" between the North and the South, or old versus new South, outline this approach, but these readings tended to be brief and schematic, as if critics were not willing to reopen old wounds.⁹ And, too, Faulkner was on record as not intending such an interpretation.¹⁰ When a reader is especially engaged in the critique of the norms and values of American society, however, the story takes on interest as an extended exemplum. Thus the two instances of this style of reading, Holland's Shep and Judith Fetterley, are both radicals. For Shep, who is Holland's example of a sixties radical, the characters and events of the story exemplify forces of social struggle—class struggle, racial struggle, and above all the struggle between true and false values. Thus he says Emily's father represents the old code, the dead hand of the past; Homer Barron represents the forces of aimless technology; Emily herself was, he says, "perpetuating the same ethos in which her father lived" (p. 61); "In a way, Miss Emily is a descendant of the culture hero, except that she's a descendant of the culture hero in his waning phase" (p. 166); "They had a very rigid formal code and it was perhaps very much a dead code by the time she got her hands on it, but it represented something which the new people weren't able to offer an adequate substitute for" (p. 161). Proceeding at such a lofty plane, he is fairly indifferent to the detailed goings-on of the event chain, though he does infer Emily's response to the lime-scattering incident—namely, scorn for the men—and he is willing to speculate under Holland's urging. He offers two motives for the murder, first, simple revenge, to keep him from leaving her; but he also evolves a second, mythic explanation, which I quote at some length:

She can reverse the social decay process by putting her lover, representative of all of them ["the newcomers"] through a physical decay process and coming

to relish the sight. This would also give some sort of, quote, explanation, unquote, for her necrophilic hangups. The fact that she wanted her father's body around to . . . preserve it from decay—she was denying the end of the line thing symbolized by putting it underground and letting the earth have it. (p. 171)

. . . So there is a double or triple pattern of explanation here—commonsense psychology (she wanted revenge), operation of social forces, and mythic patterns; these explanations seem somewhat detached from each other and so the reading is not completely totalized.

If Shep is an example of a sixties radical, then Judith Fetterley, in her book *The Resisting Reader*,¹¹ represents a kind of seventies version of the same basic style of reading. Fetterley focuses on stating the social norms and codes that explain the events of the story—there is very little in the way of constructive activity of motives, actions, responses, and consequences, except for a brief discussion of the lime-scattering incident. She also offers two motives for the murder: first, that Emily murdered Homer because she had to have a man (thus illustrating the brainwashing of the code); but she also offers the following symbolic/mythic account:

Having been consumed by her father, Emily in turn feeds off Homer Barron, becoming, after his death, suspiciously fat. Or, to put it another way, it is as if, after her father's death, she has reversed his act of incorporating her by incorporating and becoming him, metamorphosed from the slender figure in white to the obese figure in black whose hair is "a vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man." She has taken into herself the violence in him which thwarted her and has reenacted it upon Homer Barron. (pp. 42–43)

On first reading, this seems very much like Stone's celebration of Faulkner's "ghoulish evolution" of the gothic, but on closer examination, the passage is really suggesting a crude form of retributive justice, a pointed, if lurid, warning to the upholders of patriarchy. It is striking that the same elementary operations—*connecting* her growing fat to Homer's murder and *inferring* a causal link—result in such different explanations.

Like Shep, Fetterley makes heavy use of symbolic interpretation and the logic of example: Emily's confinement by her father represents confinement of women by patriarchy; the remission of taxes signifies continued dependence of women on men; the men's treatment of her, and her ability to buffalo them and commit murder without punishment, are explained in terms of the code of the "lady" who is assumed to be out of touch with reality, and must be kept so; Emily represents the town itself, and in discovering her nature, they discover their own. The focus of Fetterley's interest is in flushing the codes out of hiding and explaining what happens in terms of them, though it is not a totalizing reading in that she doesn't claim to have explained everything in the story in terms of the codes; this treatment represents the extreme of abstraction away from the events and surface of the story toward allegory and parable. That's what it means to be a Resisting Reader: to refuse to give yourself to the work, to accept any of its givens—and in fact, to bring precisely those axioms into question.

Clearly, then, these three styles or approaches are asking different questions of the text, and constructing what are to various degrees different stories in the course of answering them. . . . Readers predisposed to a certain style of reading

[however] will, when faced with the same text, come up with some very similar stories along with some very similar explanations.

... [T]he notion that these styles are, or can become, general patterns of thinking, rather than a learned decorum of literary criticism, seems to derive support from the consideration that we also exhibit differences of styles in thinking about real people and events. We think of ourselves and others as conscious, moral agents shaping our destinies in situations benign and hostile, but also as mysteries to ourselves and others, and/or as enacting typical social roles and attitudes. There is some basis for concluding that we understand literature and life in the same or similar ways, and that some of the ways we read literature will be applied in reading others of life's texts.

NOTES

1. Brooke-Rose, "The Readerhood of Man," in *The Reader in the Text*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 120–48.
2. At least five chronologies have appeared in print, all differing: William T. Going, "Chronology in Teaching 'A Rose for Emily,'" *Exercise Exchange* 5 (1958): 8–11; Robert W. Woodward, "The Chronology of 'A Rose for Emily,'" *Exercise Exchange* 13 (1966): 17–19; Paul D. McGlynn, "The Chronology of 'A Rose for Emily,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 6 (1969): 461–62; Helen E. Nebeker, "Chronology Revisited," *Studies in Short Fiction* 8 (1971): 471–73; and Menakhem Perry, "Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates Its Meaning," *Poetics Today* 1 (1979): 35–63; 311–61.
3. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 123. Iser's definition of *significance* as "the reader's absorption of the meaning into his own existence" (p. 151) leaves us in need of an intermediate term between it and *plot* (event chains)—something like *explanation*, which is constructed to account for events (e.g., in terms of character traits, maxims of behavior, mythic patterns, etc.) but which is not necessarily the amalgamation of the story into the reader's subjectivity. For one thing, explanation need not be evaluative. I am using *interpretation* in a broad sense here to mean the reader's commentary minus any plot summary, though even the latter is usually tailored to fit the commentary.
4. See Norman Holland, *5 Readers Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 21–24 (cited in the text as Holland, or Holland's Sam); and Perry, "Literary Dynamics," 62–63 et passim.
5. Ray B. West, "Atmosphere and Theme in Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily,'" in *William Faulkner: Four Decades of Criticism*, ed. Linda W. Wagner (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1973), 192–98. Cited in the text as West.
6. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (New York: Crofts, 1948), ... [413].
7. Stone, *A Certain Morbidity* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969). Cited in the text as Stone.
8. For Ruth Sullivan, however, the narrator is a prying, probing voyeur, and so are we readers. See "The Narrators in 'A Rose for Emily,'" *Journal of Narrative Technique* 1 (1971): 159–78.
9. Frederick Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, *Faulkner in the University* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 47–48.

