

# LAURENT LECLAIRE'S NECROPHILIC DESIRES AS SEEN IN ÉMILE ZOLA'S *THÉRÈSE RAQUIN*

*Necrophilic  
desires, Sexual  
disorder,  
Psychoanalysis*

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**Abstract** – *Thérèse Raquin* is a classic novel which is considered for years to have a dark yet natural story. The emotion and characterization are somewhat real. Therefore, the depiction of the characters and their lives is also real and natural. The bad and dark side of human's life in this novel was controversial in the author's time, Émile Zola. Thus, the writer finds out the necrophilic desires as one of the kind of sexual disorders seen in one of the main character's characterization, Laurent Le Claire. The writer used psychoanalysis theory in digging necrophilic desires in the unconscious of Laurent through his acts and characterization. The writer also described Laurent's past and his relationship to his father in order to prove his necrophilic desire.

**Keywords:** *Necrophilic desires, Sexual disorder, Psychoanalysis*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Thérèse Raquin is a novel by a French writer Émile Zola which was first published in 1867. At the time, the novel was a phenomenal writing. It was not because of the compliments, but most of because of the popularity of the criticism. The novel was considered too vulgar and shameful. The story of a young woman namely Thérèse Raquin who is unhappy married to her first cousin, Camille Raquin. Camille is a sick, weak and egocentric man whose life brings Thérèse Raquin into deeper unhappiness. One day, Camille brings home his childhood friend, Laurent LeClaire, who is totally having different characteristics and traits to her husband. They automatically enter a very dangerous affair. Laurent's characteristics are everything that Thérèse Raquin loves. A wild and passionate relationship brings Thérèse Raquin comes to live. However, this dangerous affair will take the toll (Zola, 2014).

The character description which is natural, the psychological problems which are real and sexual depiction which is bold takes the novel into a must read classical novel. In this research, the writer intends to analyze the sexual aspect of the novel. Since the novel tells a story of an affair and somehow sexual activity forbidden in

**SPECTRAL**  
Jurnal Ilmiah STBA  
Vol.6 No.1  
Januari 2020  
ISSN 0216-3381

that era, the writer will analyze the sexual disorder known as necrophilia exists in one of the main characters, Laurent. The sexual disorder or sexual perversion happens because of many factors. These factors and aspects of necrophilic desires in the main character would be an interesting theme to discuss since the novel and the writer are famous classical work and author, sexual disorder is also a popular topic to analyze. The sexual activity which is considered perverted is somehow unique and challenging in literary criticism.

The writer therefore chose psychoanalysis approach in analyzing the novel. The sexual aspects, especially sexual perversions are a major theme in this theory. Freudian analysis focuses on the sexual impulses and desires in human's lives. The result will show that what kind of necrophilia exists in the novel and how does it work. In the end, this research will give more contribution to the richness of psychoanalytic analysis.

Basically, psychoanalysis suggested new ways of understanding, amongst other things, love, hate, childhood, family relations, civilization, religion, sexuality, fantasy and the conflicting emotions that make up our daily lives. This theory was created by Sigmund Freud (Habib, 2005; Lemma, 2003; Thurschwell, 2000). At the beginning, psychoanalysis was intended as a psychological and psychiatric practice to help the patient in facing their psychological problem. The setting for psychoanalysis is designed to allow both analyst and patient to focus on the patient's inner world, with minimal interference from outside (Bateman, Brown, & Pedder, 2010; Laird, 2006; Milton, Polmear, & Fabricius, 2004). Thus, psychoanalysis treats the subject not as a unique essence but as the product of intersecting psychic, sexual, and linguistic mechanisms (Culler, 2000, p. 109).

It is also justified that, Psychoanalysis: Since the 1920s, a very widespread form of psychological literary criticism has come to be psychoanalytic criticism, whose premises and procedures were established by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Freud had developed the dynamic form of psychology that he called psychoanalysis as a means of analysis and therapy for neuroses, but soon expanded it to account for many developments and practices in the history of civilization, including warfare, mythology, and religion, as well as literature and the other arts (Abrams, 1999, p. 248).

