

Perfume

(i)

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PATRICK SÜSKIND

Süskind was born in 1949 to a journalist father and a sports trainer mother. He attended school in a small Bavarian village and went on to study medieval and modern history at the University of Munich and in Aix-en-Provence, France, but he never graduated. He later moved to Paris and was supported financially by his parents. There he wrote short stories and screenplays, none of which were published. In 1981, Süskind experienced a breakthrough with his play *The Double Bass*, which was performed more than 500 times in the 1984-85 theatrical season. *Perfume* is his best-known novel and spent nine years on a prominent German magazine's bestseller list. Very little is known about Süskind, as he lives as a recluse in Munich and Montolieu, France and doesn't grant interviews or allow photos. While he's won several literary awards, he's rejected most of them.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Perfume takes place during the Enlightenment in France, which is most commonly dated from 1715, when Louis XIV, died to 1789, the year the French Revolution began. The Enlightenment saw a boom in philosophical, political, and scientific study, which in turn influenced the governing and religious institutions and began to lay the groundwork to change them into the types of institutions we'd recognize as modern. It also saw the rise of the "public sphere," which allowed for greater exchange of ideas and opened every topic up for criticism. This rise of the public sphere is also associated with the rise of capitalism. Several characters in the novel are made very uncomfortable by these changes, most notably Baldini. He sees the new possibility for someone (like Pélissier) to move up the social ladder and become financially successful as a dangerous one, and is uncomfortable with the fact that due to the rise of humanism and growing interest in science, even women are reading now. Father Terrier is bothered by the philosophers who question religion, and laments that nothing can simply be right or wrong anymore. These beliefs and fears point to the anxieties of the time and help flesh out the systems that keep Grenouille alive as an infant, enslaved as a teenager, and allow him a degree of freedom as a young man once he acquires his journeyman's papers.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

There are a number of novels that explore the relationship between sense and obsession, including Joris-Karl Huysman's *Against Nature* (which is largely concerned with smell and decadence of all the senses) and Jonathan Grimwood's *The Last Banquet* (in which the protagonist is fascinated by taste). Tom Robbins' *Jitterbug Perfume* is a considerably more lighthearted exploration of the quest to create the perfect perfume. *Perfume* also shares a nearly identical first line with the novella "Michael Kohlhaas" by Heinrich von Kleist, published as a complete work in 1810.

KEY FACTS

• Full Title: Perfume: The Story of a Murderer (originally published in German as Das Parfum)

When Written: mid-1980sWhere Written: GermanyWhen Published: 1985

 Literary Period: Contemporary German Literature, Magic Realism

• Genre: Horror/Suspense, Magical Realism, Black Comedy

• **Setting:** 18th Century France (Paris, Montpellier, Grasse, the volcano Plomb du Cantal)

• Climax: Grenouille's execution, when his perfume incites an orgy among the many spectators and causes the local government to drop the charges against him.

Antagonist: Also Grenouille, arguablyPoint of View: Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

A Crooked Pinkie. According to a 1986 interview with the New York Times, Süskind slipped a family joke that his crooked pinkie finger is the reason he didn't become a concert pianist into an autobiographical sketch. This joke was taken seriously and several countries' book jackets for *Perfume* now indicate that Süskind studied at a musical conservatory.

Musical Inspiration. *Perfume* has provided inspiration and source material for a number of bands and musicians including Nirvana, Marilyn Manson, Air, and Panic! at the Disco.



PLOT SUMMARY

Grenouille is born in a market in Paris in July of 1738 to a young fishmonger. Due to the heat and the stench, Grenouille's mother passes out immediately after his birth, drawing a crowd. When she comes to she abandons her baby, but a crowd discovers the baby and his mother is arrested, tried, and beheaded. Grenouille goes through a series of wet nurses, all of whom accuse him of being especially greedy for milk. His final



wet nurse is Jeanne Bussie. Several weeks after she takes custody of him, she returns him to Father Terrier at the cloister of Saint Merri, stating that Grenouille is possessed by the devil because he doesn't have a smell. Father Terrier attempts to pay Jeanne Bussie more money to keep the baby but eventually gives in. When the sleeping Grenouille wakes and sniffs the air in a menacing way, Father Terrier is terrified and takes Grenouille straight to Madame Gaillard, who runs a home for orphans.

