

The Stockholm Syndrome of Emily in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"

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Abstract: In the tragic story "A Rose for Emily," written by William Faulkner, the protagonist Emily develops prototypical symptoms of Stockholm syndrome which contributes greatly to her pathetic ending. Finding the evidences that are corresponding to the symptoms, this paper concludes that: 1) Emily develops a strong sense of dependence and alliance towards his father who plays a patriarchal and masculine role in her life and builds a cage to control her; 2) Emily stands in line with town people who interfere and constrain her life in order to uphold her dignity and identity; 3) Emily sacrifices her faith for her lover Homer who cheats her love and challenges the dignity of the declining nobility. Finally, all factors result in the wretched ending of her life as a withered rose. However, such tragedy is by no means a particular case but a trauma imprinted on the American South.

1. Introduction

William Faulkner (1897-1962) is one of the most renowned writers in the American Literature. In 1949, Noble Prize for Literature was awarded to Faulkner as a great South epic writer and an experimentalist in the 20th century. Writing hundreds of short stories and 19 novels, he describes significant social disputes and changes in the South. However, the main purpose of his works is to reveal humanity and enlighten people to deliberate on the human evil and complex emotions [1].

"A Rose for Emily" is one of the best short stories of Faulkner. In the story, Emily, a young lady born in a noble family in Jefferson town in American South, spends her life alone due to his father's strict and conservative control. After her father's death, she falls in love with a Northern foreman, Homer. However, because of the interference of the town people and betrayal of Homer, Emily loses her love, kills his lover, locks his body in the room and lives a secluded life since then. By presenting an eccentric, obstinate and even terrifying woman and her tragic life experience, Faulkner focuses on the conflict between the Southern noble and Northern industrial class and the oppression that the male-dominated society forces on women.

Since 2000, many studies have been devoted to "A Rose for Emily", focusing on Faulkner and American South culture. Xiao Minghan discussed Faulkner's criticism on the damages caused by Puritanism on women and made in-depth analysis of Faulkner's spirit of anti-tradition and anti-industrialization [2]. Wang Xin studied trauma literature of American South and stressed the trauma of the Civil War and the cultural conflict between the South and the North [3]. Scherting wrote about the Oedipus complex of Emily which caused Emily to pour all the attachment onto Homer after her father's death [4]. Dilworth stated his opinion that the town people connived with Emily in murdering Homer, which showcased the conflict between the South and the North [5].

From mental perspective, the pressure brought by her father who constrains her from developing healthy social relation, the pressure caused by town people who "take care of" her by interfering her life, and the pressure created by Homer who betrays her love eventually lead to Emily's Stockholm syndrome, and eventually to her death. Stockholm syndrome is a condition that causes hostages to develop a psychological alliance with their captors as a survival strategy during captivity. The

specific features include: 1) the victim shall feel himself or herself trapped in a unescapable terror and tense; 2) the captor would offer things that the victim is in need of, making the victim grateful; 3) all the information that the victim receives is provided and selected by the captor; 4) the victim shall feel he or she has no choice but obey the captor if he or he wants to survive [6].

Emily is neither the first nor the last who suffered from Stockholm syndrome at that struggling time in history. Such tragedy is not particular, it is a trauma shared by all people in a certain community who have experienced terrible events. Trauma is a collective memory of human society [3]. By using trauma theory, this paper analyzes the Stockholm syndrome of Emily in the context of a male-dominated society and cultural conflict, contributing to the study of tragic women represented by Emily and demonstrating the persecution suffered by women in such a period.

