Twisted fairy tale: Narrative functions and dramatic personae in William Faulkner's "*A Rose for Emily*"

¹Sufi Ikrima Sa'adah*, ²Nestiani Hutami, ³Zakiyatul Mufidah
¹English Literature Department, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, UIN Sunan Ampel, Indonesia
²UIN Raden Mas Said, Indonesia
³University of Birmingham, United Kingdom

*Corresponding Author
Email: sufiikrima@uinsby.ac.id

Abstract:
William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" is narrated in a complex narrative structure, thus, making it difficult to follow the story's chronology despite its relatively short form. This article provides a different approach using Propp's narratology to show that the story can be read as a modern fairy tale but with some twisted elements. The analysis focuses on the sequence of events based on Propp's 31 narrative functions. The analysis also highlights the characters performing the functions following Propp's seven types of dramatis personae. The findings reveal that the events in "A Rose for Emily" conform to some of the narrative functions of a fairy tale. The initial situation introduces Emily as the heroine of the story, followed by her father's death that represents the absentation function. In the middle of the narrative, the villainy function serves as the complication of the story. The story's end is also similar to a fairy tale by the wedding function. However, these fairy tale elements are presented in twisted ways. Emily was introduced only when she died, and she poisoned Homer to be able to live with him ever after. Meanwhile, Emily and Homer also provide twists as the story's heroine and villain.

Keywords: Propp's narratology; narrative; personae; hero/heroine

INTRODUCTION

"A Rose for Emily" first appeared in the April 1930 issue of the *Forum*. It was Faulkner's first short story published in a nationally recognized magazine (Fargnoli et al., 2008; Nieto, 2021). The story features a protagonist, Emily Grierson, who defies societal norms and ultimately becomes a tragic figure. Despite it being Faulkner's most widely-read short story (Abdurrahman, 2016; Xiaokang, 2021), beginners in the literary study might find "A Rose for Emily" difficult to read due to its nonlinear plot (Burg et al., 2000). The story has five parts, and each is narrated with a back-and-forth timeline, except the fifth part, when the narrator recounts the events after Emily died.

Since its first publication, then, there have been numerous, if not hundreds, studies discussing the short story. It is arguably evident that the most discussed topic is regarding the complexity of the story. Nebeker (1970) and Rodman (1993) agree that the story's complexity lies in the chronological sequence that lacks relationship. Meanwhile, Melczarek (2009) asserts that the narrative voice contributes to the difficulty in reading the story. Furthermore, Abdurrahman (2016) finds that the story is complicated due to its sentence structure and act structure as a whole. However, it is Faulkner's treatment of time that interests many researchers to study the short story. Melczarek (2009) emphasizes that the convolution of the timeline is what makes "A Rose for Emily" difficult to read. Ahmadian (2015) concurs with Melczarek about the manipulation of time as the challenging factor. Barani & Yahya (2014) alert that the real issue in the story is the handling of time with all its complexities, while Zhang & Liu (2020) accentuate the story's chaotic time sequence.

While the aforementioned studies all focus on the story's narrative aspect, only a few have elaborated the narrative through a specific narratologist perspective. For example, Ahmadian and Jorfi (2015) and Ngulube (2020) reads the short story using Genette's narratological concept of time, including order, duration and frequency, story time, and narrative time. Meanwhile, Ravari (2017) also employs Genette's terms on time besides discussing focalization, like Xiaokang (2021), who also emphasizes the discussion on Genette's concept of perspective and voice (focalization). Moreover, Bai et al. (2020) combine Genette's narrative time and narrative perspective to read "A Rose for Emily."

Considering Faulkner's complicated description of time in the story, it is no wonder that most narratological readings on " A Rose for Emily" also focus on the treatment of time. However, all those narratological readings only employ Genette's narrative theory without considering other concepts, like Propp's, thus failing to address the story's fairytale-like sequence of events and characters. To fill in the said gap, this article presents another possibility of reading "A Rose for Emily" by the structure of its narrative seen through Propp's narratology, which to the extent of the researcher's knowledge, is easier to follow. The thesis underlying this current reading is that "A Rose for Emily" embodies such fairytale elements presented in a twisted way. Therefore, Propp's concept of functions and dramatis personae is employed to elaborate on the fairytale elements, the types of characters, and how they are twisted.

