“Miss Emily is a person that won’t take no for an answer and refuses to accept the stereotypes of how a woman should act.”

Selected South African High School Students’ Reading Responses on “A Rose for Emily”
Contents

1. Introduction and Aim .................................................................................. 1

2. Theoretical Background ................................................................................. 4

3. Method ........................................................................................................... 11

4. Readers, Responses, Characters and Convergence ........................................ 16

5. Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 30

Works cited ........................................................................................................ 33

Appendix A "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner ........................................ I

Appendix B .......................................................................................................... VII

Appendix C .......................................................................................................... XI
Abstract

Selected South African high school students’ perceptions of stereotypes in William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily” are the center of attention in an attempt to establish or refute the existence of a uniform interpretation in the interpretive community. The textual reader responses were collected by using a questionnaire. The results show that the respondents use stereotypes to understand encounters with literary texts and as tools to connect the content of the text with their own experiences. The stereotypes also provide a framework for the readers to position themselves with or against the text and the depicted characters. Consequently, the female respondents are more inclined to distance themselves from sexist values than the male readers. Next to all the readers condemn racist values and racist language detectable in the text. Overall, the readers distance themselves from negative values and identify themselves with positive values. The results show that readers use a variety of stereotypes as aids to interpret the characters, events, values and structure of society in “A Rose for Emily”.

Key words: A Rose for Emily, identification, interpretive community, group formation, Norman Holland, reader response theory, reading event, stereotypes, gender stereotypes
1. Introduction and aim

This essay explores readers’ experiences of “A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner (Appendix A). Due to the reader-oriented approach, reader responses generated solely for the purposes of the present essay are essential material for the investigation. The exploration of the reading experience is centred around the readers’ perceptions of depiction of characters in the literary text and the readers’ ability to relate characters or events in the text to those in their own life. Establishing or refuting the existence of similar interpretations among the group of respondents is an additional motive of this text.

In my essay cross-disciplinary theories form the outlines for understanding the dynamic process of interpreting literary texts and the strategies the readers employ to make sense of the literary encounters. Reception theories from literary scholars postulate the readers’ activity and vitality in the process of making meaning (Iser 107, 132; Pradl 24; Rosenblatt 12). Apart from studies of reader responses in literature, I use theories from cultural studies to explain the readers’ encounters with the unfamiliar and the process of identification and group formation in the reading experience (Hastrup 18; Stier 193). In this proceeding the readers’ inherited values, preconceptions and accumulated real-life experiences in the shape of stereotypes are seen as tools for the readers’ interpretations of the literary text and identification of reference points in the narrative (Hastrup 19; Martin and Nakayama 17; Pradl 24). I consider the readers’ accumulated experiences a foundation for apprehensions of stereotypes, which are psychological representations or impressions of individuals and their characteristics as members of a group. Furthermore, theories from the field of psychology provide understanding for how stereotypes are useful in encounters in both the real world and in literary texts (McGarty et al 2; Sklar 11).

In my essay the methodology is founded on previously conducted experiments seeking to voice the readers’ own reflections on literary texts (Miall and Kuiken “Aspects”). The material for the analysis is generated in an empirical research process of collecting textual material about the readers’ experiences of the literary text by the means of a questionnaire (Appendix B). Here, the respondents are treated as one interpretive community, which consists of selected high school students from South Africa. According to Stanley Fish, communities like this perceive texts in a similar way
Norman Holland’s well-known exploration of reader responses on “A Rose for Emily” is the primary work of reference for the responses elicited for this essay. The reader responses in Holland’s experiment are generated in interviews and paired with information from personality tests for analysis in a psychoanalytical framework, which seeks to establish which strategies the readers use to encounter the unknown (68, 99). In contrast, the present essay borrows theories from cultural sciences to explain how readers encounter new experiences.

The recommended length of this essay limits the focus; the research questions target the topic of gender, but the themes race and age, which are prominent in the literary text, are included to a restricted extent in the discussion. Ultimately, the hypothesis of the essay is that reading events at different times and in different places generate different reader responses for one literary text but shared qualities in the reading responses are detectable even in different interpretive communities. This hypothesis is inspired by Holland’s statement that different texts generate similar responses while the same text generates different responses (Holland 307-08).

Contradictory to Holland’s research, this essay is interested in detecting similarities among the generated responses. The investigation departs from the following questions:

1. Which values, norms and characteristics attributed to femaleness and maleness do the respondents perceive in the text?
2. Which characters or events in the text do the readers identify themselves with; similarly, which persons or characteristics of persons found in their own sphere of existence do the readers identify in the text?
3. How are the readers’ expectations of the character’s behaviour met or challenged in the narration and in the language?

The choice of “A Rose for Emily” is motivated by suitable length, theme and language for the respondents, the existence of analytical material on the text and the existence of previous research on the text within the field of reader response theory. The narrative feature both female and male characters as required by the research questions. Moreover, the text leaves questions unanswered, which enables the reader’s own interpretations and relating the text to their own lives (this concept is further explained in the method section). Like the present essay, Holland is interested in the readers’ recorded experiences rather than scholarly interpretations of the short story. Thus, arguably both the material generated by Holland and in this essay are situated within the field of reception theory.
The empirical research for this essay is conducted in Cape Town in South Africa. The criteria for selecting the location for the research include a native English speaking, multinational and -cultural environment. A personal interest in South Africa and local contacts willing to assist in executing the field work were other arguments for selecting this location. The selection of respondents was a two-step process; firstly, local actors within the educational establishments were approached for approval and assistance and second, the local contacts in the schools recruited volunteers for the project among the pupils. Finally, the layout of the school terms and the possibilities for cooperation resulted in the possibility of presenting the primary choice of text to respondents aged 14 to 17 years in one school in Cape Town.

The study seeks to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods; the results from a questionnaire are followed up by content analysis. This methodology is an adaptation from media research; the original set-up is designed for speech or verbal language but is well suited for the purposes of this study, where the respondents’ apprehensions are of central interest (Jensen 235). Moreover, the method is suitable for this essay, which favours multifaceted responses on the reading experience.

First, the material is analysed in the interest of establishing similarities and differences in a comparison of the response and established gender stereotypes. Second, the aim is to establish whether the reading responses indicate individuality in the form of highly differentiated answers or if there is an inclination towards consensus among the responses. Presumably, similar responses are expected among respondents from the same demographic group presenting their answers at the same time; the respondents in South Africa are students of the same age group and attend the same private school, which indicates a similar socioeconomic status and thus they are considered members of the same demographic group. The same can be said for Holland’s group of respondents who are all university students from neighbouring universities in the United States (Holland 19). Both groups of respondents are students; although an age difference exists they are in a reasonably similar position in society. However, they are located in different geographical areas in the world and thus their accumulated experiences are expected to differ. Additionally, the use of different methods for collecting responses is also likely to produce different perceptions of the literary text in a comparison of Holland’s responses and mine.
2. Theoretical background

Initially, this essay assumes that reading is a dynamic and interactional process between the text and the reader. This reasoning is along the line of Wolfgang Iser’s theory of reception, which sees reading as a two-way process rather than absorption and internalization of text (107). The meaning to the text is actively constructed by the reader; the intentions of the author and the scholarly interpretations are secondary. Louise M. Rosenblatt elaborates on the necessity of the reader; texts are a collection of symbols, which after having departed from the author, require a reader to come alive and carry meaning again (12). In this regard, the readers’ engagement with the text is a condition for the interpretation of a literary text and consequently the spotlight of this essay is directed towards the reader.

According to Rosenblatt, the interaction between the text and the reader comprises a characteristically unique event (13). Readers make their personal interpretations in each reading of each texts. The readership is accompanied by the readers’ previous experiences and their own personality (Rosenblatt 12). Thus, the reading event is primarily an affair between the readers and the text but secondarily involves the readers’ personas and their accumulated experiences. Rosenblatt explains the connection between the text, the readers and their experiences by using a metaphor of an electric circuit to explain the reading process, which ties them all together; the circuit only functions if all components flawlessly interact with each other (Rosenblatt 14). In this essay, the circuit consists of the respondents, the distributed literary text and the meaning the readers create. Presenting a literary text to readers does not guarantee a functional circuit; the compatibility of the readers and the text is essential for the creation of meaning. In this case, the presented text’s length, linguistic qualities and theme are deemed manageable for the readers to create meaning and thus complete the circuit. In Holland’s research the successful function of the circuit is ensured by selecting five undergraduate students of English literature among volunteers, whose experiences of short stories were examined (68). The motivation for selecting undergraduate students of literature was their ability to reflect upon literary texts without inhibitions or restrictions in the search of a single “correct” reading (Holland 69). The respondents of the questionnaire of this essay are high school students, who volunteered to participate in the research conducted for this essay on request of their English teacher. Thus, the respondents’ capabilities as students who are experienced and motivated readers allow expectations of them creating meaning to the literary text,
which equals a successful circuit. In this essay, the respondents’ textual reflections on and direct answers to the questions in the questionnaire are considered proof of the readers’ capacities of grasping and interacting with the presented text.

