

**Madness and Emotional Resistance in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily", "Dry September"
and "Elly": Weaponising Mental Disorder Against Patriarchal Subjugation**



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30th April 2026 (Spring 2026)

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and "Elly": Weaponising Mental Disorder Against Patriarchal Subjugation**

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Noman', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.



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Dedication (optional)

My Dadaji and Louhil, the very first Literature graduates I learnt about; you two left too soon to see me walking onto the same path as you. As my mother says, my love for English Literature and curiosity about its versatility stem from you two; I'll always believe and cherish this fact.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	7
Chapter 1 Introduction	8
Chapter 2 Methodology.....	10
Chapter 3 Literature Review	13
Chapter 4 Re-visioning Emily Grierson, Minnie Cooper and Elly's Madness as Emotional Resistance	23
Chapter 5 Acting Out or Rejecting the Female Roles: Madness as Feminist Resistance in “A Rose for Emily”, “Dry September” and “Elly”	33
Chapter 6: Female Malady in Faulkner’s Emily, Minnie and Elly: Madness as Silent Rebellion Against Southern Patriarchal Norm	43
Chapter 7: Conclusion	48
Works Cited/References:	50

Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate how female madness in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily", "Dry September" and "Elly" can be understood as a form of resistance against societal oppression rather than simply as mental disorder. Early criticism examined women's emotional struggles in Southern traditions, but recent research suggests that these struggles can also be acts of resistance. However, my review of the literature suggests that there has been little direct feminist analysis of these three short stories together. This dissertation uses feminist literary analysis and connects with Adrienne Rich's essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1971), Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness* (1972) and Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1985). These texts will help to explore how madness is a response to patriarchal control. They will also help to focus on how Emily, Minnie and Elly use silence and their actions to resist the strict expectations of Southern society. The results suggest that their behaviour represents feminist resistance because of social neglect and gendered roles. The female protagonists act as empowered rebels rather than mere victims. By analysing the primary texts critically, this dissertation depicts that female madness can be a subtle but strong form of defiance. It also explains how literature can highlight women's ways of challenging unfair social rules and gender norms.

Chapter 1

Introduction

William Faulkner's short stories "A Rose for Emily" (1930), "Dry September" (1931), and "Elly" (1934) are set in the American South: Jefferson, after the Civil War. This society still follows strict patriarchal rules, strong racial divisions, and the false ideal image of Southern womanhood. In each story, a white woman- Emily Grierson, Minnie Cooper, and Elly- are considered to be mentally unstable by the people of Jefferson. Emily keeps the dead body of her lover and engages in necrophilia with it, Minnie spreads a false accusation of being raped and behaves hysterically in public, and Elly murders both her grandmother and her lover. Earlier critics often explained these actions as personality flaws, Gothic influence of Literature, or even biological issues such as mental illness. However, this dissertation focuses on a different question:

How can the idea of madness in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily", "Dry September" and "Elly" be interpreted, from a feminist perspective, as resistance to oppression?

This dissertation intends to argue that the "madness" of these women is not simply any kind of mental illness. Instead, it is a limited but meaningful emotional resistance against a patriarchal system that denies them freedom, voice, and control over their lives. The argument in this dissertation is based on Adrienne Rich's idea of "re-vision" from her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1971), Phyllis Chesler's main propositions from her seminal text *Women and Madness* (1972) that madness can be a reaction against rejected female roles, and Elaine Showalter's claim in her influential text *The Female Malady* (1985) that female "malady" is caused by social pressure and forcefully performing gender-based passive roles.

Accumulating all these ideas, the study re-examines these female characters' silence, hysteria, insecurities, withdrawal from society, suppressed anger and, at times, homicidal attempts as hidden forms of rebellion in a society where they have no proper way to express themselves. Even though their actions are destructive, they act as survival methods that reveal and challenge the system that is responsible for making them lunatic or mad.

There is a clear gap in Faulkner studies. Many earlier works focused on psychoanalysis, Gothic themes, or narrative style. Some recent studies mention patriarchal pressure as the reason why those female characters are mentally unstable. However, as far as I have reviewed the literature, no one has fully studied madness as a form of emotional resistance by using a strong feminist perspective across all three stories together. Most studies either judge these women as immoral women, study each case from the short stories separately, or don't use feminist ideas much. This dissertation aims to fill that gap by doing a comparative feminist reading. It connects Emily's necrophilia, Minnie's rumours and hysteria, and Elly's act of murder as forms of resistance against the same Southern patriarchal system.

By showing that these female characters are not only victims but also rebels in their own way, this dissertation argues that using a feminist point of view, their "madness" can be weaponised to fight back against patriarchal domination. It exposes the gender rules that continue to control and silence women, even beyond the world of Faulkner's fiction.

Keywords: "A Rose for Emily", "Dry September", "Elly", William Faulkner, Post-Civil War American South, Feminism, Madness, Emotional Resistance, Patriarchy, Gendered Oppression, Pathologization, Southern Gothic, Grotesque

Chapter 2

Methodology

The research applied a qualitative method to investigate how the female protagonists in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1930), "Dry September" (1931) and "Elly" (1934) utilise their madness as a form of emotional resistance against the oppressive patriarchal society.

The qualitative approach focuses on an in-depth textual analysis, which includes dissecting the collective/unreliable narration in "A Rose for Emily". The collective "we" or "our" represents the fallible, patriarchal and oppressive surveillance of Jefferson townspeople who pathologise Emily's actions. For "Dry September", it studies the third-person omniscient narration throughout the short story, where the narrator wavers between the inner thoughts, intentions, flashbacks, descriptions and backgrounds of the characters. The recurring hinting and mention of the sweltering heat, dryness, sweat and humidity are also almost personified as the main causes for Minnie Cooper's hysteria, emotional turmoil and her "attack" rumour, which can be considered as her strategy to emotionally rebel against the patriarchal oppression. In the case of "Elly", it includes deconstructing Elly's stream-of-consciousness through third-person narration; Elly's perceptions, memories, regrets, fears etc. which powerfully support studying her emotional/mental state as active resistance to the suffocating patriarchal control represented by her grandmother and the old Southern norms.

Since the primary texts have been studied theoretically from a feminist point of view, three notable feminist scholars have played a key role in developing the main argument: Elaine Showalter, Phyllis Chesler and Adrienne Rich.

A few interesting points and quotes from the key texts of these three scholars have been implemented to analyse how Emily, Minnie and Elly's madness is actually a form of emotional and behavioural resistance to patriarchal and social oppression.

The research incorporates Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1985) to explore that rather than considering the female protagonists' mental states as something biologically faulty, their "madness" is actually a cultural symptom of patriarchal oppression. Showalter's argument is particularly useful for examining how the American South's toxic social norms pathologise women who cannot, or will not, conform to roles imposed on them. By applying Showalter's concept that madness is a socially and culturally constructed reaction to the enforcement of hindering women's autonomy, it allows one to reinterpret their lunacy as a form of resistance to fight back against the very patriarchal society that oppresses them, assassinates their characters and inhibits them to lead their lives on their own terms.

Feminist psychologist Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness* (1972) is utilised to shift the focus from madness as a clinical illness to a social label used by patriarchal systems to manipulate women. Her framework is important to understand how Emily, Minnie, and Elly are maladapted for either "acting out"- blindly complying with the roles patriarchy standardised for women or "rejecting"- defying those very female roles. By applying Chesler's arguments on the double standard carried out by psychiatry, which is also male-centred, this dissertation claims that the protagonists' "madness" is actually a response to the internalised gender alienation and the sacrifice of their own freedom. Chesler's concept also helps re-read their violent or hysterical outbursts as desperate attempts to reclaim independence in a world that has effectively stripped them from exploring themselves sexually.

Adrienne Rich's essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1971) from her non-fiction book *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (1979) is incorporated to analyse how to reinterpret or "re-vision" women's "mad" or non-conforming behavior as an emotional resistance toward survival, awakening, and refusal. The essay will help to understand Faulkner's Emily Grierson from "A Rose for Emily", Minnie Cooper from "Dry September", and Elly from "Elly" as figures whose madness; Emily's necrophilic act, Minnie's claim of being raped /nervous breakdown, and Elly's violent rebellion as deliberate breaks from the imposed roles patriarchy assigned to Southern white women.

