

Disconnection between the Main Character and Society in the Short Story *A Rose for Emily*

Zafi Julia Nur Fadhillah¹, Ramadhina Ulfa Nuristama²
Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya^{1,2}
✉ 03020321086@student.uinsby.ac.id

Abstract:

This research examines how a main character experiences alienation in her life. This research aims to analyze Emily's life, which does not meet society's expectations and cannot adapt to social changes in the short story *A Rose for Emily*. Descriptive qualitative methods were used in this research. The theory used is existentialism, which emphasizes the concept of alienation. In analyzing the data, researchers used library research techniques. After reading the short story *A Rose for Emily* in its entirety, the researcher found six supporting elements that prove the disconnect between Emily and society, where Emily feels isolated or unable to meet society's expectations of her and is also unable to adapt to social changes in her environment. The six supporting elements are the physical condition of Emily's house, Emily's rejection of modernization, refusal to pay taxes, alienation after her father's death, her relationship with Homer Barron, and finally, Emily's hidden death. This research concludes that the short story *A Rose for Emily* depicts alienation and disconnection between the main character and society and the environment, where Emily, the main character, feels isolated when she is unable to accept and adapt to society's expectations and developments, where her life is trapped in the past. Hopefully, this research will be useful and become a reference for future researchers who will analyze literary works that use existentialism theory, especially those that focus on alienation.

Keywords: disconnection; alienation; existentialism; short story

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana seorang tokoh utama yang mengalami alienasi dalam hidupnya. Objek dari penelitian ini yaitu menganalisa kehidupan Emily yang tidak memenuhi ekspektasi masyarakat dan tidak dapat beradaptasi terhadap perubahan sosial dalam cerpen *A Rose for Emily*. Metode kualitatif deskriptif digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Teori yang digunakan yaitu eksistensialisme yang menekankan pada konsep alienasi. Dalam menganalisis data, peneliti menggunakan teknik penelitian kepustakaan. Setelah membaca cerpen *A Rose for Emily* secara keseluruhan, peneliti menemukan enam unsur pendukung yang membuktikan keterputusan hubungan antara Emily dengan masyarakat, dimana Emily merasa terasing atau tidak mampu memenuhi ekspektasi masyarakat terhadapnya dan juga tidak dapat beradaptasi dengan perubahan sosial di lingkungannya. Enam unsur pendukung tersebut yaitu kondisi fisik rumah Emily, penolakan Emily terhadap modernisasi, menolak membayar pajak, keterasingan setelah kematian ayahnya, hubungannya dengan Homer Barron, dan yang terakhir yaitu kematian Emily yang tersembunyi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa cerpen *A Rose for Emily* menggambarkan alienasi dan keterputusan antara tokoh utama dengan masyarakat dan lingkungan, dimana Emily, sang tokoh utama merasa terasing ketika



dia tidak mampu menerima dan beradaptasi dengan ekspektasi masyarakat dan juga perkembangan zaman, dimana hidupnya terperangkap dalam masa lalu. Penelitian ini diharapkan bermanfaat dan menjadi referensi bagi peneliti selanjutnya yang akan menganalisa karya sastra yang menggunakan teori eksistensialisme terutama yang berfokus pada konsep alienasi.

Kata kunci: keterputusan; alienasi; eksistensialisme; cerita pendek

INTRODUCTION

Literary works are works that are produced from someone's imagination. In addition to imagination, literary works can be created based on someone's life experiences; happy or sad experiences can be expressed through literary works. The form of literary works varies; it can be in books, dramas, short stories, and poetry. Through the works displayed and based on imagination or life experiences, the creators of these literary works aim to invite readers or connoisseurs of their works to feel and enter into the imaginations, situations, or experiences that arise.

One of the literary works that people often enjoy is a short story. The short story is a literary work composed of exposition, rising action, conflict, climax, falling action, and resolution, where the short story can be created from the results of someone's imagination, memory, and experience. According to (Sundararaj, n.d.) stated that "There are five main structural features of a short story: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Resolution (or Denouement)." Using a structure, following the rules, and writing correctly will help readers read and understand the flow of the story more easily.

