

A Comparative Analysis of Violence in *A Rose for Emily* and in *Lord of the Flies*

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Abstract

A Rose for Emily and *Lord of the Flies*, as the respective masterpiece of Faulkner's and Golding's, have long been studied by scholars in different times, but seldom discussed and compared violence in them before. In order to make an all-around exploration of violence in literary works, this paper conducts a comparative study on violence in these two novels from five perspectives: social background, manifesting form of violence, criminal behaviors, violence types and pursuits of protagonists. These two novels share similarities and differences on violence. As for similarities, both novels are under depressive social background, with similar manifesting forms of violence. In addition, both protagonists kill others to fulfill their own desires. As for differences, *A Rose for Emily* tells about women violence, while *Lord of the Flies* talks about men violence. Besides, in the former novel, Emily is in the pursuit of love and self-awakening, while in the latter novel Jack pursues power. Through comparison, this paper reveals that violence is rooted from desire for unattainable love or goals and the evil side of human nature. Therefore, it is necessary for readers to pay attention to cultural, social, political and psychological factors behind violence aesthetics in literature and then reduce realistic violence.

Key words: Violence aesthetics; Comparative analysis; Similarities; Differences; Root of violence

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INTRODUCTION

Violence aesthetics are a generalized concept, not strictly aesthetic concept, and the main characteristics of the related works is to show offensive force, hyperbole, unconventional violence. Nowadays, it has gone out of the field of film and evolved into a cultural term. Violence is present in performance and in reproduction. The former is to weaken or hidden invasive aspect of violence while the latter is to reproduce or deepen the cruelty of violence. As its name indicates, violence aesthetics are the form of performance, which refers to the harmonious coexistence between violence and beauty in the literary works. It aims to stimulate readers' feeling of cruel beauty and their awareness of the revolution against violence.

Violence aesthetics is easy to be found in literature works. *A Rose for Emily* describes women violence, while *Lord of the Flies* introduces the violence of a group of boys. Through comparing social background, manifesting form of violence, criminal behaviors, violence types and pursuits of the protagonists in these two novels, this paper points out the root of violence and the aesthetic value of violence literature. As for similarities, this research discusses social background, manifesting form of violence and criminal behaviors. As for differences, women violence is the topic of *A Rose for Emily*, while men violence is described in *Lord of the Flies*. Moreover, the two protagonists' pursuits are widely divergent. Emily desperately wants love mainly out of mental need because she suffers a long time patriarchy and aristocratic hierarchy, while Jack desires to get power mainly out of the evil of human nature. However, neither of their pursuits comes true and both expose the dark side of human nature. Emily's violence results from males' autocracy and failure of love and self-awakening, while Jack's violence is from the evil side of human nature.

1. VIOLENCE AESTHETICS IN A ROSE FOR EMILY AND LORD OF FLIES

Violence aesthetics focus on the correlation of violence between novels and reality. It is possible to process and transform violence into literary beauty by means of art. The violence in reality is an objective existence, which results from the society itself. Violent literature is just an art gimmick or artistic form to mirror this objective reality.

1.1 Violence Aesthetics in *A Rose for Emily*

As *A Rose for Emily* describes, as one of Southern American aristocrats in decline, Emily is supposed to live a decent life. However, finally she becomes an extremely psychological distorted woman. Emily lives with her father and a black manservant, without maternal love. Under the oppression of the South American feudalism and patriarchy, she has to obey his father's orders without any resistance. After her father's death, she cannot accept such major change in her life which makes her completely collapse. She is bravely faced with the secular bias and discards noble demeanor, when she falls in love with Homer. However, after realizing that her lover Homer does not want to marry her, she acts as a flying moth darting into the fire. Put it in other words, when Emily realizes that she will be abandoned, her last hope of life is fully stripped. Finally she has no choice but to kill Harmon. Women always kill men for love. There is no exception to Emily. What makes it more difficult to accept is that Emily's woman violence maintains for forty years. Cruel Emily puts dead Homer in the new bed in her furnished room for forty years. In these forty years, the second pillow in the novel shows that Emily not only hides the man's body at home, but also sleeps with the body, which symbolizes that even after Homer's death, he still suffers from Emily's violence. Such a scaring image results from the act of women violence. The sadness readers perceive after reading greatly exceeds the cruelty the violent scenes bring up. Moreover, after reading this work, readers begin to make reflection on women violence, which is exactly the novel *A Rose for Emily* for. To deeply explore, the root of Emily's violence is her self-awakening from her tyrannical and selfish father. It is the desire for liberating from perverted patriarchy that makes Emily become a violent woman.

