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Transitivity Analysis of Character Agency in *A Rose for Emily*

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Abstract: As an important representative work of William Faulkner, a leading figure of the Southern Renaissance, *A Rose for Emily* has long been a focus of literary research. This study analyzes this short story by applying the transitivity system in Halliday's systematic functional grammar, exploring how Faulkner alters Emily Grilson's role in the transitivity process within the five sections of the story, aiming to reveal the functions of process type patterns and participant roles in shaping character agency, social power relations, and thematic meaning. This study shows that although Emily is the protagonist, in most sentences she is deprived of active social actions, and the people of the town, as collective narrators, occupy the dominant position of Actors, Sensers and Sayers, confining her to a symbol of the southern nobility. Faulkner's language choices led to this imbalance. The static description at the end makes Emily a tragic subject shaped by patriarchy, social customs and the decline of the Southern nobility. This study verified the interpretive ability of transitivity system for literary works and provided theoretical and practical inspirations for the analysis of literary discourse.

Keywords: A Rose for Emily, Transitivity, Stylistic Analysis.

1. Introduction

A Rose for Emily, written by William Faulkner, is widely regarded as a masterpiece of the Southern Renaissance. It is one of the important components of the " Yoknapatawpha Genealogy", and its story is set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County. Faulkner created this county to explore the decline of the Old South, a recurring theme in his literary works. Readers can clearly see the social experiences and collective consciousness of the southern society at that time in these stories. Yoknapatawpha County, as a symbolic embodiment of the Old South, provided Faulkner with narrative space to express his complex and contradictory emotions and inner conflicts towards the South.

Emily Grierson is the core character of the story. She is a quirky and eccentric old lady who resizes the passage of time and the inevitable changes. The story is divided into five parts and adopts a non-linear structure, with its narrative perspective constantly shifting in time and space. Readers can only learn about Emily's past through the townspeople of Jefferson. As the story progresses, Faulkner gradually reveals the complexity of her personality, the psychological impact of her long-term isolation, and her refusal to adapt to the rapidly changing world. Emily fights desperately against the power of fate, clings to the past to preserve the glory of her noble bloodline, and strives to ensure that her existence would not be erased by the new social trends. It is because her actions resonated with the broader theme of the decline of the southern nobility that she becomes a symbol of the old South. Therefore, her predicament is not only a personal tragedy but also reflects the collective predicament of the old Southern nobility, who found themselves trapped in cognitive dissonance and identity crisis. On the one hand, they want to break free from the shackles of tradition and demonstrate a rebellious spirit against the past. On the other hand, they are eager to preserve the glory and beauty of their old world.

A Rose for Emily delves deeply into human existence, covering various themes such as tradition, isolation, and the relentless passage of time. William Faulkner, the Nobel Prize winner in Literature and an American novelist, is renowned for his works such as *A Rose for Emily*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *As I Lay Dying*. Faulkner rose to fame after publishing his controversial novel in 1931, and then won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1949. He has since received two Pulitzer Prizes and two National Book Awards. Unlike Hemingway's works with war as the theme, Faulkner and many Southern writers of the American Southern Renaissance focused on the decline of Southern nobility and the conflict between old and new values. His works reflect the social issues of that historical period and showcase rich regional characteristics. The inner conflicts experienced by the characters in his works also reflect Faulkner's own inner self. Through his writing, he expresses his complex emotions towards the South and his continuous exploration of his own identity and value.

Faulkner is known as "a great experimenter of novel techniques", and the female characters he depicted often had to confront the harsh reality brought about by the social and economic turmoil of the American Civil War. He often adds suspense to his narrative, leaving readers unsure of how the plot will unfold. When the truth is finally revealed, readers are confronted with a strong sense of conflict, which enables them to better understand the characters' pain, struggle and inner turmoil. Faulkner employed outstanding narrative techniques to depict the experiences of the South, making this work an eternal masterpiece in American literature. This article employs transitive analysis to examine Faulkner's language features and narrative strategies, and explores how he uses deliberate vocabulary selection, syntactic structure, narrative organization, and the transformation of narrative perspectives to shape character images, especially the character traits of the protagonist Emily. Through these strategies, Faulkner depicted Emily as a tragic figure against the backdrop of the Old South era. This article examines the proportion and distribution of different processes in the text and transitivity system, analyzes the specific manifestations of Faulkner's typical language features, and explores how the transitivity system and Faulkner's language features jointly

construct Emily's identity in *A Rose for Emily* [1].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Studies Abroad

A Rose for Emily has been widely studied and regarded as a literary classic by scholars. Previous studies abroad primarily focus on narrative theory, feminism, symbolism and stylistics, each contributing unique insights to the interpretation of this work.

Scholars such as Nebeker, West, Melczarek, and Burg, Boyle and Lang conducted detailed studies on the narrative techniques and narrators of this work. Nebeker divided the narrators of "Roses for Emily" into three distinct groups: the contemporary society "they", the previous generation of "their", and the disappointed pursuers "we". Nebeker explores the theme of the novel by delving into the identity of the narrator, emphasizing the importance of the narrator in driving the plot forward [2]. However, he overlooked the town's implicit rejection and indifference towards Emily, as well as the mocking tone used when referring to her as part of "We".

Galotti and Ryan proposed a new interpretation of the narrator "We" based on the previous discussion of the narrator. They advocate that when analyzing plural narratives, the individual characteristics of "We" should be retained. This collective does not have a stable scale or structure, but changes its connotation as the plot develops. It not only reflects individuality but also interacts with specific social situations, achieving convergence and coexistence in specific circumstances. This individualized "We" enables the shift in perspective to resonate with the readers. Although the content and viewpoints it acquires are largely consistent, its representational and experiential responses are unique [3].