Some other relevant scholarly articles have been added to improve the quality of this research and to strongly present Emily Grierson, Minnie Cooper and Elly's mental states are misread as terror/eccentricity when, from a feminist perspective, they are really resistance.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

William Faulkner's short stories set in the American South often depict female characters who are stuck inside the rigid social rules which were followed during the Civil War. There were many criticisms of William Faulkner's Southern Gothic fiction which discussed the mental states of his female protagonists, however, those were not conducted systematically from a clear feminist perspective. Emily Grierson from "A Rose for Emily", Minnie Cooper from "Dry September" and Elly from "Elly" are usually studied separately. Most readings focus on psychoanalytic, Gothic, or narrative styles and do not treat their mental disorder as intentional resistance. Early critics mostly pathologised these women or focused on narrative technique, ignoring how gender and power hierarchy contribute to deteriorating their mental health. Later studies recognise patriarchal pressure, yet they still examine psychology, Gothic elements, or narrative approaches, with only partial feminist insight. Importantly, according to my review of existing sources in this literature, no research brings these three figures together in a single comparison to read their madness as emotional resistance to patriarchal oppression. This literature review, arranged chronologically, navigates how critical analysis of these characters has evolved with time and fulfils the research gap by reinterpreting how Emily, Minnie and Elly weaponise their insanity to retaliate patriarchal regulations and from a feminist perspective, how that madness works as a form of emotional resistance rather than pathology.

To begin with, Elizabeth Kerr's article "William Faulkner and The Southern Concept of Woman" implies how the Southern female characters under rigid patriarchal control in Faulkner's works challenge the idealised concept of a subservient and submissive woman. She uses Minnie Cooper from "Dry September" as an example of a woman whose emotional and

mental health take a toll due to oppressive expectations. Kerr argues that Minnie's hysteria arises from her inability to live up to society's ideal white female virtue. Simultaneously, her own desires remain suppressed under these expectations. Though Kerr briefly discusses how Minnie's breakdown may be read as a kind of emotional resistance, the discussion remains brief and compact. This leaves room for a detailed analysis of the madness of Faulkner's women from a feminist perspective.

Subsequently, depending on these social critiques, M.E. Bradford's article "Faulkner's 'Elly': An Exposé" analyses Elly from William Faulkner's "Elly". He portrays her as a destructive modern woman whose rebellion ends in violence. He completely refuses to consider Elly as a victim of suffocating social norms. Bradford also critiques previous critics who blamed the toxic patriarchal society for Elly's fatal behaviour, dismissing attempts to identify "the abuses which are responsible, in part, for... an Elly" (Bradford 183). He views Elly as unfit for any sympathy, insisting that "we are never allowed by the text to feel with or for her in any consistent fashion" (Bradford 186). While Bradford affirms Elly's rebellion, he tends to overlook the oppression she endures. This creates a clear gap in the argument. Bradford clearly rejects the idea that Elly's sociological and patriarchal environment are responsible for her behaviour. This ignores how Elly's mental derangement may be developed because she fails to meet certain criteria allocated for Southern elite women. As a result, future researchers can use this gap to reconsider Elly's madness as a form of resistance within a patriarchal context.

By 1971, Ruth Sullivan shifted the focus to narrative perspective in "A Rose for Emily". Sullivan, in the article "The Narrator in 'A Rose for Emily'" argues that the voice and the mindset of the townspeople of Jefferson are deeply involved in the story, noting that Emily

“can be analyzed as though she had an existence apart from the consciousness through whom Faulkner chose to reveal her” (Sullivan 159). Their view is also shaped by their fear of death, change and how women would behave in a certain way. This could be because of the post-Civil War trauma. Using psychoanalysis, Sullivan shows how this unclear narration of the story twists Emily’s image. This makes her appear crazy due to societal projection, not because of anything inherent. Even though the approach is not explicitly feminist, Sullivan’s critique helps in understanding how women’s mental states are misread through a harsh and judgmental lens. This is important to understand that madness is socially constructed. It can be further studied as a potential form of resistance to patriarchal oppression rather as a flaw someone is born with.

Disagreeing with previous critics such as Bradford, Hans H. Skei, in his article "The Trapped Female Breaking Loose: William Faulkner's 'Elly' (1934)" studies Elly from “Elly” as a character shaped by the environment. He notes that she is entrapped within the toxic Southern norms and strict ideals of femininity. According to Skei, her brutal action comes from societal pressure rather than from an inherently evil or cruel nature “Elly does not act out of some natural badness” (16). Skei compared Elly with other Faulknerian female protagonists. They face similar oppressive norms in Jefferson “a non-permissive society... destructive to a number of young women” (17). For Skei, they're not morally wicked. However, Skei’s article does not explore Elly's mental health from a feminist angle. Nonetheless, Skei's close contextual reading of the text remains useful. It can help future researchers particularly interpret her actions as a form of feminist emotional resistance.

In 1984, Dennis W. Allen's article, “Horror and Perverse Delight: Faulkner’s ‘A Rose for Emily’ ” drew attention to Emily's contradictory behaviour. In “A Rose for Emily”, Emily

appears as someone deeply proud of her social status. Yet, she seems broken from the inside. She lives as a social recluse yet she desperately craves attention and care. For Allen, this contradiction can be read through Emily's "undecidable" nature as a "copresence of opposites" that influences both her psychology and actions (Allen 686). He further argues that Emily's killing of Homer Barron and the necrophilic act should not simply be reduced to some kind of mental illness; rather, they emerge from multiple, layered motives tied to repression, denial of time, and resistance to change (Allen 687–688). Rather, this dissertation reinterprets Allen by reading her madness as a quiet form of emotional resistance, even though Allen's approach doesn't include feminist theory.

Minrose C. Gwin, in the article "Feminism and Faulkner: Second Thoughts or, What's a Radical Feminist Doing with a Canonical Male Text Anyway?" paid attention to the difficulties involved in reading Faulkner's works as a feminist text, raising "another difficult question" about "what are the ultimate effects of our feminist readings of a canonical male writer" (Gwin 57). According to Gwin, Faulkner's narratives often marginalise the female characters, as she notes how women are "shut up, out, or down" within male texts (Gwin 56). Emily Grierson's madness is highlighted as a sign of the heavy pressure created by patriarchy. Referencing critics like Gilbert and Gubar, Adrienne Rich, and Elaine Showalter, Gwin argues that madness in Faulkner can be read as a form of women's resistance against male authority, hinting toward the idea of women as "madwomen in the attic" and reading as "an act of survival" (Gwin 55–56). Gwin applies the same theory in another work of Faulkner; *Absalom, Absalom!*. Rosa Coldfield is the female protagonist from *Absalom, Absalom!*. However, the article does not extend this comparison to Minnie and Elly. Such a direct feminist comparison of these three Faulknerian

women might have offered a clearer understanding of the similar oppression and the patterns of emotional resistance.

In the article "'Elly': Like Gunpowder in a Flimsy Vault", Edmond L. Volpe argues that Elly is not a spiteful character. Instead, she is a victim, shaped by the expectations of Jefferson and its patriarchal rules, as he notes that "Elly is a product of Jefferson society... [and] cannot reject her destined role as wife and mother... All she can do is express her impotent hatred through defiance" (Volpe 276). Volpe also discusses the differing perspectives of Bradford and Skei regarding Elly. Volpe emphasised how societal confinement negatively affects women's mental health. This gap leaves space for further research, especially from a feminist view that considers madness as a possible response to oppression.

