

# ***Comparative Analysis of Feminine Awakening under Patriarchy in “The Story of an Hour” and “A Rose for Emily”***

**Yangyang Zhao<sup>1,a,\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Institute of Foreign Language, Liaoning University, Liaoyang, China*

*a. ZHAOyangyang100133@163.com*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** The heroines of the two stories "The Story of an Hour" and "A Rose for Emily" are both deeply oppressed by the patriarchal system of the old society, and both Mrs. Mallard's husband and Emily's father reflect from the side the yoke of social expectations carried by women in those times and the deep-rooted influence on their hearts. This paper combines the horizontal comparison method and the vertical comparison method to compare the two works and analyze the epitome of the era of women's awakening presented in the works, in order to have further reference and guidance for the study of women's literature in Foreign Language and Literature.

**Keywords:** The Story of an Hour, A Rose for Emily, Women's literature, Patriarchy

## **1. Introduction**

"Women's literature" refers in general to all works depicting women's lives, including the works of women writers, and the best works on women's subjects produced by men writers.[1]"The Story of an Hour" is undoubtedly a feminist literary work, while "A Rose for Emily" is a work that can be interpreted from multiple perspectives. This paper will focus on analyzing its satire of patriarchy as well as its binding and controlling of its heroine, Emily. Undoubtedly, although the two works have different main characters, story lines and social backgrounds, patriarchy has an indelible impact on the heroines, resulting in the final tragedy. By studying and analyzing, patriarchy shown in these two works, we can gain a deeper understanding of the tragedy of women of the times and see the struggles of women. Guided by the horizontal comparison method, the paper analyzes the two works in terms of their common implied patriarchal oppression and their different impacts on the heroine. Combined with the vertical historical comparison method, based on the different historical eras of the two works, this paper will also analyze the relevance of the heroine's female awakening to the specific patterns of the society at that time, and then compare and analyze the different characteristics of the era presented in the two works. Explore and analyze the female awakening under patriarchy presented in the works, in order to have further reference and guidance for the study of women's literature in English and American literature.

## 2. Horizontal Comparison - Patriarchy Presented in Works

### 2.1. Passive women

At the beginning of "The Story of an Hour", the work describes Mrs. Mallard's poor physical condition due to her heart condition, and also extensively uses passive voice in the following sections to imply the passive position of women at that time, and the stereotype of women as "weakness and need for careful care".

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.[2]

Meanwhile, in the novel, the heroine's title has always been "Mrs. Mallard", while "Mallard" is the "husband's surname" after she married her husband, not her real name. It was not until later in the story that her sister, Josephine, calls out her real name "Louise", implying the situation in which women lost their identity after marriage.

Josephine was knitting before the closed door, implying for admission " Louise, open the door! I bet; open the door. . . "[2]

Compared to the relatively secretive portrayal of patriarchal oppression faced by women in "The Story of an Hour", "A Rose for Emily" is a more straightforward portrayal of a woman standing behind a man and being dominated by him. In "A Rose for Emily", Emily is under the control of her father, who demands that she conform to his expectations of her and be a lady at all times. Even in her marriage, Emily has difficulty in taking charge of herself, as her father believes that anyone who pursues her is not good enough for her, and he rejects even the men that Emily has a crush on.

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 backflung front door.[3]

From the original sentence, it can be seen that Emily's marriage is completely under the control of her father. Emily stands behind her father and can only let him strip her of her rights. The "horsewhip" in the father's hand implies the reins of the father's control over his daughter's fate, and this desire for control by the father is a reflection of patriarchy. The fact that the rest of the town sees this injustice happening, but chooses to stand by and watch it, is also a reflection of society's acquiescence and habit of patriarchal oppression at the time, and this numbness contributes to Emily's eventual tragedy.

### 2.2. The influence of patriarchy on the heroine

In "The Story of an Hour", it is not difficult to see that Mrs. Mallard has a certain emotional attachment to her husband, and her husband also loves his wife. In the eyes of outsiders, they are a happy couple.

She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead.[2]

However, in such a family relationship, why was Mrs. Mallard immersed in the joy of regaining her freedom within an hour of learning about her husband's death? When Mrs. Mallard heard the news of her husband's death, her reaction was different from most women. She did not blindly accept the situation, but instead turned to the room to be alone after venting her despair.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.[2]

In the social context of that time, Mrs. Mallard was different from most women, which also awakened her inner thoughts of resisting and fighting against the oppression of patriarchal society, yearning for true freedom. Therefore, the greatest impact of patriarchy on Mrs. Mallard was her trade-off between freedom and love. The oppression of the society prevents her from indulging in the sweetness of love, but instead, it is like arsenic that eats away at her heart and mind. And this is also the underlying idea reflected by the novel author in her multiple works. For the ultimate inability to escape the shackles and regain freedom, Mrs. Mallard's passing seems to imply that "freedom is higher than love, and even higher than life." In the freedom of the passionate surge has been felt, the fragile heart of Mrs. Mallard can no longer tolerate the boring, bound by the people of the life for Mrs. Mallard, perhaps death is the only way. For Mrs. Mallard, perhaps death is the best ending.

Compared to "The Story of an Hour", the influence of patriarchy on Emily in "A Rose for Emily" is more profound. In contrast to the spiritual awakening and resistance caused by Mrs. Mallard, Emily gradually internalizes the oppressor in her own image and thoughts under the more comprehensive "manipulation" of her father. In the story, Emily's marriage and even her life are firmly controlled by her father. She is like a puppet in his hand, which fully explains why Emily collapsed after her father passed away, unable to accept his departure, and even preventing others from burying his body.