Narratology first got its name when Tzevan Todorov coined the term in 1969, denoting it as the science of narrative (Herman, 2005). It can refer to as both a field of study and a theory. Representing a field of studies, Kharmandar (2018) elucidates that narratology delves "various dimensions od story-telling" (56). Bal (2017) elaborates that as a theory, narratology helps the readers "understand, analyze, and evaluates narratives" (3). In a general context, narratives can appear fictional as well as non-fictional (Dawson & Mäkelä, 2023; Herman et al., 2012), articulated in either oral or written language with various genres branch out into various media (Barthes & Duisit, 1975).

One influential figure in narratology is the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp, who is best known for his work *Morphology of the Folktale* firstly published in 1928. Propp's seminal ideas on the narrative dimension have

become prominent among literary critics since he published the said book and have increased interest since its translation in 1958. The book is basically the summary of Propp's reading of the Russian fairy tales, which he considered to have the same structure of 'narrative functions.' Propp (1968) argues that all fairy tales have a limited number of narrative functions, which are what give fairy tales their basic structure.

Pirkova-Jakobson (1968), in the introduction of the book's first edition, elaborates that in conducting the structural analysis of the fairy tales, Propp started from the tales' motifs, the smallest narrative units, which he identified as the functions (xxi) and has mapped out the functions into thirty-one. Further, Pirkova-Jakobson (1968) explains that these narrative functions are identified "in terms of what the dramatis personae do." Thus, a function can be identified as the character's actions and classified based on the function's "significance for the course of the action" (Propp, 1968, p. 21). Therefore, conforming to Pirkova-Jakobson, the researcher believes that Propp's analysis can also be useful in analyzing the narrative structure of literary forms, like short stories and other narrative forms.

Regarding the thirty-one narrative functions, Propp (1968) emphasizes "the law of sequence," where the functions are always identically sequenced. Any tale might not give evidence of all of the functions, yet, the lack of certain functions never alters the sequential order. Jamshaid et al. (2018), in comparing a Punjabi fairy tale to Perrault's Cinderella, classify the thirty-one functions into six sections:

a. **Preparation**, including *i) Absentation* (one of the family members absents from home), *ii) Interdiction* (the hero is given an interdiction/prohibition), *iii) Violation* (the interdiction is violated), *iv) Reconnaissance* (the villain attempts to find the location of precious person or objects), *v) Delivery* (the villain gets information about the victim), *vi) Trickery* (the villain tricks the victim to possess him or get his belonging), and *vii) Complicity* (the victim succumbs to the villain's trick);

b. **Complication**, covering *viii) Villainy* (the villain harms a family member), *ix) Mediation* (the hero is given a request or command), and *x) Beginning Counteraction* (the hero, as the seeker, agrees to the command);

c. **Transference**, comprising *xi) Departure* (the hero departs from home), *xii) first function of the Donor* (the hero is tested to get the magical agent or helper, *xiii) Hero's reaction* (the hero reacts to the future donor), *xiv) Provision of magical agent* (the hero possesses the magical agent), and *xv) Guidance* (the hero is led to the search goal);

d. **Struggle**, containing *xvi) Struggle* (the hero fights the villain), *xvii) Branding* (the hero is marked), *xviii) Victory* (the villain is defeated), and *xix) Liquidation of lack* (the misfortune is eliminated);

e. **Return**, consisting of *xx) Return* (the hero returns), *xxi) Pursuit* (the hero is chased), *xxii) Rescue from pursuit* (the hero is rescued from the chase), *xxiii) Unrecognized arrival* (the hero arrives home unrecognized), *xxiv) Unfounded claims* (a false hero presents fake claims), *xxv) Difficult task* (the hero is assigned difficult task), and *xxvi) Solution* (the hero resolves the task); and

f. **Recognition**, involving *xxvii) Recognition* (the hero is acknowledged)*, xxviii) Exposure* (the false hero or the villain is revealed)*, xxix) Transfiguration* (the hero receives new appearance)*, xxx) Punishment* (the villain or the false hero is punished)*,* and *xxxi) Wedding* (the hero marries his bride and gets the reward).