The object of this research is a short story by William Faulkner entitled *A Rose for Emily*. This short story, first published on April 30, 1930, tells the story of a girl named Emily who lives in a fictional town called Jefferson in the South of the United States at the end of the 19th to early 20th century. Every character in a literary work must have different characteristics, so each character has unique characteristics that they show. The story's centre is the life of Emily Grierson, a reclusive woman who becomes alienated from the society around her. Her inability to adapt to social change and meet society's expectations is the essence of her struggles. The character's disconnection from society is a major focus of existentialist literature, especially in the context of alienation, which examines the individual's relationship to their environment and feelings of alienation. This research will analyze Emily's behaviour more deeply, showing her isolation from society

and the outside world. Emily experienced self-isolation and completely closed herself off from the outside world, resulting in her behaving strangely and interacting very little with the townspeople. Emily refused to live a social life like the townspeople. Her foreign behaviour started when she didn't want to pay taxes in the era of the new government, and until her death, it was so secret that the townspeople didn't know about it.

The importance of this research is to understand that social and cultural changes and past trauma resulting in conflict between the past and the present can underlie a person's self-isolation. This research was also carried out to increase insight into an individual's mental condition and past events, which can greatly influence the individual's interactions and behaviour toward society. Apart from that, the short story *A Rose for Emily* also illustrates that society tends to judge people who do not conform to social standards or who behave differently from their expectations. So, this research can provide insight into the negative impact of judgment and prejudice on the lives of judged individuals. Through this research, we can understand the social and psychological implications of isolation and the importance of maintaining healthy relationships between each individual and the community groups in their environment. Research on Emily's disconnection from society is also relevant for literary psychology research, where it can help explore the psychological issues experienced by the character, such as mental disorders, loneliness, and trauma, which can trigger someone to isolate themselves.

There are quite a lot of previous studies that used the short story *A Rose for Emily* as a research object, where these studies used different issues and theories.

The first article is entitled "A Stylistic Analysis of Complexity in William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*". The author analyzed the complexity of style in the short story *A Rose for Emily* using two different theories: the first theory, namely the stylistic analysis approach by Halliday (1985) to analyze sentence structure, and the second theory, namely narrative theory by Lauer et al. (2008) for a macro analysis of the storyline. The author used descriptive qualitative methods in this research. (Abdurrahman, 2016) concluded that "As far as style is a choice, William Faulkner chooses complexity as a device in *A Rose for Emily* to create suspense and to deliver his themes skillfully. Complexity manifests itself in the story folds in many faces, mainly in sentence structure and acts structure as a whole."

The second article is entitled "Character Analysis of *A Rose For Emily*", where the main focus of this research is characterization and symbolism in the short story *A Rose for*



Emily. (Chang & Che, 2016) used characterization and symbolism approach. After doing their research, (Chang & Che, 2016) said, "Through the depiction of the character- Miss Emily, we can see the plot of the story evolve around many conflicts – the conflict between Mr. Grierson and his daughter, the conflict between Miss Emily and Homer Barron, the conflict between Miss Emily and the community of the town, and the conflict between the past and the present." The conclusions made by the researcher include an explanation of Emily's characterization and the symbols related to her.

The third article is entitled "A Psychoanalytic Approach To Teaching Short Story: "A Rose For Emily)". (ÜNSAL, 1966) focused on analyzing how the psychoanalytic approach is applied in teaching and analyzing short stories in the context of English language learning, especially the short story *A Rose for Emily*. The researcher used psychoanalytic theory with three main theories: the Freudian approach, object bond theory, and Lacan's theory. The results of research conducted by researchers using three main psychoanalytic theories, namely, the short story *A Rose for Emily*, reveals societal pressure, a father's authority over his daughter, and past trauma. Using a psychoanalytic approach in teaching literature can help students develop critical thinking about fictional characters from a deep psychological perspective.

Although quite a lot of research has been done on the short story *A Rose for Emily*, most researchers examine the main characters, symbols, use of words, and interpretation of the short story. The research gap is visible when no research uses existentialism theory with a deeper discussion regarding Emily's behaviour, which is not following society's expectations. In contrast, Emily's behavior is the main point of the story, where Emily isolates herself in extreme ways after her father's death. This research will fill that gap by discussing Emily's "strange" behavior that does not conform to society's expectations when she self-isolates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research, entitled Disconnection between the Main Character and Society in the Short Story *A Rose for Emily*, uses the theory of existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre, aiming to analyze the behavior carried out by individuals when experiencing self-isolation. The focus of this research is only on one of several points in existentialism theory, namely alienation.



Existentialism Theory

Existentialism is a philosophical theory that focuses on freedom, responsibility and the meaning of individual life. Existentialism emphasizes that the meaning of life is something that must be formed by the individual herself/himself. The famous philosopher in the theory of existentialism is Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Sartre's famous statement, namely existence precedes essence.