10. There is one style which I find attested only in Holland's interviews (and in some of the papers of David Bleich's students), that we might call the Visualizer style, the style of Holland's Sandra, whose comments . . . are strongly weighted to descriptions of characters' expressions and feelings, decors and other physical details and commentary on the suitability of words, images and tonal effects in the narration. This is perhaps the most surface or craft-conscious of the styles, and the reason it does not appear in the published readings is that it is more a style of appreciation than explanation, or, to put it another way, it is more concerned with explaining the details of the style and presentation . . . than with the story. . . .
11. Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978).

JUDITH FETTERLEY

*A Rose for "A Rose for Emily"**

In "A Rose for Emily" . . . grotesque reality . . . becomes explicit. Justifying Faulkner's use of the grotesque has been a major concern of critics who have written on the story. If, however, one approaches "A Rose for Emily" from a feminist perspective, one notices that the grotesque aspects of the story are a result of its violation of the expectations generated by the conventions of sexual politics. The ending shocks us not simply by its hint of necrophilia; more shocking is the fact that it is a woman who provides the hint. It is one thing for Poe to spend his nights in the tomb of Annabel Lee and another thing for Miss Emily Grierson to deposit a strand of iron-gray hair on the pillow beside the rotted corpse of Homer Barron. Further, we do not expect to discover that a woman has murdered a man. . . . To reverse [the] "natural" pattern inevitably produces the grotesque.

Faulkner, however, is not interested in invoking the kind of grotesque which is the consequence of reversing the clichés of sexism for the sake of a cheap thrill. . . . Rather, Faulkner invokes the grotesque in order to illuminate and define the true nature of the conventions on which it depends. "A Rose for Emily" is a story not of a conflict between the South and the North or between the old order and the new; it is a story of the patriarchy North and South, new and old, and of the sexual conflict within it. As Faulkner himself has implied,¹ it is a story of a woman victimized and betrayed by the system of sexual politics, who nevertheless has discovered, within the structures that victimize her, sources of power for herself. . . . "A Rose for Emily" is the story of how to murder your gentleman caller and get away with it. Faulkner's story is an analysis of how men's attitudes toward women turn back upon themselves; it is a demonstration of the thesis that it is impossible to oppress without in turn being oppressed, it is impossible to kill without creating the conditions for your own murder. "A Rose for Emily" is the story of a *lady* and of her revenge for that grotesque identity.

"When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral." The public and communal nature of Emily's funeral, a festival that brings the town

* From *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, by Judith Fetterley (Bloomington and London: Indiana UP, 1978). Copyright 1978 by Judith Fetterley. Reprinted by permission.

together, clarifying its social relationships and revitalizing its sense of the past, indicates her central role in Jefferson. Alive, Emily is town property and the subject of shared speculation; dead, she is town history and the subject of legend. It is her value as a symbol, however obscure and however ambivalent, of something that is of central significance to the identity of Jefferson and to the meaning of its history that compels the narrator to assume a communal voice to tell her story. For Emily . . . is a man-made object, a cultural artifact, and what she is reflects and defines the culture that has produced her.

The history the narrator relates to us reveals Jefferson's continuous emotional involvement with Emily. Indeed, though she shuts herself up in a house which she rarely leaves and which no one enters, her furious isolation is in direct proportion to the town's obsession with her: . . . she is the object of incessant attention; her every act is immediately consumed by the town for gossip and seized on to justify their interference in her affairs. Her private life becomes a public document that the town folk feel free to interpret at will, and they are alternately curious, jealous, spiteful, pitying, partisan, proud, disapproving, admiring, and vindicated. Her funeral is not simply a communal ceremony; it is also the climax of their invasion of her private life and the logical extension of their voyeuristic attitude toward her. Despite the narrator's demurral, getting inside Emily's house is the all-consuming desire of the town's population, both male and female; while the men may wait a little longer, their motive is still prurient curiosity: "Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it."

In a context in which the overtones of violation and invasion are so palpable, the word "decently" has that ironic ring which gives the game away. When the men finally do break down the door, they find that Emily has satisfied their prurience with a vengeance and in doing so has created for them a mirror image of themselves. The true nature of Emily's relation to Jefferson is contained in the analogies between what those who break open that room see in it and what has brought them there to see it. The perverse, violent, and grotesque aspects of the sight of Homer Barron's rotted corpse in a room decked out for a bridal and now faded and covered in dust reflects back to them the perverseness of their own prurient interest in Emily, the violence implicit in their continued invasions of her life, and the grotesqueness of the symbolic artifact they have made of her—their monument, their idol, their lady. Thus, the figure that Jefferson places at the center of its legendary history does indeed contain the clue to the meaning of that history—a history which began long before Emily's funeral and long before Homer Barron's disappearance or appearance and long before Colonel Sartoris' fathering of edicts and remittances. It is recorded in that emblem which lies at the heart of the town's memory and at the heart of patriarchal culture: "We had long thought of them as a tableau, 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."

The importance of Emily's father in shaping the quality of her life is insistent throughout the story. Even in her death the force of his presence is felt; above her dead body sits "the crayon face of her father musing profoundly," symbolic of the degree to which he has dominated and shadowed her life, "as if that quality

of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die." The violence of this consuming relationship is made explicit in the imagery of the tableau. Although the violence is apparently directed outward—the upraised horsewhip against the would-be suitor—the real object of it is the woman-daughter, forced into the background and dominated by the phallic figure of the spraddled father whose back is turned on her and who prevents her from getting out at the same time that he prevents them from getting in. [Emily's] . . . spatial confinement [is] . . . a metaphor for her psychic confinement: her identity is determined by the constructs of her father's mind, and she can no more escape from his creation of her as "a slender figure in white" than she can escape his house.

What is true for Emily in relation to her father is equally true for her in relation to Jefferson: her status as a lady is a cage from which she cannot escape. To them she is always *Miss Emily*; she is never referred to and never thought of as otherwise. In omitting her title from his, Faulkner emphasizes the point that the real violence done to Emily is in making her a "Miss"; the omission is one of his roses for her. Because she is *Miss Emily Grierson*, Emily's father dresses her in white, places her in the background, and drives away her suitors. Because she is *Miss Emily Grierson*, the town invests her with that communal significance which makes her the object of their obsession and the subject of their incessant scrutiny. And because she is a lady, the town is able to impose a particular code of behavior on her ("But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget *noblesse oblige*") and to see in her failure to live up to that code an excuse for interfering in her life. As a lady, Emily is venerated, but veneration results in the more telling emotions of envy and spite: "It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons"; "People . . . believed that the Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were." The violence implicit in the desire to see the monument fall and reveal itself for clay suggests the violence inherent in the original impulse to venerate.