Furthermore, Propp (1968) specifies all those functions into certain *spheres*, which "correspond to their respective performers (79), called spheres of action. These performers are those whom Propp refers to as dramatis personae, the personages who perform the functions. Thus, with reference to these spheres of action, the types of characters present in the tale are:

a. the *villain*, a character whose role is to disturb the peace of a happy family, to cause some form of misfortune, damage, or harm (Propp, 1968, p. 27);
b. the *donor*, or the *provider*, from which the hero gains the magical agent to dissolve the misfortune (Propp, 1968, p. 39);
c. the *helper*, those whom the hero accidentally met and offer him their service (Propp, 1968, pp. 45–46);
d. the *princess* and *her father*, the sought-for person or the object of the hero's quest, while the father is the one who assigns the hero with the arduous mission (Propp, 1968, pp. 78–80, 124);
e. the *dispatcher*, the one who dispatches the hero into the challenging quest (Jamshaid et al., 2018);
f. the *hero*, a character, the subject of the narrative (Ramakrishnan, 2022), who suffers from the action of the villain, or receives the magical agent (Propp, 1968, p. 50) and
g. the *false hero*, neither a hero nor a villain, who snatches the hero's reward and whose immorality needs to be exposed (Almarayeh & Alenazy, 2022; Ramakrishnan, 2022).

METHOD
This study falls under the study of narratology since it focuses on the narrative structure of Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." The researcher employs Propp's narratological concept of narrative functions and dramatis personae following the argument that the morphology of "A Rose for Emily" exhibits the structure of a folktale/fairytale. The data were taken from the events of the story and its characters, especially Emily Grierson and Homer Barron. The analysis maps the events based on Propp's thirty-one narrative functions and the characters' corresponding acts in each function. The discussions also identify the types of characters, or the dramatis personae, that Emily and Homer represent in each function.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
As a short story written in modern times, "A Rose for Emily" presents its narrative and characters like a fairytale despite having five nonlinear parts. Presented in a fragmented plot instead of the chronological one, the story's narrative exemplifies Propp's nine out of thirty-one functions. Meanwhile, as the story's primary dramatis personae, both Emily and Homer take a turn in serving

the twist as the story's hero/heroine and the villain. This presentation, thus, grants "A Rose for Emily" as a twisted fairytale-like short story.

Functions and Dramatis Personae in "A Rose for Emily"

"A Rose for Emily" begins its story with the famous expression, *"When Miss Emily Grierson died..."* (Faulkner, 2018, p. 658). In Propp's term (Propp, 1968, p. 25), the phrase might serve as the initial situation of the tale, which introduces the future hero, in this case, the heroine, by simply mentioning the name, that is, "*Miss Emily Grierson.*" However, the introduction becomes somewhat twisted since the one supposed to be the future heroine is initially introduced as a dead person. Such a twisted introduction happens since the story starts where it ends; thus, the initial situation can only introduce the already dead heroine.

Furthermore, Propp (Propp, 1968, p. 27) adds that the initial situation may also introduce the prosperity of the hero's family, serving "as a contrasting background for the misfortune to follow." The description of Grierson's residence as "*a big, squarish frame house ... decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies*" (Faulkner, 2018, p. 658) exemplifies this situation. However, the description fails to highlight the family's prosperity since it has been long gone. The house "*that had once been white*" and "*set on what had once been [the] most select street*" *has decayed and turned into "an eyesore among eyesores.*" The decayed prosperity, thus, does not serve as the contrasting background but emphasizes the heroine's misfortune.

After the initial situation, the story continues with a function that Propp calls *absentation*[1], the first of the thirty-one functions. In this function, one of the family members is absent from home. The death of Emily's father arguably conforms to the function since he meets Prop's requirement of being an 'a member of older generation' whose death intensifies the absence (Propp, 2009, p. 26). Nevertheless, the father's death was narrated at the beginning of part two of the story instead of being at the early scene.