Some scholars from the perspective of narrative theory emphasize Faulkner's handling of time rather than the narrator. They revealed how manipulating time enhances the artistry and thematic effect of their works. According to Melczarek's research, Faulkner creates suspense and conceals the truth by deliberately altering narrative techniques and time manipulation [4]. Burg et al. further pointed out that Faulkner's unique approach to handling time in his works is particularly thought-provoking. By alternately using narrators and nonlinear narratives, he constructed a sequence of event fragments reflecting the fragmented characteristics of human memory. An in-depth exploration of Faulkner's narrative chronological order is by no means without value. His stories and novels are closely related to his specific historical background. Understanding this historical background makes the narrative framework broader and enables readers to fully grasp some key details, such as Emily's tragic ending coinciding with the decline of the Old South, her refusal to admit her father's death, and the sharp contrast between the pre-Civil War era and the society she lived in [5].

Scholars from a feminist perspective focus their research on dissecting the causes of Emily's tragedy, examining gender relations and power dynamics in the text, and in some cases, expanding the scope of feminist interpretation through cross-cultural comparisons.

Roberts and Barani and Yahya analyze the themes of *A Rose for Emily* from a feminist perspective and explored the reasons behind Emily's tragedy. Barani et al. hold that the feminist movement is committed to achieving gender equality by challenging the social limitations imposed on women. In the book, Emily is depicted as a complex character. She seems proud, domineering and independent, but in fact, she is very vulnerable inside and wants to keep the people she can rely on. The sympathetic attitude of the townspeople towards Emily reflected a widespread notion at that time that women without male support were essentially helpless. Constrained by social norms, Emily's solitary life after indicates her unwillingness to communicate with the community and to accept these judgments and restrictions [6].

Ajmal et al. further analyzed gender relations and power dynamics. They conducted a comparative study of James Joyce's Evelyn and William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*. By exploring the obedience displayed by the female protagonists in these works, they focus on how gender and power dynamics shape personal lives. Emily's submissive and passive stance in the patriarchal society was revealed. Constrained by social norms, Emily's behavior and attitude were profoundly influenced, which made it impossible for her to break free from these constraints. Eventually, she spent her entire life in loneliness until her death [7].

Giang and Dan extended the feminist perspective to a cross-cultural context for comparative analysis to explore the dynamics of gender power behind Emily's resistance and tragic fate. By comparing Emily with female figures in Vietnamese literature, they emphasized the differences in the ways women resist under different cultural backgrounds, thereby providing new perspectives and references for the feminist interpretation of literary works and cross-cultural gender studies [8].

From the perspective of symbolism, scholars have made significant contributions to the identification, decoding and systematization of symbolic elements in novels by applying professional theoretical frameworks. Wilany employed semiotic theory to identify and interpret various symbols such as the rose, the change in Emily's hairstyle, the ticking of a watch, the house, and the black. He constructed a symbolic system and believed that there were intrinsic connections among different symbolic elements [9]. Unlike the traditional interpretation of "rose" as a symbol of love, this study innovatively defines it as a symbol of the relationship between Emily and her father. It also reveals atypical symbols, such as the change in Emily's hairstyle and the ticking of a watch, combining symbolic analysis with visual and auditory symbolic perspectives.

From the perspective of stylistics, scholars have conducted micro-level interpretations of novels by linking language features with the thematic conflicts of the novels and applying both qualitative and quantitative methods. Abdurrahman conducted qualitative and quantitative research by applying Halliday's sentence structure analysis method. By analyzing sentence patterns and sentence lengths, he discovered how the complexity of sentence structure reflected the conflict between the old southern nobility and modern society. Different sentence structures have different functions. For instance, the hierarchical relationship of subordinate structures symbolizes the remnants of the old order, long sentences imply resistance to change by slowing down the reading pace, and the interweaving of parallel structures and subordinate structures reflects the collision between tradition and modernity [10]. Faulkner's choice of language form is a functional design that serves the expression of meaning. The complexity of sentence structure can directly reflect the psychology of characters, social contradictions and the depth of themes, providing a new micro-perspective for the

interpretation of literary works.

Foreign research on *A Rose for Emily* has laid a solid and multi-faceted foundation for its interpretation. From the perspective of narrative theory, scholars have clarified the identity of the narrator and explored Faulkner's manipulation of time. In feminist studies, they analyzed Emily's tragedy and broadened the perspective through cross-cultural comparisons. In terms of symbolism, semiotics broke the traditional interpretation and constructed a symbolic system. In terms of style, the hybrid research approach links language with the topic. These studies demonstrate the value of this work and provide references for domestic research.

2.2. Previous Studies at Home

Compared with foreign scholars, domestic scholars in China started their research on *A Rose for Emily* relatively late. However, like foreign scholars, they share a common interest in exploring the narrative style of the story and the depiction of female consciousness. The difference is that Chinese scholars have a unique perspective. They deeply analyze the metaphors and language features in the works, adding a unique dimension to the overall understanding of the text.

