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Comparative Textual Analysis

¹
“A Rose For Emily” by William Faulkner and “A Good Man is Hard To Find” by
Flannery O’Connor

Though written at different times by different authors, the two short stories present similar and different characteristics. The similarities and differences are evident in the plot, themes, characters, and style. This paper conducts a comparative textual analysis focusing on the similarities and differences ¹ in the two short stories.

The titles in “*A rose for Emily*” and “*A good Man Is Hard to find*” are peculiar. Faulkner adopts a title that has no mention in the story. Additionally, nothing in the plot of the story shows its relation to the selected title. Additionally, the story starts at the death of Emily, and the rest of her life’s story is a flashback by the narrator. The title can be viewed as allegorical, but still, it does not fit into the story. A rose is often used to represent love, affection, and romance, none that is present in the story. Homer may be viewed as a rose in Emily’s life as he opened up her heart to love and made her lively. However, the affection was not reciprocated as Homer preferred to drink with the men and wanted no attachments to any woman. The choice of the title ⁸ “A Rose for Emily” raises questions on its relevance to the story. The tile by O’Connor is adapted from a line in the story by Red Sam. Sam said the words ⁴ “a good man is hard to find” in

her conversation with the grandmother about how the world and people had changed such that it had become very difficult to trust anyone (O'Connor 10). The relevance of the title is seen in the characters of men like the misfit and Bobby, who find pleasure in killing people without probable cause. Additionally, despite the grandmother's plea to the misfit that he was a "good man," he still killed her, proving that indeed a good man is hard to find.

The first similarity between "*A rose for Emily*" and "*A good Man Is Hard to find*" is seen in their style. Both stories incorporate a narration technique that allows the narrator a voice in the story. Faulkner uses two types of narrators. The first is a single voice that starts the story. The second is a group of narrators who mainly talk about the life of the protagonist Emily and her interaction and reputation among the town's people. Both narrators use the first-person voice in a reminiscing manner. According to Sullivan, the narrators in this text act as a mirror, showing the reader the life of the woman little known to them (160). The narrators act as important characters in providing information about the life, family, and death of the protagonist. The narrator in Faulkner's story is not known. Still, from the narration, a reader may argue that the narrators are neighbors who kept watch of the happenings in Emily's life without ever interacting with her. O'Connor uses a third-person narration technique. In this case, the narrator is omniscient in the text. Unlike the narrator in "*A rose for Emily*," the narrator in this story is present on every occasion and knows everything that is happening in the lives of the characters.

The plot of both stories presents differences, especially in relation to the chronology of events. Faulkner's story lacks chronology. The story begins at Emily's death, and then the reader is transported to her life as a teenager before her father's death. The story then moves to her life as a thirty-year-old and then back to her death. The back and forth movement in narration presents a distorted order of events. This shows that the narrator did not know everything about

Emily and only mentioned what could be recalled at the time of narration. Though the chronology of events in the story is scattered and mixed up, there is consistency that makes the story flow (McGlynn 461). On the other hand, O'Connor presents the story from the end and then chronologically leads the reader through the events that led to that end. The part of the story after the end is seen as a flashback of events to notify the reader how the end was achieved (Bloom 59).

The theme of death is a common sight in both texts. In Faulkner's story, the entire plot is developed from the death of the protagonists. Other characters related to the protagonist also die; her father, lady Wyatt, Homer, and Colonel Sartoris. All deaths present new beginnings in the life of the protagonist. When Emily's father dies, she goes out more and gets to meet homer. Lady Wyatt's death makes the people view Emily as mad, just like her dead aunt. Homer's death leads Emily to stay secluded in her house, away from external contacts except for her negro servant. Colonel Sartoris's death leads Emily to have debt obligations that were exempted while he was alive. Lastly, Emily's death brings change to the town for the first time; they all get to enter her house, an almost impossible act when she was alive. The theme of death in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is represented by a tragic event whereby a misfit and his companions shoot and kill the grandmother and her entire family. Before the brutal murder, the grandmother reports seeing what the misfit had done to other people in the papers; this shows that the misfit had gotten involved in other murders, including that of his father, before wiping out the grandmother's family.

Another notable similarity between the stories is the representation of the Negro. Both texts present the Negro as poor and lacking the basic necessities. Faulkner represents the Negro as a servant. The Negro works for Emily and walks in and out of the house with a basket daily as

he goes to the market. The story does not mention anything about his relations or family. The Negro works for Emily from when he is a young man until he ages and starts to show grey hair. It is only after Emily's death that the Negro disappears, never to be seen again. This shows that the presence of the Negro as a character in the text greatly depended on the existence of his employer, and her death takes him out of the picture. O'Connor also represents the Negro as poor and lacking. The first encounter with a Negro in the story is when the grandmother tells John Wesley and June Star about her courtship with Mr. Edgar Atkins Teagarden from Georgia. The suitor would send her watermelons every Saturday embedded with the abbreviations E.A.T, short for his name. When the suitor did not find her at home one day, he left the watermelon at the doorstep, which was later eaten by a nigger when he saw the abbreviations E.A.T (O'Connor 4). Only a poor and hungry person can eat something just because it is written E.A.T. Another case of Negro representation is seen when the grandmother's family encounters a "Pickaninny" in the course of their journey. The nigger stands before a shack, and June Star notes that he does not have britches. The grandmother replies that "little niggers in the country don't have the things like we do," showing that the Negro was not as privileged as the whites (O'Connor 3).

Conclusion

The similarities and differences between the stories help create a form of interrelatedness among the texts. The similarities are evident in the use of the theme of death and the representation of the Negro. Differences are noted in the selection of title, narration, and plot

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