Subsequently, a successful circuit, where one or more of the components has been exchanged is expected to generate unique responses. Rosenblatt’s metaphoric circuit is in fact a constellation of multiple circuits with unique meanings; there are indefinite constellations of the orbit because the variables time, space and text are changeable (Rosenblatt 14). The impact of such external factors is confirmed by David Miall and Don Kuiken, who claim that literariness is an inextricable outcome of the readers’ psychobiological inheritance consisting of linguistic capacities, self-perception and expressions of feelings (“What is” 125). Analogously, Kirsten Hastrup claims that individuals are affected by their surroundings; observations of the surrounding world are never “neutral” but are predetermined by the values the individual has inherited (Hastrup 18). Retaining the idea of the circuit, this suggests that reading events of a single literary text generate a vast and complicated electric system of influx, dependence and consequence, which generates different outcomes if components are subtracted or added. This essay presents a literary text to a group deemed psychobiologically uniform, based on their status as students at the same school and around the same age. Moreover, their inheritance is deemed to hold the same qualities based on their geographical location. The intention is also to explore the degree of similarity between the responses generated by a selected group and investigate how the responses relate to shared values, i.e. the readers’ psychobiological inheritance.

Returning to the necessity of the readers’ meaning-making capacities for a functional circuit, Miall and Kuiken claim that the readers’ attention is seized in a process of defamiliarization, which denotes stylistic or formal exceptionalities; familiar and conventionally understood referents seem less familiar and suggest additional information outside the existence of the words (“What is” 123-124). This in mind, the evaluative judgements all depend on the reader who identifies the striking features or properties of attention in the literary works motivated by the character of the situation the reader is in (Miall and Kuiken, “What is” 125). Again, as earlier established by Rosenblatt several factors affect the creation of a literary text’s meaning but Miall and Kuiken have identified three different categories; results of protocols gathered from readings of a short story showed that the readers’ inferences were based on explanations, predictions and associations (Miall and Kuiken, “What is” 130).
This essay is interested in the associative and explanatory categories of readers’ responses targeting the concept of gender, which is addressed in terms of the expectations and generalisations associated with femaleness and maleness. Femaleness and maleness denote the concepts of social roles and qualities associated with women and men. According to Erica Carranza and Deborah Prentice gender roles are traditional and maintain their status because change of society and deviation from expected-gender prescribed-behaviour is undesired and punished in society (269). Femaleness and maleness in this essay are products of societies traditions and expectations of women’s and men’s behaviour. The associative category looks for coinciding factors in the literary text and the respondents’ realm while the explanatory category looks backward for emotional, physical and motivational causes to understand the responses (Miall and Kuiken “What is” 130). In this way, the perceptions of femaleness and maleness in the text are paired with the readers’ own experiences and associations and are thus fluid entities.

The preconceptions and expectations are linked to the concept of stereotypes of groups, which are flexible and dependent on the impression and representation. The functions of stereotypes effectively explain their role in this context as well; first, they help make sense of a perceived situation, second, they lessen the burden of the perceiver in making sense of the situation and third, they are adjusted according to the norms and social values of the perceiver (McGarty et al 2). Howard Sklar confirms that the mental process of constructing “complete” human beings based on fragments of evidence is the same in literary experiences as it is in real life (Sklar 11). Readers fill in the gaps of information by addressing them with experiences of people, impressions, expectations and sense of places; they use their own personal experiences of people to form ideas of the humans they encounter in literary texts (Sklar 11). In other words, the openness and indeterminacy of texts allow the individual to complete the literary characters with their qualities they have identified in extraliterary contexts. More conditions for the process exist according to George Pradl; the identification process is dependent on an experience constituting of a conscious transaction between a person and their surroundings, connected to both the past and the present (Pradl 24). Also, the experience requires a dual situation of the individual’s history in time; the experience of the present needs to contain the accumulated values of the individual’s history (Pradl 24). Moreover, a literary experience requires a certain level of participation in the events around an individual, otherwise the events have no connections to the previous
experiences of the individuals past and do not become representations of that (Pradl 24). In short, a text is completed by the readers’ own impressions but only in case the text can provide referential values in the readers’ personal experiences or knowledge.

Holland employs psychoanalytical theories to explain the process of encountering the unknown and the unfamiliar in literature; in his research reading is considered a process of warding off anxieties and copying with reality through processes of defensive and adaptive strategies (Holland 16). Holland agrees with Sklar that encounters with literary characters function in the same way as meeting ‘real’ people (Holland 18). In Holland’s approach, literature is used as a tool for fulfilling identities also referred to as personalities (9).

This essay views encounters with new experiences as a process of negotiating the individuals’ identity by using stereotypes as aids in the process of filling voids created by the texts. Stereotypes are appointed the role of sense-maker and category provider, but their main task is to filter relevant information from an overload (McGarty et al 4). Like the construction of meaning from literary texts, the construction of stereotypes is built on merging old and new information (McGarty et al 3). Disregarding individual qualities and focusing on the trademarks of a group by employing stereotypes is a time efficient tool but generates misconceptions and faulty apprehensions of the world; this tendency implies that stereotypes are aids for misunderstanding rather than understanding (McGarty et al 4). In addition, Craig McGarty et al claim that pointed stereotypes are confined to negative representations of groups (5). Despite negative associations stereotypes are useful for organizing and understanding the world. Furthermore, shared stereotypes are valuable in understanding the behaviour of other groups; arguably groups share knowledge and coordinate their behaviour (McGarty et al 6).

Hastrup agrees that humans are never solitary entities but are since birth incorporated in a social setting or a group, which carries a set of values, which merge with the individual’s values (18). Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama describe these activities as a dynamic process, which involves negotiation, co-creation, reinforcement and challenging others and during this exchange the understanding of the own identity is produced (174). Notable for this essay, the core symbols and cultural values which condition an identity are also central building blocks in the process of understanding new observations (Hastrup 18; Martin and Nakayama 175). Also the individuals’ ability to create images and understand themselves and others through them
is vital in encounters with unknown and unfamiliar elements (Hastrup 19). According to Jonas Stier identification and/or positioning towards or against certain groups is innate behaviour for humans, who instinctively create distinctions between “us” and “them” (95-96). The sense of belonging to a group works in two ways; the processes of social differentiation and conforming within the group not only forms the identity of individuals but creates uniform behaviour within the group (McGarty et al 6; Stier 93). Thus, groups are engaged in activities of identification, standardization and differentiation simultaneously leading to both positive and negative discrimination. In other words, the positioning of oneself through identification also carries information about the other and conversely, the positioning against the other carries information about oneself.

Two directions are distinguishable in the process of identification. Avowal is the process of an individual describing themselves and ascription is a process of others attributing identities to them (Martin and Nakayama 174). Accordingly, the readers can identify themselves in the text both based on how they describe themselves and how others see them. Here the interest is mainly on the readers’ process of avowal and the readers’ process of ascription towards others. The readers’ responses generated for this essay present both processes of avowal and ascription as the previous theories by Sklar, Martin and Nakayama anticipate, but also show that the process of negotiating one’s identity extends to others’ perceptions of the respondents themselves.

Based on individuals’ innate quality of recognizing and distancing themselves from others, the readers of a literary text find points or characters of reference for the creation of “us” and “them”. These distinctions build on the values and norms attributed to the characters in “A Rose for Emily”, and in this case, the norms and values which the readers perceived to be attributed to the characters. These norms and values are identified by the readers in the process of defamiliarization; they make an impression on the reader and provide the needed material for the reader to identify them. This identification is expected to fall within definitions of the readers’ established stereotypes in the process of understanding the encounter with the character. Presumably, the encounters with pointed stereotypes produce a negative apprehension of those in the text who adhere to that stereotype. The responses both confirmed and exceeded these expectations; the points of references extended beyond the characters in the literary text and included structures of society, historical frameworks and the use of language.
The objectivity of the readers’ responses deserves some thought. Excluding scholarly impact on the interpretation of literary texts does not exclude other possible external influences on the reader’s experience. Although each reading event builds upon the individuals experiences the impact of others in the interpretational process of a text is an issue. Here, Fish’s notion of interpretive communities explains how several individuals reach similar interpretations; the concept refers to a group of individuals, who share the same strategies for writing texts – referring to co-creating the text’s meaning – in the untraditional manner of describing the meaning making of texts (Fish 171).

The interpretive community is the plural form of Iser’s active reader but for the community the definition includes some anticipatory characteristics. Firstly, the interpretive strategies exist prior to the presentation of the text; second, the members of the community apply the meaning of a single interpretation even among a variety of texts, regardless of the degree of truthfulness in the different texts (Fish 171). This implies that the norms of society steer the interpretation of any text in the same direction. Additionally, the uniform interpretation – or re- or co-writing of texts is explained by the sense of belonging to a group (Fish 171).

