



A Rose for Emily



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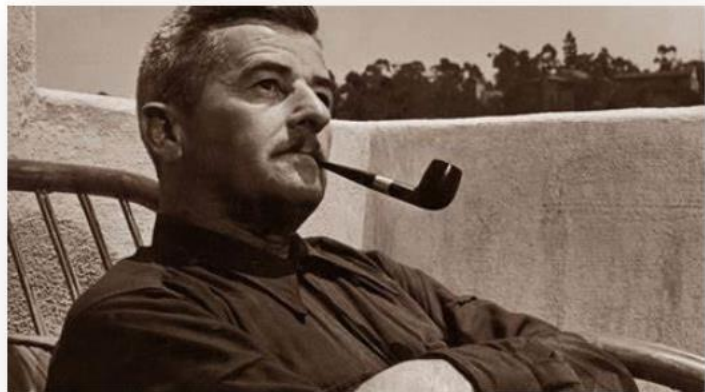
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“A Rose for Emily” is a short story by William Faulkner, originally published in *Forum* in 1930 before being collected in Faulkner’s collection, *These Thirteen*, the following year. The story concerns an unmarried woman living in the American South who attracts the concern and suspicion of the townspeople after her father dies and she becomes romantically involved with a Yankee man from the North.

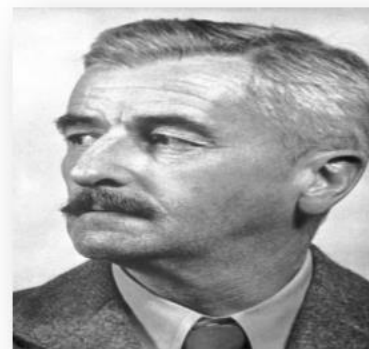


1. Facts about William Faulkner (1897-1962)

- Much of William Faulkner's early work was poetry, but he became famous for **his novels set in the American South**, frequently in his fabricated Yoknapatawpha County (约克纳帕塔法小镇), with works that included *The Sound and the Fury* (《喧哗与骚动》) *As I Lay Dying* (《在我弥留之际》) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (《押沙龙, 押沙龙!》)
- Faulkner was awarded the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature.
- Prize motivation: “for his powerful and artistically unique contribution to **the modern American novel**”



- Yoknapatawpha County, his fictional literary universe, resembled the surroundings in which Faulkner grew up. Writing about a familiar environment helped him find his voice and become an experimental writer, prepared to take literary risks.
- William Faulkner generally is regarded as one of the most significant American writers of all time. Faulkner wrote 13 novels and many short stories but started as a poet. With his breakthrough novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, he began to use stream of consciousness to portray a character's flow of inner thoughts. His books often are told from the point of view of several characters and contain accurately rendered colloquialisms combined with long sentences full of imagery and language that is sometimes surreal (超现实的).



□ Who was Absalom in the Bible?

- Absalom was the son of King David in the Old Testament (旧约全书).
- He was very handsome and had long, beautiful hair.
- His half brother raped his sister, so Absalom killed him.
- Later, Absalom fought against his own father, King David, to take the throne.
- He lost the battle. While riding a horse, his long hair got caught in a tree.
- The king's soldiers found him and killed him.
- King David cried, “O my son Absalom!”

Key idea: A tragic story of a son who rebels against his father and dies.



□ What does this biblical story tell us?

- If David had avenged Tamar, would Absalom have taken it upon himself to mete out justice (亲自伸张正义)?
- And what was the impact on Absalom's soul of carrying hatred for Amnon for so long?
- ✓ Much has been said about David's neglect of Absalom in this sad incident. It is possible that parental responsibility is a lesson we can take from this episode, but Scripture does not expressly teach it here. We do know that David did nothing about Amnon's rape of Tamar, although he knew about it.
- ✓ It seems that David's inaction had a deleterious (有害的) effect on Absalom's life.
- ✓ What we can say with certainty, however, is that **pride goes before a fall**. Absalom's self-promotion led to nothing. Absalom's plan to overthrow his father's was foiled (挫败). All events are settled in eternity.