Madame Gaillard was hit across the face with a poker as a child and as such, has no sense of smell and doesn't experience emotions. She doesn't realize that Grenouille doesn't smell and doesn't expect him to express emotion, which suits Grenouille well. The other children attempt to murder him but eventually give up. As he grows, Grenouille catalogues every scent he comes across. He finds language inadequate to express his olfactory world, and never fully grasps concepts such as morality or goodness. At age eight, the cloister stops paying for Grenouille's keep, and Madame Gaillard sells him to a tanner named Grimal.

Grimal treats Grenouille like an animal and locks him in a closet at night to sleep. Grenouille contracts anthrax and survives the ordeal, which turns him into a valuable worker as he cannot be reinfected, and he's given a bed and a blanket. At 12, Grimal begins to let Grenouille have an evening per week to himself. Grenouille takes the opportunity to traverse Paris and track scents, and feels free for the first time.

One night, while the city of Paris is setting off fireworks in honor of the king, Grenouille catches a whiff of scent that he finds intoxicating. He tracks it to a young teenage girl in the rue de Marais, sitting in a courtyard pitting plums. He strangles her, rips her dress off, and lies with her until her scent is gone. Later that night as he lies in bed, he begins to catalogue his scents into good and bad.

Giuseppe Baldini is an elderly perfumer whose business is going downhill. He's been tasked with impregnating skins for a count with the perfume Amor and Psyche by his rival, Pélissier, and rather than purchase the perfume, he wishes to copy it. After two hours of trying to ascertain the different ingredients, Baldini gives up and decides to sell his business and move to Messina. Then he hears the servant's bell ring, and when he answers the door, it's Grenouille delivering the skins from Grimal. This is the first time that Grenouille has been in a perfumer's shop, and he asks Baldini to take him on as an apprentice. When Baldini scoffs at the idea, Grenouille says that he can create Amor and Psyche. Baldini grants Grenouille the opportunity to mix the perfume. Grenouille's technique is offensive to Baldini, but when Baldini finally yells for Grenouille to stop, he smells Amor and Psyche. Baldini, awestruck, allows Grenouille to make the perfume better and as Grenouille leaves, Baldini says he'll think about taking on Grenouille.

The next day Baldini purchases Grenouille's service from

Grimal. Grimal gets very drunk as he celebrates what he thinks is the best deal of his life. While drunk, he slips and drowns in the Seine. Grenouille sets to work creating a number of fantastic perfumes for Baldini, and Baldini's business grows. Baldini teaches Grenouille how to use the alembic to distill herbs and spices, and once Grenouille has a grasp of the process, Baldini allows him to distill other items. When Grenouille fails to create the scent of doorknobs or water using the distilling process, he falls deathly ill and is diagnosed with syphilitic measles. Baldini is distraught, as he is planning to expand his business and needs Grenouille to do so. Finally, Grenouille asks Baldini about other methods of extracting scent. Baldini explains that there are several other methods, all superior to distillation, and the town of Grasse is the capital of these processes. Grenouille then miraculously recovers.

Three years later, Baldini has risen to international fame with his perfumes and he grants Grenouille journeyman's papers and allows him to leave his service. He makes Grenouille promise to never recreate his perfumes and never to return to Paris, which Grenouille agrees to. That night, Baldini's shop, which sits on a bridge, falls into the river, drowning Baldini and his wife.

As Grenouille travels towards Grasse, he finds the purer air outside the city very welcoming, and grows more and more sensitive to the scent of humans. He begins to seek solitude, traveling only at night, and eventually finds himself at a volcano in the most remote region of France. When Grenouille realizes he's completely alone, he decides to stay. He finds a cave big enough to sleep in and a small stream of water, and stays there for seven years. He spends his days daydreaming in his **inner palace**, sowing pleasant scents during the day and sipping the scent of the girl from the rue de Marais at night. One day, Grenouille suffers a terrible dream in which an oppressive fog of Grenouille's personal smell attempts to suffocate him, and he realizes he has no scent. Disturbed and terrified, Grenouille sets about attempting to ascertain if he indeed has no scent. He discovers that he is scentless and leaves the mountain.