By contrast, Pradl sees the group as a collection of unique perceptions, which only become uniform through a democratic act of discussion. The interpretations of texts are products of negotiations between the individual and a group and they are fuelled by external influences, which provide alternative realities because they collide with the readers’ reality (Pradl ix). Although the meaning of a text is then created by both an individual and a group the individuals’ interpretation is impossible to impose from the outside; Pradl states that the construction of meaning and interpretation is individual. According to Pradl, reaching a communal interpretation of a text is practicing democracy (24).

The degree of shared strategies is investigated in the collected reader responses; this essay is interested in detecting presence or absence of evidence of communal interpretation of the literary text. The idea of a uniform interpretation is supported by the ideas of Miall, Kuiken, Hastrup and Stier, who all agree that psychobiologically inherited values affect individuals’ values. Thus, the uniform group of respondents in South Africa is expected to produce similar responses because of shared interpretational strategies. Between the group of South African respondents and the responses generated by the participants in Holland’s experiment the answers are expected to differ if the
impact of the psychobiological inheritance is realized. Although the ages differ, both
groups of respondents are expected to identify themselves as students, which may
provide similar strategies in the encounters with the literary text. Therefore, the
participants in Holland’s research could be considered a uniform group of
undergraduate students. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that the participants in
Holland’s experiment are not part of an interpretive community as they are being
interviewed by Holland one-on-one and therefore able to elaborate on their opinions and
then arguably in-depth answers provide more information on their personal experiences
of the text.

The use of personal experiences corresponds with questioning the existence of a
common version of reality; however, shared concepts of the reality exist according to
McGarty, Sklar and Stier (Sklar 66). Moreover, the democratic reading echoes the
thoughts of Stier, Martin and Nakayama in the sense that discussing reading is a tool for
establishing both individual and group identity. Returning to the differences between
Holland’s experiment and this present essay, the participants of Holland’s research may
be seen as participants in a democratic reading event as their experiences were collected
in a dialogue, which included Holland questioning their statement, presenting theories
and hypotheses. In this way, their own interpretations were subject to influx from the
outside and their responses were confronted with elements outside their own realm by
Holland’s implications and interventions.

In literature research, Iser’s reader response theories are criticized for promoting
fragmentation and division in their interest in the individual’s experiences. Phillip
Goldstein sums up the main points: these theories are claimed to disregard consensus,
embrace a conservative and accepting attitude towards class division, racial biases and
judge and condemn academics as dead-end literature theoreticians, who ignore the
underlying forces of decisions (199-200). Indeed, these aspects of reception theory are
possible products of this essay. Goldstein acknowledges the truthfulness in the criticism
but ultimately concludes that despite these tendencies reception studies also critique the
foundation of aesthetic theories, interpretive communities and institutional contexts,
which promote the diversity of literary criticism on all levels (206). This essay is
genuinely interested in finding similarities among the generated responses and scholarly
interpretations. The intention of detecting convergence rather than divergence is
underlined in the incorporation on the theory about interpretive communities, which
seek a uniform voice within the group of respondents. On the account of conservative
attitudes, the choices of both method and text seek to initiate a discussion on class division and racial biases for increased awareness about the readers' perceptions on the topic.

3. Method

In the field of literature research, the interest in empirical research on the readers’ experiences is motivated by discrepancies between theoretical expectations of reader responses and the actual recorded responses of readers’ experiences (Miall and Kuiken “Aspects”). Empowering readers and trusting their self-awareness in their descriptions of their own reading activities is a key factor in the emergence of empirical research on reader responses (Miall and Kuiken “Aspects”). Miall’s and Kuiken’s instrument accesses readers’ beliefs and attitudes without judging their level of sophistication (“Aspects”). However, restrictions apply to the readers’ empowerment in the process of analysing their own experiences. Miall and Kuiken evaluate readers capable of providing insights on their own reading experiences and their interpretations of the literary texts but exclude them from conducting theoretical analysis (“Aspects). Correspondingly, this essay invites the readers to speak up about their reading experience but excludes them from performing theoretical analyses on their reading.

Previous literature research has utilized similar methods: The Literary Response Questionnaire (LRQ) consisting of 68 questions provides a scale for measuring orientation towards text (Miall and Kuiken “Aspects”). Here, the template is used in a selective manner; the LRQ is used as an inspiration for the construction of the questionnaire for this essay and the tools of analysis do not use the cohesive scale developed for an intersectional analysis of the scale. The questionnaire for this essay is loosely built on the sections of empathy and insight, which indicate projective identification with the literary characters and reflections on unrecognized qualities in and outside the text (“Aspects”). The second influential set of questions was used by Susan Hynds in a research on interpersonal cognitive complexity in literary response processes (388). The main interest is in the questions targeting the relationship between establishing a connection between motives and actions of the readers paralleling those of the literary characters (Hynds 396).

Hynds’, Miall’s and Kuiken’s questions are adapted to the needs of this essay; that is, the focus is on the respondents’ and their surroundings’ relation to the characters in the distributed literary text. The structure of the questionnaire includes both open and
leading questions. This allows more than one answer per respondent, which is an approach deemed suitable due to the respondents being encouraged to express their opinions in plural. This way, the textual responses provide a rich foundation for the analysis. Questions number one and seven allow the respondents to freely note their opinions on the narrative, while question two targets the language and characterisation in general. Question three seeks answers on the text’s correspondence to the respondents’ environment and own experience and questions four, five and six target the characters of the narrative and the respondents’ expectations of them.

Rather than using formulas to calculate a numeric value for the accumulated outcome of the material like in Hynd’s and Miall and Kuiken’s research, content analysis is applied on the answers. The generated responses are categorized according to number of mentions per topic or issue. The downside of promoting free association is a lack of uniformity and shared qualities in the answers; therefore, the presentation of results differs a bit between the questions. The answers for the open questions one, two and seven are used as in the discussion without categorisation. The answers for question three are categorised according to which events or characters the respondents identify themselves with and against. Similarly, the answers for questions five and six are categorized according to expected versus non-expected behaviour. The categorisation of answers for question three seeks to establish uniformity or diversity in the respondents’ perception of the character. In other words, the material is categorised according to identification, projection and shared qualities. Moreover, the female and male respondents’ answers are viewed as separate entities in the sections targeting perception of female and male qualities and the expectations attributed to them. In Holland’s research the aspect of gender is also incorporated by the selection of two respondents who are particularly driven by the themes of strength and power in relation to maleness and femaleness (Holland 83).

Students’ freedom to make their own discoveries is vital for literature to function as an invitation to conversation rather than a transmission of someone else’s knowledge (Pradl 15). External imposed opinions are avoided to engage the students in a conversation (with the questionnaire) about the reading. Pradl sees previous scholars’ close end readings as highly restrictive and even appalling for students (Pradl 107). Therefore, the readers’ received no interpretive or leading information on the text prior to reading. In the worst-case scenario, readers are discouraged by underlining the interpretations and scholars leading readers then to believe that texts are only for a
limited educated group of people (Pradl 107). The authority of controlling forces in the process of responses has been pointed out also by Miall and Kuiken but significant for this study, empirical studies have shown that the powers of the controlling group are limited in the case of student readers (“What is” 126).

The questionnaire and the text intend to remain as inviting as possible to the students’ answers. The empirical research benefits from a text which allows indeterminacy and uncertainty during the reading process, because these characteristics invite questioning of the readings (Pradl 107). Similarly, in *The Act of Reading* Iser stresses that a reader’s enjoyment depends on their possibilities to participate in the assignment of faculties of the text; inviting texts are neither too obscure or too clear (108). In other words, the interpretational qualities remain intact only if the literary text is independent both from imposed values from external actors as well as from itself. The defiance of the text’s absolute control invites readers into a dialogue about meaning and comprehension triggered by the linguistic signs in the reading event (Iser 107-108).

Also Rosenblatt sees the active engagement with the signs rather than the words essential in the process of actively creating meaning (14). Fish raises the same question as Pradl in *Interpreting the Variorum*; he claims that the reader’s experience, formal units and structure of intentions are one and come to being simultaneously (165). Thus, there is no need for concerns about endangering objectivity. The question of morality and objectivity is overridden by the questions of an unacknowledged interpretation and the least possibly aware interpretation (Fish 167).

On an official note about ethics of research, the empirical research is conducted under informed consent (Jensen 367). The respondents are free to decline or agree to participation, their answers will remain anonymous and they are informed about the future use of the material (Jensen 367). Moreover, the respondents are free from association to the results of the research (Jensen 367). Accordingly, the students were informed about the purpose of the research, their contribution to it and their rights in the process, prior to distribution the questionnaires. In addition, the respondents were able to ask questions and received information on the purpose of the research and contact details in print, should they wish to alter their answers afterwards (Appendix C).