Researchers such as Xiao, Liu, Wang, etc. have conducted detailed studies on the identities of narrators. Xiao emphasized the significant role of understanding the narrator's identity in comprehending Faulkner's works. He believes that "We" represents the residents of Jefferson Town, and the collective narrator reflects their conservative values and mainstream views. Xiao highlighted the unreliability of the narrators due to the inconsistency in their statements. This seems to be aimed at shifting responsibility and concealing undisclosed details [11]. However, it should be noted that Xiao's analysis lacks an exploration of "them" and does not acknowledge the existence of a third-person narrator outside the story. Unlike Xiao, Liu disagrees with Xiao's view that the narrator represents the values of the Old South, because the narrator does not support the actions of nobles like Sartoris who exempt Emily from taxes. He also cautioned that the reliability of a narrator should not be judged merely by the inconsistency in their words [12].

Chinese scholars have made outstanding contributions to the analysis of Emily's female consciousness. They sorted out the development stages of this consciousness and deconstructed the traditional female archetypes within cross-textual and theoretical frameworks. Zhen conducted a comprehensive study on the development of Emily's female consciousness. She believes that Emily's female consciousness has gone through three stages: loss, restoration and alienation. In the first stage, Emily's obedience led to the loss of her feminine consciousness and self-worth. After her father's death, she shut herself off, which led to loneliness and decline, just like a withered rose. In the second stage, Emily defied social norms and chose to be with Homer in pursuit of her own happiness, regardless of their different social statuses and the resulting scandals. Her bold actions challenged traditional expectations and demonstrated her courage to break free from social constraints. Ultimately, Emily's consciousness was still eroded by the people in the town. Despite her brave struggle against the oppression of patriarchy and the constraints of social expectations, Emily's attempt to pursue her own happiness ultimately ended in tragedy, revealing the oppression that women suffered in a patriarchal society at that time [13].

An and Li further explored Emily's female consciousness from awakening, resistance to distortion, arguing that merely criticizing the spiritual confinement of patriarchy on traditional female morality has limitations. Emily is both a submissive victim oppressed by old traditions and a representative who fought through extreme means after the awakening of female consciousness. The research confirmed the inevitable decline of the old Southern society and the increasing trend of gender equality. Emily's distorted personality and her act of killing her lover were essentially a desperate struggle against an unfair fate, reflecting the social reality of low status and lack of autonomy among women in the American South at that time [14].

By adopting a more innovative theoretical approach, Sun deconstructs the traditional female archetype from three dimensions: gender roles, violent norms, and existential significance, using a binary opposition framework and linear narrative. By integrating Gothic feminism, gender performance theory and the concept of heterotopia, this study interprets Emily's act of killing her lover as a performative resistance to patriarchal scripts, which contrasts with the female archetypes in *Jane Eyre* and *A Doll's House*, highlighting Emily's anti-hero traits. The research has proposed a third tragic path that is neither pure resistance nor passive compliance, in order to break through the simple definition of its character [15]. Furthermore, the research focuses on the subversive nature of female images rather than the conflict between oppression and resistance.

Domestic scholars have also conducted symbolic analyses of roses, houses, watches and corpses, linking them to the Gothic situation in the South. Zhang analyzes the symbolic meanings of the house, gold and watch in the work. Miss Emily's Gothic style house contrasts sharply with the grand Greek style houses of the time, remaining unchanged while the rest of the street is modernized. Although the house is dilapidated, it reflects the owner's stubborn character and symbolizes the shared traits between them. The golden chain and the golden tip of Miss Emily's ebony cane mentioned in the text hint at her wealth. The repeated use of the word "defilement" emphasizes the decline of the family from its former wealth and noble status. Besides, watches also symbolize time. By making the watch invisible, Miss Emily attempts to ignore the passage of time and evade the inevitable changes [16].

Min links symbolism with broader cultural themes, discussing the illusory rose, dilapidated mansion and Homer Barron's corpse in *A Rose for Emily*. By placing the analysis in the context of Southern Gothic literature, the article holds that these symbols interweave with each other, elevating Emily's personal tragedy to a metaphor for the fate of the old Southern civilization. Among them, the rose symbolizes the contradictory emotions of the southern society towards the noble tradition, the mansion reflects the material decline and spiritual restraint of the old order, and Homer's body reveals Emily's pathological resistance under the impact of modernity. The research also pointed out that the intentional absence of the core symbol "rose" is a narrative strategy used to deconstruct the disguise of southern cultural memory [17].

Some of domestic research lies in its application of Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyze linguistic features, with scholars using qualitative-quantitative methods to link language to narrative function and thematic meaning.

Bai analyzes this work from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics. This study adopted a method combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative

analysis involves identifying the frequency and proportion of language phenomena. Qualitative analysis applies the theoretical principles of systemic functional linguistics to examine the tone, modality and attitude subsystems in literary texts [18]. By integrating these methods, this study explores the crucial role of interpersonal meaning in Faulkner's novel creation process.

Combining SFL with narratology, Wang addresses linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and rhetoric by analyzing the transitivity of verbs in the narrative, the alternating use of personal pronouns "we" and "they", and changes in sentence length and rhythm, so as to explore the narrative functions behind linguistic forms. This study combines theories of narratology and stylistics and proves that the linguistic analysis can serve as an effective tool for interpreting narrative perspective, which provides an innovative analytical path starting from linguistic form, narrative function to thematic meaning for literary research [19].

The studies mentioned above have yielded fruitful results in the analysis of this. However, few studies have applied the theory of systemic functional linguistics to analyze the language features and language choices in literary works. Therefore, this article starts from the transitive perspective of systemic functional linguistics to analyze Faulkner's language features and language choices in the description of action, psychology and environment. The aim is to further analyze how these language features shape the characters and drive the plot forward.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Systemic Functional Grammar

The system functional grammar consists of two inseparable aspects: system grammar and functional grammar. Systematic grammar focuses on the latent relationships within the language system, while functional grammar emphasizes the role of language as a tool for social communication. The choice of language form is determined by content and expected meaning, and the development of language systems is aimed at achieving various semantic functions.

