**Historical and Literary Context of “A Rose for Emily”**

**Publication Date:** April 30, 1930

**Literary Period:** American Modernism

**Literary Genre:** “A Rose for Emily” participates in the Southern Gothic genre, which applies the conventions of Gothic fiction—such as gloomy and eerie settings, grotesque characters, and a a sense of dreadful and haunting mystery—to the American South after the Civil War. Faulkner’s work illuminates how haunted and paralyzed the South was after the Civil War. He shows the South’s desire to return to its own glorified and genteel past—even as that past was morally contaminated by the racist, oppressive, and dehumanizing institution of slavery.

**Related Historical Events:** After the North defeated the South in the American Civil War (1861-1865), slavery was abolished and many of the wealthy white Southern families consequently lost their primary source of income in agriculture, as is quite likely the case with the Griersons featured in “A Rose for Emily.” During the Reconstruction Era that followed the Civil War, the U.S. government implemented policies designed to economically rehabilitate the South and secure the rights of freed blacks, but with relatively little success. Soon after the Reconstruction Era ended in 1877, many Southern communities defiantly regressed to old cultural norms which involved aristocratic ideals founded on those established during the heyday of Southern slave-owning plantations and the marginalization and persecution of black Americans. This is the world of “A Rose for Emily,” where a yearning for a glorified Southern past conflicts with social and industrial change and progress.

**A Rose for the Title.** Readers will notice that, though the story is entitled “A Rose for Emily,” Emily never receives a rose. Faulkner explained in an interview: “Oh, that was an allegorical title: the meaning was, here was a woman who had had a tragedy, an irrevocable tragedy and nothing could be done about it. And I pitied her and this was a salute. Just as if you were to make a gesture, a salute to anyone: to a woman you would hand a rose.”

**A Family Legacy.** Colonel Sartoris, a minor character in “A Rose for Emily,” appears in other works by Faulkner, including the novels *Flags in the Dust* and *The Unvanquished*; he is modeled on Faulkner’s own great-grandfather, William Clark Falkner, a Confederate colonel in the Civil War, a businessman, and an author.