Thereafter, critics started to examine Gothic elements in Faulkner's works. Susan V. Donaldson in "Making a Spectacle: Welty, Faulkner, and Southern Gothic" portrays Minnie Cooper as a Gothic figure whose mental condition can be studied as a form of emotional resistance, particularly in how her "gothic tale of incarceration in small-town life" is "interrupted periodically by the story of Minnie Cooper's own background." (Donaldson 573). Donaldson notes how Minnie's rumour spreads like a fire in the bushes and gets amplified in the barbershop through men like Hawkshaw, McLendon etc. Neither do they care about the truth nor about Minnie's protection. Instead, they fuel that rumour to reinforce their own sense of pride and toxic masculinity. This growing social pressure takes a toll on Minnie's mental health. Minnie's hysterical laughter at the cinema symbolises her moment of resistance, as her "last sight" is of Minnie laughing hysterically, "unable to articulate what she feels but nevertheless posing a disturbing counterpoint to the tale of white male vengeance." (Donaldson 573). Donaldson's

article is surely useful for studying Gothic discourse. However, it does not fully explore madness as a form of resistance from a feminist lens.

Next, Thomas Bonner Jr.'s article "The Functions of Ambiguity: A Response to 'Miss Emily After Dark'" discusses how William Faulkner's use of narrative ambiguity reveals Emily's isolation as well as her silent defiance against patriarchal dominance. He also highlights how constant policing in Jefferson, along with gossiping about Emily further worsens her mental health. Bonner brings in approaches by Brooks and Putzel and argues how women are negatively affected by patriarchal oppression in such environments. "Brooks sees her as 'more sinned against [by the community] than sinning.'" Max Putzel is right in that "A Rose for Emily" "tells more about the town than about the victims of its malice—including Miss Emily" " (Bonner 498). His article is fit for a feminist study on mental health. However, a more direct focus on madness as a form of resistance alongside these ideas could have added some depth to the discussion.

In her article, "A Road to Destruction and Self-destruction: The Same Fate of Emily and Elly", Pingping Yang offers a comparative study of Emily and Elly- "This thesis is to illustrate the same fate of Emily and Elly" (Yang 1850). She highlights that they both commit destructive actions as a result of being unable to escape a patriarchal society that gradually strips away their agency-"Both Emily and Elly choose to destroy the man whom they can not get married to. They are forced to a road to destruction and self-destruction step by step" (Yang 1853). Yang also observes that critics focused more on Faulkner's Emily than on Elly- "'A Rose for Emily' is undoubtedly the most famous one, while 'Elly' has been receiving increasing attention these years." (Yang 1850). Yang eventually evaluates these two short stories through a social and moral point of view. This gap is useful for future researchers to evaluate their madness as

emotional resistance from a feminist perspective in a clearer way since Yang's article engages with the feminist approach insufficiently-"Faulkner accuses the intolerant even injurious social system of harm and destruction on women" (Yang 1853).

On the other hand, Ginevra Paparoni's article from 2016 "Nature and Predestination in William Faulkner's 'Dry September' " focuses on Protestant ideas like predestination, existential alienation etc. She agrees Minnie's psychological condition can be seen as a reaction to the pressure on women to remain desirable and to marry:

"in the period when the story is set, society assigns women a limited number of codified roles related to their social condition and to the different stages of their life. Women from middle and upper classes must be able to 'play' two main roles: before marrying they must be attractive and adhere to precise stereotypes of reserve and femininity in order to find a husband; after their marriage, they become mothers and must devote their life to their family by accomplishing a certain number of tasks." (Paparoni 428).

Using ideas of Edwards, Tillich, Freud etc., Paparoni links Minnie's madness to both theological isolation and social rejection-" alienation takes all its possible forms: separation and conflict from oneself, one's peers, and one's world" (Paparoni 425). However, Paparoni doesn't compare Minnie with Emily and Elly. Although the article is useful for connecting Faulkner's works with religious philosophy and psychoanalysis, a direct feminist angle is absent. This gap provides a chance for future research to reinterpret Minnie Cooper's madness as a form of emotional resistance against patriarchal violence.

Dr Vikas Sharma and Nidhi Thapar's study "Feminist Rendition of the Concept of 'Honor' in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and William Faulkner's 'Dry September'" explores how patriarchal societies control women by policing their bodies,

race, sexuality and credibility under the pretext of preserving the so-called concept of "honor". The authors assert that "this unwritten code of honor upholds 'machismo' in men and 'virginity' in women as the two pillars on which its structure is based" and that "Any damage to these structural blocks is a direct attack on the respectability and reputation of the society itself" (Sharma and Thapar 80). The authors argue that this pattern also enables male violence. In "Dry September", Minnie's accusation is believed not because of any evidence but because of her position as a white woman. They also explain that Minnie "embodies the concept of the 'southern white goddess'" (Sharma and Thapar 80) and that her "words are not to be questioned because she becomes a representative of all that is pure and revered in the southern culture" (Sharma and Thapar 82). This unverified fact eventually leads to killing a poor Black man through mob lynching by white men belonging to a socially respected class. As noted, "the word of a woman which had no societal value suddenly becomes a powerful narrative that will end with the lynching of a black man" in "a society marred by deep set prejudices" (Sharma and Thapar 79). However, the study could have been strengthened by examining Minnie's madness as a form of emotional subversion from a broader feminist aspect.

In addition, Sijie Hu and Jingdong Zhong in "On the Grotesque in American Southern Gothic Fiction: A Case Study of 'A Rose for Emily'" address the use of the grotesque in American Southern Gothic fiction with a particular focus on Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily". Her rebellion to the changes the physical carrier of her grotesqueness, the product of that time, which permeates the whole southern place after the Civil War" (Hu and Zhong 43). They posit that the grotesque reflects the South's resistance to social change after the Civil War. Emily's mental health is interpreted as a result of her attempt to cope with these toxic outdated norms. The article is insightful for understanding Emily's psychology through Gothic and grotesque

elements. Unfortunately, it does not apply a direct feminist lens. This gap provides room for future researchers to reassess Emily's madness as a form of emotional defiance.

Ramen Goswami's article "Oddities in 'Dry September' by William Faulkner Along with Racialism" investigates how racism and the social tensions of the Southern American setting psychologically impact the characters in Faulkner's "Dry September". For Goswami, Minnie's false claim of rape against Will Mayes arises more from the townspeople's neglect than from pure malice. Drawing psychoanalytic and feminist ideas, Goswami explains that Minnie's madness is not random. Instead, it works as a form of subversion against patriarchal marginalisation. As Goswami notes, "Miss Minnie, the third tragic character, is a white woman whose sad colour is prominent throughout the story. The old patriarchal framework constrains the outcome. She fabricates the rumour" (Goswami 325). However, Goswami does not systematically provide a feminist comparison of Minnie's madness with other Faulknerian women such as Emily and Elly. This gap creates space for future researchers to explore their madness as a form of resistance against society's mistreatment of women.

The sources examined in this literature review reveal a gradual shift. Earlier readings labelled Faulkner's female characters as mentally unstable. Some studies reinterpreted how patriarchy is responsible for their conditions. Recently, some critics discovered that the actions of Emily, Minnie, and Elly are deeply shaped and influenced by patriarchal control, social pressure, and strict Southern values. However, many studies still focus on separate aspects like psychology, Gothic elements, or narrative style, and only partly use feminist ideas. Because of this, madness as an intentional form of emotional resistance against patriarchy remains methodically underexplored across all three women simultaneously, according to my review of this literature. This dissertation proposes a comparative feminist approach where their insanity is

not just seen as breakdown, but as a response to oppression. In this way, the dissertation intends to highlight women's limited agency and how they suffer under it, lose their mental stability and at one point, they burst out and utilise their mental suffering to emotionally rebel against the patriarchy that oppressed and tortured them.

Chapter 4

Re-visioning Emily Grierson, Minnie Cooper and Elly's Madness as Emotional Resistance

Adrienne Rich's essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1971) suggests that women revisit and re-read old literary pieces, especially those written from a patriarchal perspective, and critically figure out what else, or through how many other lenses, those texts can be understood. This core concept directly aligns with the research gap of this dissertation; no study has particularly analysed the madness of women in Faulkner's works as a deliberate form of emotional resistance against patriarchy. Thus, the essay will help define how re-visioning Faulkner's female protagonists, particularly Emily Grierson, Minnie Cooper, and Elly, from a feminist perspective aids in identifying what society insinuates as their lunacy and destructive behaviour is actually their survival strategy to resist patriarchal oppression.