❑ Faulkner's Novel *Absalom, Absalom!*

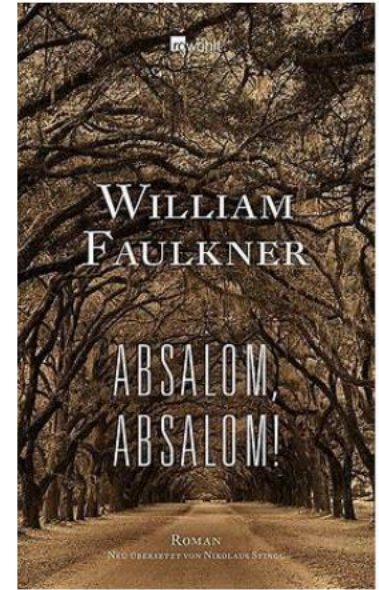
- Thomas Sutpen was a poor boy who wanted to become rich and start a powerful family.
- He built a big plantation called “Sutpen’s Hundred”. (萨德本百亩庄园)
- His son Henry killed his other son Charles to stop a mixed-race marriage.
- The family was destroyed by pride, slavery, and violence.
- The old house was burned down. No Sutpen was left.

Key idea: *A story about the fall of a Southern family, like the fall of Absalom.*



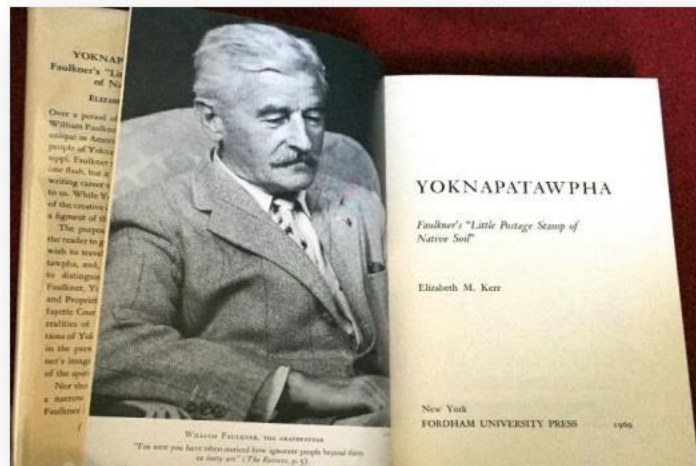
□ What does this novel tell us?

- ✓ Faulkner's title references Absalom of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), the rebellious son of King David, and suggests that the characters in the novel are caught in a similar cycle of conflict and betrayal.
- ✓ In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Sutpen's failure to acknowledge his mixed-race son Charles Bon, may be read as allegory for the South's failure to adequately repent for its legacy of slavery and acknowledge the civil rights and humanity of its newly freed Black population.



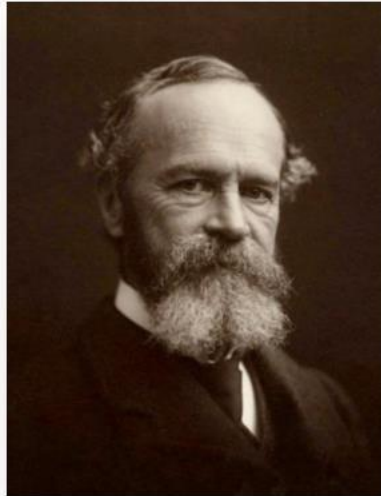
What is Yoknapatawpha genealogy (cycle)? “约克纳帕塔法世系”

- An imaginary county called Yoknapatawpha and the recurring characters were created by William Faulkner in a celebrated series of novels set in the American South, including *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*.

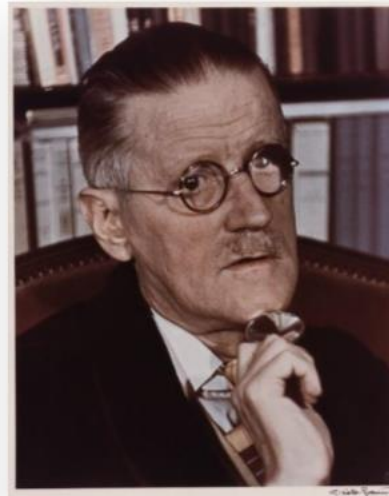


What is stream of consciousness ?

