

A rose for emily

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It is said that actions and thoughts follow energy. To elaborate, what one does or thinks depends highly on the attitude the person is experiencing at the moment. In William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*, the author presents the story through narration in a third person point of view. The narrator is the voice of the people who live in Jefferson, and tells the story in a series of memories in no chronological order. The author successfully gives the reader a general sense of how the people of Jefferson felt towards Emily and those closest to her throughout her life. In actions and thoughts shown through flashbacks, the author describes the attitude changes in Jefferson as time passes by and a newer generation arises. Throughout the story, the narrator describes changes in attitude towards Emily. It is evident that as time passes, the people of Jefferson become assertive towards her. The narrator describes the house that Emily's father left her as "...big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies... set on what had once been our most select street" (Faulkner). Based on the narrator's description of the house, Emily was noticed as a person of high quality. Having a large house with the great architecture on the most prestige street at the time, gives the reader the notion that the older generation in Jefferson saw Emily as upper class and of high descent. This older generation had respect towards her, and felt the need to have to help her. Through the narrator's perspective the reader finds out that the previous mayor of Jefferson, Colonel Sartoris, had discharged Emily from paying taxes after she had lost her father. Colonel Sartoris "...invented an involved a tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town..." (Faulkner). This act of kindness enabled Colonel

Sartoris to help Emily financially, and at the same time protected Emily from feeling like she was being given a handout. Being mayor of the town, Colonel Sartoris is a figure of leadership and power. This act of kindness is an example that the previous generation of people in Jefferson was sympathetic towards Emily. On the other hand, the newer generation showed more disapproval of how Emily was being treated. The newer generation, which had become the leaders of society, saw Emily as "... a tradition, a duty and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town..." (Faulkner). Like a chore passed down from the previous generation, Emily was now recognized as a burden. This was the new attitude towards Emily, which led to a different way to approach her. They began to follow through their own procedures. Emily was now being treated with the same respect and authority as any other inhabitant of the town by the people in charge. Although Emily was being approached in this manner, the reader knows that Emily was still viewed as someone special. At the beginning the narrator states that "...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..." (Faulkner). In order for the whole town to attend one person's funeral, that person had to be distinct. The narrator refers to Emily as a "monument" which tells the reader that the men, who attended the funeral, viewed Emily as someone who represented a higher meaning. Because the women attended the funeral out of curiosity, the reader knows that not everyone respected her as they did before. As the story continues, the reader further understands this idea of change within the town's attitude towards Emily. The narrator describes memories that

occurred years ago. For example, when Emily was young, the narrator defines her as "...a slender figure in white..." (Faulkner). The author uses terms like "slender" and "white" to depict an image of a healthy woman who is pure in the people's eyes. With positive thoughts such as those towards young Emily, the town leaders decide that the right action to take is to protect young Emily. This was necessary when the people complained about the smell coming from her home. The town leaders arranged to assist her with this issue. "They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the outbuildings." (Faulkner) By this time, it was apparent that Emily was having troubles. Once again, the earlier generation saved Emily any embarrassment or trouble by proceeding with a solution. In her time of need, Emily received the assistance needed to preserve her poise. In this section, the narrator also describes how the town's views of Emily began shifting. At first the people believed the Griersons "...held themselves a little too high for what they really were..." (Faulkner). The people of Jefferson began thinking differently after they became aware of Emily's reality, alone in a house. The narrator states, "...they could pity Miss Emily... she had become humanized." (Faulkner) As if Emily lost a power or super ability, the town felt as if they could now look at her with the same sadness as they would anyone else in the town. This new feeling foreshadows a greater change in moods to come. As time is passing by, the town continues to change. The change is not only in appearance but also in opinions. The narrator reimages Emily to show how she has changed in the eyes of the people. Before she was "slender" and "in white", now she is described as "...like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church

windows-sort of tragic and serene. " (Faulkner) This new image of Emily tells the reader that she is still seen as supernatural. The difference now is that Emily is compared to angels who have a terrible yet calm history. The image of Emily changes throughout this section, after she is seen buying poison. The narrator depicts her as "...thinner than usual, with cold, haughty black eyes...imagine a lighthouse-keeper's face ought to look. " (Faulkner) Being " thinner than usual" when one was already slim and " slender" is not a positive thought. That image brings the idea of malnutrition and a depressing lifestyle. Her cold, black eyes show that she is restless and has lost life within herself. The fact that the people know she is buying strong poison in that state, also leads the reader to believe she could end her life of misery. Earlier in the story, the people of the town acted accordingly to help Emily to protect her. In section III, we see that the local druggist is illegally selling poison to her, for what is an anticipated suicide. It is clear that the attitude towards her is no longer to protect a monument, but now to relieve a chore. The narrator continues to describe how the new attitude towards Emily affects their actions. By this time the newer generation is arising and so are their new perceptions about Emily. The people become more critical when she is seen with Homer, and describe it as "...a disgrace to the town..." (Faulkner). Dissatisfied with what they see, "...the ladies forced the Baptist minister... to call upon her. " (Faulkner) The intent of these actions was not to help Emily, but instead to change Emily's private relationship with Homer to the town's favored. When that plan became unsuccessful, the minister's wife reached out to Emily's family in Alabama to try and interfere. The town felt bothered and stayed persistent in their goal to end her shocking

relationship with Homer. The respect that was once held for Emily is no longer present. The newer generation had arisen, and with that came a new shift of ideas. The reader can understand that the new generation did not believe in assisting Emily anymore, unlike the older generation who accomplished what was possible to help her. Ironically, Emily gained respect again after she passed away. Now that she is no longer the town's "duty" or "obligation", she is respected and viewed as a monument. On the day of her funeral the narrator describes seeing Emily "...beneath a mass of bought flowers..." (Faulkner). Bringing flowers to a funeral is a sign of respect, and by the amount of flowers at her funeral, she is well respected once again. The same town that sold her poison, meddled in her personal life, and decided not to help an old woman, was now buying flowers and attending her funeral. As time passes, change is inevitable. For some people this new wave is beneficial and can withstand the newer ideals. For others, such as Emily, change is an obstacle, which prohibits evolution and improvements. The town of Jefferson experienced change and acted accordingly to the ideas of the newer generation. William Faulkner effectively contrasts differences in attitude between the older generation of the town and the newer generation. The town's actions are a reflection of their attitude, which the reader understands fully when visualizing these events.