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is a linguistic theory developed by Halliday, and its inspiration comes from scholars including Malinowski, Buhler and J.R. The research achievements of several scholars including J.R. Firth. The representative work in this field is *Introduction to Functional Grammar*. The core of SFL is to take the language system itself as the main research object. Halliday was the first scholar to conduct extensive research on SFL and is widely regarded as its founder.

In the 1970s, Halliday expanded on the language studies of Malinowski and Bühler, identifying three essential meanings that can be expressed through language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Ideational meaning refers to the expression of individuals' real-world experiences and their subjective interpretation of events. Interpersonal meaning involves the use of language to communicate with others, establish and maintain relationships, influence others' behavior, and express opinions about the world. It encompasses the presentation of an individual's stance, power dynamics, attitude, intention and judgment during the communication process. Textual meaning relates to the coherent function of language and its connection to the context. It covers how speakers organize information, emphasizing completeness, consistency and coherence. The realization of textual meaning within a text relies on the collaboration of the theme system, information system, and coherence system [20].

Halliday's work laid a critical foundation for transitivity analysis, and subsequent scholars further refined this framework. Matthiessen introduced quantitative research methods supported by a mixed corpus of clauses and words to refine Halliday's core framework of the transitivity system and conduct in-depth analysis of process types and preferential correlations between processes and circumstances [21]. With this mixed quantitative-qualitative tool, problems such as ambiguous boundaries between circumstantial elements and participant roles and lack of empirical support can be addressed. Moreover, the combination of quantitative methods and qualitative description enables discourse analysis to explore theme and symbolism through process type proportions, process-circumstance collocations, and conduct genre-specific interpretations via register-transitivity correspondence in a more detailed and objective way.

Martin made contributions to expanding the applicability of the transitivity system. He compared the similarities and differences between the two languages (English and Tagalog) and optimized the transitive system. He explored how the "case" is related to transitivity in Tagalog and refined the modification of the "agent" role (for example, the initiator or the initiator), which made the transitivity theory applicable to non-Indo-European languages and revealed the motives of role behavior and the relationship networks in different language dispositions [22]. This research breaks through the limitations of single-language analysis, providing a unified framework for cross-language discourse comparison and expanding the application scope of transitive systems.

Fawcett also made key improvements, focusing on addressing gaps in relational process analysis. He tackled key issues in relational processes such as broad semantic classification and incomplete participant role coverage. He introduced new roles like "Attributor" and "Assigner" to enhance analytical precision [23]. Vague role relationships thus become clear, which allows accurate identification of each component's semantic function and uncovers implicit connections between roles and entities. The research further subdivides the relational process to clarify semantic boundaries. Transitivity analysis can now handle complex situations while avoiding subjective role judgments. It reveals the underlying semantic logic rather than the surface meaning, and better explains how the identities of characters in the discourse are defined.

Overall, the efforts of these scholars have shaped a solid theoretical system for transitivity analysis. From basic establishment to fine expansion, their work holds special significance. The three fundamental functions of Halliday lay the core foundation for transitive property analysis. Matthiessen's quantity-qualitative synthesis approach, Martin's cross-language adaptation, and Fawcett's precise refinement of the relational process and the roles of participants jointly address the issues of ambiguity and subjectivity in traditional analysis. This refined framework proves especially valuable in literary analysis. For instance, in Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*, this theoretical framework plays a significant role in analyzing the ingenious narrative techniques of the work and its diverse language features. It can be used to reveal the underlying logic of character

behavior, explore the profound connotations of symbolic images, and connect the scattered clues in the text.

3.2. Transitivity System

Ideational meaning is a fundamental aspect of clause meaning. It is effectively realized through transitivity, a semantic system that derived from the ideational function. It serves to classify real-life events and behaviors into distinct process categories: material processes, mental processes, relational processes, behavioral processes, verbal processes, and existential processes [24]. By employing this comprehensive framework, language users gain a formal understanding of how meaning is conveyed through diverse forms of actions and states within linguistic expression. According to Halliday, each process consists of three components: the process itself, the participant, and the circumstances. However, different process types are matched with corresponding participants and circumstantial elements.

The material process encompasses the action of 'doing'. It typically involves two distinct participants: the Actor and the Goal. The Actor represents the entity responsible for carrying out the action, and it is a necessary component in every material process. In certain cases, the Actor may not be present in the clause, referring to an implicit participant. On the other hand, the Goal refers to the participant towards whom the action is directed. Consequently, the material process can be summarized as an entity (Actor) performing an action upon another entity (Goal).

The mental process encompasses activities that occur within the realm of the mind, including thinking, imagining, liking, wanting, and perceiving. Similarly to the material process, it generally involves the presence of two participants: the Senser and the Phenomenon. However, it is possible for either participant to be absent in the mental process. According to Halliday and Matthiessen, the Mental process can be further subdivided into more refined subcategories, such as clauses of emotion (involving feelings such as love or hate), cognition (related to understanding, believing, knowing, etc.), perception (involving processes of seeing, hearing, etc.), and desideration (pertaining to desires or wants). Each of these subcategories is associated with a specific type of Senser, namely the Emoter, Cognizant, Perceiver, and Desiderator, respectively [20].

