



The analysis of Jean Baptiste Grenouille's desire in Patrick Suskind's perfume: *The Story of Murderer*

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Abstract. Analyzing Jean Baptiste Grenouille through a Lacanian lens offers a compelling exploration of desire, identity, and the unconscious in "Perfume: The Story of a Murderer." Jean Baptiste's character exemplifies Lacan's concept of desire as a fundamental aspect of human subjectivity, shaped by unconscious drives and symbolic representations. The aspect of Lacanian theory relevant to Jean Baptiste is the idea of the "mirror stage," where an individual forms their sense of identity through identification with external images. Jean Baptiste's obsession with capturing and possessing the perfect scent can be seen as a quest for self-recognition and identity formation. His desire to create the ultimate perfume reflects a longing for a perfected self, mirroring Lacan's notion of the ego ideal. Moreover, Lacan's concept of the "objet petit a," the elusive object-cause of desire, helps elucidate Jean Baptiste's relentless pursuit of scent. The perfume, particularly that of young virginal girls, serves as the object of his desire, representing an unattainable ideal that he seeks to possess. This desire is not merely driven by physical attraction but also by a deeper longing for wholeness and completion, as suggested by Lacan. The researcher try to find The reflection of Desire in the novel and show what the effect of desire it self using Jacques Lacan theory of desire The analysis shows that Desire is not only about what the subject wants, but many aspects influence the formation of a desire using Lacan's theoretical method. The representation of desire in Grenouille extends beyond conscious control, deeply rooted in his psychological condition.

Keywords: Lacan, Desire, Patrick Suskind

INTRODUCTION

Indeed, humans are incredibly complex beings, constantly engaged in mental processes to navigate their lives, solve problems, and make decisions. As Knauff and Wolf (2010) suggest, these processes involve obtaining new information, evaluating it, and using it to guide future actions. Throughout this journey, desires play a significant role, often serving as obstacles that intersect with the necessities of life and shape human thoughts and actions. According to Jacques Lacan, desire is not merely a response to instinctual needs but a symbolic impulse that sustains the very essence of human life (Sheikh, 2017). While the needs of human life are instinctive and natural, desire introduces a transformative element, reshaping these needs into objects of pleasure or pain. In this view, desire is not solely about fulfilling basic requirements for survival but involves a complex interplay of symbolic meanings, unconscious drives, and societal influences.

Lacan's conception of desire as a symbolic impulse highlights the profound influence of language, culture, and social norms on human subjectivity. Desire is not confined to the realm of biological instincts but is deeply intertwined with the symbolic order, shaping how individuals perceive and pursue their desires. This perspective offers a rich framework for understanding the complexities of human motivation and behavior, highlighting the role of unconscious desires and societal expectations in shaping individual desires and actions. The analysis of desire in literature, particularly through the lens of Jacques Lacan's theory, offers profound insights into character development and plot dynamics. (Heathwood 2017) suggests that humans perceive desire as something inherently good, and its attainment brings satisfaction, while its unattainability leads to frustration. However, desires are subjective and shaped by individual experiences and interactions with the environment.

In literary works, desires often drive the actions and decisions of characters, influencing the plot's direction and development. Bennett & Royle's exploration of desire in literature highlights its role in imbuing literary works with passion and vitality. Desire, therefore, becomes a central element in creating rich and engaging narratives. Patrick Suskind's novel "Perfume: The Story of a Murderer" provides a compelling example of desire's impact on character development and narrative progression. The protagonist, Jean Baptiste Grenouille, grapples with uncontrollable desires, leading him to commit murders in pursuit of his olfactory obsession. This portrayal aligns with Lacan's theory of desire, wherein desire is seen as an insatiable force that drives individuals to seek fulfillment, often leading to destructive consequences. By applying Lacanian theory to the analysis of Jean Baptiste's character, the researcher aims to elucidate the complexities of desire as depicted in the novel. Jean Baptiste's psychopathic tendencies and relentless pursuit of his desires exemplify Lacan's notion of desire as a pleasurable pain, wherein the fulfillment of desire ultimately leaves an emptiness or void. Furthermore, the study seeks to explore how psychology influences character development in literature, particularly in shaping complex and morally ambiguous protagonists like Jean Baptiste. Through an analysis of desire, the researcher aims to uncover the underlying motivations and psychological mechanisms driving the character's actions, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the novel's themes and messages.