The violence behind veneration is emphasized through another telling emblem in the story. Emily's position as a hereditary obligation upon the town dates from "that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor—he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron on—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity." The conjunction of these two actions in the same syntactic unit is crucial, for it insists on their essential similarity. It indicates that the impulse to exempt is analogous to the desire to restrict, and that what appears to be a kindness or an act of veneration is in fact an insult. Sartoris' remission of Emily's taxes is a public declaration of the fact that a lady is not considered to be, and hence not allowed or enabled to be, economically independent (consider, in this connection, Emily's lessons in china painting; they are a latter-day version of Sartoris' "charity" and a brilliant image of Emily's economic uselessness). His act is a public statement of the fact that a lady, if she is to survive, must have either husband or father, and that, because Emily has neither, the town must assume responsibility for her. The remission of taxes that defines Emily's status dates from the death of her father, and she is handed over from one patron to the next, the town instead of husband taking on the role of father. Indeed, the use of the word "fathered" in describing Sartoris' behavior as mayor underlines the

fact that his chivalric attitude toward Emily is simply a subtler and more dishonest version of her father's horsewhip.

The narrator is the last of the patriarchs who take upon themselves the burden of defining Emily's life, and his violence toward her is the most subtle of all. His tone of incantatory reminiscence and nostalgic veneration seems free of the taint of horsewhip and edict. Yet a thoroughgoing contempt for the "ladies" who spy and pry and gossip out of their petty jealousy and curiosity is one of the clearest strands in the narrator's consciousness. Emily is exempted from the general indictment because she is a *real* lady—that is, eccentric, slightly crazy, obsolete, a "stubborn and coquettish decay," absurd but indulged; "dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse"; indeed, anything and everything but human.

Not only does "A Rose for Emily" expose the violence done to a woman by making her a lady; it also explores the particular form of power the victim gains from this position and can use on those who enact this violence. "A Rose for Emily" is concerned with the consequences of violence for both the violated and the violators. One of the most striking aspects of the story is the disparity between Miss Emily Grierson and the Emily to whom Faulkner gives his rose in ironic imitation of the chivalric behavior the story exposes. The form of Faulkner's title establishes a camaraderie between author and protagonist and signals that a distinction must be made between the story Faulkner is telling and the story the narrator is telling. This distinction is of major importance because it suggests, of course, that the narrator, looking through a patriarchal lens, does not see Emily at all but rather a figment of his own imagination created in conjunction with the cumulative imagination of the town: . . . nobody sees *Emily*. And because nobody sees *her*, she can literally get away with murder. Emily is characterized by her ability to understand and utilize the power that accrues to her from the fact that men do not see her but rather their concept of her: "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. . . . Tobe! . . . Show these gentlemen out." Relying on the conventional assumptions about ladies who are expected to be neither reasonable nor in touch with reality, Emily presents an impregnable front that vanquishes the men "horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before." In spite of their "modern" ideas, this new generation, when faced with Miss Emily, are as much bound by the code of gentlemanly behavior as their fathers were ("They rose when she entered"). This code gives Emily a power that renders the gentlemen unable to function in a situation in which a lady neither sits down herself nor asks them to. They are brought to a "stumbling halt" and can do nothing when confronted with her refusal to engage in rational discourse. Their only recourse in the face of such eccentricity is to engage in behavior unbecoming to gentlemen, and Emily can count on their continuing to see themselves as gentlemen and her as a lady and on their returning a verdict of helpless noninterference.

It is in relation to Emily's disposal of Homer Barron, however, that Faulkner demonstrates most clearly the power of conventional assumptions about the nature of ladies to blind the town to what is going on and to allow Emily to murder with impunity. When Emily buys the poison, it never occurs to anyone that she intends to use it on Homer, so strong is the presumption that ladies when jilted commit suicide, not murder. And when her house begins to smell, the women blame it on the eccentricity of having a man servant rather than a woman, "as if a man—any man—could keep a kitchen properly." And when they hint that her eccentricity may have shaded over into madness, "remembering

how old lady Wyatt, her great aunt, had gone completely crazy at last." The presumption of madness, that preeminently female response to bereavement, can be used to explain away much in the behavior of ladies whose activities seem a bit odd.

But even more pointed is what happens when the men try not to explain but to do something about the smell: "'Dammit, sir,' Judge Stevens said, 'will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?'" But if a lady cannot be told that she smells, then the cause of the smell cannot be discovered and so her crime is "perfect." Clearly, the assumptions behind the Judge's outraged retort go beyond the myth that ladies are out of touch with reality. His outburst insists that it is the responsibility of gentlemen to make them so. Ladies must not be confronted with facts; they must be shielded from all that is unpleasant. Thus Colonel Sartoris remits Emily's taxes with a palpably absurd story, designed to protect her from an awareness of her poverty and her dependence on charity, and to protect him from having to confront her with it. And thus Judge Stevens will not confront Emily with the fact that her house stinks, though she is living in it and can hardly be unaware of the odor. Committed as they are to the myth that ladies and bad smells cannot coexist, these gentlemen insulate themselves from reality. And by defining a lady as a subhuman and hence sublegal entity, they have created a situation their laws can't touch. They have made it possible for Emily to be extra-legal: "'Why, of course,' the druggist said, 'If that's what you want. But the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for.' Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up." And, finally, they have created a situation in which they become the criminals: "So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn and slunk about the house like burglars." Above them, "her upright torso motionless as that of an idol," sits Emily, observing them act out their charade of chivalry. As they leave, she confronts them with the reality they are trying to protect her from: she turns on the light so that they may see her watching them. One can only wonder at the fact, and regret, that she didn't call the sheriff and have them arrested for trespassing.

Not only is "A Rose for Emily" a supreme analysis of what men do to women by making them ladies; it is also an exposure of how this act in turn defines and recoils upon men. This is the significance of the dynamic that Faulkner establishes between Emily and Jefferson. And it is equally the point of the dynamic implied between the tableau of Emily and her father and the tableau which greets the men who break down the door of that room in the region above the stairs. When the would-be "suitors" finally get into her father's house, they discover the consequences of his oppression of her, for the violence contained in the rotted corpse of Homer Barron is the mirror image of the violence represented in the tableau, the back-flung front door flung back with a vengeance. Having been consumed by her father, Emily in turn feeds off Homer Barron, becoming, after his death, suspiciously fat. Or, to put it another way, it is as if, after her father's death, she has reversed his act of incorporating her by incorporating and becoming him, metamorphosed from the slender figure in white to the obese figure in black whose hair is "a vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man." She has taken into herself the violence in him which thwarted her and has reenacted it upon Homer Barron.

