All Eyes On Miss Emily
An Analysis of Southern Society through a Feminist Perspective in William Faulkner’s “A Rose For Emily”

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Abstract

This essay investigates how Southern society functions during the latter part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in America. This is done by looking for signs of patriarchy, religion and its influence, and also at the expectations on women in the story “A Rose For Emily”, which takes place in Jefferson, Mississippi.

Patriarchy, religion and expectations on women are visible through the analysis of the protagonist Miss Emily’s relationship to her father, her relationship to her lover Homer Barron and when she is on her own at the end of her life. Furthermore, the townspeople are the narrators in this story and how they treat and view Miss Emily in the three examined parts of her life represents how the American South functions. Also, the analysis is done with a feminist theoretical perspective.

Through the analysis, the conclusion is made that the South is a very patriarchal and sexist society. Men are considered to be the superior sex and rule over women. Because of the Puritan religion, women live in an oppressive environment and live very strict lives. For Southern women, marriage is a must if they want to survive both socially and financially.
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Introduction

No matter what society we live in, people will judge and react to our actions according to the social norms that exist in that particular society. In William Faulkner’s story “A Rose For Emily”, published in 1930, the protagonist Miss Emily’s actions are constantly judged by the townspeople in Jefferson, Mississippi. The aim of this paper is to examine what type of society Miss Emily lives in and this will be done by looking for signs of patriarchy, religion and its influence in the society, and also what is expected of a woman in the American South in terms of behaviour and actions.

Firstly, a theoretical background to feminist literary theory and criticism will be given and secondly, the analysis will be presented where Miss Emily and her relationship to her father will be analysed, followed by Miss Emily and her relationship to her lover Homer Barron. Lastly, Miss Emily’s actions and appearance when she is on her own without any man will be analysed. The way the townspeople treat and view Miss Emily represents how the American South functions, and by looking for signs of patriarchy, religion and expectations on women, the social norms that exist in the South will be visible. Hopefully, it will also explain why the townspeople sometimes are positive towards and approving of Miss Emily, and why they sometimes view her negatively and act against her. I claim that the townspeople approve of Miss Emily when she follows Southern society’s norms for women and they disapprove of her and view her negatively when she acts and lives in ways that go against those norms.

In addition, in this context it is important to point out that Miss Emily lives during the latter part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The narrators in this story are the many townspeople, probably also various generations of people. Also, it is essential to point out that the townspeople tell Miss Emily’s story after her death, and they construct the order of the plot which might not coincide with how the events actually occur in Miss Emily’s
life. The plot structure is non-chronological with many flashbacks and together with the many narrators the causality is disrupted. Faulkner’s story is very complicated and a full explanation and conclusion of how the complex American South functions will not be possible.

**Theoretical background**

As already mentioned, the theoretical perspective chosen for this paper is feminist literary theory and criticism. To begin with, in her book *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction*, Pam Morris enlightens the fact that one is able to see a social reality in literature, in this case in “A Rose For Emily”, and it can give the reader an understanding of how a “society works to the disadvantage of women” (7). Furthermore, in his book *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Peter Barry explains that some feminist critics examine how women are represented in literature written by both males and females and they also try to challenge these images of women (134). In addition, other feminist critics observe the power relations that exist in literature which often represent real life and where patriarchy often can be found (Barry 134). Also, Barry claims that some feminists “raise the question of whether men and women are “essentially” different because of biology, or are socially constructed as different” (134). This paper will discuss feminist literary theory and criticism in the three above mentioned areas.

First of all, in her book *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Toril Moi discusses Sandra M. Gilbert’s and Susan Gubar’s feminist literary theory from their book *The Madwoman In The Attic* (57). According to Moi, Gilbert and Gubar claim that the images of women and femininity that can be found in 19th century literature are to a great extent male fantasies, where “the ideal woman is seen as passive, docile and above all selfless creature” and is then often “assumed to be a vision of angelic beauty and sweetness” (57). However, if a woman does not live up to the ideal she is seen negatively as a monster, a woman who acts how she wants, prioritizes herself
and “who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her”, or at least attempts to do so (57).

In addition, Morris explains that the representation of women as either angels or monsters is a way for men to keep women in a subordinate position and to view them, as Simone de Beauvoir calls it, as “the second sex” (14). Also, according to Morris, de Beauvoir claims that a woman is everything a man is not and is therefore secondary and is termed “the Other”. The man is the norm and is seen as positive, whereas the woman is man’s opposite and therefore negative (14). Moreover, Morris clarifies that de Beauvoir believes that women are not allowed to construct themselves a confident self-identity because they are the Other, and men therefore also give negative and reverse qualities to women, for instance the man is rational and the woman is emotional and being rational is better than being emotional (14). In addition, Morris points out that de Beauvoir also claims that men feel that they can project their dreams, fears and ideals onto the Other, where the woman develops a dual and deceiving image as either pure and good or as corrupted and evil (14-15). Also, since men are the norm their views and illusions of the world, women and femininity are constructed as reality and therefore women also view other women in the way that men do, and thereby accept the picture of women as the Other men have created (Morris 14-15). Morris explains that de Beauvoir believes that many women “still dream through the dreams of men” (qtd. in Morris 15).

Furthermore, Morris discusses the Anglo-American feminist Kate Millett’s theory and points out that Millet examined the works of some highly respected male authors (15). Through the examination, Morris also explains, Millet discovered that “patriarchal power is maintained and exercised by means of men’s control over the sexual relationship” (15). In addition, Morris also clarifies that Millet eventually concluded that women are continuously imaged in degrading ways in literature as for instance virgins, whores, pure or licentious
because men in that way can maintain their sexual dominance over them (15). According to Morris, Millet believes that these images of women exist to “justify male sexual authority” (15).