Alienation

Alienation is one of the points in the theory of existentialism, alienation itself means exile. Individuals commit exile when they feel unable to be themselves and unable to act according to society's expectations. Individual behavior that may not be in accordance with society's expectations or not in accordance with social habits, can be due to several psychological things experienced, including feelings of loss of something or someone loved and trauma from a past event. This is as expressed by (Beaver, 2012) in his book entitled *Alienation and Vulnerability in the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, where he stated "Alienation refers to a transfer or exchange of ownership or loss of property."

Apart from feelings about the loss of something or a loved one, self-isolation can also be done by individuals when the individual feels pressure from the surrounding community. (Beaver, 2012) also said that "That alienation is a central condition for the possibility of oppression is significant." When an individual is given hope, the individual will feel that she/he is not free to live her/his life and will feel depressed about what she/he is facing. As an escape, the individual will isolate themselves and limit interactions with other people, because that way, the individual feels free to live their life and feel like they are themselves.

RESEARCH METHODS

Descriptive qualitative method used in this research and applied the existentialism theory that focused on the alienation experienced by Emily resulted in a disconnection between herself and society in the short story *A Rose for Emily*. The researcher expressed the results of the research in the form of a description, where the results of analysis are explained into descriptions of words or sentences obtained from reading, understanding, and analyzing the short story *A Rose for Emily*.

Research Design

This research is qualitative with a description of the research findings interpreted and explained in the form of narrative sentences and paragraphs. The researcher used a case study approach from the short story *A Rose for Emily*, where the short story is the main object of this research. The data collection technique that is suitable used in this research is the close reading technique, namely the researcher reads the short story thoroughly, the researcher starts analyzing the short story according to the research focus, then the researcher explains the results of the analysis.

Research Instruments

The research instruments were the writer or researcher and the short story itself. The researcher conducted a research whose results were obtained from the short story *A Rose for Emily* itself. To determine the validity of the research data, researcher looked again at the existentialism theory that used, specifically at the aspect of alienation contained in this theory. When the data obtained is in accordance with the conditions or points listed in the alienation aspect, then the data is valid and in accordance with the theory applied.

Research Procedure

The research process was carried out in several steps, the steps carried out in the research were:

Research Preparation

- Define the Research Problem: Researcher determined what problem will be studied in more depth regarding a literary work. Researcher examined more deeply the alienation experienced by Emily in the short story *A Rose for Emily* using existentialism theory.
- Conduct a Literature Review: After finding the problem to be studied, the researcher looked for and studied previous research related to the same literary works and theories that will be used in the research. This is done to find gaps and find out whether the problem to be studied has been done before or not.
- Prepare for Analysis: The researcher used the short story *A Rose for Emily* as the main object in this research, then the researcher used a close reading technique and applied existentialism theory to collect data and complete the research.

Data Collection Technique

- Reading the short story: The researcher read the short story *A Rose for Emily* thoroughly to understand the contents of the short story.
- Finding the issue: When the researcher read the entire short story *A Rose for Emily* and understood the storyline of the short story, the researcher then found issues or problems that could be studied in the short story *A Rose for Emily*.
- Collecting the data: After finding an issue or problem that can be studied in the short story *A Rose for Emily*, the researcher collects data that supports the issue or problem using existentialism theory as a reference.
- Describing the results: The researcher explains the data results in the form of narrative paragraphs.

Data Analysis

- Categorized the data obtained according to the topic of discussion, namely the disconnection between Emily and society in the short story *A Rose for Emily*.
- Analyzed the Emily's behaviors which depict her isolation.
- Interpretes and discusses in more depth the data that has been classified.
- Concludes the discussion points obtained from the interpretation of the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This point explains the results of the analysis, namely that it contains six of Emily's behaviors that show her disconnection from society after her father's death. The following behaviors show that Emily refuses to follow the future and developments of the times and prefers to isolate herself away from the outside world. Emily's six behaviors that indicate her isolation are:

Physical Isolation in Her House

But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps-an eyesore among eyesores.

Emily's house is described as a decaying mansion, located far from the town and stands alone without any neighboring houses around it, symbolizing her physical and emotional separation. She rarely leaves her home, and as time goes on, she becomes increasingly reclusive, shutting herself off from the outside world.

Her Resistance to Modernization

The Negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed. Now and then we would see her at a window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear on the streets.