In conclusion, the analysis of desire in literature, particularly through Lacanian theory, provides valuable insights into character development, plot dynamics, and thematic exploration. By examining how desire operates within the narrative framework of "Perfume: The Story of a Murderer," the researcher can shed light on the intricacies of human motivation and behavior, ultimately enriching our appreciation of the novel's artistic merit and psychological depth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The previous study is intended to assist researcher in finding and clarifying the goals that the author wants to convey. There are several previous studies that researcher have found so that they become references for researcher in carrying out this research. The first research is *The Desire of Humbert in the novel Lolita* (Rizky.S, 2019). From Bina Darma University. Rizky discusses the psychoanalysis of desire in the novel *Lolita* using the psychoanalytic theory of desire by Jacques Lacan. Through this research, Rizky revealed that there are 17 desires and 10 phases in *Lolita's* novel. Where there are 10 desire 'to

have' and there are 7 desire 'to be'. Meanwhile, there are 3 real phases, 3 imaginary phases and 4 symbolic phases. So from this research it proves that there is a feeling of love from lust by the main character.

The second research is *An Absurdist's Desire in Albert Camus' The Stranger* (Irawan & Mamik 2016). From Universitas Negeri Surabaya. Alan and Mamik analyzed the nature of abstruse desires in Albert Camus' novels using Lacanian or Jacques Lacan's theory in particular through the three phases of desire (reality, imaginary, and symbolic). In their findings, Alan and Mamik explain the process of desire for the main character to form an absurdist character in the novel *Stranger*. Of the three forms of the desire phase, the main character in the novel tends to show a symbolic structure through his views. The main character who has antisocial traits thinks that death is a symbol of freedom itself. However, it still requires social to realize this desire. Alan and Mimic succeeded in proving the concept of desire by Lacan that the desire of the subject originates from the unconscious

PSYCHOANALYSIS

The flow of psychoanalysis was first introduced by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) to direct efforts to recognize the formation of human identity. Psychoanalysis dismantles the area of human consciousness and believes that there is another area that can have a big influence on human consciousness, namely the unconscious area. Freud analyzed that the human subconscious mind plays a central role and controls the conscious mind (Sibi K J, 2020:76). Just like Freud, Jacques Lacan starts his thinking from the unconscious as a starting point for action and behavior along with other elements, this eventually became known as desire. This is the main influence on human actions and behavior because desire is the essence of human beings (Lacan, 1958:4). Jacques Lacan is known as a theorist whose views and thoughts are considered to have multiple interpretations and are somewhat ambiguous, so a deeper understanding is needed to understand his thoughts. Lacan himself often warns: "Méfiez-vous de comprendre" or in English, it means "Beware of understanding", this is enough to explain Lacan's doubts about the ability of humans to accurately interpret reality (Lacan, 2006). Lacan reinterpreted Freud's works a lot, he tries to translate Freud's work into a structural-linguistic context so that it is impossible to talk about Lacan without mentioning Freud at all. In addition, the dominant influences in Lacan's theory are Hegel's philosophy and structuralist and post-structuralist philosophy.

DESIRE

In a general sense, desire can indeed be defined as something that humans want to have or to achieve. It encompasses a wide range of wants, needs, aspirations, and motivations that drive human behavior and shape individual experiences. In a study, the emergence of human desire is something that is pleasant that arises from the thought of the target of desire. Desire raises a motivation to get what one wants and is imaginary (uncertain) (*Desire and Desire Regulation*). Desire is not only described as desire or sexual orientation, but desire can have a broad meaning. Desire also plays an important role in the construction process of a human goal. According to Hoffman in (basic processes Page 62) it is said that desire helps humans in finding perspective insights in controlling a

desire. Desire forces humans to fulfill it through emotion. So that the influence of desire allows humans to achieve a desire through various things. Need can simply be interpreted as a physiological need or in another sense as a physiological need that can be fulfilled. In human babies, physiological needs arise through the role of those closest to them, especially the mother. Physiological needs can always be met easily: when the baby is hungry he gets breast milk, when he needs warmth the baby gets a hug, etc. This means that babies always feel something full, whole, or without lack, loss, and emptiness. In this phase, the baby does not yet know the language and cannot differentiate between self and others: the baby still feels that he and all others are one unit. A baby for Freud and Lacan is a human being, in the extreme a piece of flesh that has not yet been formed into an individual or without an understanding of itself as a complete human being and apart from others. What resides in the baby are only needs and all their fulfillment. This need phase resides in the Real which is the "phase before thought" (Bruce, 2016). Language never exists in this space because there is no loss, lack or absence. There is only fullness, period. The entry of language is the rupture of the baby. A baby who was initially just a piece of meat and didn't understand anything, as if he had been cursed, entered a world that had already been filled with language?