Moreover, Morris explains that these misrepresentations of women as discussed above resulted in a number of female stereotypes that can be found in literature besides the angel and the monster (33). For instance, there is The Temptress, a licentious seductress with bad morals that needs to be punished and she is a reflection of men’s fears of losing dominance over the woman during sex (33). Also, one is able to find The Weaker Vessel, a woman who depends on a man because knowledge and creativity belongs to the males, and they use those claims as a way of keeping women subordinate and dependent on them (Morris 34). In addition, there is also The Perfect Woman, a good woman whose virtues are chastity, obedience and purity and is either married or is a maid and represents male honour and is in men’s possession (Morris 24 & 34). Lastly, there is The Virago, a woman who is seen as threatening to men because she is unattractive and does not want to be submissive to them, and she therefore has to be craving a man and has to be punished for it (Morris 34).

Furthermore, Morris discusses Sigmund Freud, and she believes his theory can possibly provide an answer to why men become the dominating sex and women the submissive sex and how patriarchy develops psychologically (110). First of all, Morris’ interpretation of Freud’s theory is that the first person a child begins to love is the mother because they have had a bodily relationship during the pregnancy, and to be able to create a self-identity the child needs to separate itself from its mother (110). For the little boy the separation from his mother creates an Oedipal complex, where the little boy realizes that not everybody has a male reproductive organ and fears castration and punishment from his father because the boy still has a desire for the mother and her body (Morris 96). The boy is then forced to suppress his feelings and instead identify with his father who has authority and “in so doing the son
enters into the paternal heritage: when he is big like his father he can hope for a woman of his own and the authority to possess her” (Morris 96). So, men’s idea of dominance over women is inherited from generation to generation according to Morris’ interpretation of Freud’s theory.

Accordingly, the little girl’s situation looks different. Morris explains that Freud believes that the little girl comes to the conclusion that she has no male reproductive organ at all and blames her mother for it, which makes the little girl direct her love towards the father instead and in that way she “assumes the “normal” passive feminine sexuality, desiring the father to give her a baby as a substitute for a penis” (97). So, according to Morris, Freud claims that women create their own subordinate position during their childhood.

Moreover, the view on how men and women are different in terms of sex and gender and what that means has been debated for years. To begin with, one needs to define the difference between sex and gender. Moi explains that Gilbert and Gubar claim that the genders feminine and masculine are “patterns of sexuality and behaviour imposed by cultural and social norms”, and male and female means the biological and sexual difference (Sexual/Textual Politics 64).

In addition, throughout history people have discussed and studied the biological differences between men and women and how they relate to each other. In her book Sex, Gender, and The Body, Toril Moi discusses Thomas Laqueur’s theory and he claims that from ancient time and until the 15th century people believed in a one-sex model, which means that men and women are thought not to be biologically different at all and that females just have a reversed order of the male reproductive organ (10). This idea of the one-sex model creates hierarchy between the man and the woman, where the man because he has a visible organ becomes the superior sex and the one-sex model was also used as a way of justifying the
monotheistic God’s choice for creating the man first and the woman later and why the man should be in control of the woman (10-11).

Also, Moi explains that Laqueur believes that there was a shift to a more scientific two-sex model during the 18th and 19th century (Sex, Gender, & the Body 11). Moi also discusses doctor Walter Heape’s theory, and according to him the two-sex model explains that men and women indeed are biologically different, complementary and can therefore not be equal to each other at all, and the man should therefore still be socially in control of and above the woman (11). Moi illuminates the fact that at this point science instead of religion explained why women should be submissive to men and does not like the idea of either of the sex-models, because both the models view sex as pervasive, as if one’s biological sex saturates the entire individual and determines how the individual behaves and thinks (11-12).

Furthermore, Moi explains that this pervasive image of sex had the result that certain activities acquired a sex, where for instance childcare is female and heroic adventures belong to the male (Sex, Gender, & the Body 12). Everything that is female is also feminine and everything male is masculine and with the pervasive image of sex, heterosexuality is the only sexuality that can exist (12). In addition, Moi points out that the pervasive image of sex gave rise to biological essentialism and determinism in the 19th century, which means that there is no difference between sex and gender (14-15). However, Moi claims that feminists have fought to change this interpretation and explains that there indeed is a difference, and that all women are not feminine and that women can also be masculine etc. (14-15).

According to Moi, an example of a biological determinist is Professor W.K Brooks who in his book The Law of Heredity, published in late 19th century, claims that the ovum in the female gives her certain characteristics and the same goes for the sperm cells in the male and the social differences between the two sexes have to come from their biological difference (Sex, Gender, & the Body 15-16). In addition, Moi explains that Professor Brooks believes
that men are equipped with a brain that is rational and can discover new things and work scientifically, while females’ brains are not suitable for logical thinking or reflection and instead handles the ordinary, such as social customs or everyday activities (16-17). As Moi understands it, Brooks claims that “women preserve the old, men discover the new: the ovum is conservative, the male cell progressive” (17). Moi clarifies that what Brooks means is that social ideals and norms are created from and are justified by biological facts, where the female then becomes passive and conservative and the male is seen as active and progressive. He also believes that the man is scientifically proven to be the superior sex (19-20).

