

Female Gaze in “a Rose for Emily”

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Abstract: As one of Faulkner's most famous works, “A Rose for Emily” has profound literary value and ideological connotation. This paper will discuss the novel from the perspective of feminist criticism. It will focus on the analysis of Emily's “female gaze”, and analyze the gender, class, ideology and other factors involved in Emily's “female gaze”. This paper will firstly analyze the influence of gender factors on gaze behavior and leads to the concept of “female gaze”. Then, taking Emily’s father’s death as a turning point, this paper will analyze Emily's awakening of female subject consciousness and her psychological flow of sexual characteristics, so as to show a psychological basis of androgyny. Finally, it will analyze the performance of Emily’s “female gaze” and her different gaze attitudes towards different people around her due to social factors.

1. Introduction

“A Rose for Emily” is one of Faulkner’s most famous works. This article shapes the image of a southern woman Emily who was born in a declining aristocratic family, suffering from the erosion of Puritanism and the patriarchal system of the south. It truly reflects the great changes of southern society after the civil war in the United States.

The protagonist Miss Emily is the victim of the traditional Puritan culture in the South with patriarchy as the core. In her teenage years, her father suppressed all her desires and forced her to become the standard image of “Southern lady” in the eyes of the world. Since her father died, she gradually had advanced feminine consciousness. She dared to subvert the suppression of male power and subvert the image of traditional women, but to some extent, she could not get rid of the shackles of tradition and secular. This is her own contradiction and one of the factors that lead to her tragedy.

This paper will focus on female gaze. First of all, the author will introduce the definition of gaze, quoting Sartre's “hell is other people” theory, “the other” theory of Lacan, and Foucault’s power gaze theory to make a comprehensive definition of gaze.

Secondly, it will analyze Emily’s awakening of female consciousness, including the process of her being gazed at by her father in the first half of her life, and the gradual emergence of her androgyny.

Finally, in chronological order, the author will analyze her gaze at her lover, pharmacist, and people in town. And combined with the theory of the feminist film theorist Mulvey and the first feminist movement in the United States, showing the great significance of her gaze behavior.

According to the above analysis, we can draw the conclusion that Faulkner created a female image with a rigid surface and a radical inside. She has androgynous psychology, which makes her to do a lot of abnormal behavior that feudal society people can not understand. All her life, she resisted patriarchy and feudalism with gaze, which is the light of women that can not be buried.

2. Literature Review

“A Rose for Emily” has profound ideological connotations. Many scholars have studied the text from the perspectives of Gothic technique, feminism and psychoanalysis.

In 2014, Forough Barani.etc pointed out that “A Rose for Emily” reflects the construction of female identity in traditional society. At the beginning, Emily was a helpless image who needed to

rely on a man, which was contrary to the feminist idea. But after her father's death, she gradually became distinctive and even eccentric. She did what she wants to do without caring about the opinions of the people around her. In this way, she shows the self-reliance that some feminists think women should show [1].

In 2016, Wei Yanjing proposed that “gaze” is a complex definition in her essay, which involves a series of social factors such as gender, class, culture and ideology. The gaze in the novel includes Emily’s gaze at the pharmacist, small town residents’ gaze at Emily, local government’s gaze at Emily, and Emily’s father’s gaze at his daughter. Different levels of gaze reflect the complex power struggle behind, reflecting the complex mentality of the residents in Jefferson town in the Southern transitional period[2].

In 2019, scholar Yang Hua used queer theory to systematically interpret “A Rose for Emily”. She points out that Emily has androgynous psychological traits and that her gender is fluid. Biological gender does not determine psychological gender. Gender is not a stable identity, and there is no static concept of identity. It’s a challenge to patriarchy and heterosexual supremacy^[3].

In addition, many Chinese and foreign scholars have analyzed the feminism in the article, but few have analyzed Emily’s gaze. This paper aims to analyze Emily’s awakening of female consciousness and the external performance of her female gaze from the perspective of feminist criticism.

3. The Definition of Gaze

Since gaze was introduced into the field of literature, it has become a cultural metaphor. It is not only related to the eyes, but also to social culture, race and gender. Its core meaning is the discipline, control and power behind the gaze. In the aspect of gaze theory, scholars such as Jacques Lacan, Sartre, Foucault, Chen Rong and Zhu Xiaoran have made contributions to the definition of gaze.