The father's death made Emily "*[go] out very little*" (Faulkner, 2018, p. 660). This situation might conform to Propp's second function, *interdiction.* This function is addressed to the hero not to do something. Propp (1968, p. 26) asserts that an interdiction might come after the absentation, although the reversed sequence is also possible. Alive, Emily's father set a high standard for any gentleman who wanted to court his daughter. They were never "*quite good enough" for Emily to marry* (660). This order is what restrained Emily not to go out making any acquaintances with any men in her society even after her father's death, thus serve as the interdiction in the story.

The interdiction, then, is somehow violated when Homer Barron comes into town. He was a foreman of the construction company to pave the town's sidewalks. Homer's coming illuminates Propp's third function, *violation.* He would be the one who caused Emily to violate her father's restraining order of not marrying "*a day laborer" even more " a Northerner*" (Faulkner, 2018, p. 661). In this function, Propp (1968, p. 27) warns that *"a new personage, who can be termed the*

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[1] Each function is written in italic to follow Propp's terms in the book and to distinguish them from any general terms.

villain, enters the tale." Homer can have the villain label since his coming "***disturb[s] the peace of a happy family, [and] cause[s] some form of misfortune, damage, or harm.***" By Propp's elaboration, Emily's peace is what Homer is supposed to disturb. However, it is the town's people representing the happy family who seemed perturbed. They kept saying "Poor Emily" as if they felt pity for her having a relationship with a commoner. However, from a different perspective, Homer did not disturb the peace of the town's people. He provided such interesting gossip for them.

Continuing the violation, the story moves on and provides the sixth function, defined as *trickery*. In this sequence, "***the villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings***" either by persuasion, magical means, or other means of deception or coercion (Propp, 1968, pp. 29–30). When the sidewalk construction started, it did not take long for Homer to know "*everybody in town.*" He became "the center of the group" anytime they needed a good laugh, and children "***would follow [him] in group to hear him cuss the niggers***" (Faulkner, 2018, p. 661). As the villain of the story, Homer indeed possessed such a magical means that his cordial manner. Homer won his victim's belonging, which is the favor of the town's people by his friendliness. Homer's cordiality is magical since in a Southern society like Emily's town, not many Northerners were favored. However, Homer could easily worm his way into the town's community, despite being a Yankee.

Homer's cordiality, then, leads the story into *complicity*, Propp's seventh function. It is when "***The hero agrees to all of the villain's persuasions***" (Propp, 1968, p. 30). Like many town's people who were fascinated, Emily also did not seem immune to Homer's charm. She soon was seen with him "***on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable***" (Faulkner, 2018, p. 661). Emily being with Homer, thus, broke the interdiction of her not "to forget *noblesse oblige*," the obligation Emily must fulfill as a noble, which is not to marry someone below her class.

After *complicity*, there comes the complication of the story, initiated by an act of *villainy*, the eighth function. In this narrative part, "***the villain causes harm or injury***" (Propp, 1968, p. 30) to the hero or his family. Propp further explains that the significance of this function to the previous ones is that villainy is when "***the actual movement of the tale is created***" (31). Homer's statement that "***he liked men***" and "***was not a marrying man***" illustrates this function. Considering how often he was seen with Emily on Sundays, his remark was a great contradiction, thus, making the town's ladies bothered for witnessing such a "***disgrace to the town***" (Faulkner, 2018, p. 662). Homer's villainy might represent the injury, yet, instead of bodily injury, as Propp terms, the injury Homer inflicts on Emily is beyond corporeal. Courting her every Sunday yet asserting that he did not intend to marry is arguably hurtful, although Emily was still able to "***[hold] her head high.***"

Furthermore, Homer does not only cause mental injury by saying such words. The researcher argues that Homer saying that he preferred to be with men while kept spending the Sunday afternoons with Emily, can also represent the villainy form of "***the villain declares war***" (Propp, 1968, p. 34). By such deeds, Homer had declared war on the town's people, "***some of the ladies,***" to be exact.

They "*forced the Baptist minister*" to pay Emily a visit, then, "*wrote to … Emily's relations in Alabama*" when they still saw the couple "*drove about the street*" the following Sunday (Faulkner, 2018, p. 662). The ladies tried every possible way to make sure that "*they were to be married*," contrasting their previous murmur of "*a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer*" (p. 661). they might see the marriage as better than having a Northerner who liked men stay in the city.

