

Passion and desire,
othello by william
shakespeare,
perfume by patrick
suskind an...

[Literature](#), [Character](#)



Consider the themes of passion and desire in *Atonement* by Ian McEwan, *Othello* by William Shakespeare and *Perfume* by Patrick Süskind.

Fascinated by different passions and how people are driven by different passions, I am able to study this through different literature texts. The three characters I am going to study are 'Briony' in the novel *Atonement* by Ian McEwan, first published in 2001, but set in 1934-1999, 'Iago' in the play *Othello* by William Shakespeare, first viewed by an audience in 1604, and finally 'Grenouille' in the novel *Perfume* by Patrick Süskind, first published in 1985 and set in 18th century France. Since that all three texts are set in different times and by different writers, this will effect the opinion of both a modern audience and an audience of the time it was written. Each character displays desires to control others around them, in 'Othello' and 'Perfume' to the extent of death for their passion. We see this desire to control in 'Atonement' with Briony almost as soon as we are introduced to her in the novel, "Her straight-backed dolls in their many roomed mansion appeared to be under strict instruction not to touch the walls" (P5. L6). This behaviour of Briony from a young age shows her desire to control others; everything around her is ordered and complete. The use of "straight-backed" in my opinion gives the reader a sense of fear of Briony knowing that she will always have control over not only the characters, but also you as the audience. I think that mansion could also be seen as a metaphor for her own house, thus reflecting her desire to control her family and the people who live with her. Briony's desire to control people is a continuous and dominant theme throughout the book. In the final part, Briony admits to not having an alcoholic drink, "I drank green tea" (P355. L13). This tells the reader that

even in her older age, she doesn't want to lose control by getting drunk and missing out on vital information. On the other hand, green tea has been subjected to many scientific studies due to its proposed long-term health benefits. The irony in this is that Briony is slowly dying and therefore it will give her no benefits in prolonging her life. I think that this is a way of Briony physiologically thinking that this will make her memory last longer. We see similar demanding behaviour in *Perfume* where Grenouille hassles Baldini to be able to work for him, "It was not a spoken as a request, but as a demand... hissed out in a reptile fashion" (P74. L19). The use of the onomatopoeia emphasises this demand. I think that it makes Grenouille sound angry and frustrated, which reflects the fact that animals use this as a defence mechanism. We see this animalistic behaviour in *Othello* with Iago where he describes his plans as a complex web, "With as little as a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly Cassio" (A2. S1. L168). This I think is a metaphor for Iago's plans; the web is being used to catch his prey, i. e. Othello. This animalistic imagery is projected from Iago onto the other characters around him. Othello begins to mimic this behaviour, "Exchange me for a goat" (A3. S3. L183) and even Emilia matches Iago's language where she says that she will "play the swan, And die in music" (A5. S2. L245). Iago's actions are driven by a desire to control people and his desire for entertainment and his overpowering jealousy of Othello. It is possible that Iago has his own passion for Desdemona referring to the couple as an "old black ram is tupping your white ewe!" (A1. S1. L87), where Othello is gaining what Iago himself desires. The use of "ram" is the first hint to Othello's age and I believe that the contrast of black and white emphasises Desdemona's innocence and

thus Iago uses this to project Othello as being possessed by witchcraft. The themes of sexual passion are displayed throughout all three characters. In *Atonement*, we see Briony's sexual innuendo in her description of the fountain, "blow through his conch a jet only two inches high, the pressure was so feeble" (P18. L17). This description in my opinion is a way of Briony telling the audience that her past sex life has been "feeble", and thus telling the audience that she is potentially sexually frustrated, hence foreshadowing the following events in the novel. She also does this in chapter thirteen where she is imagining how she might find the twins dead in the pond. Ironically, she describes the situation very sexually by including language like "swell", "spread", "collided" and "smooth" (P156. L14-17) suggesting that she gets a greater pleasure from describing her story. This shows that she actually has no interest in the lives of her cousins, but only the drama of the situation that she can manipulate "safely on paper" (P157. L22). We also witness older Briony projecting herself as a sexually desirable girl, "hot smooth little body" (P4. L7). Briony describing herself as 'hot' would be quite shocking for an audience reading this at this time. Despite this, I think that because Briony is in a transitional period between child and woman, her mother has underestimated her sexuality. In comparison, Desdemona in *Othello* is at a similar stage in her life. Her father underestimates her sexuality in misunderstanding her relationship with Othello, "Fathers, from hence trust not your daughter's minds" (A1. S1. L168). This relationship would be considered wrong as far as sixteenth century attitudes because of the subject of race. Iago's sexual passion is derived from a number of different things. Firstly, Emilia admits that she'll "nothing but to please his