1.2 Violence Aesthetics in *Lord of the Flies*

Although *Lord of the Flies* is a novel talking about a group of children living in a remote and uninhabited island, it is not a children's literature but a literary works written for adults in that the children's world described in this novel is just a microcosm of adult world.

In the imagined Third World War, a plane crash makes a group of children trapped on a desert island. Isolated, they have to live a primitive style of life. Ralph, who is rational, brave and optimistic, is elected democratically by

others. However, when evil side of human nature comes up, peace and harmony of the desert island is broken. As a result, children are divided into two groups. One is led by Ralph, who represents the civilization of modern society, while the other is ruled by Jack, who dismisses civilized life, advocating destroying and killing. As this novel writes, the Jack group runs after wild boars but they are unaware that the purpose of killing boars is to provide food for them. Evil human nature is infinitely enlarged and fragile human civilization collapses. To deeply research, the evil human nature is the root of violence in this novel. Under rampant human violence, established civilization is so fragile that makes readers scared, which needs them to ponder over.

2. SIMILARITIES OF VIOLENCE IN A ROSE FOR EMILY AND IN LORD OF THE FLIES

2.1 Both Under a Depressive Social Background

A Rose for Emily shares a similar depressive social background with *Lord of the Flies*. The historical background is transformed from agricultural civilization into industrial civilization. In the early 20th century, European and American capitalist has made rapid development. Major capitalist countries successively went into imperialist countries and made huge expansion in the world. They frantically invaded other countries, which not only intensified the contradiction between imperialist countries and colonies or semi-colonies, but also aggravated the contradiction between imperialist countries.

In the southern United States, the black suffered the bitter oppression of slavery which led to the intense conflict between conservatives and progressives. However, as the defeated side, the failure of the civil war, economic depression, and the social disorder didn't raise the conservatives' resistance. On the contrary, for being not adjusted to the new social system and wanting to escape from social reality, they were stuck in thoughts of the past romantic myth, which sets a depressive social background reflected in Faulkner's works *A Rose for Emily*. Faulkner has always criticized the indifference and social evils and has dedicated himself to depict the traditional southern culture in his works from which readers are able to explore the essence of human nature and the harmony between the human being and society.

Golding's *Lord of the Flies* was created after the Second World War when the conflict between the eastern countries and western countries became more violent. The average people realize their precarious fate at that moment. Golding's military career in the Second World War had great influence on his later creativity of works. He himself experienced the cruelty of war and the

tremendous disaster that the war brought to human beings. The desert island to children is what western countries full of disaster after the Second World War to adults. In other words, this desert island is a miniature of the western world in the 20th century.

Like arts being the reflection of society and life, literary works are the direct embodiment of writer's thoughts, social value as well as the people's lives at that time. It is concluded from the above analysis that these two novels are against similar depressive social background. The bitter black women's lives after the civil war is mirrored in *A Rose for Emily*. Likewise, the depressive people's living conditions after the Second World War is reflected in *Lord of the Flies*. Both novels aim at giving readers great sensory stimuli via describing violent behaviors of protagonists, thereby making people think over the human nature and the establishment of a harmonious society.

2.2 Death Being Manifesting Form of Violence

Death is the manifesting form of violence in *A Rose for Emily* and *Lord of the Flies*. In *A Rose for Emily*, the death of three characters is endowed with symbolic meanings: To be exact, the death of Emily and her father represents the decaying of southern aristocrats, and the death of Homer symbolizes the violence towards the rising industrial civilization. Emily acts as a violent perpetrator, killing others to meet her own desire. Through presenting their death, readers' awareness of the revolution against severe social problems is greatly activated.

In *Lord of the Flies*, the desert island is littered with numerous corpses which are also vested with deep meanings. All death described in this novel shows that in the end the children on the desert island are unable to escape the fate of death. Via describing death, evil human nature is disclosed, which is what Golding tries to convey in his novel. What is the aesthetic value of death is that death being the manifesting form of violence can greatly arouse readers' consciousness of revolution against social problems this novel maps. It can be inferred from deep exploration that in the two novels, Faulkner and Golding expose social problems by describing violence and death. As traditional aesthetic elements, violence and death achieve making readers realize what social problems are and how to solve them.

2.3 Both Protagonists Killing Others to Fulfill Their Needs

In *A Rose for Emily*, Emily's instinct desire has no chance to be realized due to her father abnormal love. Besides, her father brings huge trauma to the development of her personality and her attitude towards love. It is the hierarchy of aristocratic family that makes Emily subservient to her father during her lifetime.