The respondents of the questionnaire were volunteers, asked by their English teacher to participate in a research project. Thus, similarly to Holland’s study, the respondents are deemed to have an interest in reading and literature based on their willingness to participate in the project. Moreover, unlike in Holland’s study the
volunteers in South Africa are not offered any financial reward, which further indicates their genuine interest in reading. Before reading the respondents were only informed that the questionnaire is interested in the readers’ experience rather than a “correct” reading. This approach seeks to maintain the open and indeterminate qualities of the text, which enable the respondents to form their own opinion. Furthermore, the lack of foregrounding seeks to invite the respondents to draw their own conclusions. The collection of material in South Africa is enabled by the Minor Field Studies scholarship offered by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The scholarship dictates a placement period of eight to ten weeks in the country of research and requires an unquestionable connection between the collected research material, the theoretical framework and the country of research. Due to scheduling challenges and limitations regarding the length of the essay, the original idea of studying literary texts included in the local curriculum was altered.

Due to the length of the text, the readers of “A Rose for Emily” were given the text three days before they answered the questionnaire. The questionnaire was presented to the respondents in their school environment during regular school hours in November 2017. Including an informative introduction on the research, the time scheduled for answering the questionnaire was one and a half hour. The respondents were free to leave the room when they were finished. The respondents had access to the text while answering the questionnaire. The respondents could hand in the questionnaire at any time. The respondents were supervised during the response session. In total the questionnaire on “A Rose for Emily” was answered by 19 respondents for the purposes of this essay. 12 of the respondents were male and seven female. The respondents were between 14 and 17 years of age, the median age of the respondents was 15 years and nine months. The respondents were in grades eight, nine, ten and eleven at the time the questionnaire was presented.

According to Holland, the lack of statistical methods allows the use of a reference group without consideration of including a full spectrum of representatives of different age, gender and occupation (69). Therefore, the responses elicited for this essay are deemed a trustworthy source, based on the respondents’ interest in reading. In Holland’s research the reading-capacities of the respondents were explored more profoundly before the selection of the participants; he asked them to list preferred authors and chose those whose interest were “beyond the ordinary reading list” (Holland 69). The respondents were also subject to personality tests, the results of
which were coupled with their recorded responses on the literature; this process intended to browse deeper than their occupational title and their own wording of their personality (Holland 99-100). The purposes of this essay were served by collecting less information; the background information collected about the South African respondents was limited to age, grade and gender. Additionally, Holland’s research process is more extensive; responses are generated on ten different literary works and the respondents are met multiple times and the same questions are presented several times to elicit as much information as possible about the readers’ interpretations of the story (Holland 171). This essay explores the answers presented on one single text on a single occasion without the possibility of discussion, alteration or completion of answers.

Comparing Holland’s previous research and the reader responses generated for this present essay in Rosenblatt’s circuit, the text is the only segmented component while the readers, the time and the location are different. The meaning of the text is awoken by the reader in each of these situations (Rosenblatt 14). Therefore, the interpretations of the text possibly differ from those of Holland’s readers. In other words, this is an exploration of the circuits capacities in a different constellation. Holland’s readers accounted for their opinions in interviews, which (seemingly) gives them an arena for discussion and provides some understanding of their feelings. This method fulfils all three categories of Miall and Kuiken; linguistic capacities, self-perception and expression of feelings. The questionnaire used for this research did not directly target feelings and mainly focused on the linguistic capacities and self-perception. Unlike the method of this research, Holland’s method allows observation of body language and follow-up questions, which enhance the understanding of the readers’ feelings.

The questionnaire used for this research leaves no space for discussion or other’s opinions in the process of making meaning, which still implies a complete reading involving reader, text and meaning. Holland’s method indirectly invites discussion, which allows shifts and changes in opinion and taking new opinions into account. In the case of an external influence, presumably both the questionnaire and the interviews produce answers influenced by the interpretive community based on the shared perceptions of reality as established in the previous section.
4. Readers, responses, characters and convergence

The 19 South African respondents answered 96 per cent of the presented questions. Out of the five unanswered questions two blank answers were for question seven, which asks for the respondents’ free associations. Excluding these, the total percentage of answers is 98. Arguably, the conditions of a functioning circuit consisting of the three components text, reader and generated meaning were met as the respondents were able to express opinions on the meaning the text generated. In the general comments on the text, three respondents found the language difficult and eight considered the timeline of the narrative confusing and complex, but the number of responses indicate that the text was understandable. The section for free commentary on the text confirms the aptitude between the readers and the text was described as interesting and enjoyable, the language, values and relevance were commented on and themes of sexism, racism and sexuality were brought up. Moreover, this confirms the text has open and indeterminate qualities inviting readers to generate responses, corresponding with Pradl’s suggestion of requirements for individual responses established in Section 2. One respondent even enclosed a wish of discussing the text with other readers, which following Pradl is an interest in negotiating the meaning of the text with a group.

The South African respondents’ descriptions of Miss Emily are diverse but isolation and strong-will receive multiple mentions in different wordings. Ten responses describe Emily as closed off, she is described strong-willed eight times and stubborn six times. Moreover, four female respondents consider her uninterested in conforming to society’s norms. Four male respondents consider her to have problems with her mental well-being, while only one female respondent expresses the same concern. Five persons identify her behaviour as superior and four consider her strange. She is identified as a killer, old, traditionalist, fierce ignorant, mysterious, contradictory and respect imposing character by two or three persons per category. Other descriptions appearing once are sinister, cynical, absent minded, evil, scary, unattractive and damaged.

These characterisations of Emily are retrievable as well in the results of Holland’s experiment. The respondents’ answers include stubborn, old, complex, dangerous, fragile, unconforming, traditional, passive, authoritarian and an object of gossip. Also, her isolation, disinterest in acting in what the respondent considers a feminine sexuality and engagement in marriage deprive her of her power and a prosperous future (Holland 176, 177, 178, 190, 191, 210, 228, 239).
Then which values, norms and behaviour are attributed to gender stereotypes and how does this correspond to the respondents’ answers? Previous psychology research results by Carranza and Prentice provide information on the prescriptive values attributed to men and women based on their gender. Affection, childishness, femininity, compassion, gentleness, gullibility, sympathy, soft-spokenness, empathy, understanding and warmth are attributed to women (Carranza and Prentice 269). Leadership, aggressiveness, dominance, independence, self-sufficiency, forcefulness and initiative-taking and risk-taking are attributed to men (Carranza and Prentice 269-270).

The traits most frequently attributed to Miss Emily by the South African respondents deviate from the results of Carranza and Prentice; being uncompromising, stubborn, independent, respect eluding and superiority resonate better with the values attributed to men: self-sufficiency, independence and dominance. Moreover, the ability to kill and perception of the character as evil, manipulative, fierce and scary correspond to aggressiveness rather than compassion and gentleness associated with femininity. However, Miss Emily is also characterized by the respondents as damaged and complex; the characterisation is described to change during the course of the narration. In Holland’s investigation Sandra’s answer is the exception to the rule, her answer reflects the prescriptive values attributed to femaleness. Similarly, the South African respondents questioning of Miss Emily’s mental health coincide with fragility and thus the stereotypical picture of women. In short, many of the answers bring up the same things as the following response: “Miss Emily is a stubborn but creepy, strange old woman. Miss Emily is a person that won’t take no for an answer and refuses to accept the stereotypes of how a woman should act.”

In general, the research of Holland is directed towards identity themes but the responses in Holland’s research fit both the stereotypical female and male attributes established by Carranza and Prentice (Holland 146). Pride, danger and superiority match the stereotypical male attributes self-sufficiency, dominance and independence, while passivity, a ladylike appearance and fragility match femininity, gullibility and gentleness, which are attributed to femaleness. A comparison of the generated responses shows that the participants in Holland’s experiment and the South African respondents agreed that Emily is a complex character, which supports the perception of her character carrying values and traits of both femininity and masculinity. Differences between the groups apprehension of Miss Emily were also detectable; the South African respondents do not directly address Miss Emily as deprived of power neither do they comment on
her sexuality as a trait of femaleness. On the other hand, the groups agree to a large extent in their descriptions of her as lonely, old, stubborn, unwilling to conform to society and an object of gossip. A comparison of the characterisation based on the respondents’ gender shows no biases apart from female respondents considering Miss Emily unconforming to society and male respondents’ questioning her mental health.

Interestingly, Susan Donaldson agrees that “A Rose for Emily” both confirms and challenges the boundaries set between stereotypical apprehensions of men and women. Emily challenges the traditional role of a woman as a bystander and thus also challenges the male dominance in society. On the other hand, Emily’s actions are watched over and she is seen as confined and restricted by her community and forced to the background, while her father – a male character – is in the foreground (Donaldson 570-571). Assuming then that the stereotypical place for a woman is in the background and restricted by society she challenges the stereotype by active participation in the narrative. Yet, isolation from society indicates her conforming to another stereotype: the lonely spinster. The ambiguous qualities in the depiction of Miss Emily’s femaleness are also identified by Forough Barani, who claims she is partly described as a fragile and weak character and partly as a strong and independent woman (158). According to Barani, Miss Emily’s refusal of participating in and conforming to the activities of the township have logical explanations; the changes in the structures and functions of the deep South women should be guarded and left unquestioned, confronting a weaker member of society (a woman) is not an option (159). Miss Emily’s changed behaviour is a product of the changes in society; isolation is the only option for a lonely woman who refuses to take part of the emerging new structures of society and therefore ends up in isolation (Barani 158).

