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# Luxury of Captivity in William Butler Yeats' A Prayer for My Daughter and William Faulkner's A Rose for Emily

*Literary Research Paper*

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**Abstract**

William Butler Yeats' poem A Prayer for My Daughter (1921) is the continuation of his apocalyptic poem The Second Coming, as his prayer to protect his daughter by hiding her behind class divisions and hoping that his daughter never wants to seek change from traditions, while William Faulkner's A Rose for Emily (1930) shows the result of extreme superiority complex and isolating protection through the tragic life of Emily, who never got a chance to teach herself thrive through changes and developments of life because of lifelong isolation. This present study observes the lethal consequences of isolation and confining protection that affect the sensitive mind of a person, eventually affecting one's whole life. Considering both the primary sources and the secondary ones, the paper has been an approach of critical content analysis to draw its concluding remarks as per findings through the research.

**Keywords:** Captivity, psychoanalysis, parental imposition

## 1. Introduction

W. B. Yeats, in his pessimistic and apocalyptic poem The Second Coming, describes the horrible scattering of the modern world where the authority is losing its power, chaos and violence is increasing, good people are losing everything to believe in, the world keeps falling apart and straying from the centre. To make it all worse, Anti-Christ, or Satan, or a monster comes to take over the world instead of Jesus Christ to save the world. In such a faltering world, what one would think of the future of one's child, and how anyone could be safe from this increasing uncertainty and danger of the world – Yeats' A Prayer for My Daughter tries to deal with these questions, trying to provide solutions with ideals that are unfortunately conservative, discriminative and problematic.

On the other hand, the setting of A Rose for Emily by William Faulkner is the period after the American Civil War of 1861-65, right after slave abolition. The setting itself is a prominent indication of class segregation, which was lasting even after slavery was abolished. The deeply rooted classism and racism in the aristocratic class resulted in the underdeveloped mind of Emily leading to her tragic ending. The present research is a critical study on the sense of captivity through a different eye to unveil the undercurrent of 'captivity' in the selected texts.

The only objective of the study was to explore the state of captivity as an undercurrent issue in the personal lives of the female protagonists in the selected texts by the two selected male authors at the level of an unconscious subjectivity.

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## 2. Literature Review

Mitra (2015) analyses W. B. Yeats' A Prayer for My Daughter, observing that the poet's daughter is portrayed as an object of perfection weighted with the expectations of all good qualities, simultaneously staying hidden in the name of protection from the impending calamities of the world feared in The Second Coming.

Toker (1999) points out the ironies of patriarchal ideals in Yeats' A Prayer for My Daughter. Ye (2016) explains that the biggest reason for Emily's tragic fate in A Rose for Emily is her confined living environment and the strict patriarchy tying her down. Her isolation halted her from growing and learning to love leading to her downfall in love and in life itself. Ye also holds the stagnant society at fault for Emily's tragedy.

Asmarani (2017) discusses how Emily's identity got twisted and oppressed in A Rose for Emily. Asmarani concluded that Emily's father played a big role in Emily's undeveloped self-identity. Scherting (1980) points out in his paper that Emily's oppression in Rose for Emily is associated with her extreme dependence on her father, her not being able to survive without her father's excessive protection, and her Oedipus complex leading to her holding onto a dead lover that mirrored her dead father, as her father was the only person she ever interacted with.

These reviewed papers discuss the reasons behind Emily's downfall in A Rose for Emily and the hypocrisy of patriarchal protection and classism in A Prayer for My Daughter. This study observes the similarity between the treatment of the daughter of Yeats' poem and Emily from Faulkner's story, the ideology of supremacy that creates perpetual confinement.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

The setting of 1921's A Prayer for My Daughter by W. B. Yeats is a storm in the ocean, and the child is sleeping innocently inside the house, unaware of the storm of the world. The child's father contemplates how his daughter should be when she grows up to survive in the world of chaos and storm. He urges that his daughter is not extremely beautiful, but kind and good from the inside who can win people's hearts with her good virtues and qualities, as beautiful women have often been stuck in a foolish life with strange adversities. Gradually his prayer for conservativism for his daughter emerges. Yeats wishes that his daughter is free from hatred, especially intellectual hatred and intolerance to other people's opinions. He wants her to be agreeable, amiable. Yeats does not directly wish his daughter to have no opinion. But he wants that she does not tend to contradict traditional ideals. He prays that she stays in her home, in her country, in the same place, forever, never leaving, like a tree, rooted in the soil, serving the country with her amicable goodness. Supriya Mitra's paper points out that Yeats' emphasis on the wish for rootedness for his child was a manifestation of his desire to stay in one place which he could not accomplish (Mitra, 2015). By the end, Yeats expresses his ultimate wish for his daughter to be married in an aristocratic family who values traditional values, he ultimately wants her to be safe and away from the ordinary people of the streets who fight for changing the tradition. Yeats is not hiding that his ideals are nationalistic and conservative. He does not want his daughter to stray from that. He wants her to be kind and affectionate who will be liked by people, who will not be proud or arrogant, who will not contradict traditions. He wants her to be like a tree, perpetually staying in one place, almost wanting to bind her, restricting her from moving and exploring. He wants her to be limited in the conservative higher class where traditions are valued and anything fresh or new from outside of tradition cannot contaminate. He wants to restrict her from interacting with the "thoroughfares", the ordinary people deprived of the advantages of the higher class, the people who have ideas and beliefs for a change in the world. The father in this poem fears change, and he is equating change with chaos and calamity, ignoring the need for change and revolution for the betterment and development of the world. He believes that to protect his daughter from the situation of the world described in The Second Coming, she needs to be limited within the boundaries of the higher class aristocrats, without looking for new ways and exploring new ideas, serving the traditions for perpetuity, not to have the openness of mind, primely to have acceptance of traditions without questioning or contradicting or revolting, not to be mingled with those in the chaos who actually can raise voice to try and fix the chaos.