That final encounter, however, is not simply an image of the reciprocity of

violence. Its power of definition also derives from its grotesqueness, which makes finally explicit the grotesqueness that has been latent in the description of Emily throughout the story: "Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough." The impact of this description depends on the contrast it establishes between Emily's reality as a fat, bloated figure in black and the conventional image of a lady—expectations that are fostered in the town by its emblematic memory of Emily as a slender figure in white and in us by the narrator's tone of romantic invocation and by the passage itself. Were she not expected to look so different, were her skeleton not small and spare, Emily would not be so grotesque. Thus, the focus is on the grotesqueness that results when stereotypes are imposed upon reality. And the implication of this focus is that the real grotesque is the stereotype itself. If Emily is both lady and grotesque, then the syllogism must be completed thus: the idea of a lady is grotesque. So Emily is metaphor and mirror for the town of Jefferson; and when, at the end, the town folk finally discover who and what she is, they have in fact encountered who and what they are. . . . [T]he efforts to read "A Rose for Emily" as a parable of the relations between North and South, or as a conflict between an old order and a new, or as a story about the human relation to Time, don't work because the attempt to make Emily representative of such concepts stumbles over the fact that woman's condition is not the "human" condition.² To understand Emily's experience requires a primary awareness of the fact that she is a woman.

But, more important, Faulkner provides us with an image of retaliation. [Emily] does not simply acquiesce; she prefers to murder rather than to die. In this respect she is a welcome change from the image of woman as willing victim that fills the pages of our literature. . . . Nevertheless, Emily's action is still reaction. "A Rose for Emily" exposes the poverty of a situation in which turnabout is the only possibility and in which one's acts are neither self-generated nor self-determined but are simply a response to and a reflection of forces outside oneself. Though Emily may be proud, strong, and indomitable, her murder of Homer Barron is finally an indication of the severely limited nature of the power women can wrest from the system that oppresses them. . . . Emily's act . . . is possible only because it can be kept secret; and it can be kept secret only at the cost of exploiting her image as a lady. . . .

Patriarchal culture is based to a considerable extent on the argument that men and women are made for each other and on the conviction that "masculinity" and "femininity" are the natural reflection of that divinely ordained complement. Yet, if one reads . . . "A Rose for Emily" as [an] analys[is] of the consequences of a massive differentiation of everything according to sex, one sees that in reality a sexist culture is one in which men and women are not simply incompatible but murderously so. . . . Emily murders Homer Barron because she must at any cost get a man. The [gap] . . . between cultural myth and cultural reality . . . suggest[s] that in this disparity is the ultimate grotesque.

NOTES

1. See *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia 1957–1958*, edited by Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph I. Blotner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1959), 87–88; *Faulkner at Nagamo*, edited by Robert A. Jelliffe (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1956), 71.
2. For a sense of some of the difficulties involved in reading the story in these terms, I refer the reader to the collection of criticism edited by M. Thomas Inge, *A Rose for Emily* (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1970).

GENE M. MOORE

*Of Time and Its Mathematical Progression:
Problems of Chronology in Faulkner's
"A Rose for Emily"**

Over the past 30 years, no fewer than *eight* different chronologies have been proposed to account for the events occurring in William Faulkner's celebrated short story "A Rose for Emily."¹ These chronologies cover a span of 14 years (Miss Emily was born between 1850 and 1864, and died between 1924 and 1938), and they make use of many different kinds of evidence: not only internal temporal references and cross-references in the story, but also historical, biographical, canonical, and even forensic evidence. Given the amount of interest generated by this question and the range of evidence employed in the various arguments, it is remarkable that no one seems ever to have regarded the original manuscript as a possible source of chronological information; in fact, evidence from the manuscript makes it possible to solve some of the problems of Miss Emily's chronology by fixing the date of her father's death.

While critics have recognized the importance of time to a proper understanding of the story[,] . . . they have also complained, in strong and vivid language, of the difficulty of establishing a consistent chronology: "Faulkner destroys chronological time in his story" (Magalaner and Volpe, cited in Inge 63); he uses "a complicatedly disjunctive time scheme" (Wilson 56) that "twists chronology almost beyond recognition" (Sullivan 167); his technique is an "abandonment of chronology" (A. M. Wright, cited in Sullivan 167). Yet whether the story of

* From *Studies in Short Fiction* 29 (Spring 1992): 195–204. All notes are Moore's; some of his works cited have been omitted.

1. These chronologies were proposed by—in chronological order—Going (1958), Hagopian et al. (1964), Woodward (1966), McGlynn (1969), Nebeker (1970 and 1971), Wilson (1972), Brooks (1978), and Perry (1979). The first four were reprinted in Inge's 1970 casebook. Cleanth Brooks refers to five chronologies in this casebook (382n), but I have only been able to discover four, and my count is confirmed by the list in one of the suggestions for short papers at the end of Inge's volume (127). Helen E. Nebeker has proposed two different chronologies (the first in "Emily's Rose . . . : Thematic Implications" and the second in "Emily's Rose . . . : A Postscript" and "Chronology Revised"). Although different evidence is used, Nebeker's second chronology agrees with that proposed by Hagopian et al.

Miss Emily Grierson is to be understood in terms of conflict between the North and the South, between the Old South and the New South, or between the “past” and the “present,” for the sake of all these arguments it is vitally important to establish her own chronological place in the historical context of the passing generations. What dates are carved on Miss Emily’s tombstone?

The task at hand has never been stated more simply than by William T. Going in the earliest of the chronologies: “By means of internal or external evidence, date the major events of Emily Grierson’s life” (8). Yet in practice it is often difficult to distinguish “internal” from “external” evidence. Is evidence from the unrevised manuscript of “A Rose for Emily” internal or external? What about references to Judge Stevens or Colonel Sartoris in other works by Faulkner? In general, what constitutes legitimate chronological evidence? In cases of conflict, what forms of evidence should take precedence over others? The “internal” chronology of a given work may or may not prove to be consistent, and may or may not be attached (consistently or inconsistently) to a variety of “external” chronologies based on information such as references occurring in other works by the same author (*canonical* evidence), or what we know about the author’s life (*biographical* evidence) or the context of history in general (*historical* evidence). In each case, specific chronological references can be either *absolute*, in the form of dates (such as the single reference to 1894 in “A Rose for Emily”); *relative* to other references (e.g., “the summer after her father’s death,” “thirty years before”); or *contextual*, establishing a measure of time with reference to historical or natural codes of temporality outside the text (e.g., allusions to the Civil War signify 1861–65; the graying of Miss Emily’s hair is a gradual process; dead bodies decompose at a certain rate under certain conditions, etc.). The discrepancies among the eight chronologies are largely a result of underlying differences of opinion about the relative weights to be accorded these various kinds of evidence.