The central concept of psychoanalysis is the unconsciousness of human's mind, as seen in this statement:

Central to psychoanalytic theory is the idea that much of our mental life is unconscious. Unconscious thoughts, feelings and wishes form the mental bedrock, with conscious experience the tip of the iceberg. Unconscious processes cannot, by definition, be known directly but have to be inferred from their effects, in a way analogous to the powerful but invisible effect of gravity (Milton, et al., 2004, p. 17).

The statement explains that the unconsciousness is the most important aspect in the human life that controls his or her experience. In Freud's topographical model, the conscious mind is seen as the tip of an iceberg, with the unconscious the repository of a 'cauldron' of primitive wishes and impulses, kept at bay and mediated by a preconscious area, or function, where selection and processing of what is useful and acceptable to consciousness goes on. What has dominated human history to date is the need to labor. According to Freud, that necessity means that human must repress some of his or her tendencies to pleasure and gratification. Every human being has to undergo this repression of what Freud named the 'pleasure principle' by the 'reality principle', but for some of them, and arguably for whole societies, the repression maybe come excessive and make them ill (Eagleton, 2003). The illness can be called as neuroses or disorder.

Further, Freud originally believed that the conscious mind was entirely rational and contrasted with the more primitive, less logical, unconscious mental processes. He described the conscience as derived from both conscious thoughts and also from powerful unconscious remnants of parental and social demands. His map of the mind expanded from two areas (unconscious and conscious) to three. He called the primitive unconscious the id ('it'), the conscious mind the ego ('I') and the conscience the superego (literally 'over I'). All of these terms are now in common use (Burns, 2006).

Since also at the very beginning, Freud used literary works and aspects in explaining his theoretical concept, it was no wonder the connection between psychoanalysis and literature is really close. The relationship between psychoanalysis and literary criticism spans much of the twentieth century, "the connection between literature and psychology is an ancient one" (Childs & Fowler,

2006, p. 190). It is fundamentally concerned with the articulation of sexuality in language. The concept therefore goes through three main emphases in its pursuit of the literary 'unconscious' (Bennett & Royle, 2004), which is on the author (and its corollary, 'character'), on the reader and on the text. It starts with Sigmund Freud's analysis of the literary work as a symptom of the artist, where the relationship between author and text is analogous to dreamers and their 'text' (literature is 'fantasy' as seen in psychoanalytical point of view); is modified by post-Freudians in a psychoanalytic reader response criticism where the reader's transactive relation to the text is foregrounded (Selden, Widdowson, & Brooker, 2005). The connection between psychoanalysis and literature can be seen also from a statement that a literary text is not in the first place the product of an individual author, but rather the product of a much larger culture that speaks through the writer and that conveys political messages that the writer may be completely unaware of (Bertens, 2002, p. 158). Therefore, the psychoanalysis is so important that it also gives a thought on human's life as well as seen in a literary work, as long as it is something to do with the human's life impulses and unconsciousness. In literature it can be the author or character's mind inside the literary works.

Sexual aspects are the most controversial thoughts of Freud.

Of all of his controversial theories, Freud believed that the one which most outraged society was his insistence upon the sexual nature of the child. The writers of the late eighteenth-century Romantic period helped forge the notion of the child as innocent, a blank slate waiting to be written on by experience. In contrast, Freud proposed that childhood fantasies formed a continuum with sexual desires, and that all children had an innate curiosity about sex and about their own origins (Thurschwell, 2000, p. 43).

