

Perfume by patrick suskind essay



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Throughout the novel *Perfume* by Patrick Suskind, there is an obvious use of literary devices used to describe the scents which Grenouille, the protagonist, smells, the way in which Grenouille smells aromas, as this is different to the 'average' person's scent capacity, and the relevance of the aroma, as he emphasizes those smells which have an impact in the book through a more vivid and specific explanation. This will be a comparison of two passages for the novel, one from the beginning of Grenouille's life, and one from the end, in order to obtain a comparison in the description of scents through the novel. Suskind uses devices such as metaphors, italics, and juxtaposition, to name a few, to highlight the smell or aroma which Grenouille witnesses, and apply this to the theme of the novel. However, we can see through a close analysis of two excerpts from the book, one from near the beginning and one from the end, Suskind develops the character of Grenouille through the description of scents throughout the novel as the protagonist matures.

In the first extract, is a passage extracted from the introduction of the novel. In this extract the severity of the stench is portrayed in the region of the France where Grenouille was born, Paris and the 'People stank of sweat and unwashed clothes'. In this portion of the novel, they go on to describe the birth of Grenouille. He was rejected by his mother, and left to die; however, whilst in a pile of rotting fish, he was discovered and saved. This passage sets the tone for the rest of the novel, and also describes the setting, which welcomed Grenouille into the world. The 'stench' described seems to display the dismal future which is implied to already be set for Grenouille even before his birth. This is applicable to the novel as a whole as this aids the

reader in expecting a dull future from Grenouille and setting a dismal tone for the rest of the book.

This passage shows the lack of opportunity available to Grenouille at his birth, and helps to explain to the reader why Grenouille would turn out the way in which he did, and what fuels him to make the decisions he has made based on his past, and the environment, which he is engrossed in. The second extract comes from the very ending of the novel. Throughout the novel, Grenouille had been trying to make the perfect scent, and although this involved killing young virgins, being accused of murdering the virgins, and almost being hung, he continued to strive for the perfect scent. This quote comes from the very last scene, in which, after making the perfect scent, Grenouille goes on to travel until he finds a group of people sitting by a fire. He is aware of the effects of his perfume, and yet, he puts on this 'perfect' scent he has created, leading to his death by the group of people by the fire.

Upon putting on the 'perfect' scent, Grenouille was eaten by the group of people, which had witnessed this smell. This quote takes place right before his consumption but it represents the last moments of Grenouille. In this extract, Suskind explains the reaction of the group by the fire, as opposed to the actual smell itself. This shows maturity within the text, as rather than describing the basic components of the smell, the author goes on to describe the reactions of witnesses to the scent, which Grenouille has worked his entire life to create.

The first extract is from the beginning of Grenouille's life and describes the environment to which he is born, 'the eighteenth century' where 'there was nothing to hinder bacteria busy at decomposition', while the second extract is from the last moments before the death of Grenouille. In the first extract there are simplistic literary devices used, and other literary features used are minimal and basic, representative of a child, through the simplicity of the text and basic structure.

The author uses the repetition 'stench', a seemingly prepubescent word. This repetition of the word stench adds emphasis on the severity of the smell; however, does not elaborate on the aspects of the 'stench' and the effects of the scent on society as it does in the second extract, when describing the actions of the people around the fire upon smelling the awe-inspiring smell Grenouille created. The diction used in the first text is not one of sophistication; as a child would be have speech that was not yet fully developed. This is shown through the first two sentences of the description on the people and places affected by this smell, as it is a list of common people and places rather than a detailed explanation and specific location.

The language in this extract continues to develop into more developed thought such as when Suskind explains there is no limitation to the scent. This explanation as to the limitation of the 'stench' is used not only to compare the horrific smell of Paris, but also to emphasis the severity of this smell as 'even the King himself stank'. This explanation as to the severity of the smell is seemingly juvenile compared with that in the second text, as the first text simply says what the smell is not limited to and creates a list of these things, while the second text goes on to describe the reactions to this

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smell, this is more developed as it shows the influence of the scent Grenouille has created, and the influence it creates on society. The first extract, although not as developed as the second, gradually becomes slightly more mature through the paragraph, symbolizing the growth of Grenouille through his introduction to Paris through the use of more sophisticated and comparative language.

