



## The Psychic Drives of the Concept of Obsession in Patrick Suskind's *Perfume: The Story of Murderer*

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### Abstract

This research examines *Perfume: The Story of Murderer* (1985) by Patrick Suskind in the light of psychoanalysis. The events revolve around Jean Baptiste the main character in the novel and it's based in France, Paris during the eighteenth century, when the streets of Paris were full of stench, and showing the ambition of Jean Baptiste Grenouille by creating the best scent in the world, whose ambition later turns into a murderous obsession. The analysis in this research includes an analysis of the thoughts and actions of Grenouille who has a very great obsession with smells, so he acts as a killer to get what he wants, this psychological problem is called a psychopath. The aim of this research is to analyse the novel based on its structural elements and the ambition of Grenouille that deals with id, ego and superego using a psychoanalytic approach. Therefore, I relied on Sigmund Freud's psychological theory and what he says about human personality. In psychoanalysis, theories are used to provide a model for understanding human thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. As such, I will base my research on this research the unconscious mind of a psychopath in Patrick Suskind's perfume: the story of murderer by (Nessie Agustin).

**Key words:** Ego; Freud; ID; Obsession; Psychoanalysis; Superego

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Most of the problems people face are caused by their ambition, this desire to become what they want regardless of the method used to achieve their goal, here ambition turns into an obsession with its owner, an obsession that may destroy his entire life because of the immoral way to achieve their desires. *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* is a novel written by Patrick Suskind. The story was written in 1985. The genre of the novel is a fiction story and the scope is thriller story. In 2006, the novel was turned into a movie with the same title. This novel is one of the best sellers in the world. Patrick Suskind was born in Ambach, near Munich, in 1949. He is one of the most celebrated younger writers in contemporary German literature. His first play, *The Double Bass*, written in 1980, became an international success. His first novel, *Perfume* became an internationally acclaimed bestseller, he lives and writes in Munich. The *Perfume* novel is about the main character, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, who has a special gift from God, that he can smell everything in the world. Jean-Baptiste Grenouille is the only human who has the best sense of smell, but the amazing gift causes a big disaster in Grenouille's life as his big obsession to make the best perfume which similar to beautiful virgin's odour and he wants to create a perfume that gives him the magical essence of identity, so Grenouille becomes a psychopath because of many factors from his past life, the author makes his novel interesting by describing the main character as a psychopath.

Psychoanalysis plays a very important role in this novel as psychology is part of human behaviour in our daily lives. Psychoanalysis is very useful for understanding the writer's personality and for interpreting literature as well. Literature can be a reflection or expression of a person's life. The writer and the reader have a connection when they read a psychological literary work. Many motives and desires lie behind a person's behaviour naturally or abnormally, as we have noted in the novel *Perfume*,

the author plays a psychological problem on the main character who has become a psychopath due to many factors in his past life. None of us is completely free from psychological problems, so the goal of psychoanalysis is to help us solve our psychological problems.

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## 2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

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### 2.1 The Main Idea of the Novel

Most recent studies related to early childhood indicate that the harsh psychological and social experiences that a child has been exposed to can cast a dark shadow on the future of his life when he grows up, thus becoming an adult subject to mental illness and its repercussions. Some children suffer in the early years of their lives from abuse, it may be neglect, violence or the loss of parents, which affects the future of the child and this is exactly what happened with Jean Baptiste Grenouille. Jean's life was not normal from his birth until his childhood and adolescence when his mother gave birth to him, Jean was born amid dirt and foul smells, and his mother left him. She did not want him because she was poor and was unable to raise him when people saw what his mother had done, they executed her and then took Jean to the orphanage. Jean was considered a jinx, as the first sound from his lips sent his mother to the gallows, and the sound was the sound of him crying like a newborn.