Sexual activity which starts from early stages of childhood will affect the human's life in the future, whether the sexual life is 'normal' or can bring the child into later sexual disorder or perversion. According to Freud human's libido, it is human's basic, instinctual sex drive, leads human us towards a build-up of energetic excitation and a subsequent desire for release. Freud believed that each infant begins life in a state of polymorphous perversity, loving, eroticizing, wanting everything and everyone who interests it. A baby wants to put everything in its mouth, to make everything outside of itself a part of itself and its immediate world. The youngest children do not distinguish between the outside world and the boundaries of their

own bodies. For the child, becoming aware of oneself as a separate individual is a process of learning to detach an understanding of an interior self from the outer circumstances the world provides (Thurschwell, 2000).

Many of the unconscious conflicts according to Freud are sexual. Initially he believed that his patients had been sexually abused but he changed to a belief that these descriptions were more often fantasies and wish-fulfillments. He went on to shape his theory of infantile sexuality. It was explained that even very small children have strong 'sexual' feelings about their parents. Until now, this theory is still controversial. Sexual disorder, such as sadism is a result of the impulses of cruelty at the early stage of childhood. The sexual disorder and the act of aggressiveness are both interconnected (Freud, 1962). However, it does not mean that all problems arising are based merely on sexuality. As it was explained by Freud in Bateman, "In all the cases I have analysed it was the subject's sexual life that had given rise to a distressing affect. . . Theoretically, it is not impossible that this affect should sometimes arise in other fields; I can only report that so far I have not come across any other origin" (Bateman, Dennis Brown, & Pedder, 2010, p. 13).

Sexual impulses are something to do with pleasure-seeking. Sensation, imagery, feeling, emotion, together with pleasure, unpleasure and pain are names for the conscious characteristics of impulses. How they may best be sorted out is a problem whose difficulty is much aggravated by the shortcomings of language at this point. We speak, for instance, of pleasures and pains in the same fashion, as though they were of the same order, but, strictly, although pains as single self-sufficing modifications of consciousness are easily enough obtainable, pleasures by themselves do not seem to occur. Pleasure seems to be a way in which something happens, rather than an independent happening which can occur by itself in a mind. Human has, not pleasures, but experiences of one kind or another, visual, auditory, organic, motor, and so forth, which are pleasant. Similarly we have experiences which are unpleasant. If, however, we call them painful we give rise to an ambiguity. It can be said that they are unpleasant or it can be said that they are accompanied by pains, which is a different matter. The use of the term pleasure, as though like pain it was itself a complete experience, instead of being something

which attaches to or follows along with or after other experiences, has led to a number of confusions (Richards, 2004).

Talking about sexual disorder, there is a term of *necrophilia*. The term *necrophilia* is derived from the Greek words *nekros* which means corpse or dead body, and *philia* (Rabaté, 2003; Sim, 2001) which means love or friendship. Therefore, necrophilia means sexual gratification by having sex with the dead, the perpetrator gets sexual pleasure in having sex with the dead (Aggrawal, 2011). It is one of the weirdest, most bizarre and revolting practices of abnormal and perverse sensuality. Other names for necrophilia are necrophilism, necrolagnia, necrocoitus, necrochlesis, and thanatophilia. It is associated with a number of other paraphilias or sexual compulsive pathology (Sebeok, 2001), namely sadism, cannibalism, vampirism (the practice of drinking blood from a person or animal), necrophagia (eating the flesh of the dead), necropedophilia (sexual attraction to the corpses of children), and necrozoophilia (sexual attraction to the corpses of or killings of animals—also known as necrobestiality) (Anil Aggrawal MBBS, 2009; Thurschwell, 2000).

Regarding the definition, there are some variations on the theme of necrophilia are autonecrophilia, which is imagining oneself as a corpse or becoming sexually aroused by simulated corpses, and pseudonecrophilia. The term pseudonecrophilia has been used differently by different authors. Some authors take it to mean arousal from having sex with someone pretending to be dead, while others use the term to describe erotic fantasies of a person to have sexual relations with a dead body, and masturbation (but not actual contact) (Anil Aggrawal MBBS, 2009).

