

Introduction to World Literature
Professor Dr Merin Simi Raj
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Lecture 08
A Rose for Emily - Part 1

Hello and welcome to today's session of this course, today we shall be looking at this short story titled *A Rose for Emily* written by William Faulkner.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:20)



William Faulkner

- American writer, Nobel laureate 1949
- *The Sound and The Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!*
- Fictional Yoknapatawpha County, based on Lafayette county Mississippi
- American South – with a mix of reverence and criticism
- Themes: The Old South before the civil war – the old economic and social order, cultural values etc

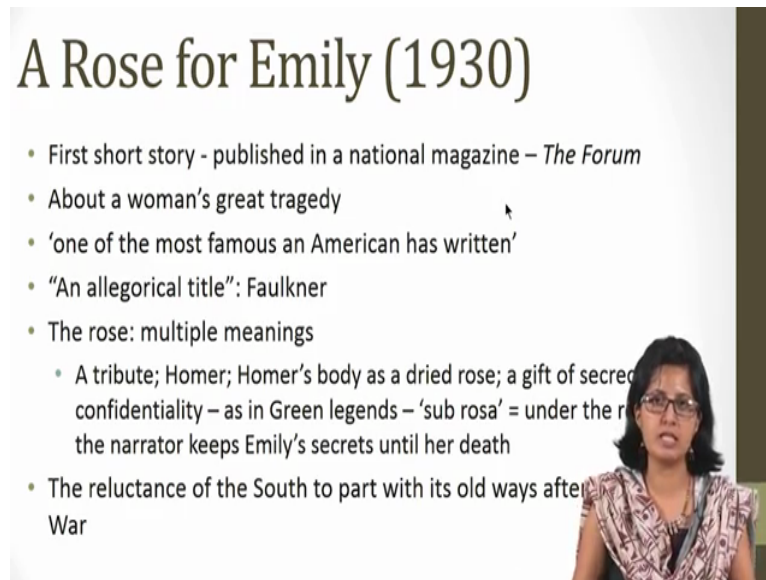
William Faulkner was an American writer, he was also Nobel laureate in 1949, some of his important works include *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!* He has been particularly noted for his depiction of the fictional county which he named as Yoknapatawpha, this is quite similar to the way Narayan, the Indian writer had created Malgudi as a fictional village.

Yoknapatawpha County is based on the Lafayette county Mississippi, Faulkner himself had spent a lot of time in Mississippi and it is considered that Faulkner is the only noble winner, he was born and lived in Mississippi. The setting of most of Faulkner's work was in the American South, he talks about the American South and the many details of it with a mix of reverence and criticism.

The themes that we find strong across the various ranges of his works, they are mostly about the old American South before the civil war. It talks about the within the context of the old

economic and social order the old aristocratic, the teaching settings, the cultural values etcetera, we will also see much of it getting reflected in this short story A Rose for Emily that we shall be taking a look at.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:45)



A Rose for Emily (1930)

- First short story - published in a national magazine – *The Forum*
- About a woman's great tragedy
- 'one of the most famous an American has written'
- "An allegorical title": Faulkner
- The rose: multiple meanings
 - A tribute; Homer; Homer's body as a dried rose; a gift of secrecy confidentiality – as in Greek legends – 'sub rosa' = under the rose the narrator keeps Emily's secrets until her death
- The reluctance of the South to part with its old ways after War

A Rose for Emily is a 1930 short story this was the first short story written by Faulkner and it was also published in the national magazine titled the Forum, the story is about a woman is great tragedy as the title implies it is about Emily and it is considered that this short story is it is one of the most famous an American has written. The title Faulkner himself has referred to this as an allegorical title, the object Rose it itself does not appear even once in the short story, there is no direct or indirect reference to a Rose but the meanings as Faulkner himself has stated there is allegorical, there are layered meanings and multiple meanings that we can attribute to the rose.