William Faulkner's groundbreaking and classic gothic short story "A Rose for Emily" (1930) is about Emily Grierson, an aristocratic spinster who becomes a recluse on her own at a young age and leads an eerily quiet and mysterious life until her death at the age of 74. The short story begins with an unreliable collective narrator, who visits Grierson's house to attend her funeral and later explores the life she leads in the fictional town of Jefferson, Mississippi. He also reflects on her enigmatic and stagnant life and how it raises curiosity amongst the townspeople. A lot of Emily's actions (revealed through the plot one by one) seem bizarre and questionable by the townspeople and by the climactic point, a twisted, dark and gory secret, carried out by Emily, gets discovered. Her madness is not something congenital but socially induced. It is important to note that the society that contributes to her madness and rebellious

nature is frozen in time. They are not properly habituated to life after the Civil War (1861-1865).

In the article, "Dehumanized Women Identity in *A Rose for Emily*", Shuang Ma notes:

“They could not help but recall the memories of the past to relieve their inner pain and were unwilling to accept the social changes brought about by civil war and post-war reconstruction. Instead, they preferred to preserve the romantic traditions of the Old South, romanticism became a means of self-consolation.” (62).

As a result, the townspeople put Emily on a pedestal and expect her to behave by following certain decorum that an ideal Southern White and elite lady should follow. Subconsciously, Emily submits herself to those norms and simultaneously, she struggles to maintain them at times. This clash between following Old South traditions and adapting to New South teachings takes a heavy toll on Emily's psychological and emotional health. According to the existing critics I previously examined in the literature review, they researched these aspects of the short story from multifaceted perspectives. However, according to my research, they do not clearly ascertain that Emily's eccentricities throughout the story followed by her committing macabre necrophiliac action are her way of emotionally rebelling against the toxic patriarchal society of Jefferson. Adrienne Rich's essay, alongside applying feminist framework to it, shall help to support this idea clearly.

One of the central quotes in Rich's influential essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” is “Re-vision-the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction-is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.” (18). This quote fosters a clear understanding of Emily's madness from a fresh and newer perspective; for this dissertation, from a feminist point of view, as a result of pursuing emotional resistance. The main idea of Rich's quote helps to identify how Emily is

represented, how her voice is missing throughout the story and how the imbalance in gendered hierarchy contributes to dominating Emily's life, eventually worsening her mental stability. The way in which William Faulkner describes the female characters in his works alarms the readers and even sparks debate amongst scholars. As Nguyen, Truc Giang, and Thai Cong Dan point out: "Faulkner's works, women are often associated with themes of blood, excrement, filth, and death, which can be seen as disturbing and unsettling." (20). This could imply that the texts of Faulkner are read from a patriarchal position where the female characters are pathologised and shunned for their actions since they fail to represent them as "normal" and "feminine". In "A Rose for Emily", Emily Grierson refuses to give up her father, Mr Grierson's dead body. " 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." (Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" 3). An older interpretation of this line would imply that Emily is being irrational and sentimental. However, by applying Rich's suggestion of separating a literary text from a male or patriarchy-driven narrative and re-examining it from a feminist experience, it could be argued that in this part of the short story, Emily was exercising her free will. Even though her behaviour here is irrational and absolutely crazy, she wields it to resist the command of the ministers and doctors of Jefferson who are particularly held in high regard and can be counted as some powerful masculine figures of the society.

Another important part in "A Rose for Emily" that can be defended from Rich's perspective is when Emily visits the drugstore to buy arsenic. She is confident and determined when she asks for the product from the druggist. " "I want the best you have. I don't care what kind." " (Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" 4). The townspeople of Jefferson presume Emily buys it because she wants to commit suicide as Homer Barron, her Northern Yankee lover is supposedly

a homosexual and doesn't want to marry her; "So THE NEXT day we all said, "She will kill herself"; " (Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" 4) and " 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." (Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" 4). From a male-glorified point of view, Emily is assumed to lose her mind and attempt to kill herself because she couldn't possibly accept being jilted by the love of her life, especially after her father Mr Grierson's death. The townspeople and the patriarchal society of Jefferson couldn't disengage Emily from the authoritative presence of male influence in her life; at first her father and then her lover. At one point, perhaps the readers get subconsciously manipulated to do so. This is the type of notion Adrienne Rich suggests to dismantle and re-imagine when reading an older literary work (19). Rich simply does not hint at re-reading a canonical, patriarchy-influenced work from a feminist perspective at first instance. Rather she indicates to studying the text itself the way it is at first and then applying a newer lens to break the traditional and patriarchal assumptions present in the text that degrade and pathologise the experience and emotions of the female characters; "We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us." (Rich 19). After applying this idea, it could be defended that though the act of buying arsenic and not offering an explanation of why she is buying it even though she is bound by the law to do so is her madness but it doesn't need to be pathologised. This is Emily Grierson's way of asserting her dominance in a patriarchal society where she lives under constant surveillance and judgment. This is the way Emily emotionally resists being questioned because she belongs to a certain gender and class in the Southern part of the United States where upper-class women were historically expected and then required to

behave in a certain way or follow certain protocols, even at the expense of their own mental health.

“Dry September” (1931), another short story by William Faulkner, presents a grim picture of life in the American South after the Civil War. It depicts a clear picture of how people are gullible toward false rumours and ready to conduct a mob lynching of an innocent individual, especially if he were Black. However, one important yet not comprehensively researched aspect of this short story is how rigid gender roles and post–Civil War Southern ideals are responsible for the development of female madness as a response to oppression. The idea of so-called “White Goddess” makes women viewed through a male point of view. They are also deeply valued for chastity, beauty, and desirability. As a result, the female protagonist, Miss Minnie Cooper, a thirty-nine-year-old unmarried woman, becomes the subject of gossip and social judgement. This psychological and emotional pressure slowly starts to worsen her mental health. This provokes her to spread a false rumour about herself. From a feminist perspective, it can be read that this crazy attempt is not a human flaw, but as a form of emotional resistance. Here, her so-called “madness” reflects an attempt to claim her identity and freedom within a deeply patriarchal society. Adrienne Rich’s essay becomes useful for this reinterpretation. Rich defines “re-vision” as the act of looking back at existing texts with fresh eyes to uncover silenced female experiences and hidden structures of oppression (18).

At the very beginning of the short story, the rumour that Minnie Cooper was raped by a Black man named Will Mayes is being discussed at the barbershop as if it is some sort of sensationalised news headline. Other characters like Jack, Butch and former military commander McLendon constantly defend Minnie. However, the barber Henry Hawkshaw constantly tries to express his disbelief in it. “She’s about forty, I reckon. She aint married. That’s why I dont

believe—” (Faulkner, “Dry September” 1). An older interpretation of Hawkshaw might describe him as the voice of reason, who is raising his voice against the prejudice and stereotypes Black people like Will Mayes often experience from elite-class white people. If Adrienne Rich's main reflection from the essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." is applied, “Re-vision-the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction-is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.” (18), then Hawkshaw can be read as a beholder of the stereotypical idea that an ideal white Southern woman is the one who is subservient by nature, gets married into an affluent household, and is submissive to her husband. However, Minnie doesn't represent those qualities. Thus, Hawkshaw quickly judges her to be unfit of being desired, let alone getting raped. His questionable mindset is revealed to be filled with the heinous notion that rape only takes place when the woman is in her youth. It also checks all the requirements of what the patriarchy considers as inviting and attractive. Upon living in such a pathetic environment, Minnie understands this suffocating pattern as well. She is aware of the fact that nobody will believe a Black man from a lower socioeconomic background over her and also of Jefferson's obsession with the concept of protecting and putting a Southern White Goddess on a pedestal. As Rima Chakraborty quotes in her article “Dry September as a Short Story”:

“Because she is white, the culture sets her atop a mythical pedestal, creating an imaginary, protective shield through which the Southern aristocracy lets nothing pass that might endanger — both physically and emotionally — its women” (1).