When the town's ladies "*were really glad*" that "*[t]hey were married*" (Faulkner, 2018, p. 663), the 'war' between Homer and the ladies seemed to cease. However, nobody expected that a bigger war was about to come. Homer did not only declare war on the ladies of the town but, more importantly, on the heroine of the story, Emily. Taking her on a drive every Sunday morning after saying he liked men might look insulting to Emily. "*[H]er dignity as the last Grierson*" would never let such an embarrassment. Thus, Emily was seen to carry "*her head high*," did not mean that she ignored the cause of the people whispering "poor Emily." The researcher sees it as more about Emily's preparing her war silently, indicating by her buying arsenic, the rat poison, at the same time as she "*ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H. B. on each piece [and] … bought a complete outfit of men's clothing*" (pp. 662-663). The poison was definitely not to kill rats, but for Homer, since around forty years after the last time he was seen, "*the man himself lay in the bed*," fleshless, beside the spot where Emily used to sleep. Homer ended up being poisoned can also be seen as the result of villainy in the form of the "*villain orders a murder to be committed*" (Propp, 1968, p. 33). Nevertheless, the twist that comes with the function is that by committing such deeds to Emily, Homer had ordered the murder, not for others but for himself.

With Homer Barron disappearing from town, the story continues to the eleventh function, *departure.* In this sequence, the hero leaves home and begins a journey (Propp, 1968, p. 39). Like other previous functions in the story, this part also reveals many twists in the actions of the hero. As the definition of the function implies, the hero is supposed to depart from home, and so is Emily. She indeed showed an act of leaving, yet, Emily did not leave her home. She locked her house to avoid the townspeople. Emily locking herself inside her house symbolically signifies her departure from society. Emily "*did not appear on the streets*" for nearly half a year, and her "*front door remained closed.*" The people could only "now and then" see her at the window, "*from generation to generation," until her front door "closed for good*" (Faulkner, 2018, p. 663). By locking her door, Emily left society to begin her journey. Again, this situation is such a twist when the journey Emily had was to lead a 'married' life with Homer's deceased body. Thus, "various adventures [that] await" (Propp 1968: 39) Emily in the journey is to 'live' with Homer for about four decades "*[u]p to the day of her death at seventy-four*" (Faulkner 2018: 663).

Homer being poisoned with arsenic represents *victory*, Propp's eighteenth function. He personifies the villain who "*is killed without a preliminary fight*" (Propp, 1968, p. 53). Homer might never expect that Emily would plan to kill him since she did not appear as a threat to him. As a Northerner who came to a Southerner town, Homer might believe that his most prominent opponent

would be the townspeople, especially when he was often seen taking Emily on rides every Sunday afternoon. Therefore, three days after Emily's cousins departed to Alabama, Homer was, without doubt, going back to town (Faulkner, 2018, p. 663). He was then seen admitted by Emily's Negro man "***at the kitchen door at dusk one evening***," probably thinking that both were going to talk about the future plan concerning what Emily had purchased for him. Emily indeed gave him what she bought, but it was definitely not the man's clothing. Since the narrator elaborated that the event was the last time the townspeople saw him, it is strongly possible that Emily gave Homer the arsenic, without him realizing, thus, making him die without putting any significant fight.

Chang & Che (2016) argue that Emily poisoning Homer is "***the best way to ensure a faithful and lasting marriage***" (p. 904). Huang (2019) concurs with Chang and Che that Emily's only way "***to possess eternal love [is] by staying with Homer's corpse***" (p. 203). Nevertheless, this act also reflects Emily's victory against Homer as well as the townspeople. Emily needed to defeat Homer since he had implied that it was impossible for him to marry Emily due to his liking of men. Thus, by killing him, Emily could finally have him for the rest of her life, even though it was his lifeless body. This finding corresponds to Kirchdorfer (2017) and Zhang & Liu (2020), who agrees that Homer's death is Emily's victory against him. Furthermore, by being able with Homer, Emily silently subdued the townspeople's whispering, which had begun when she was "***thirty and was still single***" (Faulkner, 2018, p. 660).