Many necrophiles have attracted lay attention in the past (Aggrawal, 2011). It is therefore in line with the childhood sexual aspects of psychoanalysis. In some cases, necrophilia could be as a result of oral fixation. The love of corpses may be based on grandmother and mother fixations. The corpses represented a patient's dead mother whose breast he or she still craved. By fellating the corpses, the patient is trying to suckle the breast of his or her long dead mother. This desire was always traceable to the suckling age, when the nipple from the mother's breast afforded both satiation and pleasure. In classical psychoanalytical theory, if the child is weaned too early from the mother's nipple, the child may become orally fixated and may resort to

fellatio in a later part of life. Some patients performing necrophilic desires because they feel that they can do the control without having to be scared the victim is protesting. It is theorized by some psychoanalysts that a necrophile's concept of sexuality is somewhat infantile. Psychologically healthy people participate in human relationships by receiving and giving pleasure. With a corpse, one only gets pleasure, with no need to give, indicating an immature and narcissistic ego of the necrophile (Aggrawal, 2011).

A psychoanalyst, Dalmau (Aggrawal, 2011), has tried to explain necrophilia by modifying Freud's theory to some extent. He asserts that the concept of Oedipus complex was formulated at a time when the patriarchal family structure made the father the primary source of authority. More recent sociological trends brought the woman into a better and more adequate perspective. He asserts that in the male, the original drive does view the father as a rival, but eventually the mother is seen as the frustrating figure. Phallic sadistic drives emerge with murderous and rape feelings toward her. This is the nuclear pathologic core in necrophilia, male homosexuality, and impotence. The patient of necrophilia supposedly had unresolved conflicts toward his mother, which he expressed by sexually attacking women—living and dead. That is no wonder that necrophilia is also called as thanatophilia, which can be traced to Freud Thanatos, the drives of death, aggression, and hate (McLeod, 2004). It means that, even though a necrophile tries to avoid harmful action, in raping living human in instance, necrophilia is close to crime, death aspects and aggression. It is considered a sexual perversion and the case of psychopathology which is harmful and disturbing manner (Priestman, 2003; Rzepka & Horsley, 2010).

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

The method used in literature analysis is provided by the theory. In using psychoanalysis theory, the writer uses psychoanalytical method. It means that the character is treated as the patient where he or she demonstrates the symptoms mental and sexual perversion. The writer searches for the psychoanalytical aspects as well as sexual ones to find the sexual perversion depicted unconsciously in the main character, as it is stated, "Thus, psychoanalysis treats the subject not as a unique essence but as the product of intersecting psychic, sexual, and linguistic

mechanisms” (Culler, 2000, p. 109). The subject of the analysis is one of the main characters in the novel *Thérèse Raquin* by Émile Zola, Laurent LeClaire. The writer finds the necrophilic desire as seen in this character through the intense reading and interpretation of the actions, dialogues, thoughts and personalities.

### **III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Laurent LeClaire’s Necrophilic Desires**

The novel obviously described the necrophilic desires seen from some scenes. At first, the necrophilic aspects were found as the common social condition in that era in Paris, where around the Morgue there a lot of people every day were looking for dead bodies. The dead bodies were like entertainment, where people who were curious of the dead body can be satisfied by looking at them,

The morgue is a sight within reach of everybody, and one to which passers-by, rich and poor alike, treat themselves. The door stands open, and all are free to enter. There are admirers of the scene who go out of their way so as not to miss one of these performances of death (Zola, 2004, p. 133).

However, the necrophilic aspects can be found from the spectators who looked at the corpses and found they were interesting. It was described that some spectators were having sexual desires while looking at the naked bodies of the corpses. A woman, who was shyly attracted sexually toward a young man’s corpse,

She stood scrutinising a corpse. On a slab a few paces away, was stretched the body of a great, big fellow, a mason who had recently killed himself on the spot by falling from a scaffolding. He had a broad chest, large short muscles, and a white, well-nourished body; death had made a marble statue of him. The lady examined him, turned him round and weighed him, so to say, with her eyes. For a time, she seemed quite absorbed in the contemplation of this man. She raised a corner of her veil for one last look. Then she withdrew (Zola, 2004, p. 135).