Furthermore, Moi points out that Gilbert and Gubar claim that it is men who create the ideas of what the word “feminine” means during the 19th century and charge it with certain social ideals which women then are taught to believe are normal and should be reached, however, “a woman who refuses to conform [to the social ideals] can be labelled both unfeminine and unnatural” (Sexual/Textual Politics 64). Lastly, Moi also discusses the feminist Gayle Rubin and her essay “The Traffic in Women”, published in 1975, and explains that Rubin believes that gender only consists of “oppressive social norms” in every society (Sex, Gender, & The Body 24). Gender, feminine or masculine, according to Moi are to Rubin social norms that exist only to accept the sexual difference between men and women and it is specifically oppressive to women (24). Rubin as a feminist, Moi clarifies, also of course rejects biological determinism and claims that it is the biological “raw material”, men and women’s sexual difference, which in a social process is created into gender and what becomes feminine and masculine gender is then accepted but also becomes oppressive (23-24).
Miss Emily and her relationship to The Father

In this section, Miss Emily and her father will be analysed where Southern society’s norms and what is considered accepted behaviour for women will be visible. To begin with, Miss Emily and her father have a special relationship to one another since Miss Emily does not have a mother. They are viewed both as high class people, but also as outsiders amongst the townspeople:

We had long thought of them as a tableau; Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a sprawled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the backflung 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. (Faulkner 302)

The townspeople believe that Miss Emily and her father have a perfect father and daughter relationship during her young years, where her father is the ruler. Naturally, the image of Miss Emily and her father being a tableau where the father is positioned in front of Miss Emily, holding a horsewhip and described as a serious man and Miss Emily depicted as an innocent and small girl is an evident sign of patriarchy in the story. The horsewhip symbolizes power and control, and the fact that Miss Emily’s father turns his back on a lady indicates that he is in control of her. This echoes Morris’ definition of the term patriarchy as a social order where men are the dominant sex and their interests are considered to be more important and better than women’s interests and therefore women become victims of male oppression, and are expected to be obedient and passive (4). Certainly, Miss Emily is a victim of oppression while standing in the background of her father and has only him to look up to in the family.

Furthermore, the townspeople remember Miss Emily as slender and in white clothes and the colour white symbolizes purity and virtue in the South which is seen to be positive
qualities. In her article “Analysis of The Changing Portraits in "A Rose For Emily”’, Xie Qun points out that the image of Miss Emily as slender and in white represents “the virginal quality young women are expected to have” in the South (67). In addition, Miss Emily as described in her young years resembles the literary stereotype The Perfect Woman and is a maid whom the father is in possession of. Miss Emily as The Perfect Woman upholds the Grierson family’s honour by being pure and obedient. Also, as Moi explains that Gilbert and Gubar believe, Miss Emily as a passive and selfless female is a vision of beauty and is a fantasy image her father wants to preserve. In addition, Miss Emily displays signs of Morris’ interpretation of Freud’s idea of the female Oedipal complex, and since she has no mother at all she must then direct her love towards her father instead, obviously then learning and accepting the submissive role she has in their family. In the image of the tableau, the father is the active and progressive one and Miss Emily as the woman preserves the old tradition of purity, as Moi explains that the biological determinist Professor Brooks believes. So, clearly the townspeople approve of Miss Emily’s submissiveness to her father and her deference towards him. As Morris clarifies, Freud believes that the male dominance and female submissiveness is passed on from one generation to another, and it is then no surprise that the townspeople approve of it since patriarchy evidently is prevalent in the American South. In conclusion, the father is the dominant leader in the family and when Miss Emily obeys him and is in his control she is accepted in the South, depicted positively and is seen to be an exemplary woman.

Additionally, in her article “Who Makes A Devil out of a Fair Lady? - An Analysis on The Social Causes of Emily’s Tragedy in “A Rose For Emily”, Du Fang claims that fathers in Southern society are the dominators and that daughters have no other option but to obey them (20). Also, according to D. Fang, Miss Emily’s father’s dominance, so called patriarchal chauvinism, is a social norm in the South and women’s submissiveness to men is a must and
an ideal that is not to be questioned or challenged (20). So undoubtedly, Miss Emily is described positively by the townspeople in the memory of her and her father together because she is living the Southern ideal life as a young girl and she is the ideal woman - passive, pure, obedient and as Morris claims de Beauvoir calls it, the Other.

As Miss Emily grows older, one of her father’s unusual decisions makes the townspeople question both of them. First of all, the fact that Miss Emily’s father does not let her get married to anyone seems to upset the townspeople. Clearly, a woman of Miss Emily’s class should marry young so someone else can provide for her, but the fact that Miss Emily’s father goes against that Southern norm makes the townspeople blame both of them and consider them to be aristocratic outsiders in the town. As D. Fang explained above, a father dominating over his daughter is normal in the South, but the extent of dominance Miss Emily’s father has over her that he even denies her marriage makes the townspeople react and question Mr Grierson and his acts.

Interestingly, the townspeople also seem to point out Miss Emily, the woman, as being the cause of her not marrying, even though her father is the one who controls her every move and keeps suitors away with his powerful horsewhip. As Morris explains, Millet believes that males want to dominate over women’s sexuality, and with the horsewhip Miss Emily’s father controls her sexuality so she can stay pure and away from suitors who can possibly ruin this ideal image of her. Also, Qun explains that the father evidently does not care about Miss Emily’s emotions when controlling her to this extent (67). So to conclude, by not letting Miss Emily get married and keeping her in the house, she and her father are seen as an abnormal family amongst the townspeople because they, especially her father, go against the Southern norm of not letting Miss Emily get married which evidently is not acceptable behaviour.

