

Dehumanized Women Identity in *A Rose for Emily*

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Abstract: In *A Rose for Emily*, Faulkner showed a downfallen Southern aristocratic class through the description of tragedy and the choice of the protagonist Emily. This article outlines Emily's whole life, analyzing her tragedy and resistance, which presents the deep-rooted concept of dehumanized women identity. Emily's whole life not only represents the social oppression of women in the patriarchal society, but also symbolizes the struggle and destruction out of self-consciousness.

Keywords: Patriarchal society, Dehumanized woman identity, *A Rose For Emily*.

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the American Civil War marked the arrival of the new industrial age, but the southern plantation economic system had not completely collapsed. In the novel *A Rose for Emily*, Emily is the aristocratic descendant of a small southern town: Jefferson Town. She grew up in a Patriarchal and Puritan culture environment. After her father died, the pride and stubbornness made her refuse to change. She fell in love with Homer Barron, a lively worker in the North, but his heart yearns for freedom and dislikes marriage constraints so he finally ran away. When Emily died, people entered her room and were surprised to find Homer's body in Emily's bed. Emily should be placed in the special background of the American South, especially in the early period of the conflict between the traditional culture and the new civilization to analyze the special dehumanized women identity given to Emily and her resistance.

2. The Root of Emily's Tragedy: Dehumanized Women identity

Emily's family is a representative of the South and lives in the specific social background of the South. Therefore, to analyze her image as a Southern lady, we must first analyze the historical and cultural background of the novel and the reasons for the formation of the image of a dehumanized woman. Moreover, we need to analyze the real reasons why Emily's deep control by her father and other people in the town. "Why can Emily represent the traditional Southern culture?" and "why does her father and people in the town attach so much importance to her image as a Southern ladyhood?"

For the first question, we could analyze the social, economic and religious factors. It was the combination of these factors that made the South a region different from the rest of the United States, and they had a profound and lasting impact on Faulkner's fiction.

1. Social factors. The American Civil War, which took place from 1861 to 1865, brought about great social changes in the South. The military defeat in the Civil War reduced the political and economic power of the South. The agricultural society of the South was defeated by the industrial society of the North and the Southerners suffered physically and mentally. The pre-war South was a land of romantic legends. Here nobles, knights and loyal servants lived freely and peacefully. The Civil War also led to the decline of Southern

aristocratic families and the collapse of Southern agricultural civilization. Southerners felt at a loss to cope with the ruins and shadows left by the war. They could not help but recall the memories of the past to relieve their inner pain and were unwilling to accept the social changes brought about by civil war and post-war reconstruction. Instead, they preferred to preserve the romantic traditions of the Old South, romanticism became a means of self-consolation. They spare no effort to uphold the traditional morality of the past and tried to carry it forward from generation to generation. Although everything is a memory of the past, the core ideas and values of the Old South remain in people's minds and continue to dominate Southerners' lives.

2. Economic factors. Agricultural plantations were the mainstay of the Southern economy. The plantation economy was the basis which the whole South depended. The agricultural economy and the relatively closed plantation life made the South preserve agricultural civilization centered on "the Southern family romance". In the family, the father is the leader. He is brave and respected. And the mother is elegant and sacred. She should be busy with family matters centered around her husband. This way of life allows the South to follow the same values and maintain a strong sense of collective consciousness. It is very common that in the South there are common values, common beliefs in life, and common moral standards."

3. Religious factors. With the wave of immigration to the United States, the Puritans brought Calvinism from New England to the South. At the core of this religion is asceticism, a doctrine that embraces racism, ancestry concept, and the suppression of human desires, as well as a religious defense of patriarchy. Under the guidance of this thought, the identity of women has two meanings. They are not only ladies, an idealized representative of chastity and holiness, but also scourges and the source of all evil. Under the bondage of women and patriarchal thoughts, women's humanity is repressed and their normal desires are condemned. As soon as women show a need that they should not have, they are considered guilty, a source of sin. Therefore, Calvinistic abstinence education makes the Dehumanized women depressed the heart of desire.

As a symbol of the old South, the Dehumanized women view was produced under the specific historical and cultural background of the South, which contained a series of harsh moral requirements for upper white women in the South. Under the conventions of the Southern ladyhood, white women were seen as products of purity and decency, and they

were not allowed to have their own likes and desires. These cruel norms obliterated the natural rights of Southern women, and the Dehumanized women view acted as a tool to maintain the Southern patriarchal control. For Emily, this patriarchal concept is deeply rooted, and she obeys it without reservation. When her father was alive, he chased away all the admirers of his daughter, believing that they did not belong to the same level as Emily, and he was determined to maintain the existence of this difference. After the death of her father, Emily could have been free to pursue love, but in fact, coming from such an old aristocratic family in the South, she was a model for people to follow and chase, so Emily's love affair with Homer triggered a strong public response. There was anxiety in the town, and the people didn't want to accept that their model had fallen to mixing with a lower-class person. What is more disturbing to the residents of the town is that they were afraid that Emily's personal behavior would spread to the corners of the town, had unimaginable consequences and caused social unrest. So they had increased the original whisper of this "shame of the whole town" and "bad example of youth" to blatant suppression and interference. Love, the most common and primitive of human feelings, was so hard for Emily. In the eyes of the people, she is the embodiment of the old traditional Southern morality, and she should be the defender of the old etiquette.