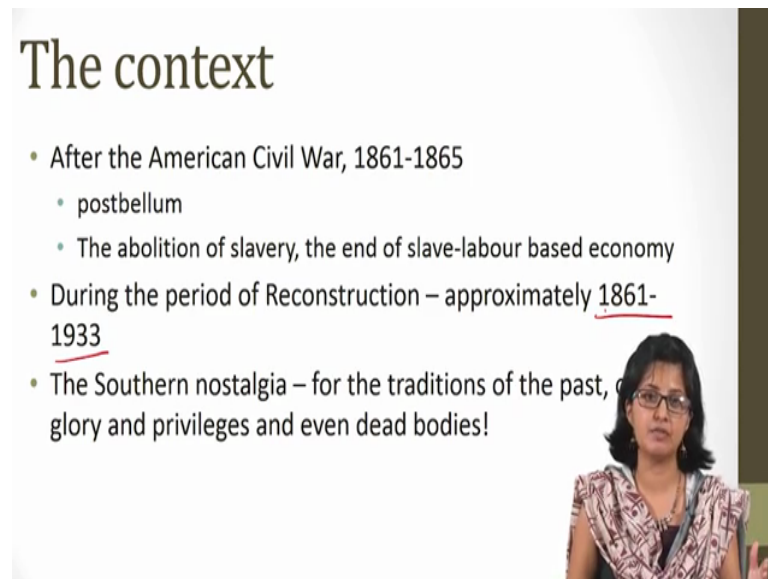
The rose could be a tribute to Emily who at the outset of the short story itself in the first sentence itself we get know that she has died, the rose could be a reference to Homer is body being perhaps compared to a dried rose, it could also be a reference to this Latin term sub rosa in Greek legends it indicates a gift of secrecy and confidentiality, sub rules are the literal meaning is under the Rose which means under secrecy, under confidentiality.

The narrator in this context we get to know that she he keeps the secrets of Emily, the secret life of Emily as very confidential with a lot of secrecy until her death it is only in the last segment the final segment of the short story we get to know the dark secret that Emily had

been hiding all this while. A Rose for Emily can be summed up as a story that deals with the reluctance of the south to part with its old ways after the civil war.

We will find Emily's character being exemplified in that sense, the reluctance that she shows in becoming a part of the new order in letting go we will see all those things in the short story.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:56)



The context

- After the American Civil War, 1861-1865
 - postbellum
 - The abolition of slavery, the end of slave-labour based economy
- During the period of Reconstruction – approximately 1861-1933
- The Southern nostalgia – for the traditions of the past, glory and privileges and even dead bodies!

A small video inset in the bottom right corner shows a woman with glasses and a patterned top speaking.

The context of the story is very important, it only in this social historical context the meaning of the story becomes more accentuated, it is set in this period after the American civil war which happened from 1861 till 1865 at the term which we use postbellum after the civil war and the major characteristics as we know of the civil war. What the civil war made possible was the abolition of slavery.

So we find a transition in the following decades because there was an end of this previous slave labour based economy. This story is set during the period of Reconstruction approximately between 1861 and 1933 and in the story we also get to know that it is around the same time that Emily is born as well. And we find a certain sense of Southern nostalgia personified in Emily's character, in the way the other characters respond to or deal with situations we find this nostalgia for the traditions of the past, for the old glory and privileges and we will find that in the persona of Emily we also find a certain kind of a nostalgia even for dead bodies.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:12)



Emily

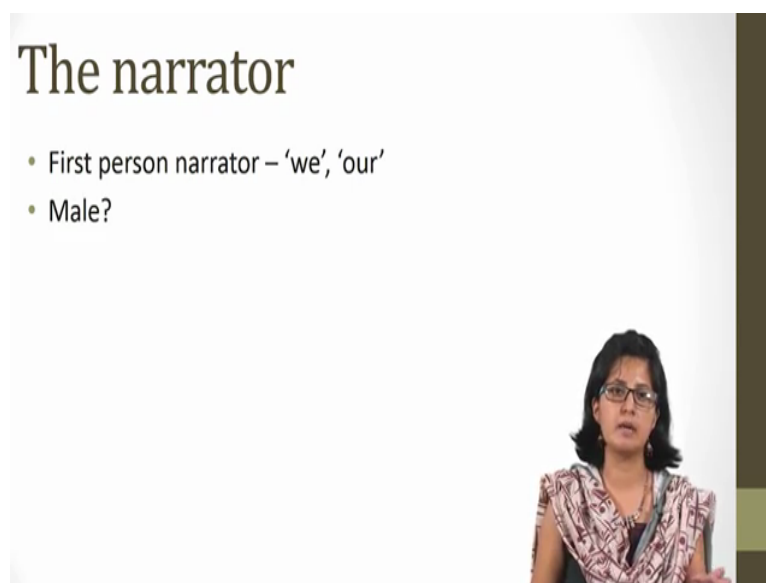
- Belongs to the aristocratic family in the South
- The Griersons – relics from the past, decaying Southern aristocracy
- White
- Has a 'Negro' servant