"A Rose for Emily," then, ends with a situation that is similar to Propp's thirty-first function. This sequence is called *wedding* and is defined by the hero's marriage and obtaining the throne (Propp, 1968, p. 63). By this definition, Emily, as the heroine, is supposed to marry her sweetheart, even though she did not take the throne since the bride or groom was neither a princess nor a prince (Propp, 1968, p. 64). However, here lies the grand twist of the whole story when Emily could only marry Homer in death. During the four decades of living with Homer's dead body, Emily could never really unite with him since she was still miserably alive. Therefore, when she died, Emily could finally be together with Homer and live happily ever in the afterlife. Moreover, Emily marrying Homer in her death, then, continues the twist, that is the heroine finally married the villain.

Discussing the dramatis personae who act the elaborated functions previously, one might not feel convinced to label Emily as the heroine, a female hero, of the story. To see her from a different angle might result in Emily being the princess who desperately calls for help. Having a rigorous father who drove away all the potential gentleman callers (Faulkner, 2018, pp. 660–661), Emily was likely to live in a castle with an impenetrable fortress. Even after her father's death, the "**noblesse oblige**" became a hindrance for Emily to have such a relationship. Therefore, when a Northerner named Homer Barron came into town, he must have seen Emily as a damsel in distress, awaiting the knight to rescue her. Thus, Homer taking Emily out on Sunday afternoons (p. 661) might actually free her from the invisible fortress her father created.

Analyzing the characters from such a perspective result in labeling Homer as the hero, a seeker hero, to be precise, and Emily as the princess. A

seeker hero is a hero with a task or quest to accomplish (Propp, 1968, p. 38; Vučković, 2023). Homer might represent this label since he came to town and was given the task by the townspeople to save Emily. This situation is similar to the tale where "***the princess demands that the hero conquer the dragon if he wants to obtain her hand in marriage***" (Propp, 1968, p. 68), with Emily's father and his rules symbolizing the dragon. However, when Homer finally seemed to save Emily from her father's rule and the townspeople's whispering, he was unexpectedly poisoned with the arsenic Emily had prepared for him. The story then reveals a twist with the princess killing the hero, making Emily the villain who causes damage to Homer's life. However, seeing that the initial situation mentions Emily's name, it is strongly arguable that Emely is indeed the heroine of the story, and Homer is the villain, as previously discussed. Nevertheless, one consideration is to make since the reason Emily killed Homer is to be able to live with him (Chang & Che, 2016; Huang, 2019), then to marry him after death. For this reason, Homer's role might shift from the villain into the 'princess' since he became the 'bride' that the heroine finally wedded.

CONCLUSION

Reading William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" using Propp's narratological concepts of narrative functions reveals that the story conforms to nine functions, (#1) *absentation*, (#2) *interdiction*, (#3) *violation*, (#6) *trickery*, (#7) *complicity*, (#8) *villainy*, (#11) *departure*, (#18) *victory*, and (#31) *wedding*. Those functions come in a sequential order despite the story being narrated in five non-chronological parts. Also, many twists occur during the sequence of events in the story. In the initial situation, Emily was introduced as the future heroine by being dead. In *villainy*, Homer rendered himself greater harm when he injured Emily's feelings. The twist appears in the eleventh function, *departure* when Emily locked herself inside her house instead of leaving the town. The biggest twist occurs in the *wedding* when Emily married Homer in death after living with his corpse for forty years.

Moreover, following Propp's seven types of characters, or the dramatis personae, Emily can have the label of the story's heroine since she was the first character introduced at the beginning of the story. However, Emily could also serve as the princess who sought help from the hero to save her even though she killed the hero in the end, earning her the villain role. Homer, in the meantime, acted as the hero who saved Emily from the suffocating family rules. Nevertheless, from another perspective, he became the villain who dramatically switched roles as the 'bride' whom the heroine married. This narratological reading of "A Rose for Emily" finally implies that a person might have many different roles in life depending on the function he or she has to conduct.

AUTHOR'S STATEMENTS

Sufi Ikrima Sa'adah conceptualized the study, designed the methodology, wrote the manuscript, conducted data collection and analysis, contributed to the writing, and acted as the corresponding author. **Nestiani Hutami** helped in

data interpretation and manuscript editing. **Zakiyatul Mufidah** helped to evaluate and proofread the manuscript.

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