

Exploring Necrophilia and Southern Gothic Elements in Faulkner's A Rose for Emily

Ibtisam Alramadan

Istanbul Aydin University, Department of English Language and Literature
Email: imohamedalramadan[at]stu.aydin.edu.tr

Abstract: *This paper comprehensively analyzes necrophilia and Southern Gothic elements in William Faulkner's A Rose for Emily. It examines the protagonist's complex psychology profile and how her behavior reflects broader social issues. The study highlights the interplay between personal trauma, societal expectations, and mental health, offering insights into Faulkner's narrative techniques and thematic concerns.*

Keywords: William Faulkner, A Rose for Emily, Necrophilia, Southern Gothic, Psychological Analysis.

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Several essentially weird acts and disorders are less heard of in the world, yet they are done to less known prevalent; one such disorder is necrophilia. A morbid and abnormal attraction to corpses marks this psychosexual disorder. More specifically, necrophilia involves a persistent and pathological obsession to engage in sexual acts with the bodies of people who have died (Zahina, 2022). It is also important to note that necrophilia is mainly regarded as a collective term for a series of behaviors, including romantic obsession with the dead and sexual acts with dead bodies. Also known as necrophilism, necrophilia is considered both a legal and psychological taboo since it is against not only ethical standards but also societal norms for almost all cultures all over the world (Pertiwi & Kav, 2020; Pura Nieto, 2021). In mental health, necrophilia is considered paraphilia, which is a pattern of atypical sexual desires and behaviors outside the societal norm. It is linked to a series of other paraphilias such as sadism, cannibalism, necrozoophilia, which relates to sexual attraction to the bodies of dead animals; necropedophilia, which relates to sexual attraction to children's dead bodies; necrophagia, which relates to eating the flesh of the dead, and vampirism which relates to drinking a person or animal's blood (Yarbrough, 2018; Babujee, 2021). People with this condition exhibit a series of symptoms, including a disconnection from the emotional and social aspects of healthy human relationships. This leads to pursuing unconventional and socially unacceptable outlets for their desires (Ma, 2023; Briedik, 2023). While this condition is rare, it has been exhibited in characters in different fictional creations, such as the short story "A Rose for Emily" by American author William Faulkner (Pura Nieto, 2021). Therefore, this paper focuses on examining this psychosexual disorder as exhibited by Emily Grierson, a character in the short retrospective Gothic "A Rose for Emily." This article aims to explore the themes of necrophilia and the Southern Gothic tradition in A Rose for Emily, analyzing how these elements contribute to our understanding of the protagonist's psychological state and the story's border societal commentary.

Necrophilia in "A Rose for Emily"

William Faulkner uses several aspects of the story to bring out the idea of necrophilia. However, most of these are

directly attached to the protagonist, Emily Grierson's behavior. In other words, in several instances in "A Rose for Emily," Emily Grierson's behavior points toward a disturbing obsession for and attention to death (Babujee, 2021). Notably, this is more reflected in her actions surrounding the deaths of her father and lover, which set a typically weird atmosphere for the entire story. The protagonist's admiration of and obsession with the dead is first shown in her refusal to accept the death of other people. This is first depicted with her father's death, Colonel Sartoris Grierson (Zahina, 2022). Upon knowing about his death, Emily initially denies the town from taking her father's body and burying it, which is a clear indicator of her failure to take in reality and accept that her father had passed away. This is exhibited by the fact that she clings to his corpse for three days, displaying an unwillingness to let go and an inability to acknowledge the natural course of life (Pura Nieto, 2021). In the same way, like other people in circumstances of death, Emily would be expected to grieve for the loss of her father. However, she did not show this state of sorrow, which further highlights her failure to accept reality (Ma, 2023). This early indication of her resistance to the inevitability of death predicts her later actions with her lover, Homer Barron. It also points towards the paraphilic tendency of being obsessed with dead bodies.

The protagonist's behavior becomes even more disconcerting when Homer Barron, the man she had romantic interests in, dies. In this, Emily felt she would lose him, a feeling she was not ready to take in. As a result, to preserve the relationship, Emily goes for a measure that is considerably more extreme than the one she took when her father died (Pura Nieto, 2021). She buys a deadly poison called arsenic and is suspected of using it to kill Homer. Rather than confronting the pain of separation, Emily chooses poison and kills him. In other words, she feels this is the only way to guarantee keeping Homer with her permanently for the rest of her life. This further points to her failure to take in the fact that death is permanent and something that is bound to happen to all people (Pertiwi & Kav, 2020). The discovery of Homer's skeletal remains, having kept his body in her home for 40 years, reveals the extent of her obsession and the distressing nature of her attempt to defy mortality.

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The behavior and actions of the protagonist point towards not only a profound fear of loss but also an obsession with the dead and a twisted desire for control over life and death (Briedik, 2023). Emily adamantly refused to accept the natural order of things relating to the death of people who would be considered the most influential men in her life. She even went ahead to manipulate the lifeless bodies of her father and Homer Barron, which points towards a profound psychological disturbance (Babujee, 2021). This confirms the idea that necrophilia is a common and outstanding theme in the story, as depicted by Emily's unnatural attachment to the deceased. The real essence of necrophilia is brought out by the fact that Emily is not just attached to the dead but also goes ahead to sleep with them, suggesting a sexual attraction to them (Ma, 2023). In the story, this is depicted by the fact that on the pillow, besides the decomposed corpse of Homer Barron, on the bed was an indentation of a head and a single strand of gray hair. This suggests the protagonist slept with Homer's body (Zahina, 2022). With all this, William Faulkner paints a haunting picture of a character trapped in a perpetual struggle against the inevitability of mortality and a distressing obsession for the dead. This study's significance lies in its detailed examination of complex themes within an essential work of American Literature, offering insights into Faulkner's narrative strategy and the broader implications of societal norms on individual psychology.