The slide features a presenter in the bottom right corner, a woman with dark hair and glasses wearing a patterned top.

Emily is a lead character about whom this entire story is getting written, she belongs to the aristo family in the south and she is also part of this family the Griersons. The Griersons the entire family the household itself can be seen as a symbol or relic from the past kind of a living symbol of the decaying Southern aristocracy. We get to know that she is white, she also has a Negro servant, daughter said during a time and slavery has already been abolished.

The intricacies of Emily is character we shall be taking a closer look at when we try to read through the short story.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:50)



The narrator

- First person narrator – 'we', 'our'
- Male?

The slide features a presenter in the bottom right corner, a woman with dark hair and glasses wearing a patterned top.

And we have the narrator who is the one who is introducing this entire story to us, it is a first person narrator but interestingly the narrator does not use I, we find we, ours and are throughout that is also something about the perspective the storytelling perspective that we shall be noticing and there are also enough evidences in the story through which we can assume that it is a male narrator.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:15)



There are multiple symbols in this short story, the Griersons family home itself is the most visible and the most dominant symbol over here and we find that Emily is father and her relatives the figure of the negro, Emily herself they all represent and personify different things. The taxes in Jefferson we find at least three or four references to the mode of tax payment and then how Emily is affected in that process, we find it through these references we find Faulkner very effectively mapping a transition period from the old order to the new order.

And there are these references to bodies, dead bodies to be precise and we also represent the decay this difficulty to let go and we will find that the personal and the social historical those elements are intricately woven in these symbols and Emily's hair it is if emerges as a very predominant symbol and that also comes across as a kind of a reference and indication of Emily's sexuality and we find that the presence of her hair, it also serves this purpose of unravelling the mystery of the story as we would see towards the end.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:38)


A Rose for Emily
by William Faulkner

I

WHEN MISS Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: 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, which no one save an old man-servant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, a stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps—a gloom among eyesores. And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of the dead among names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the



It will really useful to take a look at this short story to notice how particular elements are used to accentuate the meaning making process and it also gives us a sense of the kind of master storyteller, the master craftsman that Faulkner was how he could bring him a lot of my new details place them strategically in different points of the story, so that as a whole it begins to fit in really well.

The story begins with this statement when Emily grieves and died, our whole town went to her funeral, so we also know we already know what the setting is, what the gravity of the event which already had a, we already know the setting we also get to know about the recent even Emily is death. I will notice the use of our right from the beginning, the narrator is not really alone here it is more like a collective rendering, the narrator is also telling us about what the entire county the entire province perhaps thought about Emily and her life and in the first paragraph you also get to know that Emily is house itself is this major attraction in that area and nobody has seen that house at least in last 10 years.

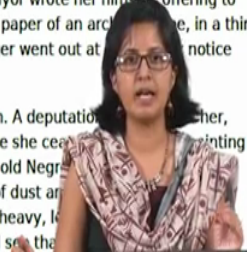
So there is a sense of enigma, a sense of suspense which is already getting built into the story. We will find this continuous use of the pronoun us and our continuing to indicate that the narrator is part taking in this collective narrative process and this is how Miss Emily begins to get introduced.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:29)

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor—he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply. They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic type, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The notice was also enclosed, without comment.