Patrick described the hideous smells that pervaded Paris, the tendency of the French people to hunt and imagine the smell of something different and strange, something that transports their souls and minds to bliss. So Patrick portrayed the power of smell in this novel and portrayed it as a powerful factor in directing emotions according to the desires of the perfumer or anyone who wants perfume. Jean had an acute sense of smell, someone who could smell a human being miles away, someone who could distinguish between scents and divide them in his mind to make a dose of perfume that nourished his soul, Grenouille had a goal of preserving the scent and making a fragrance that had never been made perfume a magician who wins the hearts of those around him, but Grenouille followed an immoral way to achieve his goal, he did not distinguish right from wrong from a moral point of view and in addition he never experienced love and care and this thing made him more ambitious and driven towards his goal to get smells as his goal turns into an obsession, so he set a goal to capture scents no matter the method and his method of achieving his goal was to kill for love and respect, he killed 25 women to create a masterpiece in the form of perfume, believing that women's scents are one of the most seductive and attractive scents. All this Grenouille did to get what he lost in his life and childhood, which is love, care and self-love. This goal fully proves the importance of childhood in a person's life. Once Grenouille achieves his goal and

ambition, he feels lost and confused, because he loses the human touch and human emotion.

### 2.2 Psychoanalysis

Based on the above explanation, I want to analyse the main character in the *Perfume: The Story of Murderer* movie, by applying the psychological approach proposed by Sigmund Freud and explaining the psychological problem that is found in the main character Grenouille. Psychoanalysis is one of the modern theories that are used in English literature, and it is the branch of psychological study that focuses on the personality of human beings, Psychoanalysis is "a technique to investigate an individual's unconscious thought and feelings" (Hjelle and Ziegler 86). Sigmund Freud and other psychoanalysts mapped the human mind, and their findings influenced literary criticism. According to psychoanalysis, the human mind consists of unconscious and conscious levels.

Sigmund Schlomo Freud is known as the founding father of psychoanalysis. He is known for his theories of the unconscious mind. He was born on May 6, 1856, and died on September 23, 1939. He was a Czech Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist who founded the psychoanalytic school of psychology. According to Freud, "Psychoanalysis reflected changing a value in the society and plays a role in the changing of values" (Pervin, 21). From a structuralist point of view, Freud believed that human personality can be analysed as a structure made up of three parts: the ID, EGO, and SUPEREGO. Their concentrations differ from person to person. For Freud, that's why we respond to the same situations differently, because of the difference in our personalities. According to Freud, the id, ego and superego "are not persons, places, or physical things, they are the names given to certain motivational forces whose existence is inferred from the way people behave." (24).

### 2.3 Structure of Grenouille's Personality in the *Perfume* Movie

#### 2.3.1 ID

The ID is that part of your personality that will give you maximum pleasure. This part does not make you think about what is right and what's wrong. It makes you follow your desire regardless of how immoral they are. Freud states that the Id is "concerned only with satisfying personal desires." (415). The first *id* of Grenouille appears in a form of curiosity, When Grenouille tries to smell the woman's scent without asking her permission, this was his first attempt, his curiosity came from the effect of the force of the smell on him, Grenouille could not stop his obsession with following the woman and smelling her. Curiosity is a characteristic of all human beings, but its ability varies from person to person. This dialogue illustrates Grenouille's curiosity:

Plum girl: Do you want to buy some?  
(Grenouille quiets and stunned)

Plum girl: two for sou...

(Grenouille still quiet and is stunned, and suddenly Grenouille smells the woman's hand. This makes the girl afraid and run) (17, p.56)

The next ID also appears in Grenouille's life, the id appears in a form of fear or anxiety. This was because of his focus on the smell of the girl selling peaches, so he frightened her with his behaviour, to prevent her from screaming. He covered the girl's mouth until he accidentally strangled her, he discovers that the girl's scent begins to disappear here Grenouille was terrified and Grenouille has the desire to keep the girl's scent forever. The last *id* appears in a form of sadness. Although Grenouille is a murderer, he is still human and has a feeling of guilt and regret. On the last time of his execution, he remembers the plum girl (the first girl who died in his hand "plum girl"). Grenouille cries, feel sad with her, he knows that the murder should not happen. Grenouille came out of Grasse unharmed after escaping from execution, at that time he had a bottle of perfume, which is a power greater than the power of money, terror and death, through which he could enslave the world with this bottle, but he returned from where he was born and threw perfume on himself and then those around him devours him to their fascination with the perfume, and the next day there was nothing left of Grenouille but his clothes and the bottle of perfume from which the last drop had fallen to the ground. Grenouille did this in the end because he has discovered that the perfume will not allow him to love or be loved like a normal person. The emergence of the id element is clear in the character of Grenouille, as *id* began to appear from the beginning of the novel in the character of Grenouille, and the novel concluded with *id* overpowering the character of Grenouille. This is evidence of his strong desire and obsession with achieving his goal.