- The term was introduced by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890).
- a literary style in which a character's thoughts, feelings, and reactions are depicted in a continuous flow uninterrupted by objective description or conventional dialogue
- James Joyce and Virginia Woolf are among its notable early authors.



William James



James Joyce



Virginia Woolf

2. Full Plot of *A Rose for Emily*

- In section I, the narrator recalls the time of Emily Grierson's death and how the entire town attended her funeral in her home, which no stranger had entered for more than ten years.
- In section II, the narrator describes a time thirty years earlier when Emily resists another official inquiry on behalf of the town leaders, when the townspeople detect a powerful odor emanating from her property.
- In section III, the narrator describes a long illness that Emily suffers after this incident.
- In section IV, the narrator describes the fear that some of the townspeople have that Emily will use the poison to kill herself.
- In section V, the narrator describes what happens after Emily dies.

3. Summary of *A Rose for Emily*

The short story is divided into five sections. The heroine is Emily Grierson, who lives in Jefferson, a small town in the South of the United States. She is regarded as the last aristocrat and lady in a small town in the south. She lives in a once luxurious house, takes a high-class carriage when going out with her father, writes beautiful and elegant letterhead, and teaches children to draw. Emily is still alone when she is over thirty because the young men who pursue her are rejected by her father. After her father dies, Emily meets Homer Barron, a Yankee. This energetic man soon captures Emily's heart. And just when she decides to entrust her sweetheart with her life, she finds that she can not keep the man's heart. The noble personality rooted in the bones of southern nobles distorts Emily's heart. She buys arsenic and murders her boyfriend, and shares the bed with the corpse until her death. The secret has not been discovered by the residents of the town until the end of the story.

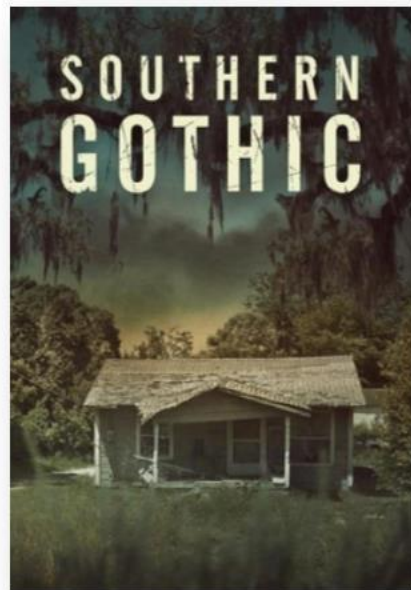
4. Analysis: Why is *A Rose for Emily* regarded as an example of Southern Gothic?

4.1 It is told by the seldom-seen first-person narrator who uses plural pronouns— “we” instead of “I”, which is fitting for the Southern Gothic.

- The narrator of “A Rose for Emily” is unusual in that the first-person plural pronoun “we” is used. They are not a character in the story. This is appropriate for a story which is a typical example of the Southern Gothic, featuring a seldom-seen narrator who harbours (藏匿) a dark secret in the attic chamber.
- The whole town appears to be the story’s narrator, a kind of collective “we” which speaks together about and against Emily’s strange behavior until the chilling **finale** (终曲) is reached, and Homer Barron’s body is discovered.
- Emily remains distant from us as readers, and we never learn about her inner life. We only see her from the outside through the eyes of the townspeople. Emily is an outsider in the town. The story lends an air of mystery to the recounted (详细叙述的) events. So little is understood of Emily’s motivations and emotions.

4.2 The story is characterized by macabre (令人毛骨悚然的), horrific, and grotesque (怪诞的) elements, and unnerving (令人不安的) result.

- Faulkner allows the mood of **uncanniness** (诡异) which **pervades** (弥漫) Emily's house and her life to emerge gradually, and the story hints at an altogether more **morbid** (病态的) and **unwholesome** (令人不快的) notion.
- Emily's reluctance to give up her father's body for burial.
- Emily has continued to "sleep" with Homer even after he was dead.
- The crumbling Gothic castle has become a house in the Southern United States, in which everything is "**tarnished**" (失去光泽的) (note how often that word recurs), spoiled, fading (like **Emily's iron-grey hair**), and falling to ruin.