fantasy" (A3. S3. L303). Unaware of Iago's proposed actions, Emilia steals Desdemona's handkerchief. In my opinion, this tells the audience that Iago gets his sexual pleasure from destroying Othello's relationship with Desdemona, rather than from his wife Emilia. He also admits that women in his eyes are simply servants, "you rise to play and go to bed to work" (A2. S1. L115). The use of the word "work" suggests that Iago thinks that a woman's only purpose is for in bed. His sexist opinion degrades women's dignity and would shock a modern day audience. Whilst Iago gets his satisfaction from his passion for secrets, Grenouille in *Perfume* gets his passion through scent, "quivering with happiness" (P45L30). The word "quivering" suggests a sexual pleasure that Grenouille gets from his love for the scent of the girl. Ironically, Grenouille has no interest in any of the girl's personalities, physical beauty and, remarkably, these sexual attractions are irrelevant to him. I think this is because he describes himself as having "merely existed as like an animal" (P45L33), and thus proving his lack of sexual desire for the girls he murders. All three characters have a passion for understanding their desires, and each do this in different ways. In *Atonement*, Briony says, "it was wrong to open people's letters, but it was right, it was essential for her to know everything" (P113. L9). This shows Briony's desperation to know everything about everyone in the household. Despite her being old enough to understand that it is "wrong to open people's letters", she ignores this in the possibility of being able to create a new story out of it. When Briony does discover the key secret for her story, she confesses, "it was what lay behind this near-joyful feeling" (P118. L4). Although in my opinion she has misread the facts of Lola's 'rape', her "

near-joyful feeling" clearly states her passion for understanding and manipulating the truth. She admits this at the end of the novel, " if I really cared so much about facts, I would have written a different kind of book" (P360. L24). I like Briony's honesty here, which reflects her statement at the start of the novel " I am what I am" (P79. L29). This is in complete contrast to Othello where Iago says, " I am not what I am" (A1. S1. L64), which ironically, yet perfectly compliment's " honest Iago[' s]" reputation (A2. S3. L330). Iago's passion for understanding grows as the play evolves, " How? How? Let's see: " (A1. S3. L393). His act summaries show the audience that he is planning his scheme as he learns more information about the other characters. At the end of Act 1, he plans his " monstrous birth" (A1. S3. L403) without stating a reason or a clear plan. Iago's plans also uncover Cassio's inner vanity when he gets him drunk to prove that he is " a man" (A2. S3. L67). I think that this is clever the way Iago reveals the other characters secrets through his many events " in the womb of time which will be delivered" (A1. S3. L370). Like wise, Grenouille hints his ultimate plan like Briony and Iago, " this scent was the key for ordering all odours" (P40. L26). The use of the word " key" suggests what Grenouille will unlock something that has been hidden, in this case the key for the perfect perfume. Baldini teaches Grenouille that perfume is created from a harmony of twelve individual scents, and the ultimate thirteenth scent. Grenouille's discovery of this final scent drives his passion to learn and understand about extracting the essence from objects, " snatch the scented soul from the matter" (P100. L3). The use of sibilance reflects Grenouille's ' hissed' manor that we previously experienced in the book, which I think reflects his dark passion.

The language of "snatch" and "soul" I feel is harsh, quick and animalistic, reflecting a kidnapping action, which is exactly what Grenouille eventually does when he claims the souls of the girls'. In each novel or play, the main characters end up driving their passion into a tragedy where the consequences of these powerful desires have significantly bad outcomes. Briony's fantasies have tragic effects on those around her. Controlling the lives of Robbie and Cecilia, she ends up living a depressed life filled with regret. Her actions stem from when Briony was a child, breaking her relationship with her family and mainly her sister, "Within the half hour Briony would commit her crime." (P156. L1). Her passion for story telling ends up becoming a "crime", putting Robbie into prison, and destroying her once close relationship with her sister. She eventually confesses, "How [her] guilt refined the methods of self-torture" (P173. L5). I think that even though Briony admits to feeling guilt, her use of "self-torture" screams for attention. She then goes on to "threading the beads of detail into an eternal loop, a rosary to be fingered for a lifetime" (P173. L6). By comparing Briony's guilt to the beads of a rosary and the physical shape of the "loop", I think that this emphasises the "lifetime" of her shame for her crime against Robbie and Cecilia. In contrast, Grenouille will never have the time to feel guilt as humans "tore away his clothes...they attacked him like hyenas", eventually obliterating him. The use of "hyenas" shows the force and violence of the consumption of Grenouille. Hyenas are skilful hunters that mainly hunt at night leaving no remains of their meal, later regurgitating hair, hooves and horns. Hyenas have also been known to eat their own kind, which mirrors how the humans consume Grenouille. This reoccurring animalistic theme I