### 2.3.2 Ego

Freud states that the ego is "the result of the creation of spiritual inner systems as the result of a reciprocal relationship between an individual and his world." (34). Freud declares that the ego is actions based on the reality principle and it makes a balance between the ID and the superego, in this principle instinctual energy is restrained to maintain the safety of the individual and help integrate the person into society. The first ego appears when Grenouille struggles with his master. The story begins when Grenouille is astonished by the perfumer Baldini with his ability to invent and manufacture the finest types of perfumes. He wanted Grenouille from Baldini in return for this to teach him how to transform scents into perfumes and how to preserve them, but Baldini refuses at first, considering that what Grenouille is doing is madness, but Grenouille's insistence pushes Baldini to accept it.

(Grenouille struggles with Baldini because he really wants to learn about smell)

Grenouille: don't you want to smell it master

Baldini: No I'm not in a good mood now. Well, a lot of things in my mind now. And just go now.

Grenouille: but master

Baldini: Go now

Grenouille: can I come to work with you master?  
Master can I

Baldini: aaa let me think about it

Grenouille: master, I have to learn about to keep the smell

Baldini: what?

Grenouille: can you teach me that (41:8)

The ego of Grenouille always comes when he connects with the fragrance and smell obsession. Here Grenouille can't stop his obsession with the smell and no one can stop him, his obsession leads him to kill to fulfil his desires.

### 2.3.3 Superego

The Superego is known as the morality principle. It is that part of your personality which checks if you are behaving in a socially and morally appropriate manner. The superego has two subparts: the conscience and the ego-ideal. The conscience prevents us from doing morally bad things. The superego helps to control the id's impulses, making them less selfish and more morally. When analysing the character of Grenouille, it is difficult for us to identify the superego in the film because it does not appear clearly in the character of Grenouille. Because his great obsession prevents him from doing what is moral and appropriate for his society, he is willing to do anything to get the smell even if he has to kill. Perhaps a superego appears in the movie when Grenouille meets Laura, the beautiful red-haired girl. She looks exactly like the girl that Grenouille killed the first time, here he stops a little because he doesn't want to kill Laura as he did with the first girl he met. But in the end, Grenouille killed Laura because she woke up and saw him. That makes us think a little maybe that Grenouille has a good side with love, since he did all this for love, considering that his obsession comes from his desire to create a perfume that brings him love and makes him a likeable person, he couldn't forget the girl he met the first time and killed her so Laura reminded him of her.

### 2.4 The Concept of Psychopath

Looking at what I explained earlier about Grenouille's childhood and previous experiences, and based on the analysis of his character, it is clear that the author made his novel *Perfume: The Story of Murderer* interesting by making the main character a psychopath, a psychopath is one of the examples of psychological problems that have a great desire to get what he wants no matter what method. A bad childhood experience can create a young man who does not know his worth, is unable to recognize emotions and will not learn the basic concepts of love, respect, and regret, man is a social being who needs love

and respect, and this is what Grenouille was missing and looking for, and the people around him looked at him as being useless and that he would bring evil wherever he went. The whole society was against him, starting from his birth, his mother abandoned him, then he was placed in the orphanage he was beaten by the nanny, then she sold him to the merchant and he treated him in the worst manner. All of this made him a psychopath.

### 2.5 The Concept of Obsession

The term obsession refers to images, ideas, or words that force themselves into the subject's consciousness against their will, and which momentarily deprive them of the ability to think and sometimes even to act. Grenouille's character is the embodiment of obsession. Grenouille's obsession was depicted as giving him the characteristic of a sharp sense of smell. A person who sees the world and controls it through his sense of smell. Grenouille's obsession with preserving scents required human sacrifice and his goal was not girls, but rather to kill them for their precious scent, and this is clear evidence of his obsession with a person who is eager to preserve the smell without caring for human life, this obsession leads him to a human being without feelings, only his thirst and desire to fulfil his destiny. Grenouille did not care if what he was doing was right or wrong. He followed his obsession without thinking of the consequences of what he was doing. In the end, Grenouille decided to commit suicide, but in a strange and unfamiliar way. Suicide is the intentional killing of oneself, but always the cause of suicide is a mental disorder and this is exactly what happened with Grenouille. His psychotic disorder caused by his obsession led to suicide, he killed himself with the perfume he had created, the perfume for which he sacrificed so much because he realized that there is one thing that perfume cannot do and that is love. On the other hand, when we talk about obsession, we talk about fear. Obsession is always associated with fear, for example, the fear of losing a certain thing or the fear of death, and this was evident in the personality of Grenouille when I talked about the *id* one of the most prominent traits in Grenouille's personality represented by fear, fear of losing smell, fear of society and his greatest fear emerged when he learned that he does not have a scent that distinguishes him like the rest of the earth's creatures. This comes from his traumas and his past, this fear is represented by an intense obsession that pushes him to fulfil his desires to avoid his fear.