The specific difficulty of establishing a chronology for Miss Emily arises largely because the first half of her story is told essentially in reverse chronological order, and the events in it are described not in terms of dates or specific historical references, but most often in terms of her age at the time. Anchoring this “internal” chronology in history requires, in effect, that we find at least one point of attachment between “internal” references to Miss Emily’s age or activities, and “external” references to dates or known historical events.

Most of the discussion in the eight chronologies has centered upon two problematic events in her life: the remission of her taxes by Colonel Sartoris in 1894 [paragraph 3], and the period of china-painting lessons “when she was about forty” [paragraph 49]. 1894 is the only date mentioned in the story, but its exact position in Miss Emily’s life (i.e., her age at the time) is by no means certain. In the third paragraph of the story, reference is made to “that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor . . . remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity.” . . . This means, at the least, that her father died no later than 1894. We are told that at the time of her father’s death Miss Emily had “got to be thirty and was still single” [paragraph 25]; and when she buys the poison about two years later, the narrator reminds us that “She was over thirty then” [paragraph 34]. The year 1864 is thus a *terminus ad quem* for Miss Emily’s birth, and is respected as such by all the chronologists.

Some, however, have taken 1894 as the point of attachment between Emily's life and historical chronology, assuming that her taxes were remitted immediately following her father's death, and that he accordingly died that same year (McGlynn, Wilson). Her age at the time is taken as 30 (McGlynn) or 32 (Wilson), indicating that she was born in 1862 or 1864 and died in 1936 or 1938. However, "A Rose for Emily" was first published in 1930, creating a "glaring discrepancy" that led Helen E. Nebeker to revise her original chronology ("Chronology Revised" 471), and that in Menakhem Perry's opinion leads to "absurd conclusions" (344n26). Nebeker and Perry take 1930, the date of publication, as a *terminus ad quem* for Miss Emily's death, which means that the year 1856 becomes the corresponding *terminus* for her birth.²

The remission of Miss Emily's taxes is mentioned twice in the story: first as occurring in 1894, and second in connection with the period of her china-painting lessons "when she was about forty": the narrator ends the paragraph describing these lessons with the remark that "Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted" (128). Some chronologists have taken this "Meanwhile" to mean that Miss Emily must have been "about forty" in 1894, and that she was therefore born in 1854 and died in 1928 (Hagopian et al., Nebeker, "Emily's Rose . . . : A Postscript" and "Chronology Revised"). Brooks's chronology is a numerical compromise between those of Going and Hagopian et al., according to which Miss Emily, born in 1852, would have been 42 in 1894. Perry also takes this "Meanwhile" as indicative of simultaneity: "She was exempted from taxation in the period when she gave china-painting lessons" (344n26). In other words, much of the discrepancy among the various chronologies can be understood as a result of the choice of where to attach the historical "anchor" of the remission of taxes in 1894: to the death of Miss Emily's father when she was "over thirty," or to the china-painting period when she was "about forty"?

Surprisingly, what no one seems to have noticed or taken seriously is that in the original manuscript Faulkner assigned a different date to the remission of Miss Emily's taxes and a specific date to her father's death: the corresponding passage in the manuscript speaks of "that day in 1904 when Colonel Sartoris . . . remitted her taxes dating from the death of her father 16 years back, on into perpetuity" (Inge 8).³ One can only speculate about why Faulkner found it necessary to shift the date of Colonel Sartoris's gallant action back ten years from 1904 to 1894, and to delete all reference to the "16 years" since the father's death. Perhaps 16 years seemed too long for Miss Emily to remain actively on the minds of city officials? In any event, it is clear that when Faulkner originally committed the story to paper, her taxes were remitted not in 1894 but in 1904, 16 years after the death of her father in 1888. Restoring Faulkner's alterations and deletions may seem to run counter to the editorial principle of respecting the

2. The provisional futurism of a situation in which Miss Emily dies fictionally some years after the announcement of her death in the "real" world, as posited in half of the published chronologies (those of Woodward, McGlynn, Nebeker ["Emily's Rose . . . : Thematic Implications"], and Wilson), is not without literary precedent. . . . In the case of "A Rose for Emily," the "inconvenience" indeed exists only if one claims to identify the fictional world of Miss Emily with the historical world of William Faulkner; but this claim is at the origin of any attempt to set up a chronology.

3. This oversight is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that a quite legible reproduction of the first manuscript page was printed as an illustration in Inge's 1970 casebook, which all the later critics have cited as a reference.

author's final intentions; but keeping the original dates in mind can help untangle the story's chronology.

The altered date and the omission of the reference to "16 years back" in the typescript version need not mean that Faulkner had necessarily changed his mind about the date of Miss Emily's father's death. Had he moved it back the same 10 years, she would have to have been born before 1848 to have been over 30 by 1878, and would thus have been of the same generation as the Civil War veterans who attend her funeral. As Brooks noted,

The "very old men—some in their brushed Confederate uniforms" who, at the funeral, talked "of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her" must have been a number of years older than she. (WF: *Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* 383)⁴

However, in the earliest of the chronologies, William T. Going invoked Faulkner's authority to the effect that Miss Emily was born in 1850 and died in 1924, since 1924 was the date assigned to "A Rose for Emily" in Malcolm Cowley's Viking Portable edition of Faulkner's works (1946), in which Cowley noted editorially that dates were assigned "with the author's consent and later with his advice at doubtful points" (cited in Inge 51).⁵ Going set the date of her father's death as early as 1882.

Manuscript evidence cannot solve all the chronological problems, since the china-painting period is defined not only in connection with Miss Emily's being "about forty," but also retrospectively, working backward from later events: the death of Colonel Sartoris, the visit of the tax delegation, and her own death. We are told that no one had seen the house's interior for "at least ten years" before she died [paragraph 1], and that the visit of the tax delegation (which may or may not have been the last visit before her death, but is in any case the only visit we are told about) took place "eight or ten years" after she ceased giving china-painting lessons [paragraph 5] and "almost ten years" after the death of Colonel Sartoris [paragraph 14].⁶ In other words, she died at least 18 years after the last lessons were given: 18 years before her death at age 74, Miss Emily would have been 56 years old, so that if the lessons lasted for "a period of six or seven years" [paragraph 49], Miss Emily could not have been "about forty" at the time, but would instead have been about 50. Paul D. McGlynn has attempted to disregard this problem by suggesting that "Of course 'about forty' might well be a genteel euphemism for 'about fifty'" (Inge 91; cf. Wilson 59); but this suggestion still does not explain why the narrator would protect Miss Emily's age only at this particular point and not elsewhere. Would anyone wish to read the narrator's two references to her being "over thirty" as genteel euphemisms for "over forty," or the announcement of her "death at seventy-four" as a coded euphemism for 84? In effect, the chronology to be established by tracing the course of Miss Emily's life forward from the time of her father's death fails to square with the

4. On similar historical grounds, one could argue that the Homer Barron episode must be set much later, since the actual streets of Oxford were not paved until the 1920s (Cullen and Watkins 71, cited in Inge 17).