Causes of Emily's Necrophilic Behavior

It can be argued that Emily was not innate, but rather this unsettling behavior related to their refusal to accept the reality of death and their obsession with dead bodies to the point of being sexually attracted to them. Instead, this behavior resulted from life-changing circumstances, societal pressures, and psychological factors (Ma, 2023). One of these causes relates to isolation and loss, which plays a massive role in shaping the protagonist's character from infancy (He, 2022). In the first place, Emily's character, marked by odd social tendencies and unique interactions with others, is strongly linked to the fact that for the more significant part of her youth, she was isolated by her father. This led to feelings of low standards, irrational judgment, desperation for companionship, and loneliness. This is even exacerbated by her father's death, an individual who exerted a powerful influence on her life (Pura Nieto, 2021). The death worsened her isolation and made her more disconnected from society. In the same way, the town was undergoing a series of changes in its social dynamics, something Emily was seemingly reluctant to adapt to. In one way or the other, this also worsened her isolation (Briedik, 2023). Notably, this isolation gradually became a breeding ground for her abnormal behavior. Also, it contributed to her inability to develop meaningful relationships with others and eventually get over the loss of her father (Ma, 2023). As such, it can be contended that an interplay of societal pressures and personal grief significantly contributed to the social isolation that later drew Emily toward the dead in an attempt to cling to the past they shared.

Emily's unsettling obsession with the dead and a sexual attraction towards their bodies can also be attributed to the Southern tradition and social pressures they came with. It can be noted that Emily was a member of a once-prominent Southern aristocratic family (Agelakis, 2020; Pura Nieto,

2021). Notably, the fact that the townspeople knew her linkages with this family put a huge weight of tradition and societal expectations on the protagonist. During the period depicted in the story, the South was characterized by a high prevalence of rigid class structure and conservative values. This implies slight deviation from societal norms attracted contempt (Zahina, 2022). This can be evidenced by the protagonist's socially unaccepted relationship with Homer Barron becoming the center of social scrutiny, forcing her to keep it a secret and away from the public's eye. Therefore, it can be presumed that the fear of being scorned and ostracized by society drove Emily to extreme measures to ensure that they were secretly permanently together, even when this required killing him and sleeping with his corpse (Feng, 2021; Babujee, 2021). In other words, the clash between personal desires and the stringent expectations of Southern society had a destructive impact on Emily's life, forcing her to go out of the conventional ways to get what she wanted while avoiding scorn from the public.

Another theme highly prevalent in "A Rose for Emily," and to which Emily's sexual obsession with dead bodies can be attributed, is mental disturbance. There are several traces of mental disturbance, more so in the case of Emily, throughout the story. For instance, she displays erratic behavior and unconventional responses to grief and loss (Pertiwi & Kav, 2020). This is partly a result of the control that her father had over her, his subsequent death, and the rejection by the townspeople, which get her out of touch with reality and the ability to digest facts. These events lead to Emily having an isolated lifestyle and her eccentric actions, such as keeping her father's dead body and later that of Homer Barron (Bai et al., 2020; Ma, 2023). In other words, it can be asserted that Emily's mental health problems make it harder for her to process reality and act accordingly. This, coupled with the Southern social pressures that also form a central theme in this story, Emily finds herself in a place where she cannot adapt to change and, at the same time, more fixated on preserving the past even in cases where it requires extreme means such as keeping her father's dead body for three days and that of her lover for 40 years (Pura Nieto, 2021). Thus, the way the author portrays the protagonist highlights the significant impact of mental distress on the ability of individuals to navigate the complexities of life, love, and loss in a society that usually demands conformity.

One can also interpret Emily's sexual obsession with dead bodies to be a product of a deep-seated desire for control in a life marked by powerlessness. In the first place, Emily's life was dominated by her father, leading to (Ajmal et al., 2023). This means that she lacked the privilege to control her life's path. Her vulnerability is also evidenced by the losses she experiences, including those of her father and later her lover (Zahina, 2022). This drives the protagonist towards asserting dominance over the forces of change and mortality. One way she does this is by refusing to accept death as a reality and insisting on keeping the dead bodies in her home. In this, she attempts to maintain authority over her narrative. The need for control is intensified by the rigid societal expectations of the Southern community, which push Emily to extreme measures to protect her reputation and relationships (Pertiwi & Kav, 2020). This forces her to keep and sleep with Homer

Barron's dead body as a means of evoking the feeling of control over the path her life takes.

Conclusion

"A Rose for Emily" comes off as a haunting exploration of isolation, loss, and the destructive impact of societal expectations on an individual. In a bid to gain control over her life, the protagonist, Emily Grierson, finds herself in a rather weird and unconventional character of an individual obsessed with dead bodies, not only for the inability to process reality but also because of a sexual attraction towards them.

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