Among them, Foucault first connects gaze with power. He points out that power refers to a network of power relations and that each power relation consists of the subject and the object. He also emphasized that power is productive and mobile. The productivity of power means that power can make someone become the paradoxical being of subject and object. The mobility of power means that neither of the two sides of power can hold its subjective or objective status of the subject forever. In some conditions, the subject of power may become the object of power and vice versa^[4].

Gaze can be explained as the projection of the subject’s desire on the object and the realization of the subject’s desire by the object. It is the realization of the object’s desire for the subject that makes the subject’s gaze meaningful. On the other hand, subject and object can be mixed into each other. In some cases, the subject of gaze may become the object of gaze, and the object of gaze may in turn become the subject of gaze.

Gaze is about power. Power works through the gaze. On one hand, the subject of gaze is actually the subject of power. The subject watches the object in order to control and tame it. When we stare at someone, we’re not just looking at them. Instead, we’re controlling them.

On the other hand, the object of gaze is the object of power, and the object is always under the pressure brought by the subject’s gaze.

Gaze involves a range of social factors, such as class, race, gender, ideology and culture.

As for gender, Mulvey points out that “in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female, the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure.” In the patriarchal society, the patriarchal values dominant the society. The male is prior to the female, and the male often has much more privileges than the female. Women often live under the gaze of men and do not have any freedom. If women gaze at men, women will be seen as impolite and aggressive. It seems that “women are doomed to be looked at^[5].”

As for the class, in a hierarchical society, people from the lower class are always watched by those from the upper class, and they have to silently suffer the suffering brought by the upper class. As for race, black people are not considered as good as white people, so they are always being looked at by white people. In “A Rose for Emily”, the gaze also has a rich connotation. It’s not just

about gender, but about hierarchy.

Many famous scholars have studied gaze and made contributions to gaze theory.

The first scholar who makes great contribution to the gaze theory is Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre pointed out that the viewer is active and aggressive. People who are looked at are victims of gaze. For people who are looked at, the gaze of other people is nothing but pressure. When they realize that they are being looked at, in order to please the viewer, they often betray their wishes and internalize the values of the viewers and try to become people that the viewer is satisfied with, which makes the looked-at lose their own subjectivity at last[6].

The power of this gaze is reflected in Sartre's theory of "hell is other people". The three characters test each other, but don't want others to see their own bad nature. Under the pressure of being gazed by others, they have to pretend to be good people. They are hell to each other.

The second scholar of gaze theory was Lacan. Lacan's analysis of the gaze was inspired by Sartre, and there are three points in Sartre's argument that Lacan admired. One is that the gaze is not what I gaze at others, but what they gaze at me. Secondly, gaze is not actually seen, but exists in the imagination of the subject. Third, the gaze indicates that "I" am the existence of "for him". To say that "I" exists "for him" and that "the other" is not really present but produce a split of "I", for I gaze at "me" as a possibility of "the other", and I "see" the gaze. This is Lacan's repeated assertion that "the subject knows that he is gazing at himself"[7]. But this is not a higher gaze, but a self-destructive gaze formed by the collision of different levels.

Another important contributor to gaze theory is Michel Foucault. Foucault first connected power with gaze theory. In his view, "power authorizes one to look: physicians at patients, police at search, and in a patriarchal culture, men to look at women." Foucault presented the medical gaze to explain the power relationship between doctors and patients. And then he expanded his research to the social gaze, which is a kind of surveillance, and he thought surveillance exists at every level of society. Surveillance is an important form of gaze. His theory of gaze includes not only the gaze at eyes, but also the invisible gaze of surveillance. Monitoring emphasizes the invisible control that results from differences in force. Eye-based fixation is closely related to visibility. The subject can gaze at what is visible to the naked eye. The visible gaze and the invisible surveillance are both instruments of power. In addition, gaze involves looking at objects. The opposition of objects is also an integral part of gaze, which is called the opposite gaze[8].

4. The Awakening of Female Consciousness

Emily's awakening of female subject consciousness involves a certain process and psychological basis.

