

In “A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner, the death of Miss Emily Grierson is the opening line of this short story. From that point on, her life is explained in terms of the way it seemed from those around her. There are short snippets of her life from childhood to early adulthood that give insight into her peculiar personality. As she grows older, her peculiar personality turns into even odder actions that result in one horrifying discovery after her death. Faulkner uses Miss Emily’s aversion to paying her taxes, to altering her ways, and to death to highlight her true aversion to any sort of change at all, which creates an interesting story that shows the consequences of refusal of change.

Early on in the story, it is mentioned that the Colonel of the town had “remitted her taxes.” When the younger generation started to become the leaders of the town, they requested Miss Emily pay the taxes that she owed. When confronted in person, Miss Emily simply stated in her “dry and cold” that she has “no taxes in Jefferson,” and those concerned should “see Colonel Sartoris.” She had no plans to pay the money that she owed to the town. Left stupefied, the leaders of the town allowed her to continue living as she did. It is unclear as to if Miss Emily truly believed that she wasn’t supposed to pay taxes. However, it is clear that she has an outright refusal to believe something that goes against what she was already told.

Following the tax incident, the narrator explains another story told as a flashback from thirty years prior. People of the town began to notice a smell that exuded from Miss Emily’s property. When encouraged to do something about it, the Judge was against the idea of “accusing

a lady to her face of smelling bad.” So, instead of confronting Miss Emily and encouraging her to change the way she was living, the went onto her property and “sprinkled lime...after a week or two, the smell went away.” In this instance, rather than trying to make her change, the townspeople acknowledged that she wasn’t going to change, and took the matter into their own hands. However, this results in some very unforeseen consequences. By enabling Miss Emily’s refusal of change, they allowed her to keep a dead man’s body in her home up until the point she died herself.

Combining both of these instances into a larger idea, it is obvious Miss Emily struggles with change in her daily life. However, she also has a firm aversion to death. The narrator mentions that when her father died, Miss Emily told the townspeople that “her father was not dead.” In what can only be described as odd, but not for Miss Emily, they had to almost “resort to law and force” in order to retrieve his body and bury it. Additionally, when she requested that those asking for her tax money speak to Colonel Sartoris, the narrator says that he had “been dead for ten years” at that point. And finally, she goes on to murder Homer Barron with arsenic, and then keeps his body in her home with her: one final aversion to death and refusal of change.

These incidents in the life of Miss Emily Grierson highlight her complete and utter refusal to change. While there are plenty of people who don’t like change, and enjoy keeping things a certain way, Miss Emily is a over exaggerated description of what a life of stagnation can do to a person. She spent her whole life living one certain way, without interruption from anyone else, and it resulted in a life essentially alone. However, it is unclear as to if Miss Emily wanted someone in her life, or if she simply didn’t want anything to change.