Considering that the respondents are students, the apprehension of Miss Emily’s age is rather unsurprising, she is after all an older lady. Moreover, the question of age is issued in the responses on identification, which are described more in detail later in this section; the respondents identify themselves as young in contrast to the old. In addition, the oddness of Miss Emily is explained by her old age. In combination with refusal of submission, unconventional behaviour and ill-willed behaviour this suggest that she fits the less generic stereotype of a witch or the lonely strange spinster. The spinster attributes of Miss Emily are motivated by Peter L. Hays, who claims his case by presenting evidence in the depiction of her as unmarried against her wishes (Hays 105-106). The apprehension of Miss Emily as isolated and deprived of a future suggests that
she does not conform to the expectations of society; however, in the role of an unplanned spinster it does not show her as a powerful but rather a powerless character who is not unique by definition of the society.

Question number five targets the respondents’ experiences of confirmation and challenge of expected behaviour of Miss Emily without referral to gender. Miss Emily’s lack of interest in shopping and her residing in a house which does not smell good are anomalies in the behaviour of women in general, challenging the stereotypical behaviour of women, according to the South African group. This response is also found among the participants of Holland’s research; Sebastian notes that it is inappropriate to tell a lady to her face that her house stinks (Holland 226). This indicates that her housekeeping skills or efforts are an anomaly among women. Similarly, the expectations of a tea-drinking nice lady are challenged. On the other hand, one respondent considers her behaviour a direct and expected result of her role in the shadow of her father. In Holland’s experiment, the relation between Emily and her father is equally considered a decisive factor in the shaping of her life (Holland 171-75). Thus, these reader responses confirm Donaldson’s claim of both challenging and confirming stereotypical gender roles present in the narrative. The behaviour of Miss Emily can also be considered challenging the norms of current society but conforming behaviour in the context of the narrative as the following response from the South African group shows: “She acted in a way that was expected from someone living in that era. I do not think it is right though. She is very self-centred, and it wouldn’t be expected of her to put her needs before that of others.” This also illustrates that the responses are not confined to a single opinion but reflect on the aspects of behaviour that both meet and challenge the expectations.

Overall, the results on meeting the readers’ expectations on Miss Emily’s behaviour are divided. The responses providing information on which kind of expectations existed for Miss Emily’s behaviour include anticipations of ladylikeness, illogical behaviour and expectations of illogical and ill willed behaviour. The story met the female respondents’ expectations only on two accounts and challenged them on eleven accounts. The male respondents were very divided in their expectations of Miss Emily’s behaviour; eleven accounts considered the behaviour challenging their expectations and twelve accounts on her behaviour saw it unconventional. Altogether, two out of three respondents considered Miss Emily’s behaviour challenging their expectations.
The South African female respondents directly express that their expectations of Miss Emily are not met while the male respondents indirectly suggest so in their description of her lack of mental health, which indicates that she is not behaving as a “normal” dweller of her town. However, the respondents also point out that Miss Emily’s behaviour makes perfect sense for her character, which indicates that she indeed fits the expectations of an isolated old woman. In this regard, the readers seem to make sense of Miss Emily by categorizing her according to different female stereotypes. Subsequently, the female respondents slightly preferred understanding Miss Emily from the impression of a submissive and fragile lady while the male respondents’ answers indicate rather appointing her the role of a lonely spinster or dangerous witch. However, both stereotypes were employed by both female and male respondents.

The respondents were asked to describe in which ways the male characters met or challenged their expectations. Six of the seven female respondents commented on gender roles and of these answers five considered the male characters’ behaviour challenging their expectations. One of the female respondent thinks that the men’s behaviour meets the expectations of their professional identities. Another respondent sees both tendencies: “As sexist men from the 1900’s, they thought they could dictate what every woman in town should be doing […]. However, when they were face to face with Emily, they challenged expectation because they became scared, submissive and let her tell them what to do.”

Among the male respondents’ answers five accounts targeted gender role expectations; three of these responses claim the male characters challenged their expectations in their weak status in interaction with Emily. The following quote illustrates the male respondents’ answers: “The men did not seem to want to challenge Miss Emily at all throughout the story. The minister did not seem to want to confront her, the pharmacist didn’t get a reason for the poison; they all seemed scared of her in some way.” This answer also mirrors Ulf Kirchdorfer’s analysis of male submission in the narrative to a great degree. One male respondent contemplating gender issues considered the men’s behaviour stereotypically male in ignoring problems. The last gender-related response from the male readers considered the development of Homer Barron’s affection for Emily because of his sexual orientation, which the respondent identifies to be directed towards men. The other responses by the male readers mentioned expectations of professional identity seven times, the behaviour was considered unexpected in terms of work ethics on five accounts. Contradictorily, two
accounts on professional identity defined the male’s behaviour as expected. Three of the respondents mention racist depiction and racist characters unexpected, but the depiction of race is considered accurate for the setting of the narrative in one of the responses.

The majority of the respondents express that the male characters behaviour in the story challenges their expectations. The results also show, that the female respondents are more likely to consider the male characters behaviour unexpected and challenging the stereotype. However, based on the summary above, not all the answers target gender directly or even indirectly. This is possibly a result of the construction of the question, which lists the professions of the men. The notes on profession are indirectly associated to gender, due to the construction of society in the narratives setting. The professions of tax collectors, church men and construction workers were unquestionably occupied by men. Thus, indirectly it may be argued that the male characters challenge the stereotypically attributed behaviour of men also in the accounts addressing profession. In addition, these characters are only encountered and depicted in their professional roles. An alternative description of the men in the story is found in Holland’s experiment; the fifth reader, Sandra, sees the male characters as ‘good men’ so Emily and the reader can be attracted to them (239).

The answers on expectations of Miss Emily’s and the male characters behaviour mirror the values attributed to the stereotypes of femaleness and maleness. Tea-drinking, neatness and life in the shadows of a patriarchal family structure all confine the character of Emily to a domestic existence of obedience and chores. This fits Carranza’s and Prentices notions of gullibility, gentleness and understanding. The following comments illustrate how the readers’ expectations of the female stereotype are challenged:

“... it surprised me when Miss Emily left every man who spoke to her stuttering and confused. It was also surprising how they did not question her and let her be.”

“In this period of time I would expect the men to be more superior in their behaviour towards women . . .”

“I thought that it was unrealistic that they would just let her continue being exempt from taxes or order arsenic freely . . .”
On the other hand, powerless male characters are also challenged stereotypes in “A Rose for Emily”. The tax debtors – all men – are forced into a battle with Emily, who refuses to obey and show weakness and eventually forces the men to leave (Kirchdorfer 146). Furthermore, the men working on Emily’s estate avoid her by all means possible and rather stay in the shadows and move around in a sneaking way than confront her (Kirchdorfer 146). Also, the druggist is silenced and thus outpowered by Emily (Kirchdorfer 146). These men are not alone in their fear of Emily, even the Baptist minister is forced by women of the congregation to visit Emily (Kirchdorfer 146). Assuming that weakness is a female attribute and powerfulness a male counterpart, Emily turns these tables around. The physically strong labourers and powerful men of medicine, state and law are all left to surrender in their battles against Emily. Besides Emily also other women in the society show off their powers in forcing the minister to visit Emily.

Applying Martin and Nakayama’s concepts of avowal and ascription to Emily’s identity reveals a discrepancy between the qualities assigned by herself and the others. Emily’s actions indicate that in the process of avowal she attributes power, decisiveness and authority to herself unlike the expectations on a stereotypical elderly lady. The stereotype of an abiding old lady is challenged when the druggist, the tax collectors, the minister and laborers are forced to ascribe the same qualities to her; this ascription might be silent, but it is evident in their changed behaviour and acceptance to obey to her behaviour. Conversely, the town dwellers avow themselves power in their professional roles, but Miss Emily ascribes non-authoritarian roles to them and refuses to obey them. Again, Donaldson’s and Barani’s points are valid, the perceptions of Miss Emily are contradictory, and the responses unsurprisingly reflect these tendencies.

Barani’s interpretations are helpful in the process of understanding the respondents’ various perception of Miss Emily. Firstly, she is a complex person and her character allows for multiple interpretations. Second, Miss Emily’s behaviour changes not only because of events in her personal life and the progression of time but also because of the changes and changed expectations of society. Barani’s claims also support the ambiguity of avowal and ascription between Miss Emily and the dwellers of her society. Miss Emily might challenge the stereotype of a submissive, gullible and gentle woman but as time passes she conforms to the stereotype of an old, stubborn and lonely traditionalist refusing to renew herself or her values. Thus, her perpetual stubbornness, strength and pride contribute to her defiance of first chivalry and then
defiance of adaptation to the societal changes (Hayes 106). Tanfer Emin Tunc claims that the tragic end of the isolated traditionalist woman is inevitable (86). Emily is one of several literary characters, who share the same tragic fate (Tunc 86). Miss Emily then confirms and represents the stereotypical values ascribed to an old lonely woman. The same tendencies and identification of the stereotype are detectable in the South African respondents’ answers as establishes previously.

