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“Tobe! Show these gentlemen out”

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profoundly, or realizes how bereft he would be facing this town on his own, or anything. That's beyond the story's imagination, and perhaps beyond Faulkner's as well. Following Lacan and Žižek, Argiro finds the story's glimpse of the Real in the "grimace of love" fixed on Homer's skeletal face. Such a Real may involve more than the failure to gratify sexual desire. Homer's has become a death's head, with a look that reflects the putrefaction of an entire social order, and returns the gaze of any member of the audience willing to see the lack structuring self and community. You might say that the unthinkable for the community Faulkner depicts is that its origins lie in the reduction of some human beings to the status of inanimate chattel; that race is a fiction meant to justify the stealing of their very lives from others no different from ourselves; that present social reality is wholly compromised by continuing practices of subjugation, the exercise of advantage, and the refusal to act in ways that acknowledge such governing illusions. Of course Jefferson knows all this too, but they act as if they do not. Some things are left unthought so we are not inconvenienced; others remain unthinkable lest we be undone altogether.

"Tobe! Show these gentlemen out"

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"MISS EMILY AFTER DARK" DIVIDES SHARPLY BETWEEN SPECULATION IN ITS first half on the possibility of incest between Emily and her father and that Homer Barron is partly black, and, in its second half, analysis of possible miscegenation between Emily and her servant Tobe. For me the major strength of the essay lies in the latter material.

A part-black Homer Barron adds little to the story. As a Yankee and a "day laborer"—even a foreman—Homer is already, in the eyes of the community, an inappropriate suitor for a "high and mighty" Grierson, and Emily's possible murder of him can be explained, as it usually has been, as an act of outrage against him for his readiness to bed her but not marry her. That she might also be dismayed by his racial mixture could be one more reason for her outrage, but insofar as it replicates her relationship with Tobe, I think it buries the central difference between the two relationships and diminishes the overall power of the story.

As for the suggestion of incest, a violently protective father is not sufficient evidence in itself, but more important, it detracts from what I take to be the chief thrust of the story: the characterization of Emily Grierson, not primarily as a psychically damaged and compulsively driven woman, but as one who methodically and deliberately challenges virtually all the social, historical, sexual, and ideological boundaries within which she lives, especially as those boundaries are described, implicitly and explicitly, by the narrator. Above all, there is the boundary—social and literary—of the spinster stereotype: “dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse,” designed to render a woman more pathetic than powerful in her various displays of defiance.

Faulkner’s creation of women who challenge these boundaries—they exist in far greater numbers in his fiction than comparable male characters—certainly influences my reading of the story and Thomas Argiro’s essay, but it is tempting to see her as a version (*sui generis* to be sure) of Caddy Compson, Addie Bundren, and Temple Drake, to take only those women who either precede or more or less coexist with her creation.

It is with the treatment of Tobe that the essay offers new material, not only in keeping with what I take to be the story’s major contribution, but its crowning example. Thomas Dilworth proposed a miscegenative relationship between Emily and Tobe in an earlier article, but Argiro expands the idea considerably, and more persuasively. What I find most striking—now that this essay has forced me to think about it—is that, while never commenting on the possible oddity or even scandal of Emily’s living situation, the narrator carefully marks the movements and gradual aging of the Negro: from a “young man” to the man admitting Homer Barron “at the kitchen door at dusk,” to the “Negro grow[ing] grayer and more stooped,” to “a doddering Negro man to wait on her,” to his abrupt (and apparently not doddering) departure: “he walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again.”

Argiro’s play with the narrator’s seemingly innocuous language describing Tobe gives the servant sexual resonance: “the only sign of life about the place . . . going in and out with the market basket” (repeated twice in the story); or “‘Tobe!’ The Negro appeared. ‘Show these gentlemen out,’” followed by Argiro’s comment: “in order for Emily to

become dramatically alive, the Negro appears" (the only time his name appears as well).

Especially interesting is the linking of "necro" and Negro, masking "negrophilia" with necrophilia. Emily's final rebellion against the community, her father, her apparently constrained life, takes the form of an extraordinarily "deceptive tableau." She offers the (male) community members a revelation of negrophilia *as* necrophilia, daring them to understand what she is and has done, knowing of course that such knowledge is not so much beyond them as impossible for them to admit.

The denial of the obvious—the strange disappearance of Homer Barron, the years of a white woman inhabiting a house alone with a black man—is a communal capacity Faulkner often dealt with: the ability, especially in his fictional Southern world, of people to know perfectly well what they must deny. For all the town's, the narrator's, obsessive concern with the life of Emily Grierson, there is never a single indication that they find Emily's living arrangements odd. The only objection to Tobe's presence is his gender: "Just as if a man—any man—could keep a kitchen properly." Emily's periodic rebellions—no taxes, no house numbers, no father's body for three days, dalliance with a Yankee laborer—are the screen of a far more explosive rebellion, just as the narrator's looping chronology is an intricate and entertaining intellectual puzzle (impossible to untangle) that is one more reader's excuse for dodging what may actually be happening in the story.

It is the absence of any consideration of the possible impropriety of Emily's decades long relation with her sole companion that becomes the elephant in the room. Emily's final affront to the people of Jefferson is the gift of a perverse act that at once reveals to them, *and* allows them to maintain their willed ignorance of, the perversion that would shock them even more, and that has been playing out before them all these years. The title is Faulkner's *touché* to another of his remarkable women.