In addition, in her essay “A Rose for “A Rose for Emily”, Judith Fetterley discusses the townspeople’s relationship to Miss Emily. She points out that Miss Emily’s status as an
aristocratic lady, which probably is one of the things her father is trying to protect by denying her suitors, makes the townspeople in Jefferson “impose a particular code of behaviour on her” and if Miss Emily does not follow this code the townspeople feel that they can question her and speak of her negatively (37-38). So, when Miss Emily is denied marriage, she is the one being blamed for not following the code of behaviour the townspeople expect of her as a lady and she is therefore considered not to be following the Southern norm of finding a man to marry her.

Some time after Miss Emily is denied marriage, her father dies and the townspeople’s admiring view of Miss Emily largely fades when she expresses some unreasonable behaviour and a woman who acts like that cannot be looked up to:

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; 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. (Faulkner 302)

Because Miss Emily does not get married, the townspeople find no reason to look up to her anymore. Since Miss Emily’s father prevents her from marrying anyone, she is left alone and also poor after his death. Of course, the townspeople are glad to see Miss Emily in such a state, an aristocratic woman downfallen, which comes from the fact that she does not follow the custom of marrying because she was not allowed to by her father. Miss Emily is a woman whom the town looks up to because of her high class, and when she does not carry the
aristocratic tradition forth as she should do in the townspeople’s eyes, she is instead “humanized”, put down to earth and pitied. This negative attitude towards Miss Emily here is again a sign of patriarchy in the South since Miss Emily now has no man to provide for her anymore, and a woman in the South should evidently not earn her own money or live alone without a man.

As Moi explains, the idea of biological determinism dominates in the 19th century and many activities are seen as either female or male and working, earning money and owning a house is something men do and women have no business in those areas. Therefore a woman, the Other, needs a man to take care of her and give her a home. So to conclude, the townspeople pity Miss Emily because she does not live up to the expectations of finding another aristocratic man for herself, the only one who the townspeople mean can restore Miss Emily’s value and continue to uphold her role as a lady.

Furthermore, Miss Emily’s reaction to her father’s death and her choice not to cooperate with the townspeople makes them go against her even more. Naturally, Miss Emily’s isolated upbringing with her father has resulted in her becoming a very private person and with little contact with the rest of the townspeople. Therefore, Miss Emily’s decision to want to keep her father’s dead body comes as no surprise, since she probably still desires to live in the past because she is used to her father being strict and controlling. He is also practically the only family she has had. Clearly, Miss Emily is used to her isolated life and knows of nothing else and so giving up her father, the only man that took care of her and ever cared for her is difficult and as a result she enters a state of denial of him passing away. In addition, the townswomen’s arrival at Miss Emily’s front door is a women’s social custom, but not a custom to Miss Emily and therefore she rejects them because they are invading her privacy. Because of her decision not to cooperate with the townspeople Miss Emily is depicted negatively as emotionless and “usual”, which can be interpreted as dull and
degraded. The behaviour Miss Emily displays as a way of dealing with her loss is not accepted in Jefferson and the townspeople pity her for it.

Also, Qun explains that it is Mr Grierson’s strict dominance over his daughter and his limitation of her freedom that results in Miss Emily denying his death and her refusing to give up his body (67). Because Mr Grierson is all Miss Emily has, she isolates him and herself in her house after he passes away (Qun 67). In conclusion, the townspeople pity Miss Emily because of her odd behaviour, which is a result of her father’s overprotective dominance. Both Miss Emily’s behaviour and the father’s overprotection and isolation of Miss Emily are in the townspeople’s eyes behaviours that go against Southern family norms.

In addition, since the women fail to reach out to Miss Emily they force the men in Jefferson to solve the situation. First of all, the townswomen call for backup to try to talk to Miss Emily and to let them bury her father, and since the first attempt with a group of women fails many others become involved in her case, interestingly more men. Of course, ministers and doctors in Jefferson manage to make Miss Emily give up her father’s dead body and make her have a breakdown. As Morris explains, de Beauvoir claims that men are considered to be rational while women are weaker and emotional and as in this case the men take control over the weaker second sex, which is Miss Emily. Also, the ministers and doctors are evidently male in the South and as Moi clarifies, the biological determinist Professor Brooks believes it is men who are logical, rational and intelligent and are therefore suited to work with medicine and theology, not women. Interestingly, the minister and religion in general must have great influence in Jefferson since the minister is called amongst the last resources in town for help. In her article “Working Through Faulkner’s A Rose For Emily – on Character and Character Portrayal”, Jie Fang claims Puritanism dominates in the South, and “together with the patriarchy convention and old moral value” women live morally strict, controlled and oppressive lives in the South (106). So, the church has large insight in
people’s social lives and the church’s interference in people’s lives is both allowed and counted on.

So to conclude, when the women are not strong enough together to make Miss Emily stop her inappropriate behaviour, powerful men instead take control and make Miss Emily give up, which means it is mainly men who make things happen. This is again a clear sign that men rule in the South and that religion has high influence in people’s social lives.