Or in the same sense the term discourse can be used; which is symbolic. Babies who don't understand anything are given the identity of humans by adult humans. Using language means losing all qualities of fullness, this is the starting point of division.

In view of the literature on the existence of the phenomenon of desire. It is known that desire arises from human wants (Lacan, 1954) . So, in the world of literature it can be said that a literary work is a manifestation of the desire of the author himself. The existence of words as symbols to satisfy the desires of writers through literary works. Lacan's description of desire focuses on how humans depend on a language and enter into the symbolic. Furthermore, Lacan explained that there is a desire that cannot be controlled by humans themselves because this desire is separate from human desires.

Lacan writes that "the unconscious is another discourse. It is explained that our subconscious desires are governed by a linguistic system which Lacan calls a symbolic order. Desire is based on tendencies in certain cases and is more complex. Desire is the driving force in taking an action, the source of encouragement, and the guide to joy and satisfaction, and the direction to sadness and frustration (Schroeder, 2006). A strong desire acts as a motivation for a person to achieve his actions, whatever those actions are. Desire is also meant as a reality that mobilizes and is personality-oriented. To desire something is to imply it to the fundamental fantasy (Lacan, 1958:25).

Lacan's psychoanalytic view actually does not oppose the Freudian view of psychoanalysis but rather develops it. In Freud's psychoanalysis, there is an explanation that there are 3 stages in human life, namely: Oral, Anal, and Phallic. Apart from that, according to Freud, there are three elements of human life such as: Id, Ego, and Superego. In short, during the oral life period, what dominates is the Id, where humans only recognize the needs of their body. This phase occurs when humans are just born into the world. In the anal phase, humans begin to form their ego and limit desire and pleasure. This is influenced by the norms and rules that have been entered. At the phallic level, there is a super ego that contains the norms in society.

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METHODOLOGY

The research approach consists of plans and detailed procedures in order to conduct research. It starts from mere assumptions to a detailed method of data collection, discussion of data, to deep interpretation. In this case, there are several actions that must be taken so that the final results of the research can be in accordance with the applicable rules. Therefore, it is very necessary to be careful in choosing the approach used to examine a research topic (Cresswell, 2014:3). Extrinsic approach is used in order to conduct this study because it is very important to investigate external aspects which ultimately lead to the topic of this research. This research focuses on the desire that exists in a character in the novel. In the process of uncovering the desires that exist within the characters of this novel, an extrinsic approach is needed. Wellek and Warren (1949:65) reckon that the extrinsic approach becomes an attempt to interpret literature in its social context. for this research, the researcher finds that desire can be investigated through psychological matters. Furthermore, the psychology of literature approach is needed to analyze the desire in the character Jean-Baptiste Grenouille in *Perfume* novel.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to Lacan, desires start when individuals sense an absence or a feeling of something significant being lacking within themselves. This sense of incompleteness or emptiness serves as a driving force, pushing them to seek things they believe will fill that void and make them feel whole. The desired object symbolizes this elusive notion of completeness, representing something that seems like it could provide satisfaction and fulfillment. However, it remains just beyond their grasp, always out of reach despite their pursuit. Lacan's idea revolves around this fundamental notion: the things we desire

become representations of an ideal state of contentment, yet they persist as unattainable and distant goals, forever keeping us longing and striving for their fulfillment.