4.3 Another reason that the Southern Gothic tag is important for “A Rose for Emily” is that Emily, a Southern lady, falls for a ‘Yankee’: a man from the North of the United States.

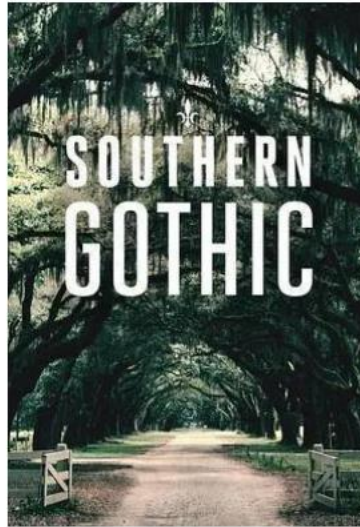
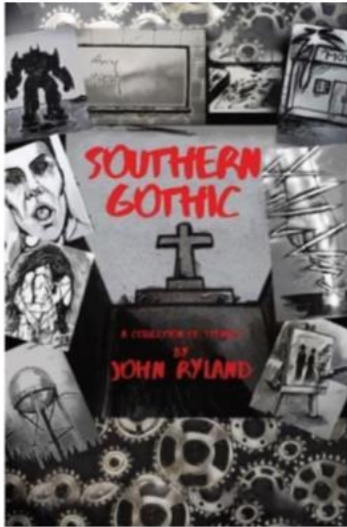
- Although the American Civil War ended in 1865, decades before Faulkner was writing, the sense of North-South divide, in terms of culture, class, and identity, proved long-lasting.
- The townsfolk are appalled by the idea that Miss Emily, an aristocratic Southern lady, might seriously be considering marriage to a Northerner, whom they consider to be beneath her on the social scale (hence the reference to **noblesse oblige** (贵族义务) : Emily should entertain Homer and be courteous (礼貌) to him, but the idea that she could marry such a man horrifies the Southern townspeople’s sensibilities).
- Women like Emily attract concern and rumour if they remain unmarried, while the bachelor **Homer Barron** – whose name summons (召唤) **Greek heroism and nobility, while also hinting at the “barren” nature of Emily’s would-be relationship with him** – charms the townsfolk and becomes popular, despite being, like Emily, an outsider set apart from them.

- 故事使用了第一人称复数代词“我们”，而“我们”并不是故事中的具体人物。这样的叙述者适用于一个典型的南方哥特式故事。整个小镇似乎都是故事的叙述者，一种集体的“我们”，一起议论和反感Emily的古怪行为，直至一个令人不寒而栗结局的出现，即Homer的尸体被发现。读者与故事中的Emily相距甚远，只能通过小镇上市民的眼睛，从外面观察到她。这个故事给被叙述的人Emily增添了神秘感，她在镇上始终是个局外人，人们对艾米丽的动机和感情上的事知之甚少。
- 福克纳让一种诡异的情绪弥漫在故事情节之中，譬如对Emily的房子和她的生活的描写。故事还暗示了一种病态且令人不安的概念，譬如Emily不愿将父亲的遗体安葬；即使在Homer死后，Emily仍继续与他“睡”在一起。摇摇欲坠的哥特式城堡在小说中变成了美国南方的一座房子，里面的一切都“失去了光泽”（tarnished这个词在小说中反复出现）、损坏、褪色（就像艾米莉铁灰色的头发一样），最后走向毁灭。
- 尽管美国内战在1865年结束，福克纳创作这篇短篇小说的时间也是在美国内战几十年之后，但无论在文化、阶级，还是在身份等方面，南北之间的分歧一直持久着。镇上的人对Emily小姐，一位南方贵族夫人，可能会考虑与一位北方人结婚的想法感到震惊。他们认为这个北方佬在社会等级上不如她（因此小说中提到了贵族义务），Emily也许应该善待Homer，但她能嫁给这样一个北方佬的想法还是吓坏了南方小镇的市民。像艾米莉这样的女人如果未婚，总会引起人们的关注和谣言，同时单身汉（Homer Barron）的名字也会引起人们的关注，因为“Homer”象征希腊式的英雄主义和高贵，同时“Barron”也暗示艾米莉与他潜在关系的“贫瘠”（barren）性质。福克纳通过这一切都在说明：Homer也是一个与全镇人不同的局外人。

What is Southern Gothic?