**Miss Emily and her relationship to Homer Barron**

In the following section, Miss Emily’s relationship to her lover Homer will be analysed where Southern society’s norms again are be visible through the way the townspeople react to and act against their relationship. To begin with, the townspeople are pleased to see that Miss Emily has a new gentleman in her life, until a revelation makes them change their mind:

> 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 . . . 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. (Faulkner 304)

Of course, Miss Emily’s relationship to Homer Barron becomes the talk of the town and the townspeople at first react positively towards them. First of all, when Homer is new in Jefferson the townspeople evidently do not know much about the newly arrived Northerner, and they seem to approve of Miss Emily and him dating even though they are from two very different social classes. In her article “Faulkner’s A Rose For Emily”, Elizabeth Carney Kurtz explains that because Miss Emily’s father did not allow her to date and marry when she was younger, Miss Emily now accepts that Homer is from another social class because she
probably desires a man and a family (40). In addition, in their essay “The Civil War and Its Consequences”, Edward L. Ayers and Bradley C. Mittendorf explain that after the American Civil War, which ended in 1865, Southern society changed both economically and socially and the pre-war tension that existed between the North and the South had probably eased off a bit (111). That is a possible answer to why the townspeople approve of Miss Emily and Homer dating, even though she is an aristocrat and he is a day-labourer. The townspeople probably hope they will marry so a new man can provide for and take care of Miss Emily. Interestingly, the narrator’s tone switches to a more positive and sympathetic one when Emily chooses to engage in finding herself a man and future provider, something the townspeople want her to do and seem to expect of her. Since the woman is, as Morris explains de Beauvoir calls it, the Other, the townspeople view Miss Emily positively here because she has a man by her side now. In conclusion, when Miss Emily begins to date Homer she is viewed more positively as she is now acting in a way that is expected of her, since she as a woman should not be on her own and needs a man to take care of her.

However, the revelation from Homer makes the townspeople instantly view them as a scandalous couple. Evidently, when Homer comes forth with the statement that he prefers men and does not seek marriage, the narrator switches to a belittling tone towards Miss Emily again. Whether Homer prefers men sexually or only socially one cannot tell, only that he is not interested in marrying Miss Emily. As Moi explains, the pervasive image of sex during the 19th century claims heterosexuality is the only sexuality that is considered to be normal and allowed. Because the South is so conservative and religious, the townspeople therefore react to Homer’s statement of male interest whether it is sexually or only socially, and to the fact that he is not interested in marrying Miss Emily. Also, in his book *Faulkner’s Short Fiction*, James Ferguson explains that Faulkner very often wrote about complicated love
relations in his short stories and seldom does the reader find a heterosexual relationship where two lovers are only devoted to each other (69).

Consequently, Miss Emily is again pitied and the townspeople seem at the same time to be bothered by the fact that Miss Emily still keeps her head high and does not care that people think her behaviour is inappropriate, that is dating a man that has explained that he has no intention of marrying her. As Moi explains, Gilbert and Gubar claim that a woman who cares about herself and tries to reject the submissive role she is expected to live up to is viewed negatively as a bad woman. In addition, from the townspeople’s perspective Miss Emily expresses strength while riding in the buggy with Homer and it clearly bothers the townspeople since a woman in the South should not express qualities that are typically male or be proud of a relationship that will not end in marriage, something Miss Emily desperately needs, according to the townspeople. Also, as Moi explains, de Beauvoir believes that a woman is not allowed to construct a confident self-identity and be proud of herself. The townspeople are therefore bothered by Miss Emily’s pride. In addition, in his article “Another View of Faulkner's Narrator in “A Rose For Emily”, Michael L. Burduck believes that it is often the women in Jefferson who are the narrators and tell Miss Emily’s story and “in the eyes of these flowers [ladies] of Southern femininity, Emily Grierson becomes a stain on the gown of Southern womanhood” (Burduck). So, a woman is not allowed to be proud of herself or date a man that will not marry her. The behaviour Miss Emily expresses is indeed not appropriate for women in the South.

Furthermore, the description of Homer as holding his whip, cigar, reins and hat are all items that symbolize Southern masculinity, strength and control. Interestingly, Homer here resembles Miss Emily’s father by holding a whip which symbolizes control again. As Morris explains, Freud claims women often develop an Oedipal complex and Miss Emily probably still suffers from the complex during her adult life and obviously then desires a man similar to
her father. However, Homer is a Northerner and his false act of trying to portray himself as a rich man of high class in the South is obvious to the townspeople by now, but it is still Miss Emily who is mostly being blamed and looked down on because she is the woman. Evidently, since Homer is a man and a Northerner it is acceptable that he is different and prefers men in the South, but it is not accepted for Miss Emily to engage in a relationship with this different man because she is a Southern woman, and the South is then apparently more socially conservative than the North. Also, as Moi interprets the biological determinist Professor Brooks’ ideas, “women preserve the old, men discover the new: the ovum is conservative, the male cell progressive” (Sex, Gender & The Body 17), where the biological fact that women have an ovum is used to defend certain social norms where the female becomes the passive and conservative sex, and the male because he has sperm cells becomes the active sex who is allowed to progress and live beyond the rules. So, women in the South have to act according to Southern tradition, but men and Northerners are allowed to act beyond it.

To summarise, their relationship is at first approved since it is better for Miss Emily to date Homer than no man at all, but they quickly become a problem after Homer’s statement and Miss Emily is again a bad woman in the townspeople’s eyes. Clearly, it is acceptable for men and Northerners not to follow Southern society’s norms, but when Miss Emily does so she is instantly pitied and is seen as a corrupt woman. Ferguson explains that Faulkner’s stories often deal with individuals who struggle in the society they live in, and “the conflicts between the needs of selfhood and the imperatives of the social order“ is very obvious if one looks at Miss Emily and her life in Jefferson (158). Evidently, the South is a difficult society to live in socially, and Miss Emily becomes a victim of oppression in Jefferson because she as a woman is not allowed to have a relation with a man like Homer – potentially homosexual and not interested in marriage, which according to the townspeople goes against Southern tradition.
Miss Emily chooses to continue her relationship with Homer Barron no matter what the townspeople say and think, a choice that results in the entire town trying to end their inappropriate relationship:

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 . . .