In time, the bold description of Laurent’s sexual desire toward a corpse or a dead person can be seen also in the scene of the Morgue. He was looking for a dead body of his friend, Camille, who, he killed the night before together with his woman in affair, *Thérèse Raquin*. While looking at the corpses, he also paid attention toward naked bodies of dead women,



He then became a simple spectator, who took strange pleasure in looking death by violence in the face, in its lugubriously fantastic and grotesque attitudes. This sight amused him, particularly when there were women there displaying their bare bosoms. These nudities, brutally exposed, bloodstained, and in places bored with holes, attracted and detained him (Zola, 2004, pp. 132-133).

In this first case, Laurent was suffering from a necrophilic fantasizer, which is necrophile who is somewhat less innocuous from a legal standpoint. He did not engage in sexual intercourse with the dead. He was content simply with fantasizing about sexual intercourse with the dead or perhaps fantasizing about sexual involvement with the dead in any other manner (Aggrawal, 2011). However, later on, Laurent put this obvious necrophilic desire under his unconscious. He later on developed the necrophilic desire into role player necrophilia. Role play necrophilia does not engage in sexual activity with the dead, but with living people pretending to be dead (Aggrawal, 2011, p. 47). However, in this case, unconsciously Laurent was pretending that his partner in affair (later on she would be his wife) was a dead person, without the agreement of Thérèse herself.

Laurent did not harm other people at the beginning. He chose Raquin because he thought by having her as his wife, he could control and enjoy his own life which was lazy and full of freedom. A major reason is that most acts of necrophilia do not seem to cause harm to anyone. When a crime is committed on a dead victim, the possibility of it getting reported is virtually zero (Aggrawal, 2011). Raquin was considered as a dead woman because her boring and dull life. Laurent avoided the dangerous situation of having sex with a dead person.

There are abundant numbers of explanation of how Thérèse is as good as a dead person. She was being cold, impassionate about everything and extremely quiet. Camille treated her almost as nobody,

He looked upon her as an obliging comrade who helped him to amuse himself, and who, if occasion offered, prepared him an infusion. When playing with her, when he held her in his arms, it was as if he had a boy to deal with. He experienced no thrill, and at these moments the idea had never occurred to him of planting a warm kiss on her lips as she struggled with a nervous laugh to free herself (Zola, 2004, p. 27).

Thérèse's life was boring,

The girl also seemed to have remained cold and indifferent. At times her great eyes rested on Camille and fixedly gazed at him with sovereign calm. On such occasions her lips alone made almost imperceptible little motions. Nothing could be read on her expressionless countenance, which an inexorable will always maintained gentle and attentive. Thérèse became grave when the conversation turned to her marriage, contenting herself with approving all that Madame Raquin said by a sign of the head. Camille went to sleep (Zola, 2004, p. 27).

Laurent therefore was getting confident that he could own and control Thérèse who had a very boring life and did not have any enthusiasm, again just like a dead person,

She is bored to death in that shop. I go there, because I have nowhere else to go to, otherwise they would not often catch me in the Arcade of the Pont Neuf. It is damp and sad. A woman must be wearied to death there. I please her, I am sure of it; then, why not me rather than another? (Zola, 2004, p. 58)

Thérèse was wearing black which is basically symbolizing death and passivity (Circlot, 2001). Thérèse was also being pale, describing a trait of a dead person. The dead woman therefore was full in his control,

The young woman, attired in black, pale and meditative, seemed to him to possess a beauty that he had hitherto ignored. He was happy to meet her eyes, and to see them rest upon his own with courageous fixedness. Thérèse still belonged to him, heart and soul (Zola, 2004, p. 146).