In the first half of her life, she was an object image to be gazed at. After her father died, she took the role of her father and became the role of gazing at others. In the traditional southern old society, women were in a weak position. If Emily maintained her complete female psychology, she would not be able to make a change from being gazed at to gaze at others. Therefore, after her father's death, Emily has a process of psychological gender flow, from "female psychology" to androgyny. At that time, her psychology not only maintained the female delicacy, but also was equipped with male strength.

But this did not mean that she denied her female identity. This androgyny was the evidence of her awakening of female consciousness. Feminism required women to have the same power as men. They opposed the old society's discipline on women's figure and posture. Her changes in appearance and psychology coincided with the feminists' opinion.

4.1 Traditional Male Gaze in Patriarchy

"A Rose for Emily" described the fate of the declining Griersons in the south. Emily's father, old Grierson, was a representative of patriarchal society in the south. Emily lost her mother when she was a child. As the only daughter in her family, she accompanied her father all day long. Although her father's harsh way of upbringing led to her silent, aloof and eccentric character and extremely eccentric temper, Emily, a beautiful young woman, was once loved by many young people.

Unfortunately, in the eyes of her father, no one deserved his noble daughter. As described in the novel: “Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a straddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip. the two of them framed by the back-flung front door[9].” The most important part of American Southern culture was traditional patriarchy culture. Patriarchy determined that women can only be subordinate to men. In the view of patriarchy, “Southern Lady” must be pure. A Southern lady was deprived of her will, lost her decision-making power, and became a vassal of the patriarchy of the family. Emily was a typical victim of this patriarchal culture.

This kind of discipline was a traditional patriarchal gaze. The father has been gazing at Emily. From the father’s perspective, Emily was totally “objectified”. This was similar to Murvey’s interpretation of the operation of power between two sexes. “Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning^[5].” Miss Emily was silent. All her images were imposed on her by her father. Under the pressure of patriarchy, she could only keep the image of her father’s fantasy. Her existence itself has lost its meaning. In the father’s eyes, Emily was just a toy that can be played with at will as well as belongs to him completely.

We can see that Miss Emily lived in the state of being gazed at by her father all her youth, which sowed the seeds for her gazing behavior. She would grow up to be just like her father, to replace him as the gaze person.

4.2 Psychological Basis of Female Gaze

For the Western feminists, the issue of androgyny has always been an important concern of feminists. The concept of androgyny as a feminist value and personality ideal was first proposed by the British female writer Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One’s Own* in 1919. This work was first translated in China in 1989[10]. The concept of androgyny is divided into two parts, physical and psychological.

Physiological statistics show that 6% to 10% of the world’s people are born between the sexes, and their physiological gender is uncertain and this world, there are gender marginalized people, who are not clear about their physical gender^[11]. Because physical gender determines social gender, they are not clear about their social gender, whether they wear men’s clothes or women’s clothes, and whether they behave like men or women. All these make gender marginalized people confused[3]. This is the phenomenon of androgyny in physical gender.

In terms of the psychological concept of androgyny, in Woolf’s classic work *A Room of One’s Own*, she once put forward the profound meaning of psychological androgyny. When Woolf saw a couple walk into a taxi together after they parted, she realized that the two sexes were naturally integrated. The obvious reason is that the cooperation between the two sexes is the most natural, and the combination of the two sexes can produce the greatest sense of satisfaction and happiness. At the same time, Woolf drew a sketch of the soul in her mind, that is, each of us has two forces, one is male, the other is female[12]. In men’s consciousness, men dominate women; In women’s consciousness, women dominate men. But for human beings, the most natural and comfortable state is that men and women live together harmoniously and cooperate spiritually. If a person is a man, then the female factor in his mind is also playing a role. If a person is a woman, then she should also have male characteristics.

Woolf’s “androgyny” is a kind of inner harmony in the heart. It has nothing to do with gender, but your reconciliation with yourself. Woolf’s androgyny is not a physiological concept, but a complementary and harmonious unity of men and women. The harmonious unity of the two sexes is built on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance between men and women. Women can live with a man’s heart, with a man’s perseverance and ambition. Men can also live with a woman’s heart, with a woman’s delicacy and sensitivity.

Androgyny also reflects the challenge to the single division of men and women, that is, the challenge to “neither male nor female”. The purpose of this theory is to break the old gender

concept and reduce the struggle between the two sexes in the human mind, so as to liberate human creativity to the maximum extent and transform the dream of freedom into the reality of the mind and the wealth of human beings as much as possible.