The second extract is from the last moments of Grenouille's life, and represents the most developed speech and use of literary devices throughout the book, as Suskind continually matures his writing through the life of Grenouille in order to aid the development of Grenouille's character. The structure of this extract is very different when compared with that of the first extract. Although this extract is shorter, it consists of more developed and specific language and punctuation, such as the use of a 'rip-tide' and 'the human will itself: straight to him' to bring an idea across to the reader. The first short sentence adds emphasis to the 'awe and pure amazement' of the group to the perfume which Grenouille has created. This portrays the emotions felt by the witnesses to the work which has consumed Grenouille for his entire life, the creation of the perfect scent, and ultimately leads to his consumption by the group which witnesses this scent.

This extract shows the more mature explanation of the scent, as rather than simply describing the characteristic's of the scent, as the first extract did, this extract describes the importance and reaction to the true beauty of the scent by the group of people, showing a development of Grenouille through the writing style used to describe his life. The author uses more developed diction in this extract as he portrays the awe of the group, and the array of

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emotions they feel as they were ' drawn to this angel of a man'. The development of Grenouille through the novel is shown in this extract through the development of the emotions of the group, in a few seconds, to the perfume, which has brought Grenouille to feel similar emotions such as ' awe', ' amazement', desire, and finally rapture.

These emotions show the emotions Grenouille felt with reference to the perfume, as he strived for the perfect scent, he was in awe and amazement of the virgins, he desired to obtain their scent and their innocence, and rapture, as he killed them in order to create his life time work. The second extract can be seen as more mature and developed through the literary devices used, and the way in which Suskind chose to develop Grenouille, through his writing.

Although these extracts offer contrasting writing styles, together they represent the development of the protagonist, Grenouille, through the development of the writing style of the novel, that of Patrick Suskind; however, as he describes the scents which Grenouille encounters and enjoys, it is not apparent to the reader, until they compare an earlier extract with a later extract. Grenouille comes to be a enthralled by the scents around him, and this is shown through the slowly increasing amount of detail used to describe the scents and the way in which this description develops.

Grenouille also becomes obsessed with creating the perfect scent, which ' human would have wanted to resist', and with the success of this comes the end of Grenouille's life. The development of the literary devices and features present throughout this novel is imperative in displaying the development of Grenouille, and through this, the reader slowly becomes more enthralled

with the text, as they begin to mature through the development of the text, in a similar way to Grenouille.

Appendix of Extracts Referred to in the Comparative Essay

The first extract: “ People stank of sweat and unwashed clothes; from their mouths came the stench of rotting teeth, from their bellies that of onions, and from their bodies, if they were no longer very young, came the stench of rancid cheese and sour milk and tumorous disease. The rivers stank, the marketplaces stank, the churches stank, it stank beneath the bridges and in the palaces. The peasant stank as did the priest, the apprentice as did his master’s wife, the whole of the aristocracy stank, even the King himself stank, stank like a rank lion. and the Queen like an old goat, summer and winter. For in the eighteenth century there was nothing to hinder bacteria busy at decomposition, and so there was no human activity, either constructive or destructive, no manifestation of germinating or decaying life, that was not accompanied by stench.” (page 3-4) The second extract:

“ For a moment they fell back in awe and pure amazement. But in the same instant they sensed their falling back was more like preparing for a running start, that their awe was turning to desire, their amazement to rapture. They felt themselves drawn to this angel of a man. A frenzied, alluring force came from his, a rip-tide no human could have resisted, all the less because no human would have wanted to resist it, for what the tide was pulling under and dragging away was the human will itself: straight to him. They had formed a circle around him, twenty, thirty people, and their circle grew smaller and smaller. Soon the circle could not contain them all, they began

to push, to shove, and to elbow, each of them trying to be closest to the centre." (page 262).