### 2.6 Dreams and the Unconscious Mind

Freud believed that 30-40 % of your mind is referred to as the unconscious which contains repressed memories, traumatic experiences and all primitive instincts and desires of which we are unaware. What a person harbours in his unconscious mind is expressed through fantasies, slips of the tongue, and dreams in particular, as they are

the key to the conscious mind in this novel. Where dreams play a strong role in this novel, one of Grenouille's goals was to reveal himself and find his entity, during the events of the novel Grenouille spent seven years in a cave far from France, finding his rest in this cave. But one night, Grenouille dreams that there is a mist trying to kill him, a mist that surrounds him from all sides, this mist is his smell, Grenouille wakes up from his dream, frightened and realizes that he has no smell, this thing makes him feel very afraid, everything around him smells except him. This dream was a motive for Grenouille to continue his career in making perfumes to prove to the world that he exists and to make himself his being, this indicates the psychological conflict within Grenouille, this desire to discover oneself and to find an entity in the society in which he lives. The absence of the smell of Grenouille is nothing but the embodiment of his absence in the life he lives and his inner struggle. Who am I? And what do I want? Therefore, its smell in a dream represents to him in the form of mist, for mist indicates nihilism, death and sadness. From another point of view, I think that this dream is a message to Grenouille that he will be responsible for killing himself. This mist that represents his smell is nothing but his obsession, an obsession that will lead him to death, and this is exactly what happened at the end of the novel where Grenouille killed himself with the perfume he had made.

## 3. CONCLUSION

This study has analysed Suskind's *Perfume: The Story of Murderer* from a psychoanalytic perspective. Suskind excelled in describing smells and embodying Grenouille's obsession with this character who was the product of the family and society, and how he became mentally deranged because of his past and his obsession with smells. The sense of smell was the focus of the novel, as the writer made us reconsider the direction of this sense. This novel is an embodiment of literary work and psychoanalysis, as they have a clear impact on Suskind's novel *Perfume*. The goal of psychoanalysis is to solve our psychological problems. During the novel, I was never able to sympathize with the character of Grenouille, no matter how bad his past was, he is a very selfish character, he only thought of himself how to achieve his desire and obsession without paying attention to the consequences of what he does. He takes disadvantage of what God has endowed him with a strong sense of smell, he could have been the most famous perfume dealer and the opportunity was available to him when he was working with Baldini, but his obsession and thirst for smell led him to be a killer. In the novel *Perfume*, Patrick points out the importance of the family and society.

The family and society have an important role in forming the personality of the individual, and in particular,

the largest role in the formation of the individual goes back to the family because the individual is a product of the role given to him by the family. Grenouille did not find anyone to guide him on this journey. Perhaps if he had found someone who held his hand and loved him, he would not have been a killer, but Suskind wanted to show us how far his obsession can reach and wanted to show us perhaps he is the victim of his society and his family, his family represented by his mother who abandoned him from birth. What caught my eye in this novel was the contradiction between the main title and the subtitle set by the writer, the main title "Perfume" and the subtitle "The Story of a Murderer." There is no relationship between them, as the word perfume means "pleasant, sweet smell" it denotes beauty, while the word murder means "a person who has killed somebody deliberately and illegally" Was it really what Grenouille did to kill? Or an obsession? Or a desire to create an entity in his community. Perhaps the writer wanted to draw the reader's attention through the title.

From my point of view, I think that the writer wants to convey to us a message from this contradiction in the title, which is that a person can turn a beautiful thing into something bad, as Grenouille did with perfume, so his

talent and obsession with making perfume caused him to turn into a criminal killer, and I also think that the bottle of perfume that Grenouille made it's just the blood of the women victims and their innocent souls.

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