2. Bird in the Cage: Relationship Between Father and Daughter

At the commencement of the 19th century, the industrial revolution was set about in the states of American North, advancing the development of capitalist economy. Meanwhile, different from the north, the southern society still depended on agriculture with manor economy system at its center. Planters ran their own manors by using black slaves, forming a “family-owned” individual sector. In such traditional agricultural society, family was the core unit, which exerted significantly impact on the social structure and value in the South [2]. Besides, because of their physical strength, male played the leading role in the work. For good reason, father in the South was in absolute power, which gradually became the feature of a male-dominated society. In respect of religion, the South was under great influence of the conservative Calvinism because Protestantism dominated all states in the South except Louisiana. In addition, after the South was defeated in the Civil War, dispirited people resorted to the religion to seek comfort, greatly boosting the growth of Puritanism whose influence was deeply enhanced since then [2]. Calvinism, as the central doctrine of Puritanism, severely suppressed human desire, seriously condemned entertainment, emphasized the dominating power of man, and ignored women rights.

The relationship between Emily and his father is an epitome of the male-dominated society, in which his father’s control and constraint on her lead to her Stockholm syndrome. Resembling many stories of William Faulkner, tragedy of Emily stems from the breakdown of a family with a tyrannical father. Emily’s father is influential to the town, not least to his own daughter. The man seriously controls his daughter’s life, be he alive or dead. Town people would picture a scene that “Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door” [7] when they describe the father-daughter relationship. When Emily is in the prime of her life and should enjoy love, her father chases and frightens all boys away. Emily has no choice but fully relies on his father who should be the only important male in her life. However, even after her father passed away, the crayon portrait of her father “haunts” the house and her life.

Emily’s behavior matches all features of Stockholm syndrome. First, she is trapped in a “jail” built by her father. The severe pressure of a male-dominated society twists the development of Emily, telling her to be obedient and even to defend for such cultural custom which incarcerates her for the entire life [5]. The male-dominated environment also curbs her socialization. Faulkner describes Emily’s father as the man who violently cuts all the connection between Emily and other social members, causing her not being able to identify her social identity and communicate with others. In the story, she barely goes out of the house, keeps distance with others and is unable to accept any changes. She asserts that she should take control of everything, getting involved in building the jail. Moreover, there is a tension existing in the father-daughter relationship. On account of that Emily is a young and beautiful young lady, it is no doubt that many young men want to pay court to her. Does Emily ever want to be rebellious? The answer is positive. She cuts her hair after her father’s death and dates with a foreman from the North, who is well below her status. The tension is stretched because Emily wants break through the chain to live a life of her own will. However, she never makes it. Even if she cuts the hair, she cannot erase her father’s imprint on her—arrogant and controlling; even though Emily disregards social convention, when she realizes

Homer's unseriousness and withdrawal, which can be regarded as a disrespect and shock to her sincere feeling and social status, she lets her "father" inside her out—puts an end to the relationship in a cruel and selfish way [2]. Finally, she shuts herself in the jail again and totally separates herself from others.

Second, Emily's father is her foundation both emotionally and financially. In order to highlight the dominating characteristic of her father, Faulkner downplays the image of the mother. Thus, Emily has to fully depend on her father emotionally. According to the attitude and a series of preferential terms in the town, Emily's father is highly prestigious and certainly plays the most important and respectable role in his daughter's eyes. Attaching to no other men in her life and having no care from her mother, Emily has a mixed feeling with her father—reverence, respect, worship and affection. In this relationship, as Freud refers, the daughter has developed a solid attachment and the father is seen as a giant umbrella, protecting her from any harm [4]. Once the relationship is broken, the daughter will feel profoundly that she is abandoned. Financially, it is the father who supports the family. Without her father, Emily, with undeveloped social ability, lives under poor condition—"lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps-an eyesore among eyesores" [7]. During all the years that Emily has to rely on herself and barely goes out of her house, which suggests that she fears for people ridiculing that she is not in her best circumstances. At the end of day, the only man Emily can and ever depends on is her father.

Certainly, is Emily a tragedy, so is her father. The social stereotype for men, especially decent men, forces them to be as strong as rock and as cold as ice. If a man is too romantic or gentle, then he is called libertine or regarded unmanly. Women are considered to be inferior to men who require them to be obedient and be willing to be manipulated. If a woman bravely pursues her love, she is thought to be unchaste; when inappropriate things happen, women are very likely to be blamed. This is a collective trauma for all the people living in such a period. By displaying the outcome of historical trauma and personal trauma caused by violating the social convention, and the breakage between individuals and community, Faulkner brings the world a lesson that trauma and tragedy do not appear accidentally. Instead, it becomes a wound for the South.