William Faulkner's A Rose for Emily, though set in a different place and context, can show the lethal impacts of class-superiority, isolation, restricted exploration, and a parent's toxic control over the child's life leading to irrecoverable consequences. The story starts after the death of the old aristocrat lady Miss Emily, with the description of a lavish house decorated in an old-fashioned way, still seeming to hold its noble prestige, a house that feels out of place and out of time, much like Miss Emily herself. The story then takes a journey to Emily's pathetic fate, as a result of holding on to the sense of superiority like a disease, and Emily's history of extreme isolation that results in lacking any understanding and exploration necessary for a human being, her excessive agreeableness and devotion within the limited boundary of her surroundings, in this case, Emily's blind devotion to her father, and her father's poisonous control over her life that eventually turns her life poisonous and stagnant. Emily's father's 'prayer for the daughter' engulfed Emily so lethally that she becomes her father himself, refusing to accept change, having to kill her lover to keep him to herself, to avoid the threat of him leaving and exploring and bring change; an attempt to lock his body forever to herself, the way her father locked her inside, away from change and interaction.

A Rose for Emily is not the story of an eccentric woman. It is Emily's story that makes us pity her for being the victim of her situation. Ratna Asmarani finds that the main factor triggering the hampered development of Emily's identity comes from her father (Asmarani, 2017). Primely, her father is responsible for her predicament, who is also associated with the social and psychological issues prompting her predicament. He isolated her, not letting her interact with any suitor in the fear that his idea of distinction of being superior would dissolve and everyone would turn out to be equal if aristocrats mingled with lower-class ordinary people. Because of the isolation, Emily could never explore her sexuality and even herself, she couldn't be healthily associated with her body, not being able to understand and accept basic human desires that she had been deprived of. Her father was her only visualization of desire and protection, and after his death, she was lost in dysfunction. Emily's social and psychological conditions are intertwined. The social issues evoked her psychological issues. She could never let go of her past. The town transitioned to its next generation, but she still believed herself to be in her old era, thus becoming socially isolated and aloof. She felt threatened by changes because her father did not let her life develop. Also, Homer Baron, who was supposed to be her suitor, was a free-spirited man who was interested in bringing changes, who liked moving around and enjoying, who was not a 'marrying man' and was not interested in settling down. He was the opposite of Emily's comfort zone of being locked in the house. So, to remove the threat of him leaving her, she killed him, so that his corpse could stay with her forever. This is her psychological dysfunction, of being sexually attracted to a dead body, which erupted because she never knew a normal healthy sexual life.

After Emily Grierson's death, the people called her a fallen monument. The house and the Grierson family were like an ominous strange presence in the town, stuck in a particular era, not moving along with the changes of the town. Emily's father had been a shadow in her life, always controlling over her, standing behind her like a figure of power. The townspeople saw them as some supernatural entity in the house, above them, who were not like them, who were separated from the world of ordinary humans, lurking like some inhuman beings in their world. Faulkner, here, tried to show the reinforcement of class discrimination and slavery. The Civil War was between the Northerners and the Southerners. The Northerners won, slavery was abolished, the Southerners had to free the slaves, and the slaves were supposed to be like the other American citizens, free people, which was hard to accept for those who were used to the advantage of discrimination, and accepting the equality was a threat to their existence. It was not only about wealth or who was rich or who was poor. The aristocrats, like the Griersons, believed themselves to be superior beings, better than other humans, not having to deal with bodily existence, but living like supernatural entities, special unearthly figures isolated and separated. Such ideas of supremacy, the belief of belonging to a better kind than the rest of humankind, created the chaos and massacre of the world in all times, the massacre which Yeats wishes to hide his daughter from, the massacre which has been created through such beliefs of division themselves. When the town's authority took initiative to eradicate the bad

smell that was coming from Emily's house, which was the smell of Homer's corpse, they never confronted Emily herself about the smell, deeming it inappropriate to tell a lady about bad smell associated with her; it is a subtle continuation of how Emily had been denied the basic humane knowledge of her own body, her biological functions, the rights of her own life itself, denied by her father, who did not want to let go of their stance of an enigma, did not let his daughter soar and learn in the fear that equality might truly be established. Nevertheless, Emily, lost and confused, with malfunctioning psychology of what to do in the world without the restrictive protection of her father, actually internalized her father's wish, making sure to not let any change enter her life and keep the possibility of change captured to herself, as the corpse of Homer.

Emily's story is the story of a victim, also the story of caution, showing the pathetic results of isolation, separation, and toxic protection, that Yeats' poem encourages for the daughter.

## 4. Conclusion

The readers do not see the state of the life of the daughter from A Prayer for My Daughter but do go through the tragedy of Emily living in a similar and extreme environment of obedience as the daughter from Yeats' poem. The present study has explored and examined the fatal repercussions of confinement of a person, even if it is disguised in the name of protection. It also contemplates the necessity of accepting the changing world and letting go of the dead and the old, the practices which could save Emily from her downfall and let the daughter from Yeats' poem live a life with growth and healthy development.

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