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.[3]

In fact, the term "patriarchy" literally means "of a father", therefore, patriarchy is a social system ruled by older men.[4] Due to Emily's life being almost completely arranged by her father, she cannot be independent and imagine her life after leaving her father. Whether it is from a material or spiritual perspective, Emily finds it difficult to face it alone. Therefore, under such influence, even after death, the father still exerted significant influence on Emily, which is directly reflected in the original text.

...as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die.[3]

Even at Emily's funeral, her father's influence still existed.

Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers, with the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and...[3]

This means the portrait of Emily's father, and it also appeared when the small town delegation going to Emily's home to persuade her to pay taxes, and its repeated appearance fully represents the father's never-ending "gaze" on his daughter.

### **3. Vertical Comparison - Women's Awakening and Resistance Struggle in Works**

#### **3.1. The awakening of women in "The Story of an Hour"**

In the context of nineteenth-century Western society, where men dominated the economy of society, the social status of women was very limited. Women's role was defined at that time as "marrying, bearing and educating children", and they did not enjoy the same employment rights as men, and even women's property was owned by their husbands after marriage. It can be said that the fate of women at that time was "dominated by their fathers in the first half of their lives and by their husbands in the second half". It was almost impossible for women to escape from the patriarchal system and gain true freedom. This also corresponds to the original title of "The Story of an Hour", which is "The Dream of One Hour", where the "dream" refers to the dream of Mrs. Mallard, the heroine, who thinks she has "realized true freedom" in that hour, which is extremely ironic.

The awakening of women in "The Story of an Hour" is reflected in Mrs. Mallard's one hour alone in the room. Mrs. Mallard felt an uncontrollable joy and encouragement in her subconscious for her husband's life after leaving.

But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.[2]

This joy does not come from the happiness of her husband's departure, but from the desire to "regain her freedom". It shows that during the years of her marriage, Mrs. Mallard's inner self had been suppressed, and she could only act as a "good wife" in front of outsiders, but could not live as her true self, but after her husband's departure, she realized that she can be herself again.

There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself.[2]

The nineteenth century was also a time when the status of women in Europe began to change, as more and more women came out of the home and into the workplace as a result of the Industrial Revolution. In addition, the feminist movement began to emerge in some European countries, and as a result, women gradually began to awaken to the fact that they were trying to escape from the persecution of the patriarchal society. Mrs. Mallard epitomizes the nineteenth-century awakening of women in a patriarchal society, and this self-awareness inevitably brings strong vitality.

### 3.2. The Resistance struggle in "A Rose for Emily"

In the nineteenth century, an idea known as "moralism" emerged in Western culture. The proponents of this idea forbade the discussion of "sexual" issues, not even the mention of any body parts, and when it came to spiritual issues, they could not describe them directly, but expressed them in a very euphemistic way. As a result, the standard of "ladylike behavior" began to emerge. Through the creation of the image of the "decent woman", the aim was to regulate and confine the development of social thought. In Simone de Beauvoir's book, "The Second Sex", wrote that "a woman is not so much 'born' as 'formed'. There is no physical, psychological, or economic predetermination that determines a woman's place in society, but rather human culture as a whole produces this so-called 'female' in the midst of the masculine and the asexual".[5] In other words, the gender identity of "female" is not innate, but is slowly formed, and it is traditional thinking and patriarchal society that shape women.

Born in the twentieth century, Emily was in a period of change between the old and the new, but unfortunately was born into an extremely traditional and conservative family, and she was trapped in the prison of the "Southern lady", as evidenced by the fact that the men of the town regarded Emily as a "monument" to the traditional lady when they attended her funeral.

When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument...[3]

The United States South, where slavery was practiced, was a typical patriarchal society in which women were treated unfairly and oppressed in a male-dominated society. Secondly, the South's traditional notion of a lady is the result of this. It was believed that the aristocrats were the symbols, traditions and role models of the South, and that the aristocrats could not live like ordinary people and marry ordinary people, especially with Yankees.[6] However, besides being a "Southern lady", Emily is just an ordinary woman who longs for love. It was under this powerful social constraint that Emily chose to rebel. She faced the criticism of the whole town, and drove out with Homer Barron frequently, but still did not forget to maintain her own dignity.

Miss Emily with her head high and Homer Barron with his hat cocked and cigar in his tea, reins and whip in a yellow glove...[3]

The contradiction between these two identities also made the later tragedy an inevitable result, even if Barron was willing to marry her, he would inevitably be hindered by the power of the town residents.

In comparison, Mrs. Mallard and Emily, as the epitome of the women of their time, reflect the progress of the times. From the fact that Mrs. Mallard can only be awakened in her thoughts and eventually end the tragedy by death, to the fact that Emily can seek her own happiness through her rebellious behavior, even though the final result is not satisfactory, it also reflects that women's independent consciousness is also developing and progressing in the change of the times, and the social influence brought by the patriarchy will also be gradually attenuated in the progress of the times.

#### 4. Conclusions

Through a comparative analysis of the two women's literary works, the paper finds that the patriarchal oppression suffered by women as "the second sex" is fully embodied in the two works, which is ultimately due to the male's disapproval of women's value and ability, and is the regulation, modeling and dogmatic cultivation of women, who are regarded as "weak" and "protected" objects. Under the social environment at that time, women's economic and spiritual dependence on men was one of the reasons for the tragic end of the two works. Both excellent works of women's literature fully demonstrate the collision of contradictory ideas: *The Story of an Hour* shows the contradiction between freedom and love; while *"A Rose for Emily"* shows the direct contradiction between the roles of the heroine, being an ordinary woman who desiring for love or being a southern lady, which both show the contradiction between ideals and realities. Men as "fathers" or "husbands" control women's actions and thoughts, and women lose their right to speak and their independence. Under the wheel of history, countless "Mrs. Mallard" and "Emily" are gradually getting rid of the control of women by patriarchal society through continuous self-awakening and resistance struggle.

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