Grenouille encounters humanity in a small village, where his story that he was abducted by robbers and kept in a cave is brought to the attention of the marquis de la Taillade-Espinasse, who developed the theory of fluidium vitale/letale. The theory states that gases in the earth are poisonous, while gases from "earth removed" regions are healing. Grenouille proves a perfect subject for study, and the marquis makes Grenouille a subject of a lecture he gives and also has Grenouille eat purifying foods for a week and gives him new clothes. Grenouille finds that he looks extremely normal. One day, when the marquis attempts to dust him with violet perfume, Grenouille stages a fainting spell and tells the marquis that the perfume is from the earth and poisonous. The marquis contacts a local perfumer and Grenouille is allowed to use his shop to create a new perfume. The perfume Grenouille creates



is a faux human scent. He decides to test it in the town and finds that the townsfolk regard him as a normal person now that he smells. Grenouille feels like a genius.

The marquis' next lecture is a sensation, as Grenouille's perfume garners sympathy from the audience. A few weeks later, Grenouille departs the city and heads for Grasse. While wandering the city, he comes across a scent very much like the girl from the rue de Marais, and Grenouille decides he must possess this scent. He finds employment under Madame Arnulfi and her journeyman Druot, and in their shop he learns how to obtain scent from flowers using animal fat.

Over the winter, Grenouille begins to experiment and creates several human-scented perfumes for himself. He's also able to successfully create a perfume of a brass doorknob. He moves on to animals, but finds that he must kill them before he can be successful. Finally he moves onto human subjects by placing small pieces of oily cloth in public places, which soak up human scent and creates the perfume of people.

Dreaming one night about the scent of the girl in the garden, Grenouille suffers the unpleasant thought that even if he does possess her scent, it will eventually run out. He decides that to make it go further, he needs to create a mixed perfume rather than use her scent in its concentrated form. That spring and summer, 24 beautiful young girls in Grasse are systematically murdered by a blow to the head, and are then stripped of their clothes and have their hair shaved off. Terror erupts in the town, especially when it's discovered that the girls are virgins. The murders only stop after the bishop in the town excommunicates the unknown murderer.

Antoine Richis, a widower and the second consul of Grasse, doesn't trust that this peace will last, and doesn't believe the rumors that the murderer has moved on to the nearby Grenoble. His daughter, Laure, has just turned 16 and is immensely beautiful. After a nightmare in which Laure is murdered by the serial murderer, Richis decides that she must be a target still for the murderer. He immediately makes plans to smuggle Laure out of the city and marry her off, as then she'd be protected by having lost her virginity.

Richis and Laure leave early that morning. Grenouille, meanwhile, had been preparing to take Laure's scent that night. But when he steps outside, he finds he cannot smell her and panics. Druot in passing mentions that Richis and Laure left for Grenoble.

Grenouille packs his supplies and tracks the runaways. When he reaches La Napoule, he comes to an inn where Richis and Laure are sleeping. He convinces the innkeeper to let him sleep in the barn. That night, Grenouille creeps in through Laure's window, clubs her, and wraps her in his oil-drenched cloth to steal her scent. He sits and watches her for hours. At daybreak, he unrolls her, packages up the cloth with her scented oil, and leaves. Antoine Richis discovers her body later that morning.

Several days later, Grenouille is arrested. The police find the hair and dresses of the 25 victims in Grenouille's cabin and display this evidence in the church square. His trial proceeds quickly and he's sentenced to death. The parade grounds are prepared for the execution and citizens prepare as though for a holiday. On the day of the execution, the grounds fill with thousands of people, and Grenouille is brought in a carriage to protect him from a mob. As Grenouille exits the carriage, he is wearing the perfume he made from the 25 virgins he murdered, and the crowd is gripped with the thought that Grenouille cannot possibly be a murderer. The effect of Grenouille's perfume then incites an orgy. Grenouille feels like a god, but soon his glee descends into disgust for humans and he begins to faint. Antoine Richis runs to Grenouille. When Grenouille wakes later, he finds himself in Laure's bed and Richis asks Grenouille to be his son. The verdict has been overturned, and Druot is arrested and executed for the murders.

