

# Perfume: the story of a murderer | analysis



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## The Scent of an Egomaniac

**Since the beginning of time, man has been predisposed to evil behaviours. Human nature has been perversely corrupted, specifically through the intolerance and estrangement to the different. In fact, according to Jens Kjeldgaard-Christiansen's studies of evolutionary psychology, humans have a propensity to outcast and be revolted by individuals who are morally and physically distinctive. In Patrick Suskind's, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille is frequently portrayed with predatory and non-human descriptions, which reinforces the reader's disgust and fear of him. Additionally, his extreme actions and thoughts suggest a mental instability that discourages the reader from sympathizing with him. Finally, Grenouille's apparent hatred for humans further voids him from society. Suskind's characterization allows for Grenouille to be viewed as a repulsive character, which the reader rejects and views as entirely unsympathetic.**

Firstly, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille has been fighting for his life every day since his birth. In fact, his mother abandoned him as a young child. Ever since, nobody wanted him, and nobody cared. For instance, the last wet nurse to take care of him, came running to a Priest to expel him from her care, as he had no smell. According to the nurse, Jean-Baptiste must be the child of the devil since all other babies had a scent, where he lacked one. This is the first encounter where Grenouille is described and seen as something inhuman.

Having a scent is a crucial aspect of what constitutes a human; thus, Grenouille is outcasted for being unusual. Suskind compares him to many other preying insects and creatures. Undeniably, Jean-Baptiste is likened to a tick as demonstrated by the following excerpt, " The tick had scented blood.

It had been dormant for years, encapsulated, and had waited. Now it let itself drop, for better or for worse, entirely without hope. And that was why he was so certain" (Suskind 69). Ticks use sense of smell to locate their prey, then draw its blood. Grenouille through his tick like manner, uses his heightened sense of smell to prey on innocent women. Furthermore, he leaves the surrounding people lifeless while he concurrently achieves his goals. Although the sad fate of his mother, Grimal and Baldini are not directly immediate, it is clear that Grenouille leaves a path of destruction behind him, as he continues his pursuit. This supports the notions of his great distinctiveness, and sense that he may in fact be cursed. Additionally, Grenouille is also compared to a toad as presented in the following passage, "...he collapsed back into himself, like a black toad lurking there motionless on the threshold" (Suskind 73). Again, Grenouille is linked to being inhuman, lurking in the shadows cast away from being accepted. Suskind continually compares Grenouille to other insects. His manner and appearance insinuate that something is tainted about him. The murdering of the plum lady manifests this predatory nature, and brands him as a ruthless killer. This allows for the reader to become revolted and insensitive. Another psychological study proves that the human's instinct of repulsion towards another person's physical appearance can alter how they view them morally as well (Robson, 2016). Therefore, Grenouille's dehumanization and appearance allows for him to become completely distanced from the reader, and gives reasons to dislike him.

Secondly, Grenouille's mental instability becomes evident in the latter of the novel. His obsession with smell is what drives him as a character. In fact, he

is willing to do anything, even kill others to achieve the creation of the perfect scent. Grenouille's twisted and manipulative thought process, can be revealed through his interactions with Baldini. Grenouille makes himself appear less intelligent so Baldini doesn't feel threatened. Considering that an especially uneducated creature could be so talented in his field of perfumery. This demonstrates Grenouille's cleverness; he knows how to achieve the things he wants through manipulation. Furthermore, Grenouille's psychosis becomes visible when he is in isolation for seven years, on a mountain. Despite barely moving, and barely eating, Grenouille is the most content he has ever been. During this period, he fantasizes about his creative powers, as demonstrated by the following quote, "...Grenouille the Great, while the peasantry of scent danced and celebrated beneath him, he glided with wide-stretched wings down from his golden clouds, across the nocturnal fields of his soul... he clapped his hands and called his servants, who were invisible, intangible, inaudible, and above all inodorous, and thus totally imaginary servants" (Suskind 127). The time of solitude he endures becomes self-indulgent. His dreams include visions of him drinking the scents of beautiful woman. In fact, the revolting character visions himself as godlike. After the seven years Grenouille makes his way back into civilization. In the city of Grasse, Grenouille uses the people's reliance in religion to his advantage. After stopping his "excommunication" tests, he gives the community a false sense of security. Grenouille also asserts himself that, gods and kings are not the true rulers of the earth, rather a person who possesses the most powerful scent. Grenouille deems himself far more superior, as he is the only person who comes to this realization. Suskind makes it obvious that Grenouille feels no remorse, as he's only acting upon selfish objectives. In