3. Desperate Animal in the Zoo: Relationship Between Individual and Community

Traditional principle of women's ethics in the South is one of the chief culprits for women's miserable lives. Chastity is seen as the prime virtue of women, even more important than their lives or personal value [2]. Christian culture and racism shape a subordinating role of women. Bible devotes significant amount of expectations for a woman in the society and blame women for surrendering to the desire and lure of Satan, causing human to be driven out of the Garden of Eden [2]. In addition, racism also plays a vital role. In order to keep the pure blood lineage, people attach great significance to women's chaste. A "good" lady shall have no desire or libido, a natural impulse of human beings. Their appeals, identities and dignity could not be recognized by the society. After the civil war, the once prosperous South had to face the fact that it was defeated by the industrialized North. Losing its land, its slaves and its pride, however, the South could not accept the failure nor could they acknowledge that their prosperity was on the decline ^[1]. When encountering the straightforwardness, rudeness and casualness of Northern people, the proud, conservative and stubborn Southerners would be well-armed.

The relationship between Emily and town's people reflects the stereotype toward women in a male-dominated society and the cultural conflicts, contributing to Emily's Stockholm syndrome. In the beginning of the narration, the narrator makes a comparison—"the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house" [7]; when handling the tax issue, the narrator claims that "only a woman could have believed it" [7]. In their eyes, woman is foolish, unreasonable and boring and thus should follow man blindly. However, they are ordinary women living under rules of society, accepting cruel violation of their rights and even assisting men to control other women's lives. Emily is even more miserable. As the last noble in the town, she is treated as a "monument" [7] rather than a real human.

The tension between Emily and town people brings a great pressure for the socially unable lady. On one hand, Emily and other people belong to a community where they defend their value and dignity as Southerners; on the other hand, Emily despises other people; town people feel awed and jealous about Emily and take pleasure in the noble's suffering.

Under the stress and intervention inflicted by the town people, Emily develops Stockholm syndrome. First, town people push Emily into a jail established according to their stereotypes and expectations of what a noble should behave. Emily, to town people, is a remnant of old tradition and a sign of the past glory of the South. They protect the past honor, but also express their antipathy for a class society in which the Griersons holds higher position than them. Since Emily is the last noble in the town, people pay great attention to her and subconsciously take the responsibility of "taking care of her" without her assent anyway. When she falls in love with the foreman Homer who is described as "a Yankee— a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face" [7], they believe that this frivolous man can never deserve their monument. They actually cannot recognize the natural impulse for love in Emily [8]. Before being a human, Emily has to be firstly a symbol. Thus, they have done the best to send her kinfolks to Emily and title her love a shameful act, a violation of "noblesse oblige" [7]. Even worse, when they hear that Emily have bought some poison, they are delighted that Emily should kill herself to defend her dignity and atone for staining her chastity. As a woman, Emily shall never show her desire for love; as a noble, she shall never date someone below her status. She is once again locked in the "jail" built by town people who ruin her last chance to break free.

Second, the social foundation of Emily is the community she lives in. As the tradition in South is tearing apart, town people stand in line with Emily in protecting the South glory, yet they gladly feel pity for Emily for her declining situation. They, as the foundation for Emily's social life, deeply involve in her life from a distance. When they have some hard-to-say requirements for Emily, they would rather solve them in secret. Evening for helping her, they do it in a reserved way by sending their grandchildren to learn painting at Emily's. Emily cannot live without the existence of the town people who offer her a sense of being respected, a reminder of being a noble and a spur for her to live up to her responsibility. Emily and the town people are leaning on each other for support, although they put so much stress on her and push her to a dead end.