Emily has a process of gender flow psychologically, which was the psychological basis of her gaze. Her psychological change started with the death of her father. She used to be a slim Southern lady in white, a lovely girl who was completely controlled and gazed at. After her father died, she lost all her dependence. At first, she blinded herself and did not want to accept the truth of her father's death. "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^[9]." But her father's death also meant that she was free. In Emily's family, her father is the epitome of patriarchy. The death of Father also means the collapse of patriarchy in the family. Gradually, her psychological gender began to flow, and she began to have some androgyny characteristics. "When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows---sort of tragic and serene^[9]." Now, she is "androgynous" both physically and psychologically. This androgyny gave her the psychological basis for female gaze.

Before her father died, Emily had long hair. Long hair can reflect a woman's tenderness. At this time, Emily was also the representative of southern ladies. When her father died, Emily cut her hair short, which showed that she gradually deviated from the image of a southern lady and began to seek her own happiness with her heart. From the appearance, Emily has deviated from people's understanding of the concept of women and gradually became a man. Her psychological gender flow went further. Her psychology and appearance were perfectly combined with male characteristics, which made her gaze justified.

5. The Significance of Female Gaze

In chronological order, Emily's gaze went through three phases. First, she made a tentative gaze at her lover, then a stranger, and finally gazed at the entire town. And each time her gaze grew stronger and more confident. From Homer to the residents of the town, Emily showed her strong individualism again and again, even when the whole town is talking about her. This sense of rebellion was rarely seen in Southern women in the 20th century. This was the gaze of the real women power. Emily lived in the middle of the first feminist movement. This feminist movement, with white middle-class women as the main body and with the goal of fighting for women's suffrage in the United States, started in 1848 and ended in 1920 when the US Congress passed the bill to give women suffrage, marking the successful end of the first feminism movement in the United States. From a certain point of view, it was in line with the feminist movement's advocacy of individual liberation and resistance to patriarchy. In this social environment, Emily's female gaze was significant.

5.1 Gaze At Homer

For Emily and Homer, one was a clever and reserved Southern noble lady, while the other was a rude and lazy working Yankee. They should not have met each other. Both of them defied the social convention, and it was the beginning of Emily's rebellion. In the traditional society, a couple of lovers were always dominated by the man. Men gazed at women. "Gaze" refers to viewing with power operation, desire entanglement and identity consciousness. Most of the viewers are the subject of "seeing", the subject of power and desire. Most of the viewed people are the object of "being seen", the object of power and the object of doing whatever they want. In the patriarchal society, men were generally the subject of seeing, while women were the second sex and the object of being seen. But in the relationship between Emily and Homer, Emily was the subject of seeing, challenging the traditional male gaze.

5.1.1 A Subversive Gaze

mily's gaze on Homer was reflected in the process of their love. Miss Emily dared to condescend

as a lady and goes on a trip with Homer. In their relationship, she belonged to the active side.

She has been “gazing” at Homer, not only “staring” was “gazing”, but also active behavior was a kind of gaze. “Presently we began to see him and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable^[9].” When it comes to Homer’s identity, a Northerner, a day laborer, which was exactly the kind of identity that Emily’s father most despised and would never allow him to approach Emily. This was Emily’s protest against her father in action and a subversive gaze. Here, Emily subverted three relationships. The first was the patriarchal father’s personal control over his daughter; second, the class gap between aristocrats and civilians; third, women’s weak position towards men in the traditional old society.

5.1.2 Resistent to Feudal Restriction

Their love affair didn’t last long. Because the patriarchal society required women to abide by women’s ethics, it did not allow any transgression. However, men’s romantic style was often crowned with the aura of romantic knights. “Because Homer himself had remarked---he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club---that he was not a marrying man^[9].” After Emily found out that Homer had no intention to marry her, she was faced with a situation of losing the initiative. Once she was separated from Homer, she became an abandoned wretch in the eyes of the town. This has been the suppression of women’s free personality in feudal society for a long time. Women remained the weaker side in love relation. They couldn’t deal with breakups calmly. Once they were separated from men, they belong to the abandoned side, which was pitiful to others.