Emily's refusal to adapt to changes in the town shows her disconnectedness from the evolving community. For instance, when the town installs new sidewalks and other modern developments, Emily remains unaffected and does not want to know about developments in modernization in the outside world. Emily only left the house when she was with Homer Barron, and that only happened a few times, after that she locked herself in her house again.

Refusal to Pay Taxes

A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

When the new generation of town officials approaches Emily to collect taxes, she adamantly refuses, claiming that she owes nothing due to a long-ago agreement made by Colonel Sartoris, the former mayor. Her rejection of their demands shows her unwillingness to participate in civic responsibilities, further distancing herself from the town's social order.

Alienation After Her Father's Death

After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man — a young man then — going in and out with a market basket.

After her father died, Emily became increasingly isolated. Because during her lifetime her father had expelled several men who wanted to propose to Emily, so when her father died, Emily lived alone without a partner and only lived with her male servant. This event marked an important turning point in her life, deepening her isolation from society. She even refused to acknowledge her father's death for three days, until finally the townspeople forced her to bury her father's body. This shows the psychological disconnection from reality and social norms that Emily experiences.

Her Relationship with Homer Barron

And, as we had expected all along, within three days Homer Barron was back in town. A neighbor saw the Negro man admit him at the kitchen door at dusk one evening. And that was the last we saw of Homer Barron. And of Miss Emily for some time. The Negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed.

Emily's relationship with Homer was a sign that Emily was starting to be interested in the outside world and perhaps would not isolate herself anymore, but this was not true and did not match the expectations of the townspeople. Even though at the beginning of Emily's relationship with Homer, the townspeople gossiped about the two of them, but eventually the townspeople felt that Emily would return to being a cheerful woman who would not shut herself away. The townspeople's hopes were wrong, this was indicated when someone saw Homer for the last time enter Emily's house through the kitchen door in the afternoon, after which Homer no longer appeared. Instead of building a lasting relationship with Homer, Emily killed Homer and let his corpse sleep with her for years until Emily herself died.

Her Isolation in Death

And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering Negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the Negro.

Not only did Emily shut herself away during her life, but even in death she was still cut off from the town's residents. The townspeople continued to mourn and attended Emily's funeral held by her two female cousins as a matter of human obligation. The townspeople were increasingly shocked by the discovery of a human skeleton which they believed to be Homer Barron's body in the room above Emily's house. This indicates that Emily's extreme confinement was experienced and that very little of Emily's life was known to the townspeople.

CONCLUSION

Some people choose to spend their free time reading literary work, including the short story *A Rose for Emily*. In reading short story, you need to understand the words and the true meaning the author wants to convey. That way, readers will join in the atmosphere created by the author. It is no longer strange to know that short story is often written using its structures and is sometimes difficult to understand, therefore it is necessary to

understand the parts of a short story structure starting from exposition, rising action, climax to resolution. By understanding the structure of a short story, as readers we will have no difficulty understanding the plot of the story.

This research analyzes the short story *A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner through an existentialist theoretical approach, especially the concept of alienation. Emily Grierson, the main character, experiences a strong isolation from the society around her. Overall, this research explains that the isolation experienced by Emily is the result of a clash between society's demands and changes that Emily does not want. Through the theory of existentialism, Faulkner describes how Emily is trapped in social and psychological isolation, which ultimately drives her to take extreme actions in searching for the meaning of life in the midst of emptiness.

REFERENCES

- Abdurrahman, I. B. (2016). A Stylistic Analysis of Complexity in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(4). <https://doi.org/10.7575/aial.v.7n.4p.220>
- Beaver, V. (2012). *Alienation and vulnerability in the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*.
- Chang, W., & Che, Q. (2016). Character Analysis of A Rose For Emily, (Hss), 902–907. <https://doi.org/10.2991/hss-26.2016.147>
- Sundararaj, A. (n.d.). Short Story Structure: The Art of Writing A Great Short Story – Jericho Writers. Retrieved October 16, 2023, from <https://jerichowriters.com/short-story-structure-writing-a-great-short-story/>
- ÜNSAL, A. (1966). Kisa Öykü Öğretiminin Psikanalitik Yaklaşım "a Rose for Emily" (a Psychoanalytic Approach To Teaching Short Story "a Rose for Emily"). *Dil Dergisi*, 72–86. https://doi.org/10.1501/dilder_0000000003
- <https://repositorio.ufsc.br/bitstream/handle/123456789/163604/A%20Rose%20for%20Emily%20-%20William%20Faulkner.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>