In the town, Emily is a prisoner and the "monitors" exert pressure on her behavior. As time goes by, Emily is tamed. She even deprives her lover of life and sacrifices her own life to fulfill the mission that the old society leaves to her. Faulkner depicts a shared trauma for generations under such circumstance. The South has gone through a war, death and violence and detached from the past, the present and the future in a transition period. The internal struggle and the external challenge create a tension in the society. For Southerners who want to retrieve the past glory, they have to attach their dreams to certain targets. However, according to psychologists, trauma can be cured by telling the story because it suggests that the wounded start to reexamine, observe and think about the story in a new perspective, which means that they have developed new relationship between themselves, others and the world [3]. Therefore, by narrating the story, the generation represented by the town people expresses their guiltiness and sends "a rose" for Emily, marking a significant progress in society.

4. Hopeless Romantic Tragedy: Relationship Between Emily and Homer

The Civil War is a watershed in American history, changing the pattern of economic development. The whole country embarked on its industrialization and democratization. After the war, people doubted that if live, human and even God was not as good as they pictured in the transcendentalism. A bunch of writers tried to abandon the rosy imagination but to focus on the pure reality with Faulkner being one of the best. Before the Civil War, the prosperous South was immersed in a peaceful and stable environment. As the industrial economy gained its momentum in the North, the political and economic differences between the North and South triggered violent conflicts. Although the economy in the South was gradually recovered after the war, the mental trauma lingered for a long time for they lost their spiritual backbone. They had no independent

“homeland” and live in a world they could not see the value. In such a dilemma, Southern people and writers saluted the past glory and criticized the moral degeneration in a modern world [1]. Faulkner, one of the most prominent Southern writers in American literature history, precisely seizes the most controversial and poignant features in his imaginary Yoknapatawpha County, a miniature of the South. Choosing to protect and commemorating the South, Faulkner exposes its ugliness and celebrates its past glory.

Different attitudes of Emily and Homer toward their relationship showcase the conflict between the Southern and Northern cultures and thus results in Emily’s Stockholm syndrome. Homer is a typical Northern man who is called “a Yankee—a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face” [7]. Being casual and sloppy, he is incompatible with the conservative surrounding. He is such a sociable person that he acquaints with many people in a short period of time. Being a classic Southern noble lady, all her life Emily is locked in with the same kind of person, thus meeting a brand-new man is a surprising experience. Differences between Homer and her create a fatal attraction to her. Besides, after she lost her father, “with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will” [7]. Homer is all about a free man who loves social intercourse and loathes constrain and never wants to be bound to anything. Encountering a conservative lady like Emily, Homer does not deny the possibility between the two and takes Emily for a ride openly in his casual suit. From the description of Homer in the story, Faulkner recognizes the fresh concept of a society where people are free to pursue personal happiness and pay more attention to the human rights but also reveals the irresponsibility and lack of seriousness of modern society. Especially, the “free-style” attitude of the Northerners offends the inviolable pride of the Southerners, leading to an inevitable tragedy.

Cultural clash contributes to Emily’s Stockholm syndrome. First, their relationship is a dangerous jail into which Emily locks herself. Homer is a gregarious person who clearly belongs to the lower class. Coming to the South, Homer immerses himself in a brand-new situation and is curious about people here. In the North, people are more democratic and open-minded and not have the same hierarchical sensitivity as the Southerners. In his view, it is nothing inappropriate for him to date a girl from upper class and it is nothing wrong to try new things—Emily is more of refreshment to his life. Besides, to date a noble lady and take her for a ride in public is such a perfect chance to show off and raise his profile in town people’s eyes. What’s more, because of the scornful judgement of town people against him, he is irritated by their blind pride. Dating with Emily can also be a way to mock them and throw a counterblow to their mean behavior. For all these reasons, he begins this relationship with a less serious intention. Emily, breaking the chain of the rigid principle and embracing the desire for love, jumps into the romantic jail of Homer and gets trapped in it. By killing Homer and preserving his corpse in her house, Emily, in this way, keeps him with her forever and confines herself to a desperate plight.