5. Cowley also acknowledged in his Introduction that "As one book leads into another, Faulkner sometimes falls into inconsistencies of detail." He added that "these errors are comparatively few and inconsequential. . . . I should judge that most of them are afterthoughts rather than oversights" (Cowley 7–8).

6. In the place of the reference to the china-painting lessons as having ceased "eight or ten years earlier" (120), the unrevised manuscript reads "6 or 7 years ago" (Faulkner, *Manuscripts* 189).

chronology to be derived retrospectively from the time of her own death.

Interpreting the reference to “at least ten years” as possibly allowing for as much as 20 years is also no solution, since the visit of the tax delegation is the peg from which the date of the smell “thirty years before” is hung. Internal references indicate that Homer Barron must have died when Miss Emily was about 33 or 34 years old: at least 40 years before her own death (equal to the “at least ten years” since the last visit plus the 30 years since the smell), and two years after her father’s death, which occurred when she was already at least 30. A limit is thereby set to the range of time included in “at least”: her last visit had to occur “at least ten years” and at most 12 years before her death, since if it occurred more than 12 years earlier, she would have been under 30 when her father died.

In summary, the chronologies can be divided roughly into two groups: one group—Woodward, McGlynn, Nebeker (“Emily’s Rose . . . : Thematic Implications”), and Wilson—connects the tax remission of 1894 with her father’s death (Emily is between 30 and 34 in 1894); while the other—Going, Hagopian et al., Nebeker (“Emily’s Rose . . . : A Postscript” and “Chronology Revised”), Brooks, and Perry—links the reference to 1894 with the period of china-painting (i.e., Emily is “about forty,” or between 39 and 42, in 1894). The first group tends to disregard the narrator’s reference to the remission of taxes as being retroactive: “the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity” [paragraph 3]. Taxes are collected annually—“On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice” [paragraph 4]—so that if Miss Emily’s taxes were remitted the same year her father died, the narrator’s reference to the retroactive nature of the remission would appear to be unnecessary.

This much can be determined on the basis of “internal” references alone; but the references to Colonel Sartoris and to Judge Stevens lead us outside the story to look for external canonical evidence in the form of references to these gentlemen in other works by Faulkner. If Judge Stevens was already 80 years old and mayor at the time of the smell (which the chronologies date variously between 1884 and 1896), then he is probably too old to be Judge Lemuel Stevens, the father of Gavin Stevens, who is mentioned in Faulkner’s late works: he would have been between 102 and 114 years old at the time of his death in 1918—perhaps not an altogether impossible age, but one remarkable enough to be worth mentioning. Nevertheless, most of the glossaries and indexes have identified the elderly Judge Stevens of “A Rose for Emily” with Judge Lemuel. . . .

Similar problems arise with the reference to a Colonel Sartoris who was mayor in 1894 and who died “almost ten years” before the visit of the tax delegation (and thus about 20 years before Miss Emily’s death, when she was about 54). Once again, there is some doubt about which Colonel Sartoris is meant: Faulkner has described the early history of the Sartoris family more thoroughly than that of the Stevenses, so that it appears correspondingly more difficult to imagine a strange new Colonel Sartoris, unique to “A Rose for Emily” and unmentioned elsewhere, who could have been mayor in 1894. Faulkner’s works mention two Colonel Sartorises: Colonel John Sartoris, who dies too early to have been Miss Emily’s mayor in 1894, and his son Bayard—“the banker with his courtesy title acquired partly by inheritance and partly by propinquity” (*Reivers* 74)—who dies too late. . . .

However, the original date of 1904 for the mayoral edict may help to solve this problem as well, since young Bayard Sartoris could well have been mayor at that time. We are told in *The Reivers* of his propensity for passing edicts, although he is not specifically named as mayor; when his matched carriage horses are startled by a home-made automobile, “by the next night there was formally recorded into the archives of Jefferson a city ordinance against the operation of any mechanically propelled vehicle inside the corporate limits” (27–28); additional information in *The Reivers* makes it possible to date this incident as having occurred in 1904. The Colonel’s tendency to govern by radical edict is mentioned in “A Rose for Emily” as well, since it was “he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron” (par. 3).

In conclusion, the neglected manuscript evidence, by allowing us to fix the date of the death of Miss Emily’s father in 1888, makes it possible to establish a chronology that is different from the eight that have been suggested previously (although it differs from that of Perry by only one year). Perhaps when Faulkner decided to move the time of Miss Emily’s tax remission back by ten years, he simply failed to consider the consequences of this alteration for the rest of the chronology. Yet whether the year in question is 1894 or 1904, the internal inconsistency of the period of her china-painting remains, together with the canonical inconsistencies concerning the identities of Judge Stevens and Colonel Sartoris. The ancient Civil War veterans who try to remember Miss Emily are not alone in having to cope with the problem of “confusing time with its mathematical progression.”

APPENDIX: A CHRONOLOGY FOR MISS EMILY GRIERSON

- 1856: Miss Emily is born; the narrator never mentions her birth directly, but his reference to “the day of her death at seventy-four” (127–28) defines the parameters of any chronology in terms of a span of 74 years.
- 1870–1879: The Grierson house is built “in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies” (119), thus presumably during the 1870s.
- 1888: Her father dies after “she got to be thirty” (123).
- 1889: She meets Homer Barron “the summer after her father’s death” (124).
- 1890: She buys arsenic from the druggist “over a year after they had begun to say ‘Poor Emily’ . . . She was over thirty then” (125). She poisons Homer Barron, who disappears “two years after her father’s death”; a smell is noticed “a short time after” (122), which is also “thirty years before” the tax visit (121).
- 1893–1900: Miss Emily is “about forty”; she gives lessons in china-painting “for a period of six or seven years” (128).
- 1894: “Meanwhile” (119, 128) Colonel Sartoris, the mayor, remits her taxes.
- 1920: She is visited by a deputation of the Board of Aldermen “eight or ten years” after she stops giving china-painting lessons (120) and “almost ten years” (121) after the death of Colonel Sartoris.
- 1930: She dies “at least ten years” (119) since her last visit, presumably from the tax deputation; after her funeral, the room, “which no one had seen in forty years” (129), is opened.