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. (Faulkner 304-305)

Miss Emily keeps on her living with Homer, which makes the townswomen again try to take action against her. Interestingly, after being forced to watch Miss Emily’s relationship to Homer go on for a while now the townswomen in specific raise their voices and begin to speak negatively of Miss Emily – her being a scandal and a bad role model. As the townswomen have been indoctrinated in Southern society’s norms while growing up, they take action against what they learned is unfitting behaviour for a woman. As Morris explains, de Beauvoir claims that because men’s view of the world, females and how it functions is the accepted one, women learn to view other women in the same way that men view them. The reason why the ladies in Jefferson react strongly to Miss Emily’s relationship is because they have been taught that Miss Emily’s type of relationship is inappropriate. Also, D. Fang explains that because of the ruling Puritan religion, a Southern woman is forced to stay pure until marriage and “any active desires or behaviours concerning sex were regarded as degradation or corruption” (21).

Even though the townswomen are not entirely sure that Miss Emily has a sexual relationship, the possibility of it and the determined fact that their relationship is not leading to marriage makes them want to put an end to it. Also, the women in Jefferson “at last” (an indication of that it is possibly a male narrative voice speaking, as men this time “did not want
to interfere” (Faulkner 304-305) and is pleased that the women take action against Miss Emily) call the Baptist minister to speak to Miss Emily, clearly with no luck and then Miss Emily’s relatives are called to come and try to resolve the situation. The town Jefferson is a very established community with deeply rooted traditions, and when someone like Miss Emily acts against the traditions the townspeople as a unified force take action against what they assume is a threat that lives around them (D. Fang 22). That is the reason why so many people in Jefferson become involved in Miss Emily’s relationship.

Also, again the idea of biological determinism is evident in the South where the male Baptist minister is the one who has knowledge and is educated and the women are restricted to dealing with and discussing the social problems that occur. In her article “Gender and Authorial Limitation in Faulkner’s “A Rose For Emily”, Renee R. Curry explains that the women in Jefferson have a social curiosity concerning Miss Emily’s life, while the men prefer to keep their distance from her (Curry). In addition, it also seems as calling the male minister again is a last resort, an indication that the South indeed is a highly religious society and that the Protestant church has great influence on both the townspeople and the activities going on in Jefferson, since the church is allowed to interfere everywhere and is counted on to help in social emergencies such as Miss Emily’s case. J. Fang believes that Miss Emily tries to live her life in a way she wants to which also goes against Southern tradition and the immense involvement in her life by the townspeople and the church probably also affects her emotionally in a negative way (106). Also, Edward L. Ayers and Bradley C. Mittendorf explain that Southerners believed the “powerful South was part of God’s plan for the spread of Christianity and progress” (4). So evidently, the South is a religiously strict society that no one should fight against if they want to be socially accepted in it.

In conclusion, now even the women in Jefferson go against Miss Emily which again is a sign of patriarchy in the South since they reinforce it by acting against Miss Emily and make
her an example of a disgraceful woman. Also, the church and Christianity is a large part of Southern society since the church can take action against what the townspeople view as inappropriate relationships and behaviour, ideas that probably come from the church in the first place. Homosexuality, relationships that do not end in marriage and relationships with potentially homosexual people, are ideas of inappropriate living in the South. Practically everybody is working against Miss Emily in Jefferson by now, trying to make her understand the Southern social error of her ways.

**Miss Emily on her own**

In the following section, Miss Emily purchasing poison at the druggist’s along with her receiving a visit by the Aldermen regarding her taxes will be analysed. Again, Southern society’s norms are visible through the way the men interact with Miss Emily. To begin with, Miss Emily’s attempt to buy poison results in a silent power struggle between the sexes, but Miss Emily manages to get what she came for:

“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 lighthousekeeper’s face ought to look. “I want some poison,” she said . . . 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. (Faulkner 304)

At the beginning of the meeting, a shift of the male druggist’s attitude towards Miss Emily can be seen. First of all, when Miss Emily decides to go and buy poison she is still dating Homer Barron and the townspeople are still gossiping about them. Therefore, since Miss
Emily still has a man by her side she is depicted as a degraded but still accepted woman in the beginning of the meeting, as thin and in her thirties which means that she is skinnier than most other Southern women and is by now an old spinster. However, when Miss Emily begins to demand the druggist to give her some poison she is depicted as cold with a strained expression on her face and black eyes, all adjectives with negative connotations. Also, Miss Emily’s face is compared to a lighthouse keeper’s face, a simile which might indicate that the druggist sees her as an isolated woman, that she is secretive. Because of Miss Emily’s isolation from the townspeople throughout her life, they perceive her as “mysterious and eccentric” (J. Fang 105). The druggist perceives Miss Emily in a similar way in their meeting here as well. Also, as Morris explains, de Beauvoir claims women are by men represented as having dual sides and these images reflect men’s ideals and fears. So at first, the male druggist remembers Miss Emily as a socially degraded spinster, but accepts her because she as the Other still has Homer by her side.