Although Minnie Cooper is not a Black woman, one of the main and important concepts of Rupe Simms' article "Controlling Images and the Gender Construction of Enslaved African Women" is useful here. Simms reinforces how the white elite strategically constructed gendered

images to maintain their sociopolitical dominance and the existing social hierarchy (882). Minnie takes advantage of it. Verily, McLendon's dialogue about being in Minnie's support reveals it; "are you going to sit there and let a black son rape a white woman on the streets of Jefferson?" " (Faulkner, "Dry September" 2). At first glance, Minnie's action might raise some questions about her morality and sanity. Typical patriarchal narratives like Hawkshaw's might even label her as a notorious attention seeker. However, if Adrienne Rich's proposition from the essay is applied, "We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us." (Rich 19)", it claims that this madness of Minnie is her way of refuting the social oppression that leads to her personal suffering; she feels insecure around friends her age who are married with children, suffering from body dysmorphia, leading a monotonous life with no real purpose while living with her old mother and aunt, after being jilted by her bank cashier lover, and finally breaking down at the cinema over a love scene. This dissertation asserts that all this anguish in Minnie's life is due to the patriarchal control surveilling her like a hawk. The male-dominated town of Jefferson expects Minnie to become the ideal White Southern woman. When she fails to meet those standards within a certain age, the town itself gossips about and mocks her. They make her feel as if she is some foreign object that has mistakenly landed on this earth. All these aspects take a heavy toll on Minnie Cooper's mental health, compelling her to spread that vicious rumour about herself so that she can hold onto her reputation, desirability, and presence in the town.

"Elly" (1934) by William Faulkner is about a young girl, Elly, from the American South, who openly rebels against her family's strict environment. From the very beginning of the short story, a generational conflict between her and her grandmother Ailanthia, who also happens to be her namesake, is present. Elly wants to explore herself sexually but her grandmother, who

symbolises the moral codes of the Old South, inhibits her from doing so. Elly's craving for her sexual freedom constantly clashes with the harsh surveillance of her grandmother. At one point, Elly loses her cool and resorts to violence; she intentionally grabs the steering wheel of the car toward the precipice and commits homicide of her grandmother and her lover, Paul. A lot of research has not been done on this short story by Faulkner. It is not even widely known amongst readers. Still, a few scholars researched "Elly". The majority of them condemned Elly, assassinated her character to the point labelling her as a "flapper" and finally, her devastating act at the end of the short story. As per my reviewing, a minuscule number of authors lightly consider her as a victim of the harsh moral codes of Southern society. Very few studies fully read madness in Faulkner's Elly as her emotional rebellion to patriarchy. Using Adrienne Rich's "re-vision", Elly's violence of killing her grandmother and her lover Paul is not a mere mental decline but becomes a meaningful sign of resistance within oppressive Southern norms.

Adrienne Rich describes "re-vision" as "an act of survival". She encourages readers to approach old texts from new perspectives (18). This idea helps address the research gap, as earlier studies may not have carefully studied madness in Faulkner's female characters as a form of emotional resistance. When "Elly" is read in this way, the focus shifts from judging her as a promiscuous young lady to understanding how her behaviour works under patriarchal control. From the beginning, Elly is shown in a restrictive domestic setting: "She was eighteen... In this shadow she half lay almost nightly with a different man... and presently they all believed that they knew why." (Faulkner, "Elly" 1). The "shadow" represents the controlling gaze of Southern patriarchy, which defines her identity before she can speak for herself. In Elly's house, her grandmother is the manifestation of the Southern societal oppression that suppresses women from living their lives freely on their own terms. Here, despite the older Ailanthia being a woman

herself, she tries to cage the younger Ailanthia within the same rigid mould. As a result, Elly's behaviour, particularly her insistence on being sexually engaged with Paul or flirting with other men out of sheer disobedience toward her grandmother, is often dismissed as irrational or as her madness. However, these actions can instead be understood as a form of emotional resistance if, using Rich's suggestion of re-visioning older texts from a fresh lens (mainly feminist) is directly applied. In relation to the research question of this dissertation, Elly's madness can therefore be seen not as a pathologised female subjectivity but as a limited way of expressing herself within a constraining patriarchal system.

Rich also argues that readers, especially females, should return to past texts "not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us." (Rich 19). This idea is important for addressing the research gap, as it allows to study the pattern of deranged behaviour in Faulkner's female protagonists in detail. Instead of calling it madness, it can be understood as resistance. This breaking point is clearly shown in Elly's final confrontation. When she suddenly moves across her grandmother's knees and they face each other in "a profound instant of despairing ultimatum and implacable refusal," shouting "Then die!," (Faulkner, "Elly" 9); the moment goes beyond a simple act of massacre-based madness. Re-visioning this scene from a feminist perspective helps to understand Elly discarding patriarchal control over her life. This catastrophic act becomes Elly's strongest weapon to ensure her emotional resistance. At this point, words are no longer enough, and violence becomes her only companion to reclaim agency. As a result, Faulkner's description of Elly supports the main argument that what is often called madness in his female characters can actually be seen as a response to oppression.

Across "A Rose for Emily", "Dry September", and "Elly", a recurring pattern is noticed amongst Faulkner's female characters. Their behaviour is often marked as irrational, excessive,

or violent. This dissertation intends to point out that their behaviour is shaped by patriarchal control, constant social surveillance, and rigid Southern moral codes. This idea connects directly to the research gap, where, according to the existing sources I examined, female madness in Faulkner has rarely been read as emotional resistance, and is usually treated as a disorder. When Adrienne Rich's idea of re-vision is applied here, the reading shifts slightly. Emily, Minnie and Elly no longer seem mad in a clinical sense. Their madness becomes a response to suffocating social norms of the place they spent their entire life. Their actions reflect limited agency under pressure. It perfectly matches the research question of this dissertation. Emotional resistance, therefore, can be read as a silent form of non-compliance towards unequal patriarchal society.

Chapter 5

Acting Out or Rejecting the Female Roles: Madness as Feminist Resistance in “A Rose for Emily”, “Dry September” and “Elly”

Phyllis Chesler’s *Women and Madness* (1972) explains how patriarchy is the sole reason why psychiatry and psychology often label misery of women into “madness” (Chesler 107-108). The text also suggests that women are referred to as ill or dismissed when they overly perform the gender roles patriarchy expects from them as well as when they try to resist it. It is a no-win situation for women. Through interviews, history, and mythological events, Chesler shows a clear double standard, where qualities praised in men are termed as pathology in women. Earlier criticism tends to read madness in William Faulkner’s female characters as inherent mental illness, without fully reading how patriarchal society contributes to it. Chesler’s argument allows “madness” to be seen not just as a breakdown, but as something shaped by pressure and control, and ultimately, can also lead to feminine resistance. In that sense, the behaviour of women in “A Rose for Emily”, “Elly”, and “Dry September” can be read differently. What appears as mental instability in Emily Grierson, Minnie Cooper and Elly can also be studied as their emotional resistance. A few important quotes from *Women and Madness*, alongside some noteworthy quotes from each story, will be utilised to contextualise how the representations of “madness” among Emily, Minnie, and Elly can function as a quiet but meaningful form of resistance within a patriarchal setting. The first crucial quote is:

“Women are impaled on the cross of self-sacrifice. Unlike men, they are categorically denied the experience of cultural supremacy, humanity, and renewal based on their sexual identity—and on the blood sacrifice, in some way, of a member of the opposite sex. In different ways, some women are driven mad by this fact.” (Chesler 31).