“Here, then, on the most putrid spot in the whole kingdom, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille was born on July 17, 1738. It was one of the hottest days of the year. The heat lay leaden upon the graveyard, squeezing its putrefying vapor, a blend of rotting melon and the fetid odor of burnt animal horn, out into the nearby alleys. When the labor pains began, Grenouille’s mother was standing at a fish stall in the rue aux Fers, scaling whiting that she had just gutted. The fish, ostensibly taken that very morning from the Seine, already stank so vilely that the smell masked the odor of corpses.” (Suskind, 1985: 11)

Grenouille's birth in the malodorous fish market symbolizes his entry into a world saturated with scents, where his heightened olfactory senses immediately manifest. The strong and varied smells present at birth provide Grenouille with an initial sensory experience that differs vastly from a typical birth setting. This exposure could potentially stimulate his olfactory receptors more intensely than usual, contributing to the development of his extraordinary sense of smell. In contrast to a sterile or neutral birth environment, Grenouille's introduction to life amidst pungent and diverse odors possibly plays a role in sensitizing his olfactory faculties from the very beginning. This early exposure could have primed his senses, leading to an exceptional olfactory sharpness from infancy. Grenouille's birth in such an environment becomes a foundational element in shaping his character. It lays the groundwork for his profound connection to scents and potentially contributes to the development of an olfactory sense that is unparalleled, setting the stage for his later unusual desire and quest for the perfect scent.

“He was just about to leave this dreary exhibition and head homewards along the gallery of the Louvre when the wind brought him something, a tiny, hardly noticeable something, a crumb, an atom of scent; no, even less than that: it was more the premonition of a scent than the scent itself—and at the same time it was definitely a premonition of something he had never smelled before.” (Suskind, 1985: 48)

In this quotation from "Perfume: The Story of a Murderer," Grenouille experiences an extraordinary sensory encounter that profoundly affects him. It highlights Grenouille's sensitivity to scents, emphasizing his extraordinary ability to perceive and interpret even the faintest traces of aromas, means he possesses a sense of smell that enables him to detect scents beyond than normal.

“He, in turn, did not look at her, did not see her delicate, freckled face, her red lips, her large sparkling green eyes, keeping his eyes closed tight as he strangled her, for he had only one

concern—not to lose the least trace of her scent.” (Suskind, 1985: 53)

Grenouille's need to collect scents isn't just something he wants or decides on. It's more like a strong feeling inside him that pushes him to do it, almost like an instinct he can't control, not just something he thinks about logically. Grenouille is so focused on getting the girl's scent that he doesn't really think about her as a person. Even while he's harming her, his main concern is keeping her smell. This shows how he doesn't care about her feelings or who she is; he just wants that scent really badly.

Indeed, in the context of the statement provided earlier, there are several aspects that influence the classification of desire as a driving force for Jean Baptiste Grenouille's life in "Perfume: The Story of a Murderer" by Patrick Suskind. Such as :

- a. Early Life and Instinctual Connection to Scents
- b. Unconscious Drives Steering Actions
- c. Representation of Desire Beyond Conscious Control

In Patrick Süskind's "Perfume: The Story of a Murderer," the character of Jean-Baptiste Grenouille serves as a captivating embodiment of desire, intricately woven throughout the narrative in various forms, each unveiling a complexity of his yearnings and obsessions.

Grenouille's life journey, marked by an innate and instinctual connection to scents, symbolizes an essential component of his object of desire. From his birth in the malodorous fish market, where his olfactory senses were immediately sharpened, to his relentless pursuit of the perfect scent, Grenouille's early life shapes his instinctual connection to aromas. Furthermore, the novel vividly portrays Grenouille's unconscious drives steering his actions. His neglected childhood, devoid of nurturing and family connections, creates an internal emptiness that drives his unconscious desires for fulfillment and completeness for his own identity. This lack of emotional nurturing becomes a foundational element in the formation of Grenouille's desires, manifesting in his obsessive pursuit of scents as a means to fill the existential emptiness within him. The representation of desire in Grenouille extends beyond conscious control, deeply rooted in his psychological condition.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Patrick Süskind masterfully illustrates how desire intricately weaves through Jean-Baptiste Grenouille's character in "Perfume: The Story of a Murderer." Grenouille's instinctual connection to scents, unconscious drives steering his actions, representation of desire beyond conscious control, neglected childhood, and relentless quest and symbolism of scents collectively highlight the multi-dimensional nature of desire's effects on an individual's psyche and actions. Grenouille's pursuit ultimately leads to his own isolation and a haunting depiction of the consuming and destructive power of unfulfilled desires. It also serves as a cautionary exploration of the consuming and destructive nature of unchecked obsessions. It showcases the dangers of wanting something that can't be satisfied, making Grenouille feel alone, disconnected, and morally troubled. His character vividly demonstrates how strong desires, when

uncontrolled, can create complex problems, making us think about the limits, effects, and moral side of wanting things deeply.

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