On the question of relatable events or characters in the narrative, among the male respondents one left the question unanswered and four found the story unrelatable and distant. One respondent found resemblances in the depiction of American society and the characters in the narrative and Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock’s movies and the literary works of Charles Dickens. One respondent found similarities in the power relations between blacks and whites in contemporary South Africa and in the narrative, where whites perceive themselves superior and blacks perceive themselves inferior. One respondent also commented on encountering derogatory use of language targeting race like the portrayal in the text. Another respondent found slight relatability in the younger generations battling the old generations. Two readers perceived points of identification in miss Emily’s character to some extent, in her standing up for herself and acting stubborn but on the other hand one respondent clearly defined that killing is nothing they would do. Similarly, Homer Barron was found relatable, but the response clarified the similarities did not include racist language. Judge Stevens was forced to do things against his will. Personal experiences of relationships and events in other persons’ lives were also seen as relatable in the short story.

Three of the female respondents found similarities in the structure of their own society and the one depicted in the narrative; they considered superiors, higher rank persons and age to be like their own experiences. Three respondents deemed Emily relatable motivated by her assertiveness, pride and loneliness. Among the other characters the townspeople’s gossiping was found resonating with their own experiences and Emily’s attitudes towards taxes was found in others.

Mirroring the respondents’ perception of themselves towards the depicted characters in the narrative and applying the concept of avowal and ascription shows that Emily, Homer Barron and Judge Stevens share the qualities the respondents attribute to themselves. The equivalent in qualities attributed or perceived behaviour towards the respondents by others than themselves are the townspeople and characters of authority. The most frequently described attributes of Emily are reflected in the respondents’
identification with single characters; the respondents describe themselves as strong willed, lonely and assertive.

“I have had disappointments and embarrassments in my life, but I’ve still tried to keep my head up . . .”

“I feel as though I’m as assertive as she is and if I could I’d also escape into my own house for a very long period of time.”

Mostly, the respondents ascribe themselves positive characteristics in the process of avowal. According to the respondents, negative qualities are mainly ascribed by others to themselves; the respondents see themselves as underdogs in the structures of society, in the way members of society address them. Negative qualities are also ascribed by the respondents themselves to others; they find others’ behaviour unconventional by the standards of society’s norms. The following response from the South African context illustrates this point of view:

“I could relate slightly with the characters of the younger generation having to deal with a stubborn member of the older generation like Miss Emily Grierson, as I as a young person often deal with people older than myself, such as teachers or my parents (who are in their sixties).”

Youth is a point of reference in indicating lack of power in comparison to those of older age, in more powerful positions or those groups of authority who simply treat the respondents in an unfair manner such as the town’s dwellers. On the other hand, the narrative challenges the norms of behaviour interlinked to stereotypes of age, here especially the concept of old versus young. Where men are considered more powerful than women, young people are considered more powerful than old people; a stereotypical assumption based on the physical qualities of human beings and the notion of illness increasing closer to death. Here, the tax debtors are proven wrong; the young powerful men are powerless in the battle against the old lady (Kirchdorfer 146).

The age difference between Holland’s respondents and the South African respondents is not significant in number but neither insignificant in the results; both groups of respondents are after all students and thus members of a reasonably homogenous group but their perception of experienced power shows that the points of differences in the narrative differ. In Holland’s experiment, Sam identifies himself with the upper class and power, but in his case the point of reference is the author (Holland
Saul responds negatively when the story mirrors lack of control and threat; negative reactions are elicited by those characters who are unlimited in their power: Miss Emily’s father, Miss Emily and the murderer (Holland 192, 198). Unlike the high school students, the undergraduate students identify themselves with those characters in powerful positions and distance themselves from the situations where their control is lost. Holland’s respondents confirm Stier’s theories on identification with positive encounters, but the South African respondents contradict this theory by identifying themselves with qualities and characteristics with negative connotations.

According to Holland, a positive response to a literary text requires the readers to distance themselves from the work; the creation of meaning relevant to the readers’ own experiences is conditioned by the ability to create meaning of the events outside the own sphere (342). Thus, the creation of groups that distinguish “us” from “them” is important for the reading experience and the completion of the circuit. These tendencies reflect the theories earlier presented by Stier, Martin and Nakayama in Section 2. The identity of one-self is attributed positive values, whereas the identity of others is identified with negative connotations. This explains the readers’ identification with negative experiences; after all, the identifiable negative experiences of the readers are the results of society’s structures, “the others”, who are attributed negative values. This process of identification with positive attributes and against negative ones is evident in the generated responses; one respondent finds similarities in personal experiences and Miss Emily’s behaviour but highlights that murder is out of the question unlike in Miss Emily’s case.

Another aspect of the process of distancing is shown in the responses on the language. The respondents comment on the use of derogatory terms and the setting is deemed foreign, outdated and thus an unattractive reference for direct identification but an attractive point of reference for counter positioning. Sixteen of the nineteen South African respondents mention racism either directly or indirectly in their responses. The questionnaire does not target racism directly and thus these findings are unquestionably interesting. The respondents use strategies of distancing themselves from the language’s racist values prevalent in the narrative. This is an expression of the process of group formation described by Stier; group external values function as the reference point for the readers in their making of a uniform identity. The South African respondents reacted on the word choices such as “negro”, which they considered derogatory. This shows the formation of a distinction of “us” and “them”; the them
confirmed by appointing negative values to the language considered stereotypical for
the narrative and in this manner distinguishing the own group’s values as positive in not
using this type of expressions. This point is illustrated by responses describing the
language in the narrative as “outdated”, “foreign” and “controversial”. Looking back at
Miall’s and Kuiken’s process of defamiliarization and Rosenblatt’s linguistic signs
setting of the process of construction meaning, the language may be argued to stand out
from the respondents’ regular encounters with language and thus throws the readers into
a process of considering the text in relation to their own experiences. In the case of “A
Rose for Emily”, the values of the text’s language are deemed inappropriate for the
setting of the South African respondents and create a distinct gap between the norms of
the narrative and the readers’ own society. This corresponds with McGarty’s notion of
pointed stereotypes, which are mainly apprehended as negative. In the elicited
responses, the superiors who use derogatory language become personifications of
negative stereotypes. These stereotypes are the reference points used for establishing
differentiation in values, which leads to readers’ distancing themselves from the
stereotypes.

Corresponding with the values expressed in the language of the narrative,
respondents also point out racism in characters and in the structure as an element they
distance themselves from both directly and indirectly. In Holland’s research, Shep
considers the use of words such as “nigger” a part of the setting and a tool for creating
the scenery, which according to him is non-abrasive use of language (Holland 221-22).
Moreover, Shep identifies the oppressive structures of society and racism in the
narrative (Holland 206). Structural racism was also mentioned by the South African
respondents several times and even recognised in their contemporary society as a
remnant from former times. The following comment from one of the respondents
illustrates this tendency: “As a part of the ‘younger generation’ it can also be difficult to
read blatantly racist texts without feeling slightly repulsed.”

However, the respondents also claim that the language is helpful in recognising
the setting of the narrative, thus underlining that the setting differs from their current
experiences of acceptable behaviour. On the other hand, the language is considered an
expression of values and carrier of norms attributed to the stereotypical racist, which the
respondents identify as “the other”. Subsequently, the definition of the other also
defines the readers themselves: they are distancing themselves from the racist structures
and use of language in the story. Also, this reveals the values, which direct the group
towards uniform behaviour. Again, a response illustrates this process in the best way possible: “the guttural [sic] identification of race will be found to be offensive and unnecessary by most.”

Summarizing the results of the responses generated in South Africa shows that the readers of “A Rose for Emily” interpreted the text and thus the three-component circuit of a reading event was successful. The readers’ ability to interact with the text and bring in their own experiences then fulfilled the expectations of the response theories of Rosenblatt and Iser. The response on the narrative are both divergent and convergent; however, the results suggest the existence of a dominating yet not superimposed rewriting of the text among the respondents. Most of the readers are able to identify themselves in some traits of the characters, in parts of the events or structures in the society depicted in the narrative. These results are according to the expectations built up by the theories of Sklar and McGarty, which claimed that the interpretations of literary characters are completed by filling in the gaps of the literary text with their own experiences. Moreover, the identification with events and characters in the text shows that the readers’ actions confirm the innate qualities of positioning against and with groups according to Stier’s and Hastrup’s claims. Thus, also positioning against values or norms was anticipated. Indeed, the readers positioned themselves against the norms and values of the depicted society and some of the characters’ negative qualities. Unexpectedly, the readers also positioned themselves against the use of language in the narrative by juxtaposing it to the accepted values of language use in their own society. This criticism directed towards the narrative and its language are proof that reader responses are a tool for raising awareness on the readers’ thoughts on contemporary biases detectable in society, which was claimed as a defence for the use of these theories against Goldstein’s critique. Contrary to the critics’ claims, these responses show a fight against accepting attitudes towards racism and conservatism rather than accepting attitude.