To simplify, patriarchal society forces women to make constant self-sacrifice or perform roles against their will, unlike men who enjoy greater freedom, power, and authority. Women's identities are shaped by patriarchal expectations tied to gender and relationships. This hypocrisy can leave a negative impact on their emotional health. And in some unfortunate cases, it leads to psychological issues or what society loves to address as “madness” when it comes to women. This claim is further reinforced by René Rosfort’s reflection in the article “Sacrificing Gender: Kierkegaard and the Traumatic Self” that “Gender is both an intimate and an alienating part of my selfhood. I cannot simply discard or choose my gender... I can never be at ease with my gender because it represents... an otherness that I anxiously have to appropriate.” (Rosfort 348). Rosfort’s idea strengthens Chesler’s argument and helps to understand that gender is not only an external structure of oppression but also something that becomes deeply internalised within the self: “Conditioned female behavior is more comfortable with, is defined by, psychic and emotional self-destruction” (Chesler 49). This results in negatively impacting the mental health of women. The alienation described by Rosfort makes it clearer how patriarchal expectations not only operate socially but also disrupt and fracture a woman's sense of self from within. This internalised gender alienation and forced self-sacrifice is useful to Faulkner’s female characters, suggesting that their so-called “madness” can be read as a form of emotional resistance against patriarchal oppression. The core concept of this quote plays a significant role in justifying Emily’s madness as a form of emotional rebellion. The scene where the unreliable narrator recalls Emily and her father as a “tableau,” with Emily described as “a slender figure in white in the background” while her father stands in the foreground “clutching a horsewhip” (Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily” 4), symbolises the rigid and unjustified dominance of Mr Grierson toward Emily. Mr Grierson is not only Emily's father but he also represents the superiority complex that

the patriarchal society at first suffers from and then imposes upon women to suppress their autonomy and selfhood. Emily's position in the tableau represents the harsh reality of her passive life; at the very back and invisible in the world's eyes while her father's dominant pose overshadows Emily, portraying his unending authority and control over her. Mr Grierson's suffocating influence over Emily is also the reason she is compelled to stay unmarried the rest of her life since "None of the young men was quite good enough for Miss Emily and such." (Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" 4).

Another substantial quote that is directly connected with the core summary of *Women and Madness* which also aids to justify madness as a form emotional resistance in Faulkner's Emily Grierson, Minnie Cooper and Elly is:

"What we consider "madness" whether it appears in women or in men, is either the acting out of the devalued female role or the total or partial rejection of one's sex-role stereotype. Women who fully act out the conditioned female role are clinically viewed as "neurotic" or "psychotic." When and if they are hospitalized, it is for predominantly female behaviors such as "depression," "suicide attempts," "anxiety neuroses," "paranoia," or "promiscuity." Women who reject or are ambivalent about the female role frighten both themselves and society so much so that their ostracism and self-destructiveness probably begin very early." (Chesler 56).

This passage allows one to grasp how "madness" is defined socially, not just medically from a feminist critique. Women are labelled "mad" for either fully accepting or resisting gender roles. In both cases, rigid sex-role stereotypes developed by the patriarchal society create the problem, not any natural flaw in women. This concept enables a clearer understanding of which drastic step Emily, Minnie or Elly attempts results from the intense pressure of rigid gender expectations

in Jefferson and struggling between being conditioned to submission and striving for resistance, not because they possess or are naturally diagnosed with mental health issues.

By the end of the short story, the disturbing climax of “A Rose for Emily” is revealed. “Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it... we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair.” (Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily” 7). After Emily's death, the locked upstairs room in her old house is finally opened. Inside, Homer Barron's decayed body is found lying on the bed. This twist discloses Emily's necrophilia; Emily not only killed Homer Barron with arsenic long ago but also kept sleeping beside his body for years. This is Emily's haunting version of her conjugal life since she was denied a normal one by her father and the debilitating patriarchal Southern society. This event doesn't clearly justify Emily as a cold-blooded murderer. It is her way of resisting accepting the fact that Homer Barron ended things with her. By preserving his body for years and living with it, Emily turns abandonment into a form of control. No earlier study has fully examined the madness of Faulkner's female characters as a deliberate form of resistance to patriarchy, as per the sources I reviewed. Chesler's argument supports the idea that Emily's extreme madness, followed by her necrophilia, comes from the pressure of strict gender roles of the Southern part of the United States, post-Civil War and it causes her struggle between submission and resistance. If the pillow scene is viewed from Chesler's perspective, it helps to clarify that Emily's madness is not a personal flaw. It is a response to a larger system of structural violence that controls and limits women.

Minnie Cooper's sudden roaring laughter at the cinemas in “Dry September” resonates with Chesler's idea. After the lynching of Will Mayes, which begins from a rumour she spreads about her being raped by him, Minnie is taken out by her friends so that she gets distracted by the

perturbing event and feels better. " She began to laugh. In trying to suppress it, it made more noise than ever; heads began to turn. Still laughing, her friends raised her and led her out, and she stood at the curb, laughing on a high, sustained note, until the taxi came up and they helped her in." (Faulkner, "Dry September" 9). Minnie's hysteria reflects what Chesler calls the "acting out of the devalued female role" (56). In the patriarchal society of Jefferson, a "good" white woman is expected to remain humble and controlled. However, for Minnie, this role becomes impossible after years of being unmarried, losing her youth, and experiencing sexual frustration. As a result, hysteria becomes her only way to express herself. It works like a performance, where her body speaks because females, exercising their autonomy, are not entertained in her town. At the same time, the reaction of her friends and later by others at the cinema "heads begin to turn" (Faulkner, "Dry September" 9) highlight how society quickly judges and pathologises such behaviour. Taking her away in the taxi reflects how patriarchal society is ignorant toward women's emotional outburst in public, instead of addressing it with the intention of being empathetic toward the victim. Minnie's nervous breakdown is not only a sign of her suffering. It also becomes something that society can't control. Even though Minnie may seem like a lunatic and hapless spinster, she still makes sure that Jefferson doesn't return to their normal lives after the lynching, caused by the rape rumour by Minnie herself.

This observation changes the meaning of Minnie's "madness." It is no longer just a weakness. Instead, it can be seen as a kind of defiance. By behaving hysterically in public, Minnie defies the violence and dominance committed by patriarchy. Her extreme showcasing of emotion reveals the emotional pressure caused by adhering to stereotypical gender-roles. Her madness silently challenges the patriarchy that denies her from having any kind of freedom. Thus, it could be stated that like other Faulknerian female protagonists like Emily Grierson and

Elly, who display their derangement through their destructive actions; Minnie's lunacy becomes a form of expression shaped by patriarchy, and at the same time, a way to push back against it.

In William Faulkner's short story "Elly", Elly's sudden outburst; "What else can I do, in this little dead, hopeless town? I'll work. I don't want to be idle. Just find me a job anything, anywhere, so that it's so far away that I'll never have to hear the word Jefferson again" (Faulkner, "Elly" 3); clearly explains the kind of "madness" explained in *Women and Madness* by Phyllis Chesler. According to Chesler, what is called madness in both women and men "is either the acting out of the devalued female role or the total or partial rejection of one's sex-role stereotype" (Chesler 56). In this case, Elly's words reflect rejection and rebellion. She openly refuses the Southern patriarchal expectations placed on women like her. These include staying idle at home, marrying someone within the circle (in her case, later getting unwillingly engaged to Philip, an assistant cashier at a bank who has been trying to court her for quite some time), and remaining tied to Jefferson. By lashing at her grandmother and asking for financial independence and wanting to leave the town, she does not adhere to the "devalued female role" of silence and obedience. This is exactly what patriarchy labels as "madness" as her desire for freedom is considered socially unacceptable. Her emotional meltdowns, flying into rage, and later impulsive actions are not random. They only take place because of Jefferson's toxic environment. When there are no correct means of defiance available, these mad behaviours become one of the few available responses.

Elly's condition shows a form of resistance shaped by frustration and confinement. Her words highlight the suffocating nature of the "little dead, hopeless town," (Faulkner, "Elly" 3). Her later actions reflect that same hardship. From a feminist view, this "madness" can be seen as Elly's rejection to comply rather than any sort of mental illness. This idea challenges the by-

default belief that a “sane” woman must remain submissive. A similar pattern can also be noticed in *A Rose for Emily* and *Dry September* by William Faulkner. Emily Grierson’s isolating herself from Jefferson and necrophilia while Minnie Cooper’s hysterical behaviour in public and falsely accusing Will Mayes of raping her reflect resistance in different forms. In all three cases, madness becomes meaningful. It is not only suffering, but also a way of rejecting patriarchal control.