WORKS CITED

- Brooks, Cleanth. *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1963.
- . *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1978.
- Cowley, Malcolm. Introduction. *The Portable Faulkner*. New York: Viking, 1946. 1-24.
- Cullen, John B., and Floyd C. Watkins. "Miss Emily." *Old Times in the Faulkner Country*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1961. 70-71. Rpt. in Inge 17-18.
- Faulkner, William. *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*. New York: Random, 1950.
- . *Flags in the Dust*. New York: Random, 1973.
- . *Requiem for a Nun*. New York: Random, 1950.
- . *The Reivers*. New York: Random, 1962.
- . "A Rose for Emily." *Collected Stories* 119-30.
- . *The Unvanquished*. New York: Random, 1938.
- . *William Faulkner Manuscripts: These 13*. Ed. Noel Polk. New York: Garland, 1985. 188-214.
- Ford, Margaret Patricia, and Suzanne Kincaid. *Who's Who in Faulkner*. N.p.: Louisiana State UP, 1963.
- Going, William T. "Chronology in Teaching 'A Rose for Emily.'" *Exercise Exchange* 5 (February 1958): 8-11. Rpt. in Inge 50-53.
- Hagopian, John V., W. Gordon Cunliffe, and Martin Dolch. "A Rose for Emily," *Insight I: Analyses of American Literature*. Frankfurt: Hirschgraben, 1964. 43-50. Rpt. in Inge 76-83.
- Inge, M. Thomas. *William Faulkner: A Rose for Emily*. The Charles E. Merrill Literary Casebook Series. Columbus, OH: Merrill, 1970.
- Kirk, Robert W., and Marvin Klotz. *Faulkner's People: A Complete Guide and Index to Characters in the Fiction of William Faulkner*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1963.
- McGlynn, Paul D. "The Chronology of 'A Rose for Emily.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 6 (1969): 461-62. Rpt. in Inge 90-92.
- Nebeker, Helen E. "Emily's Rose of Love: Thematic Implications of Point of View in Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily.'" *Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 24 (1970): 3-13.
- . "Emily's Rose of Love: A Postscript." *Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 24 (1970): 190-91.
- . "Chronology Revised." *Studies in Short Fiction* 8 (1971): 471-73.
- Perry, Menakhem. "Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates its Meanings [With an Analysis of Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily']." *Poetics Today* 1:1-2 (Autumn 1979): 35-64, 311-61.
- Runyan, Harry. *A Faulkner Glossary*. New York: Citadel, 1964.
- Sullivan, Ruth. "The Narrator in 'A Rose for Emily.'" *Journal of Narrative Technique* 1 (1971): 159-78.
- Wilson, G. R., Jr. "The Chronology of Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily' Again." *Notes on Mississippi Writers* 5 (Fall 1972): 56, 44, 58-62.
- Woodward, Robert H. "The Chronology of 'A Rose for Emily.'" *Exercise Exchange* 8 (March 1966): 17-19. Rpt. in Inge 84-86.

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING

1. William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" shares its southern setting with several other stories in this book: one by Eudora Welty ("Why I Live at the P.O.") and three by Flannery O'Connor ("A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "The Lame Shall Enter First," and "Everything That Rises Must Converge"). What makes each of these stories distinctively "southern"? Does "southern" mean the same thing to each of these authors? Write an essay in which you compare and contrast the southern setting of "A Rose for Emily" with the setting of at least one of these other stories.
2. What information can a reader detect, or infer, about the narrator of "A Rose for Emily"? What sort of person or persons could be telling the story (young, old, male, female, black, white, a southern local or a northern visitor)? Does the narrator share all the values of the townspeople, or express any mixed feelings about their views or behavior? Does Faulkner (or the implied author of the story) share all the narrator's attitudes, or does the story place the narrator at a certain ironic distance from author and reader? Write an essay in which you characterize the authority and limitations of the narrator in relation to the society of Jefferson and to the implied author of the story.
3. In his essay "We all said, 'She will kill herself,'" Lawrence R. Rodgers argues that "A Rose for Emily" is, in fact, essentially a detective story. Do you agree? Does it really matter whether or not "A Rose for Emily" is a certain "kind" of fiction? Write an essay in which you either agree or disagree with Rodgers's approach to the story and the significance of that approach.
4. George L. Dillon, in his essay "Styles of Reading," identifies three types of readers: those who read for "Character-Action-Moral," those who are "Diggers for Secrets," and those who are "Anthropologists." Dillon's analysis suggests that, although these types of reader may vary in sophistication, no one type is more or less likely to produce a "correct" interpretation of a given literary text. Apply Dillon's model to any of the stories you have read in this book and suggest three possible readings, each valid in its own right.
5. Judith Fetterley urges a feminist reading of Faulkner's story in her essay "A Rose for 'A Rose for Emily.'" Do you find her arguments persuasive? Write an essay comparing Fetterley's take on "A Rose for Emily" with that of another critic who considers the social subordination of women or the gender of characters or the narrator to be crucial to the meaning of this story.
6. Much has been written about Faulkner's handling of time and chronology in "A Rose for Emily." In his essay "Of Time and Its Mathematical Progression," Gene M. Moore describes a variety of critical attempts to untangle the story's time line. Taking note of the arguments Moore describes, write an essay in which you present your own interpretation of chronology and its importance in "A Rose for Emily."
7. In this chapter you have seen how a single work of literature (Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily") can generate a broad range of critical responses (the accompanying essays by Dillon, Fetterley, Moore, and others). Taken together, these texts represent a kind of ongoing conversation between a "primary text" and "secondary texts," and even among these "secondary texts" themselves. Using secondary texts available to you at a library and on the Internet, write an essay in which you join in the critical "conversation" about any of the stories you have read in this book. Be sure to follow the standard scholarly procedures for documenting your sources properly.

STUDENT WRITING

Crystal 1

Willow D. Crystal
Professor Akerley
English 1002
23 April 2004

"One of us . . .": Concepts of the Private and the Public in William Faulkner's
"A Rose for Emily"

Throughout "A Rose for Emily," William Faulkner introduces a tension between what is private, or belongs to the individual, and what is public, or the possession of the group. "When Miss Emily Grierson died," the tale begins, "our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house . . ." (467). The men of the small town of Jefferson, Mississippi, are motivated to attend Miss Emily's funeral for public reasons; the women, to see "the inside of her house," that private realm which has remained inaccessible for "at least ten years" (467-68).