The positioning with or against the characters or events in “A Rose for Emily” uses different strategies. The readers identify themselves directly with those characters who are attributed positive values. The readers identify themselves indirectly through positioning themselves against groups and depictions of time, which are attributed negative values. The positioning process works according to the theories of identity and group formation established earlier by Stier, Martin and Nakayama; the process of avowal incorporates positive values and the process of ascription incorporates negative values.
values. However, a contradicting yet compromising tendency also emerged; in the case where “the other” group imposes negative actions on the readers’ identity, the readers also identified themselves with negative or unsuccessful values. These findings illustrate that cultural science theories of identity making and positioning are feasible in descriptions of readers’ literary experiences.

The results also show that stereotypes are viable aids in explaining readers’ process of making sense of encounters with literary texts. The readers’ perception of which stereotypes the characters concur with show patterns of divergence but the principle is still helpful in understanding the process of interpretation. In agreement with Pradl and McGarty the gaps left in the literary texts’ depiction are filled with the readers’ own real-life observations or experiences of other literary texts or forms of media. Unexpectedly, a certain historical setting or manner of using language also adhere to the description of stereotypes in their functions of making sense of a literary text.

Moreover, the South African respondents illustrate that the psychobiological inheritance is an important contributor in the process of identification and positioning towards the text; the responses showed that structures of the local society, the history of the area and the environments behaviour affected the respondents’ reactions to the literary text. The responses generated by the questionnaire in South Africa partially confirm Fish’s notion of the interpretive community’s unison voice in co-writing the interpretation of literary texts. Norms and value lead interpretations of a community in a distinct direction. On the other hand, Pradl’s suggestion that individuals’ interpretations are impossible to impose from the outside are confirmed by the fact that the evidence lacks a completely uniform interpretation. Among the group of respondents, the majority apprehend her as an isolated and unadapting member of the society and the same characterisation is detectable among the responses of Holland’s experiment. The South African interpretive community is even more unison in their condemnation of the racist characteristics of the text. This implies that there indeed exists shared perceptions of reality. Linking the high degree of shared perceptions to the concept of psychobiological inheritance, the respondent’s similar perceptions are an expression of the prevalent values of the South African reader community, which according to these responses condemns racism. Yet, the responses are far from completely uniform among the South African respondents and even less uniform if the results from Holland’s research are included.
Neither does considering gender as an element for group division among the responses provide completely uniform patterns of perceptions of the literary characters or the points of reference. However, indications of patterns are detectable; the female respondents considered both Miss Emily’s and the male characters’ behaviour unexpected to a higher degree than the male respondents. The female respondents also addressed challenged gender roles more frequently than the male respondents. On the account of relatability with the characters and events in the short story the results show that both female and male respondents identified themselves with positive characteristics identified in the depiction of Miss Emily, but only male respondents identified themselves with the positive values attributed to the male characters. Thus, the results show a slight tendency of male respondents relating to male characters more than female characters identifying with male characters.

On the whole, the results show that pointed expressions of sexism and racism provide a higher degree of uniform interpretations. Like in the case of the use of language in the short story, Miall’s and Kuiken’s theory of defamiliarization is valid also for the topics sexism and racism, which are perceived as striking and unfamiliar and thus generate responses which echo the values of the respondent’s values. These issues or the language used to describe them appear as striking to the readers; the question of racism created similar responses among most of the undivided group of respondents, while the question of sexism appeared as striking and outstanding to a higher degree among the female respondents.

Consequently, this essay shows that the same text generates different responses, but similar processes of understanding the encounters with the literary text are detectable, which confirms Holland’s theory about the reading process. The evidence suggests that the possibility of completely uniform interpretation of a literary text – if that exists – is generated through a democratic reading event, where the readers through discussion establish a single interpretation. Yet, that contradicts the indicatory evidence in Holland’s experiment, which also showed differences between the participants’ perception. However, the participants in Holland’s experiment discussed the texts only with the researcher not with each other. Presumably then, apart from a discussion for establishing an interpretation, the final option for a uniform interpretation is an externally imposed interpretation but in that case the reading event excludes the readers’ themselves from participation and thus results in an unsuccessful reading event.

Reconnecting to Rosenblatt’s and Iser’s active reader, the readers who are not able to
bring their own experiences into the reading event are unable to grasp the meanings of texts due to their inability of filling the gaps left in the texts with their own personal experiences. In other words, successful reading of literary texts is conditioned by the possibility of identification and interpretations based on own experiences and thus generates unique responses even if the processes of interpreting the text are similar to each other.

5. Conclusion

This essay, situated within the field of reader response theories, investigated South African high school students’ interpretations of femaleness and maleness in the short story “A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner. In addition, the respondents described their relatability to the text. The intention was to confirm or refute a uniform interpretation of the text by analysing the respondents’ perception of the literary text’s characters, the values attributed to the characters and the points of reference the readers’ found for identifying events, themselves or other real-life persons in the text. The concept of stereotypes was used as a tool for categorizing the respondents’ answers and their perceptions of the literary text. The investigation was performed by presenting the narrative and a questionnaire to 19 volunteering respondents. Furthermore, similar tendencies as discovered in the analysis of the responses were retrieved in the results Holland’s experiment generated.

Originally, the intention was to explore the differences between reading responses generated by the same method in interpretive communities in two different countries. However, that plan proved too complicated for this essay. Finally, similar results to those found in the responses from the South African readers were searched from previous reader response research results, which were extracted with a different method and in a different context by Holland. The expectations were that these two groups would provide vastly different answers. However, similarities were possible to establish among the responses of the results of Holland’s research and the responses produced in South Africa.

The results show that attributed qualities of femaleness and maleness are shared by different interpretive communities, but the attributed values and norms are not uniform. Likewise, the identification with characters and events in the narrative diverges and converges both within and outside the interpretive community. Respondents in both communities found points of reference in the narrative but not all of them were the same; the answers on points of identification ranged from qualities and
behaviour of the characters to situation within society’s structures. Identification and relatability to characters and events also takes the form of positioning oneself against values attributed to a period of time, which functions both as a justification for understanding the context and a reason for rejecting the text. In addition, the positioning against groups and their behaviour provided reference points for readers.

The material from the South African respondents was surprising in several ways. Although some questions received many similar answers there was not one question which received the same kind of answer from all the respondents. Moreover, the difference in expectations of the character and the points of reference were spread among the different characters in the narrative. Unexpectedly, the points of reference also extended to the depicted structure of society and the use of language. Moreover, the responses showed that the literary text was mirrored against other pieces and forms of fiction, which was unexpected. The results also showed that the readers’ accumulated experiences are a vital ingredient in the process of interpreting literary texts. Although not targeted in the questionnaire, the question of racism was lifted by most of the respondents. A tendency which indicates that the norms of the society guide the interpretations.

The results showed that the attributed characteristics for the literary characters coincided with female and male stereotypes both by challenging and confirming to them. The stereotypes were useful in the process of making sense of the narrative in both cases. No significant differences were detectable between the female and the male respondents use of stereotypes. The most frequently found stereotypes were those of submissive women, powerful men and the old and unmarried women. The only remarkable difference between the respondents’ perceptions in relation to their gender was detectable here; sexism is more likely to be condemned by the interpretive community consisting of female respondents. However, both females and males view femaleness and maleness as a dichotomy. Thus, reciprocal information is provided for the definition of the stereotypes of both females and males in the text by the perceptions of a single gender.

The process of forming identities uses the dichotomy of “us” and “them” in a similar way; in the process of identification the readers used both information confirming their own and other’s identities to establish their own position towards the text. As established earlier, similar tendencies in the process of reading exist in all readings of the same literary text but the interpretations produced in those processes
differ. In conclusion the responses from South Africa suggest the existence of common version of reality, which is the foundation for the interpretive community’s re-writing of the text; the community’s values were expressed through a condemning attitude towards racism.

Both the themes of sexism and racism are considered a result of the readers finding the values of the previously mentioned themes unfamiliar and striking. I used the functions of stereotypes also for the concept of racism; the identification of negative values and positioning against the “racist stereotype” works like the identification process against any other negative qualities. Surprisingly, the highest degree of uniform responses were found in answers condemning behaviour attributed to certain values rather than to certain characters or events in the narrative.

Theories from other sciences proved successful in interpreting the processes of encountering new experiences; both the psychological theories used by Holland and the theories from cultural sciences this essay uses are useful. The use of a questionnaire for the purposes of eliciting answers worked according to the expectations. However, presumably a more precise questionnaire could have provided answers directly targeting the issues of interest. On the other hand, more specific questions may endanger the open and inviting qualities, which invite the readers to incorporate their own experiences. The analysis method does raise the question of external interpretation and thus a formula like those used by Hynds, Miall and Kuiken is helpful for an objective interpretation of the responses.