This passage from Chesler's *Women and Madness* is essential for understanding how and why whatever Elly does is not because of any mental illness. They are deliberate forms of resistance: “madness is essentially an intense experience of female biological, sexual, and cultural castration, and a doomed search for potency.” (Chesler 31). The term “castration” is not mentioned here by Chesler in any literal sense. She refers to how a woman’s identity is seized away from her in different ways. This includes her biological autonomy, meaning control over her own body, her sexual autonomy, meaning the freedom to choose relationships, and her cultural autonomy, meaning the right to defend and represent herself in society. Chesler also argues that what is called female “madness” is actually the result of this loss of power. Also, madness is the outcome of a system that hinders women from having any agency over themselves.

"Listen. You remember that curve with the little white fence, where it is so far down to the bottom? Where if a car went through that little fence... You and she will be in the car. She won't know, won't have time to suspect." (Faulkner, “Elly” 8). Inside her uncle's bathroom at Mills City, Elly from “Elly,” devises a plan to kill her grandmother and shares it with Paul in a very calm and calculated way. She knows the exact place, the curve, the white fence, and the drop. She thinks about who will be in the car. She also plans how to prevent her grandmother

from suspecting anything. This demonstrates careful thinking. It is not irrational. However, society would label it madness because it breaks feminine norms of being humble, coy and docile. Through Chesler's idea, this becomes Elly's "search for potency". Elly's namesake grandmother vehemently dominates and surveils Elly's life, especially her relationship with Paul. She represents the very patriarchal constraints that limit Elly's agency.

This helps explain madness as emotional resistance. Elly has no option to resist openly. She cannot oppose her family directly. She cannot freely choose to be in a relationship with Paul. She cannot escape the rigid social expectations of Jefferson. Because of all these factors, her resistance becomes secret, sinister and violent. According to Chesler, this is a "doomed search for potency.". The act gives Elly some sort of independence, but it cannot truly free her. The word "doomed" is important. It pinpoints that this resistance will fail and Elly is going to be the only victim and sufferer. Elly is not freed. She gets systemically destroyed by the same system that pushed her to this verge. Yet, the act itself becomes the only way for Elly to subvert, even if only temporarily.

Therefore, this interpretation of Elly suggests that her madness can possibly be read as a purposeful form of emotional resistance rather than any conscious psychological breakdown. At the same time, it also answers the research question by connecting the bridge between oppression and how it influences behaviour. From this sense, madness is not simply any illness but a form of expression shaped by patriarchal limits.

One significant passage from Chesler's *Women and Madness* for understanding Minnie Cooper's madness as a form of emotional resistance is:

"Most women, while morbidly concerned with their "appearance," are actually quite removed from their bodies in terms of either "satisfaction," "confidence," or "activity." It is not

surprising to find a continuation of this among female schizophrenics—who are, after all, "females." (Chesler 55).

The quote from "Dry September" that supports this argument is:

" That was when her face began to wear that bright, haggard look. She still carried it to parties on shadowy porticoes and summer lawns, like a mask or a flag, with that bafflement of furious repudiation of truth in her eyes." (Faulkner, "Dry September" 4).

Minnie Cooper's face is described as having a "bright, haggard look," which she takes "to parties on shadowy porticoes and summer lawns, like a mask or a flag." (Faulkner, "Dry September" 4). Her face no longer reflects her true self. It becomes something she performs for the townspeople in Jefferson. It is like a sign she must carry for society to read. Her body displays what the town expects from their version of an ideal woman. This reflects Chesler's idea of "removal from their bodies" (Chesler 55). Minnie focuses only on her appearance, the "mask/flag she 'still carried'," (Faulkner, "Dry September" 4) while natural preferences such as satisfactorily dressing up and confidently carrying oneself when going outside have no space in the room. All these make her feel alienated from her own townspeople. Minnie no longer lives through her body on her own will as an active subject. She barely exists as an object shaped by patriarchal expectations.

The line "bafflement of furious repudiation of truth in her eyes" (Faulkner, "Dry September" 4) from the short story helps to determine Minnie's madness-as-resistance. On the outside, she follows social rules by attending parties and trying hard to maintain her appearance. However, her eyes start to reveal something different. They portray anger and rejection of the "truth" that society assumes and forces on her. This truth refers to her position as an obedient and respectable woman in Jefferson. This very compliant woman's later accusation causes Will Mayes's mob lynching. This inner rejection by Minnie is not only a sign of her madness. From a

feminist lens, it is her form of exerting her agency and not complying with the social expectations of patriarchal Jefferson. The pressure to comply with the feminine standards in a patriarchal society becomes burdensome for Minnie to deal with. The “haggard look” and the anger in her eyes indicate that this objection is worth collapsing. Madness here represents a refusal to continue the performance.

“Madness” in Faulkner’s female protagonists is not merely personal and inherent. It is also heavily shaped by patriarchal norms and societal pressure. Emily in “A Rose for Emily”, Minnie in “Dry September”, and Elly in “Elly” highlight forms of resistance that ultimately made them face repercussions. Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness* (1972) guides us to understand that women’s outbursts reflect either conformity to or rejection of imposed sex roles. By connecting Chesler's argument through a feminist lens, their deadly actions emerge as responses to social control rather than any congenital mental health issues. Each female character is at first deprived of independence and basic respect, then labelled “mad” when she deviates. Their behaviour surely reveals the consequences of denied agency, making “madness” a disturbing yet meaningful form of resistance.

Chapter 6

Female Malady in Faulkner's Emily, Minnie and Elly: Madness as Silent Rebellion Against Southern Patriarchal Norms

Elaine Showalter is a notable American critic who writes about how women have been treated in literature and culture. In her widely cited text *The Female Malady*, she discusses how “madness” became strongly linked with women in English society. She argues that this so-called insanity was not simply medical, but shaped by social expectations: ““insanity” is simply the label society attaches to female assertion, ambition, self-interest, and outrage” (Showalter 72). Women who showed anger, frustration, or independence were often labelled as unstable and their mental condition was pathologised. This made it easier for patriarchal society to silence them. Characters like Emily, Minnie or Elly are not merely mad or mentally disturbed. Their behaviour can be seen as deeply influenced by pressure from strict Southern norms. So, madness becomes more like an outcome of everything. It also works as a hidden form of rebellion, when Emily Grierson, Minnie Cooper and Elly have no safe or reliable way to subvert patriarchy. Three useful passages from *The Female Malady* will be used to link with two appropriate quotes from each of the short stories to explain how madness in those female protagonists is a direct result of tirelessly performing sex-based female roles under patriarchal norms in Jefferson.

In William Faulkner's “A Rose for Emily,” the unreliable narrator's line that “the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man...going in and out with a market basket” (Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily” 2) shows how Emily Grierson isolates herself in Jefferson. This act is not just any random eccentricity. It becomes a strategic, emotional way of isolating herself from the town. Her servant Tobe's routine is the only clear connection to the outside world, which makes Emily's seclusion feel controlled and deliberate. This description clearly fits Elaine

Showalter's argument in *The Female Malady* that "Depression, illness, withdrawal, and complaint, she understood, were feminine forms of protest far less effective than rebellion and action" (65). Even if Emily's response does not look like open rebellion, she, emotionally distancing herself in her eerily decaying house, blocks the Jefferson community from reaching out to her. Emily refuses visitors, avoids taxes, and rejects the town's pressure to arrange a suitor for her. From a feminist view, Emily's isolation can be read as madness that completely rebels patriarchal demands. This resistance represents the expectations of marriage and constant requirements from females being surveilled and judged yet staying mum. These pressures have shaped Emily's life, especially after her father's death.