The relational process addresses the relation between two distinct entities. It can be classified into two modes: attributive and identifying. In the attributive mode, one entity attributes a quality or characteristic to another entity. While the identifying mode serves to identify one entity in relation to another. In the attributive relational process, there are two participants: the Carrier and the Attribute. The Carrier entity carries the attribute being ascribed, while the Attribute represents the quality or characteristic being attributed. On the other hand, the identifying relational process involves the Identified and the Identifier. The Identified is the one being identified, while the Identifier serves as the basis or reference for identification. It is crucial to note that the attributive relational process is non-reversible, indicating that the Attribute cannot be attributed back to the Carrier within the same clause.

The behavioral process pertains to the physiological and psychological behaviors exhibited by individuals, encompassing activities such as breathing, coughing, smiling, dreaming, and staring. It combines elements of both material and mental processes. The Behaver, typically a conscious being, assumes the role of the participant within this process. Behavioral processes are generally middle, frequently manifesting as a clause containing only the Behaver and the Process. The Range provides additional details about the process. It is integrated into the expression of the process rather than serving as the target of the process.

The verbal process involves the expression of meaning through speech, encompassing various forms of communication. The Sayer, typically a human, is the one who engages in speaking. The Receiver, on the other hand, is the participant to whom the speech is directed or addressed. The Verbiage refers to the content of what is being said or the specific name given to the utterance. When people convey the message, the verbiage can either be reported in a separate projected clause or summarized within the same clause. However, in the case of a projected clause, it is not considered as a participant in the verbal process; instead, the process and participants within the projected clause are analyzed independently.

The existential process signifies the existence or occurrence of something. It involves a single participant, known as the Existent. While it shares similarities with the relational process, it is also connected to material processes of the 'happen' type.

4. Analysis

A Rose for Emily is divided into five sections. The first part introduces Miss Emily Grillson's funeral and the fact that the townspeople asked her to pay taxes. The second part explores Emily's relationship with her father, the decline of her family's social status, and her isolated life. The third part tells of the controversial courtship relationship between Emily and Homer Barron. The fourth part shows Homer's disappearance and Emily's initiative to buy medicine. The fifth part returns to Emily's funeral, where the townspeople of Jefferson uncover the truth about Homer's disappearance. These sections gradually reveal Emily's life, her relationships with characters such as her father and the townspeople, the townspeople's views of her, and ultimately her tragic and heart-wrenching ending. This article will gradually analyze the types and proportions of physical processes in each section to explore the character building of Emily.

4.1. Section 1

Section 1 depicts the clash between the townspeople and Emily over tax issues. Through the transitivity system, the study found that there is a total of 82 clauses in Section 1, among which 40 (48.78%) belong to the material process, 21 (25.61%) to the relational process, 11 (13.41%) to the mental process, 6 (7.32%) to the verbal process, and 4 (4.3%) to the existential process. The material process and the relational process account for the majority.

The analysis shows that among the clauses of the material process, only six clauses have Emily, the protagonist of the book, as the Actor. At the same time, in these six sentences, Emily acts in a very passive way, such as she no longer went out, ceased the painting class, received a notice to pay taxes, or stood quietly. Obviously, the story of the novel revolves around her, but she rarely takes the initiative to act. However, different people in the town are trying to influence her, whether it is Colonel Sartoris or the mayor, whether they appear as "they" or "we", which further intensifies the readers' impression of Emily as passive and obedient. In most cases, "They" are the Actors, indicating that the younger generation

is actively taking measures, hoping that Emily will assume her tax responsibilities. Only in two instances do “They” become the Goal, while "the Negro" assumes the role of Actor. This shift in roles creates a literary effect for the readers. “They” are the active agents before they visit Emily. However, once “They” enter her house, "They" no longer assume the role of Actor but become the Goal, indicating a change in the situation.

Mental processes are often used to analyze characters' emotions and inner conflicts. However, similar to the material process, the role of Senser is undertaken by the townspeople, and their mental processes are mostly of the perception type. The verbs used are “smell”, “see”, and “hear” progressing in a sequential manner. After the Negro opened the door, “They” first smelled the musty odor, then saw the interior decoration, and finally heard the sound of the clock. This series of perceptions is logical, allowing readers to easily immerse themselves in the perspective of “They” to learn about Emily. What can also be seen is that although Emily had lived in Jefferson for many years, she was still so mysterious to the townspeople. Although the townspeople respect her very much, she does not care and keeps people at a distance.

From the verbal information conveyed in the verbal process we can find that when in the face of the townspeople's request for her to pay taxes, even if they tried their best to explain the situation to her, she firmly interrupted them and repeated the same sentence "I have no taxes in Jefferson" to show her refusal. The townspeople were defeated, which made Emily's position in the town more special.

Emily’s special status is also reflected in the clauses of the circumstantial attributive process, which describe the appearance and location of the house to gradually present the general background information of the characters to the readers. Both the architectural style of the 17th century and the location on the once most select street fully illustrate that the Emily family holds a special position in the town, which is incompatible with the new things such as "garages" and "cotton gins".

“They” only dared to understand Emily through their senses rather than through their actions or independent thinking, which shows the huge influence of the noble system and old beliefs on the townspeople. The conflict between them represents the collision of old and new ideas. The line “So SHE vanquished them, horse and foot” signifies the failure of the new values. The power and influence of the old South have not vanished but still exist in the life of the South. The nobles of the old South attempted to conquer the emerging industrial system in the north [25]. Readers can get a preliminary understanding of Emily's social environment and the attitude of the townspeople towards her in Section 1.