think is a metaphor for humans consumption. Realistically the two main human desires are for food and for sex, and are the two things for mankind to thrive. The novel then could be viewed as a lesson for human's base desires and thus revealing our inner darkness. Iago's inner darkness stems from his way with words by subtly aggravating the other characters, " can he be angry? I have seen the cannon When it hath blown his ranks into the air" (A3. S4. L135). Iago plays this naïve façade towards the other characters by asking obvious questions like " can he be angry". The references to " cannon" and " blown" reminds the audience that Othello is a soldier and finds it difficult to process emotional information. Iago is eventually punished after cheating the character's minds, " If there be and cunning cruelty That can torment him much and hold him long, It shall be his" (A5. S2. L330). This is the only information we receive from Shakespeare that suggests what happens to Iago after Emilia catches him out, revealing his true colours to the other characters. Even to this point in the play we see animalistic references, " Where is that viper? Bring the villain forth. " (A5. S2. L282). The reference to " viper" suggests the pure evil in Iago. Under scientific research, viper's behavior has been studied and scientists have found that the snake can determine how much venom to inject into its prey depending on the circumstances. Their attack has also been referenced to as more like a stab than a bite. This compliments Iago's behavior throughout the play as he judges the situations he is in as he goes, determining how much ' venom' to inject and stabbing Roderigo and Cassio. In each text, I think that the majority of the audience would find it difficult to sympathise with the main characters due to their selfish manners. Briony's karma comes in the form of

a slow death, " simple nouns might be the first to go" (P355. L2). This is Briony's sense is the worst possible outcome. The obsession of writing that she heavily relies on is the thing that surrenders her passion for control. Although initially the audience may sympathise with Briony " because [she] will need continuous care" (P354. L25). The way Briony mentions this in my opinion is more attention seeking by not directly asking for pity. She then goes on to talk about how Paul Marshal and how " perhaps he's spent a lifetime making amends" (P357. L36). The word " perhaps" suggests that she is uncertain on how Paul Marshal dealt with his atonement and thus tells the reader that she has derived the story from her own imagination, just like she did with the ' rape'. In my opinion, this prevents the audience from sympathising with Briony because she it still lying about past situations to the bitter end of the novel without reason. In comparison, Grenouille acts without a clear explanation to his motives " like a child playing with building blocks — inventive and destructive, with no apparent norms for his creativity" (P39. L6). The word " apparent" could suggest that Grenouille may have a motivation for his actions, but SÃ¼skind chooses not to reveal Grenouille's thoughts with the audience because he is a very invert character. Although Grenouille has no real reason for his desires, as an audience we admire his intelligence and his amazing sense of smell which leads to his success in achieving his goal. Thus I think that this gives the reader a controversial decision on whether to sympathise with Grenouille. Additionally the use of " child" also hints Grenouille's lack of knowledge " what these were meant to express remained a mystery to him" (P26. L19) suggesting that he doesn't know right from wrong when he makes the

decisions to murder the thirteen girls. This intern provides the reader more of a reason to sympathise with this mass killer. The use of the phrase “inventive and destructive” highlights Grenouille’s originality with creating scents as well as his passion for ‘destroying’ everything in his path “in order to possess it...for his heart to be at peace” (P40. L26). This juxtaposition of ‘destruction’ and ‘peace’, I think reflects the animalistic ‘destruction’ of Grenouille’s body when ‘they attacked him like hyenas’ so that when he is dead, to him, he is at ‘peace’ as he has achieved his goal of attaining his perfume. This in my opinion is why I personally, and I would imagine many other readers, sympathise with him, knowing that he has fought his passion and succeeded. This theme of ‘destruction’ for ‘no apparent norms’ mirrors Iago’s actions, he had no motive for all that he did, but rather did them out of pleasure. We know that Iago’s passion to ruin Cassio branches from his favoured lieutenantcy over Iago’s, “Three great ones of the city... I am worth no worse a place” (A1. S1. L8-10). The fact that Cassio loses his position to Othello very early on in the play makes the audience wonder why Iago persists on punishing Othello and thus we grow to loathe Iago very early on, yet at the same time, we admire his clever wit and gift of manipulation. In all three texts we see similarities and differences that link them all together. Iago, Briony and Grenouille all have no sexual passion for their own particular sex life, but rather others around them and certain objects. Each of their passions lend them power that drive them to gain a high control and defeating everything in their path to succeed. Similarly, all three texts stop at the height of their passion where they appear to have the most control. Each text portrays the character’s passion having an

animalistic effect, (" hyenas", " viper", " swan"). I think that this suggest that when someone has a great passion for something, the actions they take to achieve their goals are limitless and so their inner animal is released in order to sustain their passion. The effect of this animal imagery lends itself to the fact that the three texts all have a consuming passion, ultimately death. I think that the themes of passion and desire are very potent and all have different ways of luring the audience into the storyline. From this, I have learnt that there is no generalised beauty, but only every individual's perspective on beauty and passion. Bibliography Sparknotes. com — Othello modern English translation The Arden Shakespeare Othello by William Shakespeare Pengiun, Perfume by Partick Suskind Ian Mc Ewan, Atonement