But Emily didn’t complain and cry feebly. She had been gazing at Homer, still hoping to marry him. Even though the town objected that she had degenerated into being with the Yankee, she still didn’t turn her eyes to other men. In their relationship, Emily always took a proactive attitude. After knowing that her love with Homer could never endure, she took extreme actions, that was, to poison Homer. In this extreme way, she gazed at Homer again and for the last time.

“The man himself lay in the bed. For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him^[9].” Like her father, Emily has thoroughly transformed Homer into an object that she can do whatever she wants with him, such as holding him in hugging pose. She had gazed at the dead man for decades. Her mental eccentricity was beyond imagination.

The entangled relationship between them, Emily killed not only Homer, but also the traditional female image of herself. In this process, she completed the subversion and betrayal of female identity, constructed independent identity, and changed the passive situation of traditional women.

5.2 Gaze At the Pharmacist

Emily’s communication with the pharmacist was a classic description of gaze. “‘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^[9].” In their first meeting, Emily showed her power. Her eyes and facial texture indicated that her state is tense. This state of alert means that she would not give people an opportunity. She wanted to take the initiative and be the one who stares at others.

“The druggist looked down at her. She looked back at him, erect, her face like a strained flag^[9].” In their eye contact, we can see that Emily refused to be inferior in the communication of sight, even though she was not superior in height. She straightened up and tried to show her strength and coldness.

When asked about the use of the poison, she refused to answer obediently, only resisting the pharmacist with her eyes. For this reason, she purposefully adjusted her gesture so that she could look at the pharmacist head up and take the initiative in the communication of sight and emotion. “Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up^[9].” In the fighting of sight, the pharmacist was defeated. Emily once again took the initiative in gazing.

5.3 Gaze At Residents

When the residents of the town asked her to pay taxes, there was a description of her gaze. “Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, 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[9].”

Gaze and power are interrelated. The mobility of power means that neither of the two sides of power can hold its subjective or objective status of the subject forever. In some conditions, the subject of power may become the object of power and vice versa[4]. The residents came to ask her to pay taxes, and was originally the initiative side, but as soon as they met Emily, she turned from a guest into a host. Emily gazed at them blatantly. She neither agreed them to enter the room, nor invited them to sit down, indicating her cold attitude. Under her pressure, the speech of the residents’ representative also became stuttering. The description at the end of the passage also intensified the atmosphere of this seesaw battle. “They could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain[9].” Of course, the result was not unexpected. “So SHE vanquished them, horse and foot[9].” In the contest of power, she won. Emily gazed at them again.

Emily spent the rest of her life in such a silent and cold gaze. “She had evidently shut up the top floor of the house--like the carven torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from generation to generation--dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse[9].” She became a sculpture, an idol. Her power expanded, and she peered down on them like a god. She was more rigid, showing a gender-neutral image.

6. Conclusion

In “A Rose for Emily”, Faulkner showed us a portrait of the transitional American South. The Civil War attacked severely the Southern traditional politics, economy and culture. After the Civil War, the New South began to take place of the Old South. However, the transformation from the South to the New South took much time and the new power couldn’t replace the old power at once. In this complicated contest, Emily became a bright flag.

As the protagonist of the article, she was a very contradictory person. On one hand, the old social system made her enjoy the sense of superiority as an aristocrat; on the other hand, she hated the patriarchy as the core of the old system. For this reason, she made a series of protest, such as falling in love with the Yankee, cutting her hair and so on. To outsiders, she was still the embodiment of that tradition, but in fact she has carried out a quiet revolution.

“A Rose for Emily” was not a pure feminist work, but the feminist thoughts contained in it were worth exploring. The complex power struggle between people in the transitional South was revealed through “gaze”. Emily’s life was lonely, but beneath her lonely appearance there was a strong individualism surging. She spent the first half of her life as a noble southern lady who was been gazed at, and the second half as an eccentric woman gazing at others. And in a series of gazing at her lover, pharmacist, small town residents and so on, she showed an increasingly strong power.

Without saying a word, she defied the patriarchy and realized the betrayal of the traditional female identity and the release of her own personality. As a representative of the southern tradition, Emily, while actively maintaining the southern tradition, has gradually deviated from the tradition and become a hermaphrodite.

Every progress in history is always cruel and tortuous. It constantly asks for the price from human beings, and Emily becomes the victim of this progress.

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