4.2. Section 2

Section 2 contains 89 clauses, including 34 (38.20%) material processes, 17 (19.10%) mental processes, 20 (22.47%) relational processes, and 18 (20.22%) verbal processes. The material process clauses in this section focus on depicting the townspeople sneaking around Emily’s house and sprinkling lime to resolve the unpleasant odor. Consequently, the majority of Actors are still the townspeople. After deliberation, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn, slunk about the house, sniffed along the base of the brickwork, broke open the cellar door, sprinkled lime there and in all the outbuildings, and crept quietly across the lawn. This sequence of actions constructs a vivid scene in readers’ minds. Faulkner tends to use continuous action descriptions to depict events. The "activity" of these four men stands in sharp contrast to Emily’s "stillness," reaffirming that the townspeople are always willing to take the initiative to influence Emily and act as active agents of actions. With the incomplete information, readers’ understanding of Emily through the townspeople’s perspective is limited, and they can only comprehend Emily through speculation.

Analysis of the mental process clauses reveals that the Senser roles, shift constantly within "They", "People in our town," and "We," providing intuitive evidence for the transformation of the narrative perspective in the novel. Further analysis reveals that the viewpoints perceived and the emotions expressed by "They" and "People in our town" are usually negative towards Emily. They expressed sympathy for her misfortune. When "We" serves as the Senser, the mental process always belongs to the perception type, and phenomena are always excuses "we" make for Emily's abnormal behavior and impoliteness in order to better ignore her inappropriate behavior. The stance and indifference of urban residents as onlookers are quite evident in this passage. In the face of Emily's sadness, they did not truly understand her or accept her as part of the community, but tolerated her inappropriate behavior with a helpless attitude. This also indirectly reflects the expectations of the town residents for Emily, who believe that she should maintain the etiquette and elegance of the nobility.

Clauses belonging to the relational process can attribute certain characteristics to characters. Through these clauses, readers can observe how Emily and her father are constructed, as exemplified by the following deconstructed clauses:

a) her father was a spraddled silhouette in the foreground.

b) her father had his back to her.

In clause a), the Identified is “her father”, and the Identifier is "a spraddled silhouette," embodying the father's posture and contour-like image, and the circumstantial element "in the foreground" emphasizes his dominance and oppression. In clause b), the Carrier is "her father," and the circumstantial elements "his back" and "to her" together form a complex circumstantial component that indicates the spatial direction. The clause depicts a body posture filled with estrangement, exclusion and indifference, expressing the emotional estrangement between father and daughter. Whenever her father was present, Emily would always stand quietly aside like an obedient doll.

Regarding the verbal process, the verbiage conveyed is all related to solving the strange smell in Emily's home. From the roles of different Sayers and their corresponding views, it can be seen that during the deliberation process, there are differences in the attitudes of the younger and older generations towards Emily. The older generation, represented by Judge Stevens, believed that Miss Emily should not be disturbed. She is a noble person. The people in the town should respect her and not let her feel embarrassed. However, the younger generation suggested that she should be informed in a direct way to carry out the cleaning. Ultimately, the suggestions of the younger generation were opposed by the older one, and the problem was eventually resolved in a way that avoided disturbance and rudeness. In summary, the increase in verbal processes in the second section, as well as the constant shifts of Senser roles in the mental processes, enable readers to more clearly understand the attitudes of different generations toward Emily as a special existence. While they seem tolerant and magnanimous toward Emily,

they are actually indifferent and do not regard her as a living person or a part of the community, but rather as a symbol of the aristocracy.

4.3. Section 3

There are 70 clauses in Section 3, which introduces the story of Homer Barron and Emily, and interweaves the incident of Emily buying arsenic from the druggist, including 23 (32.86%) material processes, 8 (11.43%) mental processes, 22 (31.43%) relational processes, 15 (21.43%) verbal processes, and 2 (2.86%) existential processes. In this section, the material process and the relational process still dominate, and the proportion of the relational process is almost equal to that of the material process.

From the perspective of the bearers of Actor in the material process, Emily takes on this role more in this section than in the previous two sections. The content of the clauses is no longer about passively accepting external influences, but also includes the Goal, showing that she actually interacted with the townspeople and acted as a more active agent of actions. In the previous two sections, it was always the townspeople who wanted to understand and influence her, but in this section, she took the initiative to influence the townspeople. The real agent of the implicit action in the clause "her hair was cut short" is also her, which reflects Emily's psychological transformation, her desire to make changes and escape from bondage.

The relational process is a good tool for introducing new characters. Faulkner uses this type of clause to show the characteristics of Homer. His presence further emphasizes that the Old South had gradually been influenced by the new trends from the North. His interaction with Emily can be regarded as a direct conflict between the North and the Old South. He was unrestrained and flamboyant, and was often the center of the crowd. Different from the dull and serious language used to describe Emily, the words for him are more relaxing, allowing readers to look forward to his accompany with Emily, hoping that he can rescue Emily from the shackles.