However, when Miss Emily turns secretive about the poison the druggist remembers her negatively as unattractive because she isolates herself from him. Here, Miss Emily resembles the image of the unappealing and non-telling monster woman that Moi explains about and Gilbert and Gubar claim can be found in literature. Miss Emily rejects being submissive when demanding poison and she buys poison for personal reasons she wishes not to share with the druggist. So to conclude, when Miss Emily enters the druggist’s she is still viewed as an accepted woman and he is respectful towards her, but as soon as she begins to demand poison and does not want to give an explanation to what she is going to use the poison for, she is being secretive towards the druggist and is therefore depicted negatively as a monster. She also refuses to be submissive to the law, which is created by men. So, this is yet another sign of patriarchy in the story, where women should not try to challenge men in areas that they control, in this case the pharmacy.
Interestingly, at the end of the meeting it is instead Miss Emily who gains control. Even though Miss Emily is being secretive the druggist gives her what she demands, namely the poison. He can deny her the poison, but chooses to give it to her out of fear. Also, the male druggist seems to be taller than Miss Emily since he looks down on her, but the amount of strength Miss Emily expresses by tilting her head and staring in his eyes and the fact that the druggist is alone makes him surrender in the silent power struggle between the sexes, break the eye contact and give Miss Emily what she wants. Apparently, the druggist does not know how to handle the situation and surrenders. According to Fetterley, the townspeople in Jefferson have a patriarchal vision of how ladies often act – they are “neither reasonable or in touch with reality”, which enables Miss Emily to use her status as a lady as a tool of power to get away with things, no matter how odd they are (39-41). Also, Burduck explains that the townspeople probably have their suspicions to what Miss Emily plans to use the poison for since they by now know Homer is not interested in marrying her and Miss Emily, now in her thirties, probably does not want to be alone either (Burduck). However, Curry clarifies that because of the image the townspeople have of Miss Emily as a lady, accusing her of anything “would have negated her standing as a lady” and “destroying ladies . . . [is] undesirable in a patriarchy” and they therefore ignore their suspicions (Curry). Now, even though the druggist views Miss Emily as isolated, secretive and unappealing, her role as a lady makes him give her the poison without any further questions. Also, at the end of the meeting Miss Emily partially resembles the literary stereotype The Virago, where she is described as unattractive by the male druggist because she places him in a situation he cannot control, and Miss Emily also refuses to be submissive to him by not explaining what she intends to use the poison for. Miss Emily is in this situation a powerful woman who refuses to play the druggist’s game.

In conclusion, Miss Emily is the one who is in control at the end of this meeting and stands up for herself, and since the druggist is alone without any other men to help him
control the situation, Miss Emily walks away as the winner. Evidently, women in the South are not allowed to act against men or demand their space and are accepted when they have male supervision, and are viewed negatively when they are on their own.

Miss Emily is now old and because she has been a rebel against Southern society’s norms most of her life she is described as an entirely “fallen monument” during the last meeting the townspeople have with her before she dies:

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 . . . 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 . . . 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. She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt . . . [And] her voice was dry and cold. “I have no taxes in Jefferson”. (Faulkner 300)

The old Miss Emily is the mistress of herself and her own house, and the Aldermen view her as a fallen woman because of it. First of all, when the Aldermen come to visit Miss Emily Homer Barron has disappeared many years ago. Now that Miss Emily is completely on her own without any male supervision she is depicted as entirely negative by the men who visit her home, again a sign of patriarchy. When Miss Emily enters the room the men rise to show her respect in her house probably because she is the last aristocratic Grierson. However, she is depicted as little, fat and wearing black clothes, which is the opposite of how she is remembered as a young girl, slender and in white. Since Miss Emily is not living the Southern ideal life anymore, she is therefore described as unattractive and being obese. Also, Miss Emily again resembles the literary stereotype The Virago because she has no male by her side
now, refuses to be submissive, has control of her own house and she is perceived as unfeminine by being obese. Also, according to Ferguson, Faulkner uses isolation and intrusion as a pattern in “A Rose for Emily” to attain cohesion in the story (141). When the Aldermen intrude in Miss Emily’s home to discuss taxes, she isolates herself by displaying an impenetrable front.

Additionally, Miss Emily’s body is described as having been “long submerged in motionless water” (Faulkner 300), a simile which can be interpreted as her being unattractive because she never progressed in life, did not marry and have a family, as the townspeople and Southern society expect of her. She stands still in the same place all her life like the body does in the motionless water. Because Miss Emily is the active one here, stands for what she believes in and takes control of the situation she is described as unappealing and unfeminine. In this scene, Miss Emily is depicted even more negatively than when she visited the druggist. According to Fetterley, Miss Emily is portrayed as grotesque here because she is in control and is violating the pattern of male dominance (34-35). Indeed, the Aldermen view Miss Emily as a fallen woman, but Miss Emily as The Virago is a powerful woman here again as she manages to escape paying her taxes by denying their existence and by not playing the Aldermen’s game. Also, Miss Emily is wearing black, which according to Qun is a colour that represents the “visually transferred dominance in this scene . . . Certainly, she controlled this situation instead of the Aldermen” (68). Clearly, Miss Emily must understand that by playing the role of a madwoman, she will be left alone and does not have to pay taxes. However, since the reader only gets the townspeople’s version of Miss Emily’s story we will never know her own thoughts or her version of her life. Ferguson clarifies that Faulkner often wrote about wronged women in his short stories, where they eventually strike back or revenge others or society for oppressing them and treating them badly (74). Miss Emily is a wronged woman in Jefferson, and by playing the role of a mad lady she vanquishes the Aldermen. In conclusion,
the Aldermen view the old Miss Emily as a fallen woman because she chose not to follow Southern society’s norms and traditions and is in the end pitied and looked down on because of her choices. Undoubtedly, a woman like Miss Emily and her unorthodox behaviour is again not accepted in Jefferson and by living with no man by her side and by not marrying in the American South, all a woman becomes is an outcast.