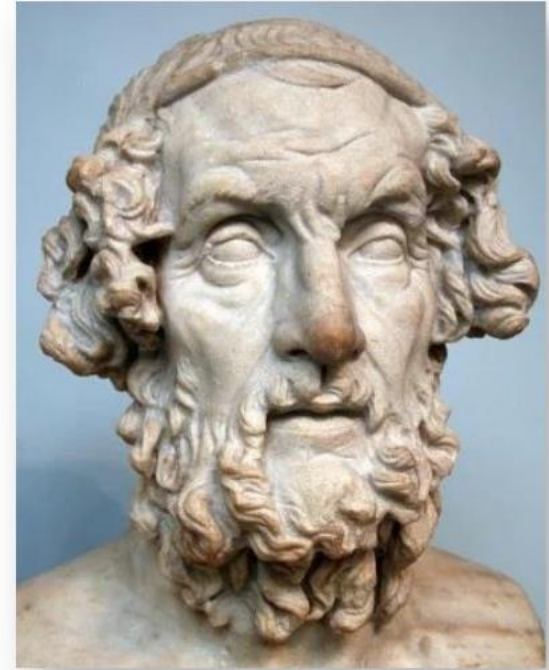
- ❑ **Southern Gothic** : a literary genre depicting life in the southern US and featuring grotesque themes and imagery

(*Collins English Dictionary*)



● Homer

Homer was probably born around the 8th or 9th century BC. What we know is that Homer was a blind poet and the first thing that comes to our minds are his two masterpieces, the epic poems *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that describe the Trojan War and the adventure of Ulysses (Odysseas in Greek) once the Trojan war was over. These poems have been an important part of the Greek culture and are considered part of world's classic literature.

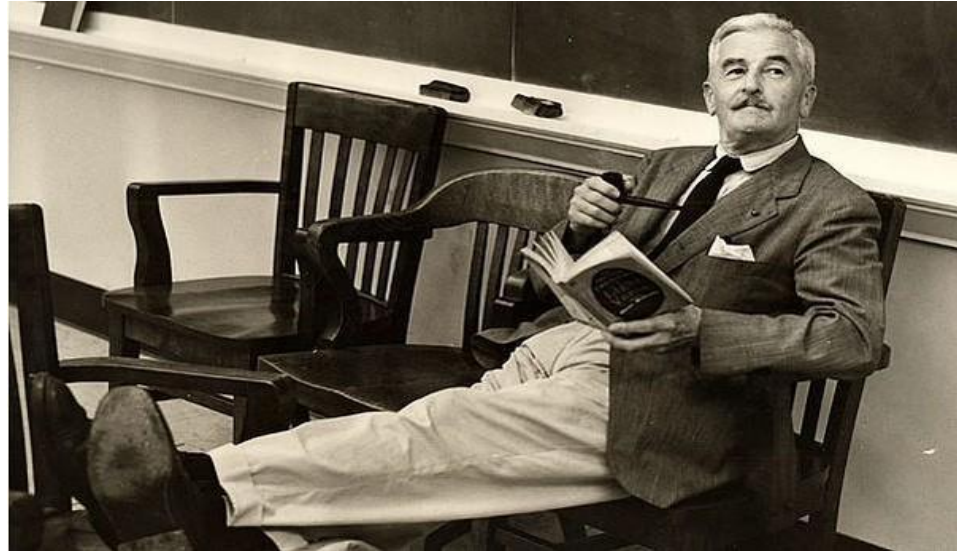


The Ancient Greek Poet Homer

● Why does Faulkner title his story ‘A Rose for Emily’?