The changes brought by Homer were indeed noticed by the townspeople. In the verbal process, the townspeople still talked about Emily from the perspective of onlookers, judging every move of hers. When the younger generation acted as Sayers, they thought that Emily would not take Homer seriously, believing that their classes did not match. When the older generation acted as Sayers, they believed that no matter how sad Emily was, she should not forget the etiquette and decency of the aristocracy. When Sayers of different generations faced Emily's attempt to rebel against the symbol of tradition, their evaluations were all negative. In essence, they did not want Emily to change, and always confined her according to traditional ideas, making her unable to escape. This can also be seen when "We" acts as the Carrier in the relational process, with "glad" as the Attribute. It reveals that at the beginning, "We" were glad about their association, thinking that Emily was finally interested in other things instead of being immersed in her own world, reflecting the sympathetic but slightly superficial concern of onlookers. However, in the mental process clauses, as their interactions became more frequent, the attitude of "We" as Sensers became disapproving. At this time, "that she was fallen" acts as the Phenomenon, and the entire object clause serves as the content to be perceived and believed, describing a psychological cognition held by the Senser "We", who thought that Emily was fallen and had lost her dignity.

The high proportion of the relational process is also related to the descriptions of Emily. Emily or parts of her body, such as her face and her head, serve as the Identified and the Carrier. The circumstantial relational process positions her as being over thirty years old, and the attributive relational process describes her physical attributes that she is still slender and even thinner than usual, emphasizing the heavy psychological pressure she bears. It also endows her with facial features that she has cold and arrogant black eyes, and she always maintains an arrogant attitude and a sense of alienation. When talking to the pharmacist, just like she drove away the people who wanted her to pay taxes in Section 1, she did not listen to other people's opinions, but just repeated her point with the simple sentence "I want some poison", which shows that she does not want to get along with the townspeople or integrate into them.

4.4. Section 4

Section 4 consists of 97 clauses, centering on Homer's disappearance, including 35 (36.08%) material processes, 19 (19.59%) mental processes, 32 (32.99%) relational processes, 10 (10.31%) verbal processes, and 1 (1.03%) existential process.

In terms of material processes, the majority of this section lacks a Goal participant. Even when the townspeople want to intervene in Emily's life, their influence is indirect. Shen argues that stylistic analysis necessitates an examination of how authors utilize and differentiate transitive processes of the same level to achieve specific thematic effects. It also involves discerning the contrasts or oppositions inherent within the same transitive process, thus revealing the deeper thematic significance conveyed by these stylistic choices [26]. In this section, the language choices within the material processes serve to create distance between “We” and Emily. The line “Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted” shows that Faulkner omits the Actor to accentuate the prevailing sense of detachment.

In response to Emily's relationship with Homer, the townspeople begin to take actions in this section, and the collective narrator is divided into individual agents. “The ladies”, as the Actor, take “the Baptist minister” as the Goal, with the action result being “to call upon her”. The ladies not only exert a direct influence on the minister, but also clearly specify the subsequent action that the latter must perform. This reflects the moral and social pressure exerted within the community, as well as their active posture of attempting to intervene through a religious representative, a formal channel.

The agent “the minister's wife” takes an implied Goal “a letter”, which is omitted in the sentence, with the recipient being “Miss Emily's relations in Alabama”. The preposition "to" is used to introduce the recipient of information. The minister's wife sent a message to Emily's distant relatives, hoping that they could influence Emily. The pressure has spread from within the community to the outside, and the degree of intervention is constantly escalating. Finally, "We" takes on the role of Actor, with the process verb “sat back” and the circumstantial element of purpose “to watch developments”. Through a series of material processes, the community transformed from an intervener to a bystander, reflecting the community's rigid and indifferent attitude towards Emily. On the other hand, Emily shows greater initiative as an actor in this part. In addition to proactively purchasing daily necessities, she also opened a studio to teach the people in the town how to paint, which was her initial

attempt to interact with the townspeople.

In this section, the Senser in the mental process is always assumed by the narrator "We". Therefore, even with a large number of mental processes, readers still cannot directly understand Emily's mental activities. They can only understand her changes and the attitude of the "We" towards her. Faulkner uses verbs such as "know", "learn" and "see" to describe the changes in Emily that "we" as outsiders have discovered. The verbs "believe" indicate the narrator's speculation about Emily. Halliday classified mental processes into categories such as perception, cognition, emotion, and desideration. Among these, cognition and volition are considered higher-level mental processes [20]. In this section, most mental processes fall into the category of cognition. The author tends to use cognitive mental processes to describe the occurrence, development and resolution of events. This narrative perspective introduces suspense because readers cannot determine the reliability of the events depicted by "We".

Similar to the mental process, in the verbal processes of Section 4, the role of the Sayer is always assumed by "We". Besides, the content of the Verbiage is often about comments on Emily. Here are some examples:

(a) So THE NEXT day we all said, “She will kill herself”

(b) When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, “She will marry him.”

(c) Then we said, “She will persuade him yet,”

(d) and we said, “They are married.”

Examples (a) to (d) illustrate that, in addition to the mental processes, Faulkner also uses the verbal processes to drive the plot forward. Besides, the residents of the town observed Emily's life in silence and always commented on her behavior. According to Zhang, Miss Emily's association with Homer Barron, such as driving through the town together, was contrary to Puritanism and tarnished her reputation as a virtuous lady. The people in the town couldn't tolerate such humiliation [16]. Therefore, when the Baptist minister failed to persuade Emily to correct her inappropriate behavior, the minister's wife corresponded with Emily's relatives, attempting to intervene. People expect Emily to abide by the behavioral norms of a Southern lady. She is not regarded as an independent individual but as a symbol, representing the old traditions and values [27].

4.5. Section 5

There are 50 clauses in Section 5, including 18 (36.00%) material processes, 7 (14.00%) mental processes, 23 (46.00%) relational processes, 1 (2.00%) verbal process, and 1 (2.00%0 existential process. Different from the previous four sections, the proportion of relational processes in this section is higher than that of material processes.

