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Sandbox Essay 1

Sandbox Essay 1: The Oval Portrait and A Rose for Emily

The stories, *The Oval Portrait* and *A Rose for Emily* both convey the relationship between mortality and desire. Though both stories contain different narratives, they both center around the idea of possession or possessive behavior. For example the semiotic structure of *The Oval Portrait* is that the main character is not only viewing art through his own eyes, but is also viewing from the artist's perspective upon finding the artist's journal. The painting and the journal are both semiotic in that through one perception the painting is just an interesting, innocent, nice painting, but with the artist the subject of the painting has a darker connotation upon just a first glance. The semiotic structure of *A Rose for Emily* is captivated by mystery. It conveys that even through observation, a person may never know what is really going on in one's life. The story focuses on the life and death of the main character and then turns into something deeper towards the end. This essay will depict the ways in which mortality and desire are conveyed in these two stories, and how they apply to structuralism.

The structuralist narratology of *The Oval Portrait* focuses on perspective, language, and desire. In the beginning of the story the main character can't quite pinpoint the source of his interest in this painting of a young woman. The painting expresses beauty, youth, and also mystery as it depicts such a life like expression. The main character describes the painting as "It was a mere head and shoulders, done in what is technically termed a vignette manner; much in the style of favorite heads of Sully. The arms, the bosom, and even the ends of the radiant hair

melted imperceptibly into the vague yet deep shadow which formed the background of the whole. The frame was oval, richly gilded and filigreed in Moresque. As a thing of art nothing could be more admirable than the painting itself.” The narrator learns after reading the artist’s journal that the subject died. This ideal embodies fervor and that the desire to encapsulate something can cloud not only judgement but reality. The fictional mode of structuralist criticism comes into play with this story because it is ironic that the painter was so full of desire to paint and capture the mere beauty of his subject, that he neglected her. It is ironic that the subject was so wrapped up in the notion of being painted, and lusted after in a way that would have made her feel whole, that she neglected herself. Mortality is depicted in the story because the youth and beauty of the woman will always be present in the painting. Desire is depicted in the form of obsession and negligence. The language of the narrator changes as he is forced to shift perspectives.

The structuralist narratology of *A Rose for Emily* also focuses on perspective, language, and desire. The story opens with the main character, Miss Emily’s funeral and talks about her life and her projected personality. The narrative is part of the language aspect of the story because it uses words from an earlier time period, and there is a third party narrator not depicted as a one suggested person, but has the mystery of being multiple people, the townspeople. The story looks at the effects of mental health and loss, the townspeople notice changes with Miss Emily, she cuts her hair short and she starts going out less, but nothing that particularly leads to suspicion of anything darker going on. Mortality is depicted in the story towards the end when the townspeople discover that there is a dead body in Miss Emily’s home. There’s this hint of the idea that through pain, you can save something good. The description of the dead body from the

townspeople was; “For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust. Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair.” This infers that Miss Emily didn’t want to come to terms with the death of her lover, her desire to lay next to it while rotting, also depicts an obsession. The structuralism of both stories are similar in this macabre language, and setting and explores the connection between attraction, desire, and mortality.