- ❑ No roses appear in the story itself, although the attic room which features at the end of the story, the would-be bridal chamber in which Homer Barron’s body rots, is described as having valance (帷幕) curtains of a faded rose colour and rose-shaded lights.
- ❑ Note that the curtains are “a faded rose colour”, not only because they have been in the attic room for decades (since Emily planned to marry, and then ended up murdering, Homer), but because they symbolize the faded dreams of sexual fulfilment and marital love which Emily, through her engagement to Homer Barron, had entertained (抱有).
- ❑ But these rose-coloured details convey more than Emily’s thwarted (挫败的) sense of womanhood and romantic love.
- ❑ Indeed, roses are rich in symbolism: **they are associated with love and romance, but also with an overly romantic view of the past.** “A Rose for Emily” is a story about a woman who is, in a sense, trapped (陷入) in the past: she is reluctant to give up the dead body of her father when he dies, and she is unwilling to let Homer leave her, being prepared to kill him in order to keep him in her life.
- ❑ For the next few decades, she keeps him in the attic chamber so that she can, in effect, arrest the passage of time and keep him close to her.
- ❑ So the “rose” for Emily **also symbolizes the romance of the Old South: a land of idealism and tradition.**

- **Why does Faulkner title his story ‘A Rose for Emily’?** In an interview William Faulkner gave at the University of Virginia, he suggested that Emily deserved to be given a rose because of all of the torment she had endured: at the hands of her father, perhaps at the hands of Homer as well, and as a result of the townsfolk treating her like an outsider.



□ 5. Close Reading

Section I: The Tax Confrontation (Opening Scene) 税务对峙 (开篇场景)

Passage: *They rose when she entered... Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.*

Analysis:

This is the reader's first direct encounter with the elderly Emily. The description—"bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue"—establishes her as a death-in-life figure (一个活死人式的人物). Her claim that Colonel Sartoris (dead ten years) will settle the tax matter introduces the story's central theme: Emily's refusal to acknowledge time and change. The ticking watch (time) hidden in her belt (concealed but still present) is a crucial symbol.

这是读者第一次直接见到年迈的艾米丽。文中描述将她塑造成一个活死人式的人物。她声称已死了十年的萨托里斯上校会帮她处理税务，由此引出故事的核心主题：艾米丽拒绝承认时间与变迁。藏在她腰带里滴答作响的表（时间）虽被隐藏却依然存在，这是一个关键象征。

Section II: The Tableau Vivant (Father and Daughter) 静态画面中的父与女

Passage: *...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...*

Analysis:

This frozen image is the interpretive key to Emily's psychology. Her father's dominance is shown through physical placement (foreground vs. background), posture (back turned to her), and symbol (horsewhip = control/violence). Her white dress signifies virginity/purity. The "back-flung front door" paradoxically invites suitors while the father drives them away. This tableau explains why Emily remains unmarried at thirty and why she later clings to corpses.

这幅定格画面是解读艾米丽心理的关键。父亲的支配地位通过空间布局（前景与背景）、姿势（背对着她）和象征物（马鞭=控制/暴力）得以体现。她身上的白裙象征贞洁/纯洁。“向后甩开的前门”看似邀请追求者，父亲却将他们赶走。这幅画面解释了艾米丽为何三十岁仍未结婚，以及她后来为何执着于尸体不放。

Section III: Emily Refusing Her Father's Death 艾米丽拒绝承认父亲的死亡

Passage: *She told them that her father was not dead... She did that for three days...*

Analysis:

This foreshadows the ending directly. Emily's inability to accept her father's death such as refusing burial, keeping the corpse, establishes a pattern. The town's reaction is significant: 'We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that.' This sympathetic framing shapes how readers judge her later murder of Homer.

这直接预示了结局。艾米丽无法接受父亲的死亡——拒绝下葬、保留尸体——由此形成了一种行为模式。镇上人的反应很值得注意：“那时我们没说她疯了。我们相信她不得不那样做。”这种同情的视角影响了读者后来如何评判她杀害霍默一事。

Section IV: The Arsenic Purchase 购买砒霜

Passage: *I want arsenic... I want the best you have... For rats.*

Analysis:

This is a masterclass in dramatic irony. The town assumes she will kill herself, but the reader later realizes the “rats” are Homer. The druggist’s legal requirement to ask the purpose becomes a dark joke. Emily’s cold, haughty demeanor during this exchange reveals her capacity for calculated violence.

这是对戏剧性讽刺的一次大师级演绎。镇上的人都以为她会用砒霜自杀，但读者后来才意识到，她所说的“老鼠”其实就是霍默。药剂师出于法律要求必须询问用途，这一问反而成了一种黑色幽默。艾米丽在交流中表现出的冷漠、高傲态度，揭示出她具备实施预谋暴力的能力。