This opposition of the private with the public has intrigued critics of Faulkner's tale since the story was first published. Distinctions between the private and the public are central to Lawrence R. Rodgers's argument in his essay " 'We all said, 'she will kill herself' ': The Narrator/Detective in William Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily.' " The very concept of the detective genre demands that "there must be concealed facts that . . . must become clear in the end" (119), private actions which become public knowledge. In her feminist tribute, "A Rose for 'A Rose for Emily,'" Judith Fetterley uses the private-public dichotomy to demonstrate the "grotesque reality" (34) of the patriarchal social system in Faulkner's story. According to Fetterley, Miss Emily's "private life becomes a public document that the town folk feel free to interpret at will" (36). Thus, while critics such as Rodgers and Fetterley offer convincing—if divergent—interpretations of "A Rose for Emily," it is necessary first to understand in Faulkner's eerie and enigmatic story the relationship between the public and the private, and the consequences of this relationship within the story and for the reader.

The most explicit illustration of the opposition between the public and the private occurs in the social and economic interactions between the town of Jefferson, represented by the narrator's "our" and "we," and the reclusive Miss Emily. "Alive," the narrator explains, "Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor, . . . remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity" (468). Ironically (and this is one of the prime examples of

the complexity of the relationship of private and public in the story), the price of privacy for Miss Emily becomes the loss of that very privacy. Despite—or perhaps because of—her refusal to buy into the community, the citizens of Jefferson determine that it is their “duty,” their “hereditary obligation,” to oversee her activities. When, for example, Miss Emily’s house begins to emit an unpleasant smell, the town officials decide to solve the problem by dusting her property with lime. When she refuses to provide a reason why she wants to buy poison, the druggist scrawls “For rats” (471) across the package, literally and protectively overwriting her silence.

Arguably, the townspeople’s actions serve to protect Miss Emily’s privacy—by preserving her perceived gentility—as much as they effectively destroy it with their intrusive zeal. But in this very act of protection they reaffirm the town’s proprietary relation to the public “monument” that is Miss Emily and, consequently, reinforce her inability to make decisions for herself.

While the communal narrator and Miss Emily appear to be polar opposites—one standing for the public while the other fiercely defends her privacy—the two are united when an outsider such as Homer Barron appears in their midst. If Miss Emily serves as a representation—an icon, an inactive figure in a “tableau,” an “idol”—of traditional antebellum southern values, then Homer represents all that is new and different. A “day laborer” (470) from the North, Homer comes to Jefferson to pave the sidewalks, a task which itself suggests the modernization of the town.

The secret and destructive union between these two representational figures implies a complex relationship between the private and the public. When Miss Emily kills Homer and confines his remains to a room in her attic, where, according to Rodgers, “she has been allowed to carry on her illicit love affair in post-mortem privacy” (119), this grotesque act ironically suggests that she has capitulated to the code of gentility that Jefferson imagines her to embody. This code demands the end of a romantic affair which some residents deemed “a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people” (472), thus placing traditions and the good of the community above Miss Emily’s own wishes. Through its insistence on Miss Emily’s symbolic relation to a bygone era, the town—via the narrator—becomes “an unknowing driving force behind Emily’s crime” (Rodgers 120). Her private act is both the result of and a support for public norms and expectations.

At the same time, however, the act of murder also marks Miss Emily’s corruption of that very code. By killing Homer in private, Miss Emily deliberately flouts public norms, and by eluding explicit detection until after her own death, she asserts the primacy of the private. The murder of the outsider in their midst thus leads Miss Emily to achieve paradoxically both a more complete privacy—a marriage of sorts without a husband—and a role in the preservation of the community.

Yet the elaborate relationship between Jefferson and Miss Emily is not the only way in which Homer’s murder may be understood as a casualty of the tension between the public and the private. When Miss Emily kills Homer, Rodgers contends, “from the town’s point of view, it was the best thing. . . . Homer represents the kind of unwelcomed resident and ineligible mate the town wants to repel if it is to preserve its traditional

arrangements" (125). The people of Jefferson and Miss Emily join in a struggle to "repel" the outside and to ensure a private, inner order and tradition. This complicity creates intriguing parallels between the illicit, fatal union of Homer and Miss Emily and the reunion of the North and the South following the Civil War. In this reformulation of the private and the public, Miss Emily becomes, as Fetterley notes, a "metaphor and mirror for the town of Jefferson" (43). Miss Emily's honor is the townspeople's honor, her preservation their preservation.

Finally, the parallels between Miss Emily's secretive habits and the narrator's circuitous presentation of the story lead to a third dimension of the negotiations between the private and the public in "A Rose for Emily," a dimension in which Faulkner as author and the collective "we" as narrator confront their public consumers, the readers. Told by the anonymous narrator as if retrospectively, "A Rose for Emily" skips forward and back in time, omitting details and deferring revelations to such a degree that many critics have gone to extreme lengths to establish reliable chronologies for the tale. The much-debated "we" remains anonymous and unreachable throughout the tale—maintaining a virtually unbreachable privacy—even as it invites the public (the reader) to participate in the narrator's acts of detection and revelation. Rodgers observes:

The dramatic distance on display here provides an ironic layer to the narrative. As the observers of the conflict between the teller-of-tale's desire to solve the curious mysteries that surround Emily's life—indeed, his complicity in shaping them—and his undetective-like detachment from her crimes, readers occupy the tantalizing position of having insight into unraveling the mystery which the narrator lacks. (120–21)

The reader is thus a member of the communal "we"—party to the narrator's investigation and Jefferson's voyeuristic obsession with Miss Emily—but also apart, removed to a plane from which "insight" into and observation of the narrator's own actions and motives become possible. The reader, just like Miss Emily, Homer, and the town of Jefferson itself, becomes a crucial element in the tension between the public and the private.

Thus, public and private are, in the end, far from exclusive categories. And for all of its literal as well as figurative insistence on opposition and either/or structures, Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" enacts the provocative idea of being "[o]ne of us" (474), of being both an individual and a member of a community, both a private entity and a participant in the public sphere.

Works Cited

- Faulkner, William. "A Rose for Emily." The Norton Introduction to Literature. Shorter 9th ed. Eds. Alison Booth, J. Paul Hunter, and Kelly J. Mays. New York: Norton, 2006. 467–74.
- Fetterley, Judith. "A Rose for 'A Rose for Emily.'" The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978. 34–45.
- Moore, Gene M. "Of Time and Its Mathematical Progression: Problems of Chronology in Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily.'" Studies in Short Fiction 29 (1992): 195–204.
- Rodgers, Lawrence R. "'We all said, 'she will kill herself' ': The Narrator/Detective in William Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily.'" Clues: A Journal of Detection 16 (1995): 117–29.