



## LINGUA-CULTURAL FEATURES IN ILLUSTRATING THE CLOTHES IN “A ROSE FOR EMILY” BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

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**Abstract.** This article is devoted to the study of linguo-cultural features in depiction of clothes in “A Rose for Emily”, by William Faulkner, focusing on how language and cultural context describes perceptions of character and setting. The usage of clothing in Faulkner’s story reflects both the social codes of the American South and the deeper psychological states of his characters, particularly the protagonist Emily.

**Key words:** linguo-cultural features, social status, cultural identity, symbolism, social expectations, isolation, tradition.

**Introduction.** In “A Rose for Emily”, William Faulkner uses the description of clothing as a linguo-cultural feature to illustrate the main hero’s struggle against societal changes, reflecting the tension between tradition and modernity in the South. The Emily’s attire from the elegant garments symbolizing her aristocratic heritage to the worn and outdated clothing signifying her isolation and decay serves as a powerful metaphor for the fading values, ultimately revealing the profound impact of cultural identity and social status on individual existence.

**Main body.** Linguo-cultural features refer to aspects of language that reflect and convey cultural meanings, values, and practices. These features reveal how language and culture interact to shape communication, identity, and worldviews. Linguo-cultural elements are especially visible in language choices that convey traditions, social norms, and local customs, and cultural knowledge within everyday expressions and descriptions<sup>1</sup>. William Faulkner not only describes the character but also reflect the broader cultural and social themes at play in the story. Emily’s clothing is often described in a way that highlights her status as a member of the once prominent Grierson family. For instance, her use of fine fabrics and her past elegance symbolize her connection to a bygone era of Southern aristocracy. As the story progresses, her clothing becomes more frayed and outdated, symbolizing her personal decline and the decay of her family’s status in the community.

The descriptions of clothes provide insight into the cultural values of the

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, *The Southern Gothic. Language and Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2001.



time, particularly in the Deep South. The emphasis on tradition and social status is mirrored in the way clothing is portrayed, representing stability and connection to the past. Clothing also reflects the gender norms of the time. Emily's clothing represents both the expectations placed upon her and her disobedience of those norms through her choices and behavior. "As she took her stance for a short mashie shot, he looked at her closely. She wore a blue gingham dress, rimmed at throat and shoulders with a white edging that accentuated her tan. The quality of exaggeration, of thinness, which had made her passionate eyes and down-turning mouth absurd at eleven, was gone now. She was arrestingly beautiful<sup>2</sup>". In *A Rose for Emily*, the mention of Emily's "blue gingham dress" is brief but crucial. Gingham, a simple, checked fabric often associated with modest, everyday attire, contrasts sharply with the image of the aristocratic, Old South Emily that her community holds. This description comes in a scene where Emily is interacting with the town's aldermen who have come to discuss her unpaid taxes. The blue gingham dress describes her fallen status and the passage of the time, suggesting both a faded nobility and her diminished financial means.

The analysis of Faulkner's linguistic choices in describing clothing in *A Rose for Emily* reveals the intricate relationship between language, culture, and identity. Faulkner's use of clothing as a symbol, tied closely to cultural and social themes, underscores the complexities of Emily's character and highlights the enduring impact of cultural heritage on individual lives. Throughout a detailed examination of language, Faulkner not only points a vivid image of Emily but also reflects the South's struggle between honoring tradition and embracing change.

"Among them lay a collar and tie, as if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left upon the surface a pale crescent in the dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks<sup>3</sup>". The description of the man identifies the room where Homer Barron's corpse lies, is a haunting detail that suggests a sense of immediacy and intimacy. This imagery creates the impression that Homer had only recently been in the room, even though years have been passed since his death. Faulkner uses this detail to identify dreadful atmosphere and reveal Emily has distorted perception of time and reality. The collar and tie signify both Emily's desire to preserve Homer in a domestic, almost marital role, and her inability to let go. By arranging his clothing as if he might return to wear it, she envisions a permanent connection to him, despite his death. It serves a powerful symbol of her resistance to the passage of time, mirroring her unyielding clinging to the past.

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<sup>2</sup> "A Rose for Emily" In *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, Vintage Books, 1995

<sup>3</sup>. *The Art of Faulkner's Novels*. P 123-125



In "A Rose for Emily" William Faulkner uses descriptions of clothing to reflect Emily's character, social status, and the passage of time. Thin, spare clothing. In the story's later years, Faulkner describes Emily as wearing thin, spare clothing, which reflects her physical decline and the worn-down nature of her life. Her clothing here represents the passage of time and her fading connection with society, as well as her isolation and neglect. "Black Clothing". Emily is seen wearing black after the death of her father. Black clothing is typically associated with mourning, and Emily has continued wearing of black highlights her inability to move on her father's control. "Bridal Clothing". In the room where Homer Barron's body is discovered, there are items associated with a bridal setting, including a "bridal suit". This clothing choice, though bizarre in context, represents Emily's desire for companionship and her fixation on a distorted version of romantic commitment. Throughout the story, Emily is described as wearing clothing that is old-fashioned and overly formal, reflecting the rigid values of the Old South that she represents. This outdated style signifies her resistance to change and the persistence of southern aristocracy in her character. These clothing descriptions serve to illustrate themes of tradition, decay, isolation, and resistance to change, all of which are central to the story<sup>4</sup>.

**CONCLUSION.** The linguo-cultural features of clothing in A Rose for Emily provide critical insights into Emily's character and the Southern society that both sustains and alienates her. Through his carefully chosen language, William Faulkner weaves cultural symbols and dialects into descriptions of clothing, capturing the traditions, class distinctions, and social expectations that shape Emily's life and drive her isolation. Clothing descriptions weather lace, black mourning attire, or old-fashioned garments - mirror Emily's complex relationship with the past, her resistance to change, and her communities' judgement.

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<sup>4</sup> "Revisiting Faulkner and Southern Womanhood in "A Rose for Emily." *Southern Literacy Journal*, vol.32, no2, 2000, pp. 1-20.



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