fact, his absence of superego is shown by the following quote, "... [Laure Richis] was still there, the incomparably beautiful flower, she had survived the winter unblemished, her sap was running, she was growing, expanding" (Suskind 189). Here, the word choice of "sap" indicates that she is only viewed as a commodity for her beautiful scent or aura, which indicates Grenouilles underdeveloped superego. He, does not have the capacity to understand or care about his terrible deeds. He also exhibits a massive egoism that he can only find happiness by creating a world in which he has control over. Thus, with Grenouille's ability to create sublime scents, and understand the power it holds over people, he ultimately gains control over humanity. Nothing in the world, outside of *his head*, gives him remotely the same satisfaction. According to a renown psychological bulletin, "Moral transgressions are often described as 'disgusting.' This linguistic similarity suggests that there is a link between moral disgust and more rudimentary forms of disgust associated with toxicity and disease." (H. Chapman, K. Anderson 2013). Here, Chapman indicates that when an individual seems mentally troubled or behaviourally inept, there is a tendency to feel disgusted. Readers find Grenouille's motives sickening because they have the mental disposal to comprehend the distinction between right and wrong. Attaining access into Grenouille's thoughts reveal the disturbed reality of his mind, which deters the reader from being sympathetic.

Lastly, Grenouille is not accustomed to social interactions. Indeed, his character is a recluse. Grenouille does not have the capacity or desire to have genuine connections with anyone, for the other characters, "... considered [him] totally uninteresting. People left him alone. And that was all

he wanted.” (Suskind 182). That being said, Grenouille’s interactions with other characters are minimal, as his hatred of people drives him away from society. However, he seems to use every person that he does encounters for his own benefit. This is first seen, when he was just born, he chose to cry out in the street and get his mother killed. In that moment, he took his mother’s life to survive. It is also demonstrated with Baldini, when his house falls into the Seine after they made plans to part ways. Again, in Grasse, when he uses his captive narrative to make people curious and kind towards him so that he can further his purpose. Grenouille only allows himself to be in the presence of other people if it assists himself. This idea is shown in the following quote: “ He had preserved the best part of her and made it his own: the principle of her scent.” (Suskind 40). He only subjects himself to this interaction with Laure to “ preserve her scent”, nothing more. His lack of remorse and connection for Laure, displays his emotional detachment to humans. After killing the twenty-three other females, Grenouille accomplishes the perfect scent. Upon the initial experience of Grenouille’s masterpiece, the city initiates in an immediate orgy. This demonstrates the true power he now holds over humans. His perfume worked in every way he imagined, yet he finds his hatred for humanity overshadows any gratification he experiences from his success. That being said, the following quote adds to this idea: “ And suddenly he knew that he had never found gratification in love, but always only in hatred—in hating and in being hated.” (Suskind 240). However, he realizes that he is happy when he hates, and when he is hated back. Grenouille isolates himself from being accepted due to his hated, and reclusive character.

Suskind's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* effectively portrays Jean-Baptiste Grenouille as a remorseless killer. In fact, the direct comparisons to inhuman creatures, makes Grenouille appear utterly disgusting. Additionally, he alludes the lack of understanding for morality and love through his mental instability. Moreover, Grenouille's hatred for humanity is the final divide from society that completely disconnects the human in him. Respectively Suskind's representation of Grenouille, leaves the reader with no choice but to see him as a menacing character who should seek a mental help specialist.

### Works Cited

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