FAULKNER’S
A ROSE FOR EMILY

Rhetoric 101 – Short Literature Analysis
WILLIAM FAULKNER’S, “A ROSE FOR EMILY”


Faulkner won/received the Novel Prize in Literature in 1949.

Setting takes place in Jefferson, Mississippi County in a Faulkner-created county of Yoknapatawpha.

Gothic horror is a genre of fiction presenting dark, mysterious, terrifying events that take place in a gloomy or ghostly setting. The genre derives its name from the Gothic architectural style in Europe between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. When a Gothic story takes place in the American South and centers in part on Southern cultural traditions and character types, as well as on a realistic rather than a romantic account of events, scholars often characterize the story as Southern Gothic (think “A Good Man is Hard to Find”
YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Annotate for the following
- Imagery
- Foreshadowing
- contrasting relationships, actions, or dialogue
- Characterization
- Points that show narration

Symbols
- House
- Ink/Stationary
- Sidewalks
- Mailbox, Metal House Number
- Tarnished Metals
- Whips

Theme/Motifs to annotate for/notice:
- Sidewalks
- Miss Emily’s hair
- Miss Emily’s shadow
- Psychological bondage
- Death of the old South
- Mystery
- Reality vs. Delusion
- Living in the past
QUESTIONS TO ANSWER + DISCUSS

1. In paragraphs 1 & 2, the author speaks of buildings and structures, describing Miss Emily as a fallen monument. Where else do related images occur? If Miss Emily is a fallen monument, what is she a monument to?

2. Analyze Miss Emily’s character in terms of distinguishing fantasy from reality.

3. The story is told by “we”: who do you imagine this narrator (or narrators) to be? So basically, who is the narrator? Can we trust him/her/them? What is their tone and attitude toward Emily? How is this represented by their calling her “Miss Emily”?

4. Women of the Old South and of a “good family” were often put on pedestals as paragons of virtue and respectability and given special treatment as “ladies”. How do you see these attitudes at work in this story? How have they shaped Miss Emily’s life and how people view her? Why is she called a fallen monument in the first paragraph?

5. Notice references to the Civil War in the story. Where do they occur? How does that war play a role in the story?

6. In this story, an aristocratic Southerner murders a Yankee carpetbagger. Is the story about the triumph of a defeated South over a supposedly triumphant North? What is this story really about?

7. What happened with Homer Barron? Why did she take up with him? Why did he abandon her? Why did he come back?

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1. What is the “rose” for Emily? (next slide)

2. What does the title tell you about the story? Why isn’t it called “A Rose for Miss Emily”? Read Faulkner’s interpretation of the story (next slide-handout), stated many years after he wrote it. What other interpretations are possible about the story which are different from or even contradictory to Faulkner’s interpretation?
William Faulkner speaks on "A Rose for Emily" in 1955:

I feel sorry for Emily's tragedy; her tragedy was, she was an only child, an only daughter. At first when she could have found a husband, could have had a life of her own, there was probably some one, her father, who said, "No, you must stay here and take care of me." And then when she found a man, she had had no experience in people. She picked out probably a bad one, who was about to desert her. And when she lost him she could see that for her that was the end of life, there was nothing left, except to grow older, alone, solitary; she had had something and she wanted to keep it, which is bad—to go to any length to keep something; but I pity Emily. I don't know whether I would have liked her or not, I might have been afraid of her. Not of her, but of anyone who had suffered, had been warped, as her life had been probably warped by a selfish father . . . . [The title] was an allegorical title; the meaning was, here was a woman who had had a tragedy, an irrevocable tragedy and nothing could be done about it, and I pitied her and this was a salute to a woman you would hand a rose.

SYMBOLS EXPLAINED...

**House**: Described as stately but decaying, Emily's house represents what is left of the Old South.

**Mailbox, Metal House Number**: These symbolize modernity and change. Emily refuses to allow postal officials to install the house numbers and the mailbox.

**Sidewalks**: The new sidewalks that Homer Barron and his crew construct appear to symbolize the post-Civil War Reconstruction era.

**Ink/Stationery**: The note Emily sent the mayor was written on "paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink." The archaic shape of the stationery and the faded ink seem to represent the outmoded traditions of the Old South.

**Tarnished Metals**: The tarnished gold head of Emily's cane and the tarnished silver toilet set in the room with Barron's corpse symbolize aging, deterioration, and death.

**Whips**: The narrator makes it a point to mention the whips Mr. Grierson and Homer Barron use to lash their horses while driving Emily in their buggies. The whips may represent the male-dominated society of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.