

# Birth and death perfume essay



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The most common occurrence of death in the novel is people that interact with Grenouille for an extended period of time. This can be seen as Grenouille becoming a bringer or agent of death, it can be seen with his mother, Madame Gaillard, Grimal, Baldini, Marquis and Druot. All these people mistreat Grenouille and all have cruel personalised deaths. Grenouille never intentionally hurts any of these people but it can be said that he did not have the best feelings towards any of them.

However this bringer of death title is seen “ This was the year 1799. Thank god Madame suspected nothing of the fate awaiting her as she walked home that day in 1746”?, almost implying that Grenouille was related to her death and he was somehow responsible for it. Grimal's death also has hints of being Grenouille's fault, “ As he passed Pont Au Change, soundlessly, without bumping against the bridge piers, sixty feet directly overhead Jean-Baptiste Grenouille was going to bed”?.

The death of the characters can be seen as quite cruel and sadistic which seems to run along with the tone of the book, but Grenouille never has the intention to harm others or hurt only ever to gain scent. “ He, in turn, did not look at her, did not see her delicate, freckled face, her red lips, her large green sparkling 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”?.

However this amoral approach can be seen as a defence for himself, by removing himself of regular human feelings at this point it shields him from realising the atrocities of his actions. Grenouille seems to have no bearing over the concept of life and death, the only time the reader sees Grenouille

care about life and death is when he realises that scents have a life span, upon realising this he has somewhat of a breakdown. Birth is not a large part of the novel, however it is a very important because it discusses Grenouille's frame of mind.

And when the final contractions began, she squatted down under the gutting table and there gave birth, as she had done four times before, and cut the new born thing's umbilical cord with her gutting knife"? , the first and only real birth in the novel is Grenouilles and that helps the reader grasp at some reason why he might be the way he is. His abandonment at birth makes between love or life, which ultimately leads to his detachment from humanity. The second birth is the birth of Grenouille's ' soul', he discovers this when he finds himself attracted to the scent of plum girl.

The narrator describes this as his first birth like he is personally involved with it, using very emotive language " It was as if he had been born a second time; no, not a second time, the first time, for until now he had merely existed like an animal with a most nebulous self-awareness. But after today, he felt as if he finally knew who he really was: nothing less than a genius. "? . This section gives the first insight to the reader of the more narcissistic side of Grenouille.

Something can be said for Grenouille giving birth to the ruler of his imaginary world that he surrounded himself in the caves, because this is not the careful and precise measured Grenouille that the reader has come to know. This is a more intense version of the Grenouille the reader discovers when he kills the plum girl by the river. However this Grenouille with more power and more

compulsive style of living dies off to some extent when he realises he is different to other people.

Outside he pulled on his rags (his shoes had rotted off him years before), threw the horse blanket over his shoulders, and that same night left the Plomb du Cantal, heading south”? Suddenly decides to come down the mountain he had been living up for the last 7 years. This *grenouilles* is a mix of the pre cave *grenouilles* and the post cave *grenouilles*. The death of the main characters is often overshadowed by the deaths of the virgins that Grenouille kills in Grasse (and Paris if you include the plum girl).

The killings are very important to the shaping of Grenouille’s final character, he becomes more and more desperate for the scents of the young women. This frenzy is started off by Grenouille’s realisation that scents can die. This is unlike the tic like nature that the reader had come to expect, it expresses the most human side that the reader has seen of Grenouille yet. “ This was a most unpleasant thought for Grenouille. It frightened him beyond measure to think that once he did possess the scent that he did not yet possess, he must inevitably lose it.

How long could he keep it? A few days? A few weeks? Perhaps a whole month, if he perfumed himself very sparingly with it? And then? He saw himself shaking the last drops from the bottle, rinsing the flacon with alcohol so that the last little bit would not be lost, and then he saw, smelled, how his beloved scent would vanish in the air, irrevocably, forever. It would be like a long slow death, a kind of suffocation in reverse, an agonising gradual self-evaporation into the wretched world. ”

The killing of the girls in conjunction with the realisation that scent could die shapes the pre execution Grenouille, moving closer to the man who had power over “ The incomparable Empire of Grenouille! ”?. Laure was not the same as the other 24 virgins that he killed, “ He had never felt so fine in all his life, so peaceful, so steady, so whole and at one with himself”?.

Considering that was Grenouille only waiting to capture her scent knowing that the scent would mature soon means that he is excited to harvest it once again showing a lack of concern for the life of humans.

This is the death with the most information on it, unlike the rest of the novel Suskind uses this as one of the climax points towards the end of the novel. This takes place over 6 pages (217-223) from the moment that Laure and her father leave Grasse and the chase begins. Concurrently it has the smallest description of a death, by telling the reader “ Grenouille set to work with professional circumspection?? ”. Grenouille’s own death is the one with the most differences and inconsistencies to the other deaths, one of the reasons is because he is the protagonist and the antagonist at the same time.

This confuses the reader because they don’t know what to feel when Grenouille dies. The other reasons include; that he is the only one that’s death has not come from Grenouille but still came from humans, that he gives himself in and the fact that he is consumed. This can be seen as an allusion to the bible (which would be consistent to the rest of the book), “ Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me”. It can also be seen as the ultimate act of passion and pleasure in

lustful way, this is because it is the ultimate joining of two people to become one.