The Actors of the material processes are the Negro, Emily's two female cousins, and the townspeople, while Emily no longer takes on this role, which means the narrative perspective returns to the plot in Section 1 where the townspeople attended Emily's funeral. It is worth noting that although the collective narrator is mostly represented by "They", in some specific actions, "One of us" is the actual agent of the actions, who uncovered the truth of Homer's disappearance. There are both commonalities and individualities within the collective. This interpretation of the collective narrator makes the perspective shift resonate with readers when interpreting literary works, that is, the content and views they obtain are generally consistent, but their representational and experiential response is unique [3].

The relational process clauses can be divided into two parts. The first part focuses on describing the guests attending the funeral. “The ladies” serve as the Carrier, with the Attribute being “sibilant and macabre”. These two adjectives imply their behavior of whispering, which makes readers feel creepy. When “the very old men” serve as the Carrier, the circumstantial element “on the porch and the lawn” locates the distribution of these people. They form the background of the scene, symbolizing the existence and witness of the community. When “some of the very old men” serve as the Carrier, the circumstantial element is “in their brushed Confederate uniforms”, showing their dressing. From the Confederate uniforms they wear, it can be seen that these old men are not only witnesses of the community, but also living embodiments of the Old South and its lost values. Their appearance in this attire at the funeral indicates that this is not only a personal funeral, but also a mourning for an old order and an old way of life.

The second part of the relational process focuses on describing the scene of Emily's room, which is also the place where the mystery is finally revealed. Through the detailed description of the environment, Faulkner allows readers to follow the townspeople to explore and uncover the truth bit by bit. Therefore, the relational processes at this time do not focus on the same Carrier to attribute characteristics, but keep changing, from “the silver”, “a collar and tie”, “the suit”, “the two mute shoes” and “the discarded socks” to “The man”, “The body”, so as to depict the panorama of the room. The calm and objective static descriptions in all relational processes form a huge contrast with the truth, profoundly revealing the distorted inner world of Miss Emily. She was unable to face changes and losses, and could only use death to create a terrible and permanent "possession", which is a classic depiction of obsession, time and death in Southern Gothic literature.

The mental processes, which express sensory experiences, are highly synchronized with the relational processes in Section 5, and are also divided into two parts. In the first part, "They" are the Sensers, with the process verb "believed", indicating that they expressed their views at the funeral. In the second part, the Senser becomes "We", and most of the process verbs are sensory verbs such as "looked", "noticed" and "saw", which echo the gradual depiction of the room scene in the relational processes. It is precisely because "We" perceive the environment step by step that there is a detailed portrayal of the room brought by the relational processes, which not only creates a gloomy atmosphere, but also amplifies the literary tension of the plot.

5. Conclusion

Through a systematic analysis of transitivity processes of the five sections in *A Rose for Emily*, this study demonstrates how Faulkner constructs the process by which Emily Grillson gradually transformed from a socially observed symbol into a tragic Gothic subject. From Section 1 to Section 5, the distribution of process types and participant roles reveals the persistent imbalance of agency. Although Emily remains the narrative center, she has always been deprived of continuous active social actions, while the residents of the town act as the dominant Actor, Senser and Sayer, constantly explaining, evaluating and redefining her.

At the level of social representation, the collective narrators achieved through "They", "People in our town" and "We"

present an image of a positive moral observer. Through material processes, the people in the town indirectly interfered in Emily's life. Through mental and verbal processes, they speculated and judged her behavior. Emily was only permitted to exist as a symbol of the Southern nobility. When she attempts to act beyond this role, especially in her relationship with Homer Barron, these actions are quickly reinterpreted as moral transgression or personal degradation.

From the perspective of stylistics, Faulkner's language choice reinforces this asymmetrical power relation. Emily's presence as an Actor was limited. Her static attributes dominate in the relational process, and readers cannot directly understand her psychological process. These factors together form a de-personified language pattern. Her inner world remains unattainable and is almost entirely presented through the observations and speculations of others. This narrative strategy not only maintains ambiguity but also reflects Emily's social isolation.

Finally, Section 5 shifts from action-oriented to relational process-oriented. Static descriptions of space and objects have replaced event-driven storytelling, revealing the truth through observation rather than action. In this way, Emily was eventually bound by time and death, becoming a symbol of the collapse of the Old South. Faulkner presented her as a tragic subject, who was shaped by patriarchal authority and ultimately destroyed by it.

Miss Emily is not merely a self-imprisoned person. In fact, she is bound by social norms and standards. She is reluctant to communicate with others and often stays alone at home, in sharp contrast to the outside world of her daily life. Emily represents the noble class of the Old South. Through her experiences, readers can gain a deep understanding of the predicaments faced by the nobility of that era. Although Emily seldom speaks up for herself in the story, we can still see her struggle against social constraints. The conflict between the old and the new, the opposition between the north and the south, made her life full of drama. These conflicts made that era so unique, arousing the curiosity of the new generation while also evoking the nostalgia of the older generation. It can be said that *A Rose for Emily* is a work of social and historical significance, as Faulkner vividly depicted a specific historical period for us.

This study employs the transitivity system to analyze the character portrayal of *A Rose for Emily*, offering a new interpretation of the work. However, the research has limitations and fails to incorporate micro-language features such as sentence structure into the analysis. Further research can conduct a detailed analysis of microscopic language selection and combine it with transitivity system analysis to explore how transitivity processes exist through specific linguistic choices.

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