Because Emily withdraws herself from everything so completely that her madness becomes something more beyond any simple pathology. It does not let the community control her anymore. Thus, madness can be seen as a protest against patriarchal oppression. This interpretation answers the research gap. Emily's death, described in "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..." (Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" 6), indicates how hidden illness can function as an opposition, even if faintly from a feminist perspective. As Showalter argues: "to deny, suppress, and stupefy these emotions leads to madness, hysteria and mental deterioration" (65). Her sickness stays unseen because society already "believes" it knows what women are supposed to feel and do. The house becomes the only place where the town's gossip, constant judgement and false concern do not get to bother Emily. In feminist terms, this intentional approach protects Emily's secret life, including her defiance of patriarchal expectations. In this way, Emily rejects roles like spinster or wife. Jefferson's late discovery of her condition explains how feminine protest stays powerful through invisibility and reclusion. It

also supports the broader question of how madness in Faulkner's women can be read as emotional resistance to patriarchal domination across "A Rose for Emily," "Elly," and "Dry September".

In William Faulkner's "Dry September", Miss Minnie Cooper's life is shaped by the "bright dresses" and "idle and empty days" that carry "a quality of furious unreality" (Faulkner, "Dry September" 5). This connects with Elaine Showalter's claim in *The Female Malady* that "to deny, suppress, and stupefy these emotions leads to madness, hysteria and mental deterioration" (Showalter 65). Minnie's femininity is tied to her staying visible and relevant through clothes, makeup and monotonous routine. However, this feels hollow at one point. The "furious unreality" reflects not confusion but also tension beneath the surface in Minnie's life. The community reduces her worth to gossip, idleness, and judgment after the rumoured assault of being raped. From a feminist lens, this condition is not a weakness. Instead, it reveals an emotional turmoil. Minnie refuses to be pitied, even if it requires her to falsely accuse an innocent Black man of raping her. In doing so, she embodies the suffering Showalter describes as part of adulthood. This challenges the patriarchal system that limits Minnie's agency and development. Such an interpretation helps fill the research gap of this dissertation.

Minnie's hysterical breakdown in the picture shows what happens when emotions are suppressed for too long. Her friends immediately take her home and rub some ice around her temples to calm her down. Even though "the ice was fresh and cold," "the laughing welled again and her voice rose screaming," which reveals a sudden loss of control (Faulkner, "Dry September" 9). Showalter's argument is relevant here. When frustration and unhappiness are repressed for a long time amongst women, they often lead to "madness, hysteria and mental deterioration" (Showalter 65). Minnie's laughter and screams clearly reflect this condition.

At the same time, the reaction of the town matters. The “dark glitter” (Faulkner, “Dry September” 8) in Minnie's friends’ eyes and the tense atmosphere represent how society monitors her every move and judges her. Her outburst breaks the calm behaviour expected from women under the Southern patriarchy. For years, she had tried to “stupefy” (Showalter 65) the pain caused by gossip, public shame, and neglect, but now, she can no longer tolerate it. Instead of showing weakness, this moment can be seen as resistance. Her screaming becomes a way of reclaiming her voice. It interrupts the rules of a patriarchal society and forces the community to face its own role in her suffering. In this way, Minnie’s madness in “Dry September,” along with similar cases in “A Rose for Emily” and “Elly,” can be read as a deliberate form of emotional resistance. This interpretation directly addresses the research gap by showing that Faulkner’s women do not simply turn mad but use it to challenge and expose patriarchal oppression.

In William Faulkner’s short story “Elly”, Elly's private thoughts during her secret meeting with Paul de Montigny points to an intentional act of her sexual agency. This choice clashes with the patriarchal control imposed by the grandmother. As Elly and Paul nearly cross the line in the shrubbery, she thinks with excitement, “I wish she were here to see! I wish she were here to see!” (Faulkner, “Elly” 3). This desire from Elly's side should not be treated only as teenage rebellion. It works as emotional resistance. Elly turns her body and desire into a form of defiance against the grandmother’s strict policing of female chastity and racial purity as Paul’s family is rumoured to black (Faulkner, “Elly” 2). After the grandmother interrupts their rendezvous, Elly lies in her room and thinks with “panting and amazed regret.” She worries, “‘I didn’t even have a chance to sin,’ she thought... ‘She thinks I did and she will tell that I did, yet I am still virgin. She drove me to it, then prevented me at the last moment’” (Faulkner, “Elly” 3). The anger reveals double standards: the grandmother tempts her and then punishes her.

Patriarchal society does the same thing with women. At first, it "grants" women some facilities. When women question and try to object to the structural violence embedded within it, the very patriarchal society turns a blind eye to their pleas. When the same women emotionally start to resist their oppression, it makes their behavior being addressed as "madness", "hysterical" or "insane" by the patriarchal society. These moments support Elaine Showalter's claim that "'Insanity' is simply the label society attaches to female assertion, ambition, self-interest, and outrage" (72). Elly's near-seduction and rage are not signs of any real mental illness. These are attempts to protect her autonomy. On her own will, Elly resists a "dead, hopeless town" (Faulkner, "Elly" 3) and an arranged marriage that would trap her in a "dead life" (Faulkner, "Elly" 4).

This chapter therefore demonstrates that madness in Faulkner's female characters must be read as emotionally charged resistance shaped by patriarchal oppression. Through Showalter's framework, Emily's isolation from Jefferson and necrophilia, Minnie's hysteria and the accusation of getting raped while Elly's sexual defiance and killing her grandmother are responses to restrictive gender roles rather than mere instability. Their actions expose how Southern social norms produce, label, and control female behaviour. By interpreting these mental states as deliberate forms of protest, this analysis addresses the research gap and answers the central question: madness functions as a subversive strategy through which women contest, disrupt, and momentarily escape patriarchal authority in Faulkner's fiction.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

To finally conclude, this dissertation has thoroughly attempted to analyse that madness in Emily Grierson, Minnie Cooper, and Elly in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily", "Dry September", and "Elly" should not be considered as acute mental illness or abnormality read in Gothic texts. Instead, it works as a form of emotional resistance to patriarchal control. Using Adrienne Rich's idea of "re-vision", Phyllis Chesler's critique of sex-role stereotypes, and Elaine Showalter's concept of the female malady, the dissertation tries to explain how each woman turns the label of "madness" into a way to resist and survive within a restrictive system.

Chapter 4 re-visions the texts and examines that Emily's necrophilia can be studied as an attempt to control the men who left her. Minnie's rumour and hysteria become a way to regain attention and desirability that the "White Goddess" ideal denies her. Elly's act of murder represents a final rejection of her grandmother's strict control and the wider surveillance of Old South values. In Chapter 5, by applying Chesler's ideas, these actions are depicted as both expressions of and resistance to limited female roles. Emily's expected self-sacrifice turns into a disturbing form of possession. Minnie's hysterical breakdown at the cinemas becomes an act of refusal. Elly's sexual and violent behaviour reflects a desperate search for having control over her own life. Showalter's claims in Chapter 6 point out that their withdrawal, hysteria, and anger are shaped by cultural pressures. These responses come from forced silence and submission, and they act as quiet but strong resistance in a patriarchal society.

These findings directly address the research gap identified earlier. As per my review of existing sources, no previous study has clearly examined madness in Faulkner's female characters as a conscious form of emotional resistance to patriarchy. Earlier criticism either

judged the characters morally, focused only on their psychology, or used feminist theory in a limited way. By studying the three stories together under a consistent feminist approach, this dissertation finds a clear path. Madness becomes the only form of expression when voice, freedom, and agency are denied.

The findings in this dissertation also have wider importance beyond Faulkner. It shows how literature reflects the ways women have been pushed to express resistance through behaviours that society calls abnormal. They add to feminist discussions about how women's mental health is socially constructed and how resistance can exist within that very mental health crisis. Although these female characters are trapped and punished, they still expose and challenge the hidden limits placed on Southern women.

No dissertation is perfect. Each of them is subject to having gaps. The study focuses only on three short stories and three feminist theorists. Future research could include more of Faulkner's female characters, as well as ideas of race, class, and modern psychological theories. Even with these limits, the dissertation aims to prove that what the town of Jefferson calls "madness" can be understood, from a feminist view, as a strong act of emotional resistance. It becomes a way of survival that refuses to accept patriarchal control. Through this analysis, literature continues to be a space where women's hidden forms of resistance can be seen and valued.

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