**Discussion**

Through the analysis, the late 19ᵗʰ and early 20ᵗʰ century Southern society’s norms and the expectations on women that exist in the society are now definitely visible. First of all, patriarchy is prevalent, where men rule in all institutions and fathers rule their families. Fathers are very protective of their daughters and control their social lives to a large extent. Secondly, a woman has to obey her father and be selfless and pure in order to uphold the family’s honour. By also being passive, in contrast to the man who is the active one, she is seen as an exemplary woman in the American South, an ideal every woman should strive for. Also, women’s sexuality is controlled by men and being pure until marriage is a must in the Puritan South.

Furthermore, one of the most important social norms that exist in the South is women marrying at an early age, so a man can take care of them. Women become accepted in the South through marriage, because they then prove they are worthy to be complementary to a man. Also, finding a future husband is the number one priority for young women in the South. So, when Miss Emily’s father denies her marriage by being overprotective of her and breaks that norm, the townspeople view them as an odd family in Jefferson. However, even then Miss Emily is blamed for not marrying, an indication that women’s feelings often are disregarded and that it is easier to blame and accuse a woman, the second sex, than to accuse
a man, especially an aristocratic one. In addition, men are the only ones who can give a woman value by marrying her and a woman that does not marry becomes an outsider.

In the South, a man is the rational, intelligent and working sex who makes things happen while a female has to stay at home and deal with domestic chores and childcare, which are considered suitable for her sex. Women are also restricted to the social realm where curiosity of other people’s business and gossiping are everyday activities for them. The social interest in other people’s business is expected of women in Jefferson and the townswomen are then bothered by Miss Emily’s decision to isolate herself from them, even though she is an aristocrat. Miss Emily, because she is an aristocratic lady has even higher expectations on her than regular Southern women in Jefferson and the townspeople react strongly to her ignorance of those expectations.

As mentioned before, Puritanism is the ruling religion and the South is a very religious society, where the church and the male ministers are allowed to interfere in people’s social lives in Jefferson. When Homer Barron explains he prefers men and has no interest in marrying Miss Emily, both the church and the rest of the townspeople react strongly to their relationship. Homosexuality is due to the religion and the ruling idea of biological determinism unthinkable and shameful in the 19th century conservative South. Because of their inappropriate and possibly premarital sexual relationship, Miss Emily is seen as a corrupt woman and a bad role model. However, the townspeople in Jefferson do not seem to have too much of a problem with Homer being a Northerner or that he and Miss Emily are from two different social classes. It is still better for Miss Emily to have a Northerner, than no man at all. Also, in Southern society, men are allowed to act beyond tradition and rules because they are the superior sex, but women are forced to follow Southern tradition and if they do not follow it they are seen as bad women. The 19th and 20th century South is a
difficult, strict and oppressive society to live in for women and most of the ideas of how women should act and behave comes from the strict Puritan religion.

Lastly, since the men in the South are rational, women need male supervision and dominance and need to be submissive to men in order to be seen as good women. However, Miss Emily chooses to disobey all of those rules in a large part of her life and she is therefore seen as unattractive, unnatural and unfeminine in the last meeting she has with the Aldermen, the total opposite of the ideal woman she is as a young girl.

**Conclusion**

First of all, the short story “A Rose For Emily” seems to be a story that is constructed both to uphold and to display cracks in the Southern small town norm system in Jefferson, Mississippi. The patriarchal conventions in the story are both criticized and upheld within the narrative. Secondly, because the story is told by the townspeople after Miss Emily’s death as previously mentioned, the order of the events that occur are constructed in a certain way by the townspeople and probably constructed so for a reason, just like, for instance, the genders feminine and masculine. There probably is another real order of the events that occur in Miss Emily’s life but the reader will never know the real order since Miss Emily never got to tell her story herself. Therefore, in the eyes of the townspeople, Miss Emily becomes Gilbert’s and Gubar’s monster woman that Moi explains about, who never speaks or reveals her secrets. Because Miss Emily cannot speak for herself, her story is instead told by gossiping townspeople in a patriarchal discourse and society.

Furthermore, one can indeed come to the conclusion that Southern society is highly patriarchal and sexist, where the men set the rules that is to be followed by women, but they themselves can act beyond them. The man is the norm and the woman is the complementary Other. In addition, the ruling Puritan religion has high influence in the society and living a
Puritan life is hard, mainly for women since the expectations on them and the limitations for them are immense. For instance, a woman has to be feminine to be able to call herself a female and she has to stay pure until marriage and is restricted to taking care of the household and children. Of course, to study or work is not suitable for women in the South either, since men believe only they have the capacity for such activities.

Lastly, my claim of why the townspeople at times view Miss Emily positively and at other times view her negatively is confirmed. The reason why the townspeople sometimes approve of Miss Emily and view her in a positive way is because she at that time displays a behaviour that is appropriate for a woman of her status and she is then following Southern society’s norms, according to the townspeople. For instance, they view her positively when she is the ideal woman as a young girl living with her father or when she chooses to engage in finding a future husband for herself. However, the townspeople view Miss Emily negatively when she behaves in ways that go against Southern norms, such as when she refuses to give up her father’s dead body or when she is proud of herself while riding in the buggy with her male-interested love Homer.
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