Emily's tragedy mainly comes from two aspects: the lack of maternal love led to the control of patriarchy and the destruction of religion. Emily was born in a town where "women are not allowed on the streets without aprons." Feudal Southern towns brutalized aristocratic women in the name of Southern ladyhood. Emily's mother is never mentioned in the novel, and only the father and daughter are taken in the photo. The absence of mother seems to imply that women can only hang on the edge of society, and women have no right to speak in the male-dominated society. More importantly, the absence of the mother image shows two points: First, the relationship between husband and wife is not good. The couple have not communicated for a long time. Second, children lack maternal love. Both of these reasons are likely to lead to character defects in children at the developmental stage, especially to their sexual and psychological health. In contrast to the absence of her mother, her father's great influence on Emily directly caused her tragedy. In *A Rose for Emily*, there is a description of their father-daughter relationship: "We had long thought of them as a tableau; Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a straddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door." From the above description, we can imagine that Emily's father is like a defender, defending the dignity and authority under the patriarchy. He drove away all the men who pursued Emily with "a horsewhip in his hand", depriving his daughter of youth and love. It makes her a tool to defend the old system in the South, and ultimately leads to Emily becoming a victim of the patriarchy.

On the one hand, the traditional values of the South emphasize patriarchy. On the other hand, the destruction of religion is also one of the important factors causing the tragedy. The Puritan view of women also clarifies the subordinate status of women in society and family, which has also left a deep influence on Emily. In the South at that time, women were oppressed and abused in many ways. In thought, they are required to be pious and obedient; In behavior, they

are required to be chaste and keep a home. Such a view of women left Emily the virtue and dignity, but did not teach her how to live independently, so Emily coldly and arrogantly looked at all the new things around her, stuck to the lifestyle and privileges of the old South, and rejected modern civilization. However, as a woman, Emily also yearns for love and a wonderful new life. So Emily boldly declared war on tradition. In the battle between love and tradition, when love was about to win, Emily learned that Homer has no intention of marrying her. But the news of their marriage was already known, which made her proud heart unable to bear all this result, so she adopted extreme ways to keep her lover, for their tragic life to draw a helpless end. In fact, Emily had gone from being a victim of the ravages of Southern tradition to a criminal. As a result, Emily suffered from both domination and oppression, and was afraid to get rid of the old values and ways of life. On the one hand, she is not only the sustenance of the town people seeking the past, but also the prisoner and victim of patriarchy and Puritanism. On the other hand, she wants to fight against the old tradition in order to pursue her own love and new life. But unfortunately, in the end, she was killed by the old traditions.

3. Emily's Resistance and Adaptation

The novel not just telling the reader that Emily refuses to accept all new things, but from two aspects: One is to resist the changes of the times in every aspect of life. The other is to kill her lover in an extreme way and keep the corpse. First is her resistance to the changing times. As a representative of Southern life, she is attached to the old way of life. She refuses to pay taxes and refuses to nail the mailbox to the door. But it is this stubbornness that keeps her isolated for years, not communicating with people, living within her own world. The killing of Homer is also an act of resistance by Emily. Not just as many critics dismiss Emily as a perverted necrophilic. Emily's attachment to the corpse can also be seen as her desire to preserve this deserved love that was destroyed by her father and other people, her deep desire for the opposite sex, and her struggle against the abnormal environment of the South area, in which Emily still stubbornly yearns to live a normal life and shows her humanity. Because of her Dehumanized women image, her family had high expectations of her. This influence of her family prevents her from pursuing love and eventually becomes crazy. Emily can only use the death of her lover to continue that eternal love, in order to express her extreme resistance.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, every analysis of a novel needs to be based on the special background, and for this novel, we need to analyze the reasons for the image of Dehumanized women and the deep meaning implied by this tragedy. The novel *A Rose for Emily* depicts the decline of an old era. The novel uses Gothic techniques, special perspectives and unique ways of free travel of time and space to write out the general psychology of the whole Southern society-the stubborn adherence to the old tradition. Emily also witnessed the decline of the old Southern aristocracy. As a tragic character in the novel, Emily's female consciousness is revived after a long period of repression, but it brings her endless pain and harm. Civilization will eventually replace barbarism, and the benign development of society is irresistible. Emily's tragedy marked the end and disintegration of the traditional customs and

culture in the South, and also symbolized the arrival of a new civilization era.

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