After the death of her father, she is kind of free from the shackle of patriarchy. However, the patriarchy has

been rooted in her thoughts and has great impact on her thoughts and behaviors all her life. Although she decides to change her oppressed fate and dominate her own life, she is not successful. Because her desire for love can't be satisfied, she takes killing others as the only way to retain the eternal love. In doing so, the desire that she wants to control Homer and revenge her dead father can be fulfilled, which finally brings infinite pleasure to herself. As shown in literary works, desires at their hearts being unsatisfied, people change their depressed emotions into killing or violence.

In *Lord of the Flies*, Golding makes incisive and vivid description of the human desire and the evil side of human nature. Take Jack for example, it is easy to notice Jack's tyrannical wild behaviors in this novel, such as suddenly pulling out a knife from the scabbard and cutting into the trunk of a tree. Jack himself claims that what he hunts for is meat, but readers clearly see it from his violent behaviors that what he hunts for is his inner evil human nature. Children escalating competition for food and power, the desert island gradually loses its original beauty. The children abandon the social morality and constantly tempt themselves to meet their inner desires. They change from hunting wild boars to hunting and killing children themselves. Eventually, they complete the whole process from human to beast.

3. DIFFERENCES OF VIOLENCE IN A ROSE FOR EMILY AND IN LORD OF THE FLIES

3.1 Violence of Different Genders

In *A Rose for Emily* women violence gets perfect depiction. After Emily's father dies, Emily meets Homer from the north and wants to grow old with him. However, Homer has no intention to start a family with her. In order to achieve her goal of being with Homer forever, Emily takes the extreme way to kill Homer with poison, and sleeps with his body for thirty years. Her attitude and behavior toward her lover of Homer is so much different from others who may choose to be away from Homers. What is the root of such weird behavior is that she suffers the suppression of patriarchy and the southern aristocratic hierarchy, Emily lives an isolated life and is not competent at taking charge of her own life. Women violence is not only a tragedy but also an extremely weak way to fight against men's power. In the society dominated by male, women have to raise social attention to their plight through the violence. Faced with the society governed by man's power and violence, women are no longer just a victim of violence (Sneard, 1986).

Lord of the Flies depicts the struggle among a group of boys who are cruel and finally turns the desert island into fire. Men violence is obviously seen in the novel.

For example, as a representative of civilized world, Ralph advocates public health and civilized behaviors a lot of times without any effect. Other children still clay their faces with mud, wear ragged clothes and love wild hunting. The growth of these children is influenced by male-centered world. Men's loving adventure and attack make them in traditional society enjoy sovereignty, but also make them have to face the cruelty of war, so men intend to be obsessed with the power, violence and war. Boys in this novel become the victims of the war of fighting for food and power. To be mentioned, struggle of male adult world in reality is more violent and cruel than boy world in the fiction.

To sum up, women violence comes from the oppression of the society or system and the pursuit of love, while men violence stems from the desire for power and the evil side of human nature.

3.2 The Different Pursuits of the Two Protagonists

Although there is a word "rose" in the title *A Rose for Emily*, there isn't any plot about rose in this novel. The word "rose" only appears one time in it. In western cultures, the rose is regarded as the symbol of love. In *A Rose for Emily*, love as an indispensable element all Emily's life pushes her to seek her true self. In Faulkner's works, Emily decides to walk on the road of awakening but her awakening begins with her love and also ends with it. Homer is the only life-saving straw for Emily, but Homer can't save her life. Therefore, she poisons him and then keeps his body at home for years. In this novel, love is the key factor which leads to failure of Emily's self-awakening.

In *Lord of the Flies*, being the representative of evil, barbarity and irrationality, Jack has extremely strong desire for power. The opportunity of being a leader comes to Jack when the dispute between setting fire for rescue and hunting for meat begins. An increasing number of children show their interest in hunting for meat as no rescue teams arrive in this desert island. At that moment, Jack quickly gets out of Ralph's lead and becomes a leader. In other words, the rationality represented by Ralph is defeated by the evil human nature of the boys.

To conclude, desire for love and desire for self-awakening are the pursuits of Emily, while desire for power is the pursuit of Jack.

CONCLUSION

A Rose for Emily and *Lord of the Flies* are famous representative literary works of violence aesthetics, so this paper chooses these two masterpieces to explore violent aesthetics literary works reflect. Violence in literary works shows itself in different forms and ways. In order to make a comparatively complete exploration on violence in literature, it is essential to make a comparative analysis of these two novels from five perspectives: social background, manifesting form of violence, criminal behaviors, violence types and pursuits. To be exact, similarities and differences about violence in them are analyzed so as to find out the root of violence. Therefore, by means of the comparative study, readers are able to appreciate the violent aesthetic value of literary works and ponder over how to reduce realistic violence.

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