

How are the protagonists of perfume and the outsider essay



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In the novel *Perfume* by Patrick Süskind, the protagonist Grenouille has this ambition to create the ultimate scent. It is this sheer ambition of his that leads him on an epic journey. The protagonist of *The Outsider* by Albert Camus is Mersault. They are portrayed as outsiders through their actions and reactions to situations. Although they are alike in difference to society, there is a clear distinction between the two characters on a more personal level. Grenouille is born into squalor.

He is the unwanted son of a fish-market worker. Grenouille's mother wished that it were already over,' this shows that Grenouille is not born out of love and is unwanted. This is different to the many as families wish to have children but Grenouille is not wanted. This could be reflective of Süskind's view that society would not accept Grenouille as he is far different to the average man. Süskind's is illustrating society's intolerance of difference. A startling point is that Mersault describes the journey to his mother's home as more of a hindrance than an unhappy occasion. I had to go up to Emmanuel's place to borrow a black tie and armband. ' Any other person would have expressed deep hurt and anguish. Again Mersault is illuminated in a light of difference, of not being like everyone else. Grenouille, is also motherless, but this time from birth.

This is because of his mother abandoning him after birth. She is beheaded, '... a few weeks later beheaded at the place de Greve. ' This would place him as an outsider in society, as he does not have a proper family. At the vigil of his mother, Mersault has the audacity to smoke a cigarette, ' It really didn't matter. This is audacious as it was as an incredibly disrespectful and careless action which conveys the image of Mersault being less than human and not

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paying proper respect to the circumstances. It could be the intention of Camus to demonstrate that in solely following our instincts or wants we can alienate ourselves from others, Mersault has done nothing wrong, but he has done something at an awkward time. He hasn't adhered to the social 'codes of conduct' at his mother's funeral. Throughout the scene in the home, the reader discovers more about this strange man and how he thinks.

Mersault complains of how bright the lights are and how he has a back ache, 'The glare of the white walls was hurting my eyes.' These are not the thoughts of a man that cares that he has lost his mother; they are the words of a man that perceives the situation as an inconvenience. This could reveal some subconscious guilt of Mersault's concerning the relationship between his mother and himself. In the following days Mersault does not act conventionally. He proceeds to go swimming rather than mourn the loss of his mother.

He meets a young woman by the name of Marie Cordona and swims with her to a buoy. After a sunny swim together he asks her to see a film. These were not the acceptable actions of a recently bereaved person. These actions present Mersault as an outsider in that way that he has subversive actions following such a great loss. Many people would go into mourning and not socialise but Camus presents Mersault as an outsider by doing the opposite. Mersault will only do something if he feels like it. This is evidence of his existentialist lifestyle.

Mersault does not know that he leads this lifestyle but there is plenty of evidence to support it. Existentialism is a philosophical movement which

emphasises individual freedom and choice. Camus intends to portray Mersault as an outsider using Existentialism in the way that Mersault would now do as he pleases and when he wants to. With little or no thought to how this would affect those around him – Mersault acts out of necessity. An example is where Mersault wants a cigarette, therefore he has it. This is strange as the context is that he has lost his mother and he is in the presence of a dead body.

Mersault treats any situation the same, with no consideration of factors that could change society's view. In this way Mersault is objective in his actions. On page 29 when asked of his mother's age at death Mersault simply replies, 'About sixty.' This would suggest a distant relationship with his mother which isn't normal, as she is the sole reason he exists. In writing this, Camus presents Mersault as having subversive relationships which do not express emotion often. Even as a young baby, Grenouille is far from ordinary.

His wet nurse complains that he consumes far too much and that he is not ordinary. The priest then takes him in. He notices how the baby doesn't smell, it has no odour. After this revelation the priest is confronted by a waking Grenouille. He then the child started to scream, '... he was about to say 'devil', but caught himself and restrained...' it is obvious that a priest would not use this word for any reason. This singles Grenouille out from the crowd as he is almost called a devil soon after birth, when you are meant to be at your purest.

It is alarming to read Mersault's response to the question of whether he is regretful for killing the Arab. Mersault replies, '... rather than true regret, I

felt a kind of annoyance. ' This would absolutely demolish any link between Mersault and the rest of humankind, in not regretting committing murder. It is an incredibly key event in the book. It enables the reader to truly understand him, and from this quote, one could say that he is not ordinary. Grenouille has an epiphany when he is in one of his foster homes.

He discovers his talents of smell. It is this talent that excludes him from the others. He is treated as an outsider of the group of children in care. They display fear towards him and do not talk to him. In conclusion, Camus portrays Mersault as an outsider as his protagonist does not act to the expectations of the society that he is in. It is not that he surreptitiously goes against society and does whatever to contradict it, it is just that he acts out of necessity and this may, or may not fall in accordance with ' accepted' social living.

Mersault is human, he does have all the characteristics of a human, but because he lives his life differently he is deemed an outsider. His sometimes antisocial behaviour acts as a block to prevent the protagonist developing through interaction with other characters which would inform the reader of less concerning the character. Sometimes the information supplied about others is in almost as much detail as all the reader learns of Mersault in the novel by Camus. Grenouille is portrayed as an outsider as he is a killer.

He is singled out quite strongly as he is committing murder and demonstrating his hatred for others. He too does not follow the accepted ways of society but kills for a higher good, to make the ultimate scent. Not only does is he a killer but Si?? skind sets out to make him outsider in his

attitude towards mankind. Grenouille often associates Man with trash and rotting garbage as he has had to escape the smell of mankind that could sometimes be as, ' ghastly as the stench of manure. ' This anti-social behaviour would single Grenouille out as he would have few relationships or contact with humans.