They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation of three, including the mayor, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased to go out. The door was opened by a Negro man, who had been in the service of the family for lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a room which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse, an odour which clung to the walls and filled the room. The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, dark, old-fashioned furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see the



Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty and a care. A sort of hereditary obligation upon the town dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor he who fathered the addicted that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity.

This information is important in order to give us a sense of how things were before and how things are going to change, he talks about a mere Colonel Sartoris who was perhaps working hand in hand with the aristocracy, who had a come up with sartorial codes and rules for the Negro women and who also had exempted Emily is father from being the taxes and when Emily continues to not to pay the taxes, totally oblivious to this change of order and the change of roles.

We come to know that Emily continues to live in this old order, which was in certain ways more comfortable and very convenient for her. We find the use of the term Negro throughout the story and it is also a way in which the South had continued to address the black person and towards the end of this paragraph we find this only a man of Colonel Sartoris generation and thought could have invented it and only a woman could have believed it because Colonel Sartoris comes up with this strange logic that Emily is father that Emily is father had loaned money to the town and this was a way of repaying them by exempting them from taxes and when the narrator tells us that only a man of Colonel Sartoris generation and thought could have invented it and only a woman could have believed it.

We get another two things about the narrator one he does not believe it himself, he does not begin they are belong to the older generation, he belongs to the newer generation which believes in the new order of things, the new economic order, the new social political order and who believes in this historical thing which happened the abolished of slavery which brought about a significant change in the way things were structured in and around America and when he says only a woman could have believed it, he is also perhaps indicating that he is not one among them.

So we get to know that the narrator is a young man who believes in the new order of things, who does not belong to the old generation and he and it is a man.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:02)

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply. They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china-painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell. The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the pane was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning in slow motes in the single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a portrait of Miss Emily's father.

They rose when she entered—a small, fat woman in black, with



When we look at the ways in which Emily Grierson gets described, we also pay attention to the way in which her own physical frame had undergone a change, there is a reference to this incident when the Aldermen after having a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen they come to Emily is home to collect taxes and this is how she is described, a small fat woman in black and we find in a later segment of the story, one of the earlier descriptions about Emily she being a small, a thin woman wearing white.

So we see this transition also affecting the way in which perhaps Emily responds to the changing circumstances, the changing social economic conditions and the shifting value systems.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:53)

gold head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.

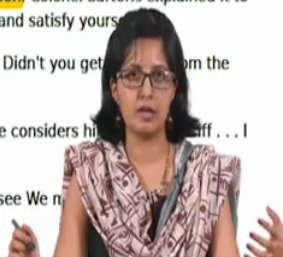
Her voice was dry and cold. "I have no taxes in Jefferson," Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yours.

"But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn't you get the order from the sheriff, signed by him?"

"I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said. "Perhaps he considers himself a sheriff . . . I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We need to see the books."

"See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson."



When these men came to Emily's house to demand for taxes she has the audacity to tell them I have no taxes in Jefferson because she continues to believe in the old order where her father was exempted from taxes and we also get to know that she is totally unwilling to change with the times and she is extremely insensitive to the law of the land and she thinks that she continues to enjoy certain privileges and certain positions and certain exemptions which were handed down to her over generations.

And we also get to know that the way Emily's character is portrayed particularly in this instance where she refuses to pay taxes, we do find that Faulkner is being critical of this attitude but there is also a sympathetic way in which this gets portrayed because it is about a woman, who was at some point part of the aristocracy, enjoyed certain powers in that context and now she is extremely helpless and that helplessness comes out in the form of this defensive attitude, miss arrogant attitude.

The sympathy with which Faulkner, our presence in poetry is Emily is very hard to miss and quite admirable.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:05)

II

SO SHE vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell.

That was two years after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart—the one we believed would marry her—had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man—a young man then—going in and out with a market basket.

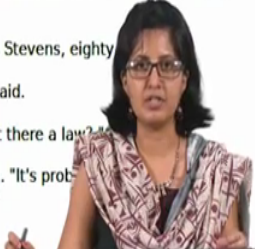
"Just as if a man—any man—could keep a kitchen properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons.