A longer essay on reader responses and interpretive communities may successfully incorporate a larger number of respondents from several different interpretive communities. Here the options are unlimited; the same text or different literary texts exploring the same theme may be given to readers to compare stereotypes or attributed values and explore the process of establishing identities and groups departing from that text. In a longer format this present essay could make us of the elicited responses by a more detailed investigation of the themes sexism and racism and their function as stereotypes.
Works cited


This version of “A Rose for Emily” was selected due to online availability and an uncomplicated layout. Moreover, this copy is published for educational purposes and is thus compatible for the selected group of readers who are students.


A Rose for Emily by William Faulkner

WHEN Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old man-servant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores. And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor—he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply. They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china-painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell. The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father.

They rose when she entered—a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head. Her skeleton was small
and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.

Her voice was dry and cold. "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves."

"But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn't you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?"

"I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said. "Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff . . . I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see We must go by the--"

"See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But, Miss Emily--"

"See Colonel Sartoris." (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.) "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobe!" The Negro appeared. "Show these gentlemen out."

II

So SHE vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell.

That was two years after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart--the one we believed would marry her --had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man--a young man then--going in and out with a market basket.

"Just as if a man--any man--could keep a kitchen properly, "the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons.

A neighbor, a woman, complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, eighty years old.

"But what will you have me do about it, madam?" he said.

"Why, send her word to stop it," the woman said. "Isn't there a law?"

"I'm sure that won't be necessary," Judge Stevens said. "It's probably just a snake or a rat that nigger of hers killed in the yard. I'll speak to him about it."

The next day he received two more complaints, one from a man who came in diffident deprecation. "We really must do something about it, Judge. I'd be the last one in the world to bother Miss Emily, but we've got to do something." That night the Board of Aldermen met--three graybeards and one younger man, a member of the rising generation.
"It's simple enough," he said. "Send her word to have her place cleaned up. Give her a certain time to do it in, and if she don't..."

"Dammit, sir," Judge Stevens said, "will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?"

So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brickwork and at the cellar openings while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his shoulder. They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the outbuildings. As they recrossed the lawn, a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol. They crept quietly across the lawn and into the shadow of the locusts that lined the street. After a week or two the smell went away.

That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town, remembering how old lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that the Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such. We had long thought of them as a tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a sprawled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door. So when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated; even with insanity in the family she wouldn't have turned down all of her chances if they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized. Now she too would know the old thrill and the old despair of a penny more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom 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. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.

---

SHE WAS SICK for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows--sort of tragic and serene.

The town had just let the contracts for paving the sidewalks, and in the summer after her father's death they began the work. The construction company came with niggers and mules and machinery, and a foreman named Homer Barron, a Yankee--a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. The little boys would follow in groups to hear him cuss the niggers, and the niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks. Pretty soon he knew everybody in town. Whenever you heard a lot of laughing anywhere about the square, Homer Barron would be in the center of the group. Presently we began to see him and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable.

At first we were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest, because the ladies all said, "Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer." But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget noblesse oblige-

without calling it noblesse oblige. They just said, "Poor Emily. Her kinsfolk should come to her." She had some kin in Alabama; but years ago her father had fallen out with them over the estate of old lady Wyatt,
the crazy woman, and there was no communication between the two families. They had not even been represented at the funeral.

And as soon as the old people said, "Poor Emily," the whispering began. "Do you suppose it's really so?" they said to one another. "Of course it is. What else could . . ." This behind their hands; rustling of craned silk and satin behind jalousies closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily."

She carried her head high enough--even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness. Like when she bought the rat poison, the arsenic. That was over a year after they had begun to say "Poor Emily," and while the two female cousins were visiting her.

"I want some poison," she said to the druggist. She was over thirty then, still a slight woman, though thinner than usual, with cold, haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which was strained across the temples and about the eyesockets as you imagine a lighthouse-keeper's face ought to look. "I want some poison," she said.

"Yes, Miss Emily. What kind? For rats and such? I'd recom--"

"I want the best you have. I don't care what kind."

The druggist named several. "They'll kill anything up to an elephant. But what you want is--"

"Arsenic," Miss Emily said. "Is that a good one?"

"Is . . . arsenic? Yes, ma'am. But what you want--"

"I want arsenic."

The druggist looked down at her. She looked back at him, erect, her face like a strained flag. "Why, of course," the druggist said. "If that's what you want. But the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for."

Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up. The Negro delivery boy brought her the package; the druggist didn't come back. When she opened the package at home there was written on the box, under the skull and bones: "For rats."

So THE NEXT day we all said, "She will kill herself"; and we said it would be the best thing. When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, "She will marry him." Then we said, "She will persuade him yet," because Homer himself had remarked--he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club--that he was not a marrying man. Later we said, "Poor Emily" behind the jalousies as they passed on Sunday afternoon in the glittering buggy, Miss Emily with her head high and Homer Barron with his hat cocked and a cigar in his teeth, reins and whip in a yellow glove.

Then some of the ladies began to say that it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people. The men did not want to interfere, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister--Miss Emily's people were Episcopal--to call upon her. He would never divulge what happened during that interview, but he refused to go back again. The next Sunday they again drove about the streets, and the following day the minister's wife wrote to Miss Emily's relations in Alabama.
So she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments. At first nothing happened. Then we were sure that they were to be married. We learned that Miss Emily had been to the jeweler's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H. B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing, including a nightshirt, and we said, "They are married." We were really glad. We were glad because the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been.

So we were not surprised when Homer Barron--the streets had been finished some time since--was gone. We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off, but we believed that he had gone on to prepare for Miss Emily's coming, or to give her a chance to get rid of the cousins. (By that time it was a cabal, and we were all Miss Emily's allies to help circumvent the cousins.) Sure enough, after another week they departed. And, as we had expected all along, within three days Homer Barron was back in town. A neighbor saw the Negro man admit him at the kitchen door at dusk one evening.

And that was the last we saw of Homer Barron. And of Miss Emily for some time. The Negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed. Now and then we would see her at a window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear on the streets. Then we knew that this was to be expected too; 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.

When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning gray. During the next few years it grew grayer and grayer until it attained an even pepper-and-salt iron-gray, when it ceased turning. Up to the day of her death at seventy-four it was still that vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man.

From that time on her front door remained closed, save for a period of six or seven years, when she was about forty, during which she gave lessons in china-painting. She fitted up a studio in one of the downstairs rooms, where the daughters and granddaughters of Colonel Sartoris' contemporaries were sent to her with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent to church on Sundays with a twenty-five-cent piece for the collection plate. Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted.

Then the newer generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town, and the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of color and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. The front door closed upon the last one and remained closed for good. When the town got free postal delivery, Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them.

Daily, monthly, yearly we watched the Negro grow grayer and more stooped, going in and out with the market basket. Each December we sent her a tax notice, which would be returned by the post office a week later, unclaimed. Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows--she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house--like the carven torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from generation to generation--dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.

And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering Negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the Negro.

He talked to no one, probably not even to her, for his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse.

She died in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight.
THE NEGRO met the first of the ladies at the front door and let them in, with their hushed, sibilant voices and their quick, curious glances, and then he disappeared. He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again.

The two female cousins came at once. They held the funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers, with the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and macabre; and the very old men --some in their brushed Confederate uniforms--on the porch and the lawn, talking of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her perhaps, confusing time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottle-neck of the most recent decade of years.

Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it.

The violence of breaking down the door seemed to fill this room with pervading dust. A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. Among them lay a collar and tie, as if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left upon the surface a pale crescent in the dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks.

The man himself lay in the bed.

For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair.
Appendix B

By filling out this questionnaire:

• I agree to participate in this research project.
• I have read this consent form and the information it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions about them.
• I understand that I was selected to participate in this study due to my position as a student.
• I agree to my responses being used for education and research on condition my privacy is respected. I understand that my responses will be used in aggregate form only, so that I will not be personally identifiable.
• I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this project.
• I understand I have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage.
• I understand that this research is published in electronic format.

Name: __________________________

Age: __________________________

Gender: __________________ Grade: ____________ School: __________________________

QUESTIONNAIRE ON “A ROSE FOR EMILY” BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

Please answer these questions on your experiences and opinions on the text. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

1. In brief, what was your impression of the text?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
2. What are your thoughts on the language of the text? How did you find the
descriptions of the characters in terms of race, gender and age?

3. Which characters and sections – if any- in the story could you identify in your
own life? How are they traceable to your own experiences?

4. How would you describe Miss Emily in the story?
5. In which ways did Miss Emily meet or challenge your expectations of how she should behave?

6. Which ways did the men (e.g. the pharmacist, the minister, the tax collector and the building workers) meet or challenge your expectation of how they should behave?
7. Please feel free to add any comments on the text (story, language, characters) here!

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you again for your assistance!
Appendix C

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research.
This literature research is interested in how readers experience texts. The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information for a BA thesis on reader response research at Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden. The information provided by you in this questionnaire will be used for research purposes. It will not be used in a manner which would allow identification of your individual responses.

Best regards,
Pia Österman, Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden, po222ed@student.lnu.se