Faulkner, William. *Faulkner at Virginia*. University of Virginia Press. 2010. Originally Recorded 1957. Audio. Accessed 19 March 2015

Excerpts from where William Faulkner Discusses “A Rose for Emily”

http://faulkner.lib.virginia.edu/page?id=clips&section=selections

**Inspiration**

**Unidentified participant:**I was just wondering, one of your short stories, "A Rose For Emily," what ever inspired you to write this story [...]?

**William Faulkner:**That, to me, was—was another sad and tragic manifestation of man's condition in which he—he dreams and hopes, in which he is in conflict with himself or with his environment or with others. In this case, there was the young girl, with a young girl's normal aspirations, to find love and then a husband and a family, who was browbeaten and—and kept down by her father, a selfish man who—who didn't want her to leave home because he wanted a housekeeper, and it was a natural instinct repressed, which—which you can't repress it. You can mash it down, but it comes up somewhere else in a—very likely a tragic form, and that was simply another manifestation of man's injustice to man, of—of the poor tragic human being struggling with its own heart, with others, with its environment, for the simple things which all human beings want. In that case it was a young girl that—that just wanted to be loved and to love and to have a husband and a family.

**Unidentified participant:**And that purely came from your imagination?

**William Faulkner:**Well, the story did, but the—the condition is—is there. It exists. I didn't invent that condition. I—I didn't invent the fact that young girls dream of—of someone to love and children and a home, but the story of what her own particular tragedy was was invented, yes.

**Symbolic Object**

**Unidentified participant:**Was the "Rose for Emily" an idea or a character? Just how did you go about that—?

**William Faulkner:**That came from a—from a picture of the strand of hair on the pillow. It was a ghost story. Simply a picture of a strand of hair on the pillow in the abandoned house.

**Title of the Story**

**Unidentified participant:**What is the meaning of the title "A Rose for Emily"?

**William Faulkner:**Oh, it's simply the poor woman had had no life at all. Her father had kept her more or less locked up, and then she had a lover, and he was about to quit her. She had to murder him. It was just "A Rose for Emily," that's all.[*audience laughter*]

**Southern Ideals**

**Unidentified participant:**I have two questions. One of them relates to this idea of money. Wouldn't you say that the gentleman is confusing the traditions of the North with the traditions of the South? [*audience laughter*] The South, the Old South, is best pictured in the ideals in the story "A Rose for Emily," where the old woman gets along without the money and keeps up the family traditions. Don't you think that there would be a distinction as far as the respectability in this?

**William Faulkner:**Yes, there is. In the South respectability has little connection with money. Money don't hurt the respectability, but the respectability don't need the money in the South. You're quite right.

**Unidentified participant:**Wouldn't this be shown in The Sound and the Fury, too? Jason would be trying to get money, whereas the rest of the family, they don't care, and the Negroes really regard them as respectable people.

**William Faulkner:**That's right, yes.

**Unidentified participant:**They regard Jason as white trash.

**William Faulkner:**Yes, that's right.

**Conflict between North and South**

**Unidentified participant:**Sir, in "A Rose for Emily," is it possible to take Homer Barron and Emily and sort of show that one represents the South and the North? Was there—was there anything on your part there trying to show the North and the South in sort of a battle? Maybe Miss Emily representing the South coming out victorious in the odd way that she did?

**William Faulkner:**That would be only incidental. I think that—that the writer is too busy trying to create flesh and blood people that will stand up and cast a shadow to have time to—to be conscious of—of all the symbolism that he may put into what he does or what people may read into it, that [if] he had time to—that is, if one individual could—could write the authentic, credible flesh-and-blood character and at the same time deliver the message, maybe he would, but I don't believe any writer is—is capable of doing both, that he's got to choose one of the two. Either he is delivering a message, or he's trying to create flesh-and-blood, living, suffering, anguishing human beings. And as any man works out of his—his past, since any man—no man is himself, he's a sum of his past, and in a way, if you can accept the—the term, of his future, too. And this struggle between the South and the North could have been a part of my background, my experience, without me knowing it.

**Story as Criticism of its Time**

**Unidentified participant:**Sir, it has been argued that "A Rose for Emily" is a criticism of the North, and others have argued saying that it is a criticism of the South. Now, could this story, shall we say, be more properly classified as a criticism of the time?

**William Faulkner:**Now that I don't know because I was simply trying to write about people. The writer uses environment—what he knows—and if there's a symbolism in which the—the lover represented the North and the—and the—the woman who murdered him represents the South, I don't say that's not valid and not there, but it was no intention of the writer to—to say, "Now let's see, I'm going to write a piece in which I will—will use a symbolism for the North and another symbol for the South," that he was simply writing about people, a story which he thought was—was tragic and true because it—it came out of the—out of the human heart, of human aspiration, the human—the conflict of—of conscience with—with glands, with the Old Adam. It was a conflict not between the North and South so much as between, well, you might say, God and Satan.  
Yes, sir.

**Unidentified participant:**Sir, just a little more on that thing. You say it's a conflict between God and Satan. Well, I don't quite understand what—what you mean there. Who is—did one represent the [...]?

**William Faulkner:**The conflict was—was in Miss Emily, that she knew that you do not murder people. She was—she had been trained that—that—that you do not take a lover, you marry. You don't take a lover. She had broken all the—the—the laws of her tradition, her background, and she had finally broken the law of God, too, which says you do not take human life. And she knew she was doing wrong, and that's why her—her own life was wrecked. Instead of having murdered one lover, and then to go on and—and take another and when she used him up to murder him, she was expiating her crime.  
Yes, ma'am.

**Unidentified participant:**But can't a person like Miss Emily, though she did do all the things that she had been taught not to, and being a sensitive sort of a woman, it was sure to have told on her, but do you think it's fair to feel pity for her because, in a way, she made her adjustment, and it seemed to have wound up in a happy sort of a way—certainly tragic—but maybe it suited her just fine.

**William Faulkner:**Yes, it may have, but then I don't think that—that one should withhold pity simply because the—the subject of the pity, object of the pity, is pleased and satisfied. I think the—the pity is in—in the—the human striving against its own nature, against its own conscience. That's what deserves the pity. It's not the fate of the individual. It's man in conflict with his heart or with his fellows or with his environment. That's—that's what deserves the pity. It's not that the man suffered or that he fell off the house or was run over by the train. It's that he was—that man is trying to do the best he can with his—his desires and impulses, against his—his own moral conscience and the— the conscience of—the social conscience of—of his time and his place, the—the little town he must live in, the family he's a part of.