A neighbor, a woman, complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, eighty

"But what will you have me do about it, madam?" he said.

"Why, send her word to stop it," the woman said. "Isn't there a law?"

"I'm sure that won't be necessary," Judge Stevens said. "It's probable that man of hers killed in the yard. I'll speak to him about it."



If you look at the structure of the story we will find that it is divided in different segments, when we come to the second segment we are introduced to a different time period altogether and this is how the time period is qualified it is 30 years before the smell, the smell and the details around it from where the smell came and what it had led to that also forms the crux of the story.

I would try I will try not to include any spoilers in this, I would encourage you to read that your own, read the story on your own and figure out what exactly the smell was about and what role this smell played in this story and we do get a lot of these indicators about the timeline. The second segment begins to talk about 30 years before the smell and two years after her father is death and a short time after her sweetheart.

The one we believed would marry her, had deserted her while giving the timeline we are also being made privy to various incidents that happened in Emily is life that is the smell episode, it is 30 years before the smell, it is two years after her father is death and a short time after her sweetheart had deserted her.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:21)

"I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said. "Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff . . . I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see We must go by the--"

"See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But, Miss Emily--"

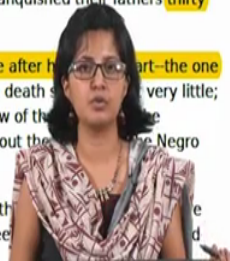
"See Colonel Sartoris." (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.) "I have no taxes in Jefferson. To be!" The Negro appeared. "Show these gentlemen out."

II

SO SHE vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers **thirty years before about the smell.**

That was **two years after her father's death and a short time after her father had died--the one we believed would marry her--had deserted her.** After her father's death she was very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the young men had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the Grierson man--a young man then--going in and out with a market basket.

"Just as if a man--any man--could keep a kitchen properly," they would not be surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between her and the high and mighty Griersons.



Then we also find people complaining about the smell and the ways in which the lot tries in to intervene and not to intervene and how the local people also take it upon themselves to get rid of the smell.

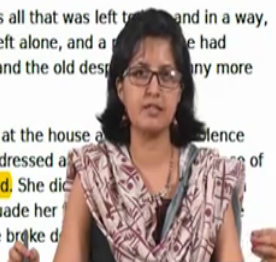
(Refer Slide Time: 15:34)

lawn and into the shadow of the locusts that lined the street. **After a week or two the smell went away.**

That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town, remembering how old lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that the Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such. We had long thought of them as a tableau, 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. So when **she got to be thirty and was still single**, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated; even with insanity in the family she wouldn't have turned down all of her chances if they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a town that had become **humanized**. Now she too would know the old thrill and the old despair, any more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer sympathy and aid, as is our custom Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual, but with a look of grief on her face. **She told them that her father was not dead.** She did not let the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them examine her body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down and let them bury her father quickly.



I will go will not go into the details of it and then the story tells us after a week or two the smell went away and here there is a description of her, Emily this was 30 years before the smell, two years after her father had died. Emily is a slender figure in white, she got to be 13 and was still single that certainly is a concern, it is the American South it is the period after the civil war are the end of the 19th century, it is a conservative attitude towards single

women, so the town the entire town is concerned that she is 30 and she is still single and we also get to know that and just before the second segment ends we are being made privy to another horrific detail after her father is death Emily refuses to part with the dead body, she is adamant and insisting that her father is not dead.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:32)

they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized. Now she too would know the old thrill and the old despair of a penny more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.

III

SHE WAS SICK for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows—sort of tragic and serene.

We will wrap up this session by drawing your attention to the last segment in this second part. We did not say she was crazy then we believed she had to do that we remembered all the young men her father had driven away and we knew that with nothing left she would have to cling to that which had robbed her as people well, when the narrator is telling us that we did not say she was crazy then it also implies that now at the time of narration, the narrator believes that she is crazy now.

So now it is important for us to keep these details in mind which would also help us and lead us towards a better understanding of the rest of the story. I encourage you to read through the entire story before we complete this discussion, thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.