



# Bloom's Literature

## The Structure of "A Rose for Emily"

Faulkner's structural problem in "A Rose for Emily" demanded that he treat all of Miss Emily's life and her increasing withdrawal from the community and that by extreme selection he give a unity, a focus to these conflicts. Thus he divided the story into five parts and based them on incidents of isolation and intrusion. These divisions have a perfect symmetry that is encountered often in the works of Hawthorne but seldom in those of Faulkner. The contrast between Emily and the townspeople and between her home and its surroundings is carried out by the invasions of her home by the adherents of the new order in the town. Each visit by her antagonists is a movement in the overall plot, a contributing element to the excellent suspense in the story, and a crisis in its own particular division of the story.

In youth Emily is not wholly separated from her somewhat sympathetic environment. In later life, however, she withdraws more and more until her own death again exposes her to the townspeople. In part one there is one invasion: after several notifications, the Board of Aldermen enter her home in a futile effort to collect her taxes. The second part describes two forced entrances into her isolation, both of them caused by a death. Four men cover her lawn with lime and break open her cellar door to sprinkle lime there, hoping to stop a terrible odor—though they are not aware that it is caused by the rotting corpse of her poisoned lover; the burial of her dead father, the purpose of the second intrusion, is accomplished only after three days of persuasion.

The inviolability of Miss Emily's isolation is maintained in the central division, part three, in which no outsider enters her home. Her triumph is further revealed in this part when she buys the arsenic without telling what she plans to use it for. Like the second part, the fourth contains two forced entrances. The Baptist minister calls upon Miss Emily to chide her for the disgrace to the town caused by her affair with the Yankee Homer Barron; and a letter from the rebuked minister's wife causes the second intrusion, a visit from her relations in Alabama. The symmetricalness of the story is rounded out in the fifth part when the horde comes to bury a corpse, a Miss Emily no longer able to defy them.

This structural pattern, unnoticed in any of the previous analyses of this story, makes "A Rose for Emily" as symmetrical as *The Scarlet Letter*, with the platform scenes at beginning, middle, and end. Faulkner has made the form a perfect vehicle for the content. At the center of the story is the indomitableness of the decadent Southern aristocrat, and the enclosing parts reveal the invasion of the aristocracy by the changing order.

Watkins, Floyd. "The Structure of "A Rose for Emily"" *William Faulkner*, Facts On File, 1998. *Bloom's Literature*, [online.infobase.com/Auth/Index?aid=100535&itemid=WE54&articleId=6658](https://online.infobase.com/Auth/Index?aid=100535&itemid=WE54&articleId=6658).

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