In justifying the necrophilic desire, Laurent was a man of control, a control freak who needs nothing but a full lazy and happy life,

Laurent spoke in a tranquil tone. In a few words he had just related a characteristic tale that depicted him at full length. In reality he was an idle fellow, with the appetite of a full-blooded man for everything, and very pronounced ideas as to easy and lasting employment. The only ambition of this great powerful frame was to do nothing, to grovel in idleness and satiation from hour to hour. He wanted to eat well, sleep well, to abundantly satisfy his passions, without moving from his place, without running the risk of the slightest fatigue (Zola, 2004, p. 50).

In the end, the death was the nearest aspect in Laurent's life. He decided to kill Thérèse Raquin's husband, Camille, in order to be together with Thérèse Raquin. This murder, though was not a form of direct necrophilic desire, was an act of necrophilic orientation, since according to one of psychoanalysts, Erich Fromm,

For him necrophilia meant any attraction to death. Normally people love life (biophilia), but when social conditions stunt biophilia, they may adopt a necrophilic orientation. Necrophilic persons hate humanity. They are bullies, warmongers, and racists. They prefer night to day and prefer to operate in shadow and darkness. They love terror, torture, bloodshed, and destruction. In general they delight in destroying life. They love to discuss sickness, death, and burials and are fascinated by dirt, decay, corpses, and feces (Aggrawal, 2011, p. 30).

All the secrets of murder and the idea of manipulating Camille's mother to accept him as Thérèse's husband were operated in shadow and darkness, just like the gravedigger who stole the corpse in the dark of the night.

### **The Cause of Laurent LeClaire's Necrophilic Desires**

The basic notion of necrophilic desires is the childhood sexual drive and Oedipus complex. It is known that in Oedipus complex, the male child has a rival toward his father in competing for his mother. Freud in his psychoanalysis theory found that all the adults he studied, including himself, showed evidence of a more or less deeply buried attachment to the parent of the opposite sex and concomitant hostility to the parent of the same sex (Milton, et al., 2004). It means that there must be a father-son conflict between a necrophile and his father as seen in Laurent's life, "Well, I don't know," answered Laurent. "We are not on good terms; we ceased corresponding five years ago." (Zola, 2004, p. 48). Laurent also boldly wished for his father's death, "My father will die one of these days, and I am waiting for that event to live and do nothing." (Zola, 2004, p. 50).

The basis of necrophilia is somewhat concerning the unstable and impulsive emotion. It is also marked by *abulia*, it is a lack of will and initiative (Aggrawal, 2011). As it can be seen that Laurent was a man with a lack of will and initiative. He wanted a simple and idle life where he could spend the days in easy ways,

The profession of advocate had terrified him, and he shuddered at the idea of tilling the soil. He had plunged into art, hoping to find therein a calling suitable

to an idle man. The paint-brush struck him as being an instrument light to handle, and he fancied success easy. His dream was a life of cheap sensuality, a beautiful existence full of houris, of repose on divans, of victuals and intoxication (Zola, 2004, p. 50).

It is also known that a necrophile is a person who is psychologically disturbed and incapable of love and has failed to establish union with others (Aggrawal, 2011). Laurent in many occasions was not able to have a serious love relationship. As the result, he often used the service of prostitutes to please himself (Zola, 2004, pp. 48-49).

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Laurent LeClaire was a necrophile. His necrophilic desires were obviously seen in the beginning of the story where he admitted that he was attracted to dead women lying naked in the Morgue. However, he later developed his necrophilic desires to a living woman, another main character in the novel, Thérèse Raquin, whose life was as good as dead. Laurent had a very lazy and idle life and he wanted to satisfy himself in any possible way. By having Thérèse as his wife, he could have all the satisfaction he wanted and full control of the woman just like a necrophile who enjoyed having sex with a corpse or fantasizing it.

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