Second, Homer provides Emily a hope for a new start. After the death of Emily’s father, she becomes a victim who falls from a ship and almost drowns in a vast sea. Then, she sees a log. Out of habit or the survival instinct, she clings to it and wishes this log could save her. Obviously, Homer is the log. Being fresh, humorous, and free of constraint, he is completely out of Emily’s knowledge and attracts her in a lethal way. Emily falls in love with him, entering a dreamy and novel wonderland. Unfortunately, Homer is free in nature and flirts out of curiosity and entertainment. In a male-dominated society, attitudes towards love of men and women are different. To man, love is nothing compared to social status and wealth; for woman, love is the uppermost romantic fantasy for life. Homer offers a chance to Emily to have a taste of love but locks her in the hopeless romantic fantasy and then ruthlessly takes back his love. Emily self-willingly locks herself in Homer’s romantic trap. Yet, Homer favors a life of freedom. The more they are familiar with each other, the more irreconcilable Homer finds him and Emily are. Homer seduces Emily into his trap but he never really intends to be married while Emily fearlessly jumps into the trap and cannot get out even if Homer lets her to do so. All experiences of love for Emily come from Homer but he destroys her last chance to believe in love and open her heart to people. She is terrified and then it turns into angry, so all she can do is to kill Homer to keep him with her forever as well as to protect

her dignity.

The relationship between Homer and Emily is a tragic result of cultural clash, which is not a particular case. Not only for love, but also in all aspects in life, the cultural conflicts cause damages both mentally and materially. Civil War brings about social and political changes, requiring a more democratic and united nation. The spirits of freedom and respect for personal pursuit lash the South violently. The South is haunted by the memories of disaster and suffers from oppression and exploitation. This trauma is a lasting nightmare and they want to protect themselves and to revenge. They got nothing to lose but their pride and tradition. Therefore, when it is challenged by the “foe”, personal happiness and human right are ignored because they shall defend themselves as a whole. Emily and Homer are too different to deserve a happy ending because she shoulders too much responsibility and Homer is too careless about it. In the historical trauma, so many “Emily” and “Homer” open their arms to embrace an inevitable war in which they sacrifice their lives, yet they are worthy of a rose of empathy.

5. Conclusion

Emily is a pitiful bird. Emily develops a strong sense of dependence and alliance towards his father who plays a patriarchal and masculine role in her life. By building this cage for Emily, her father curbs Emily’s development of social ability; after Emily’s father died, town people put her into a larger cage, judging and manipulating her stumbling way of learning how to fly. Emily stands in line with town people who interfere and constrain her life in order to uphold her dignity and identity; Homer cuts her wings and ruins her hope. Emily sacrifices her faith for him who cheats her love and challenges the dignity of a declining nobility. Finally, all factors result in the wretched ending of her life as a withered rose.

Being a victim of male-dominated society and the conflict between the South and the North, Emily suffers from Stockholm syndrome and is tortured to death. On Emily’s funeral, a rose for pity is sent to Emily. It is not sent simply because she is the object of the pity or people gain satisfaction from sending the pity to her. It is her fearlessness to strive against her nature and conscience and her courage to face the conflict with his heart or with her fellows or with her environment that deserves the pity.

However, Emily’s fate is by no means a particular case but a trauma imprinted on the history. Trauma is a collective bitter memory of human society. Through the act of sending a rose to Emily and narrating the story, town people make atonement to their guilt and at the same time recover from the historical trauma. In a society where only if people obey the agreed rules can they be accepted, people are obliged to act as a whole to punish or correct the deviants at any cost. When they realize they have done wrong, their conscience tortures them. Being the puppet of a decaying and backward society, they all sustain a severe damage which leaves them with a scare that can never be wiped out. Therefore, as they tell the story, though finding vindication in a reserved way, they redeliberate the significance of respecting human rights and valuing freedom, which generates the power to trigger a social revolution. At last, Emily’s death and the redemptive narration of town people indicate that the old time has come to its end. It ushers in a future of hope and equality for which people struggle, suffer and make endless efforts throughout the whole human history.

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