Grenouille travels back to Paris, thinking that he wants to die. When he arrives after midnight, he walks to the Cimetière des Innocents, where vagabonds are gathered. He joins the group and then pours his last bottle of perfume over himself. The group converges on Grenouille and attacks him, tearing his body to bits and eating it. When Grenouille is gone, the group is embarrassed, but everyone feels like they have finally done something out of love.

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CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jean-Baptise Grenouille - The protagonist of the novel. Grenouille possesses an absurdly keen sense of smell, no smell of his own, and an intense hatred of humanity, which combined leads him on a journey to create the perfect scent that will allow him to control humanity. He's likened to a **tick** as he's small, inconspicuous, and sucks the lifeblood out of his victims. He realizes his purpose in life when he discovers the intoxicating scent of the girl from the rue de Marais, and vows to become a master perfumer. He sees nothing wrong or strange about committing murder; he only desires to possess the scent of his victims. He learns to create perfumes conventionally under Baldini, spends seven years wallowing in his hatred of humanity in a remote volcano and his inner palace, and finally sets about creating a perfume that will allow him complete power over people in the town of Grasse, created from the scents of 25 murdered virgins. Grenouille believes that having this power will make him happy, but when he deploys his perfume, he finds his hatred for humanity overshadows any pleasure he experiences from his success. He then uses his perfume to commit suicide in Paris, destroying both himself and his powerful perfume in the process.



Giuseppe Baldini – The perfumer who takes Grenouille on as an apprentice; Chénier's employer. Baldini is very concerned with upholding and maintaining order, both in the larger world and in the smaller world of creating perfumes in his workshop. He's described as kind, although often to his own detriment, but also treats Grenouille as little more than a fountain of brilliant ideas for perfumes. He uses Grenouille to save himself from the has-been perfumer he'd become and rises to European fame with Grenouille's formulas, though Grenouille isn't allowed to take credit for his work. When Baldini exhausts his uses for Grenouille, he grants Grenouille journeyman's papers and sends him on his way. Baldini dies that night when his business, which sits on a bridge crossing the Seine, collapses into the river.

Marquis de la Taillade- Espinasse – A marquis who retired from court life at Versailles to pursue scientific discovery. His pet project is the idea of fluidum vitale, or the idea that the earth contains poisonous gases that can do damage, while places and items that are "earth-removed" (places with high elevation, or birds) are healing. Grenouille provides the perfect example of his theory in action when he comes to the marquis' attention after spending seven years in a cave. The marquis uses Grenouille to support his theory, gives several lectures, and pays Grenouille for being a research subject. The marquis eventually decides to climb the highest mountain in the Pyrenees, from which he will return a man aged 20 thanks to the healing powers of the fluidum vitale at the high elevation, but he never returns.

Laure Richis – The young daughter of Antoine Richis and Grenouille's final target. She's very beautiful, with red hair and pale skin, and Grenouille finds her scent to be even more intoxicating than that of the girl from the rue de Marais. Though her father tries to save her by arranging her marriage, Grenouille murders her before the marriage can take place and creates his most intoxicating perfume with her scent.

Monsieur Grimal – The tanner whom Madame Gaillard sells Grenouille to as cheap labor. Grimal treats Grenouille little better than a domestic animal, valued only for how much work he's capable of completing. Grenouille remains in his service from age eight to fifteen, and after Grenouille is released from his service, Grimal drowns in the Seine.

Madame Gaillard – The woman who cares for Grenouille after he was rejected by Jeanne Bussie. She runs a home for orphan children. Madame Gaillard's father hit her in the face as a child, and as such she has no sense of smell and doesn't experience much range of emotion. As such, she isn't aware that Grenouille doesn't smell. Her primary concern is making sure she can afford to die at home, but she suffers the unfortunate fate of dying in a public hospital after losing her fortune during the French Revolution.

Dominique Druot – Madame Arnulfi's first journeyman and

eventually second husband, Grenouille's supervisor. He thinks highly of himself and as such Grenouille allows him to think that he's a superior perfumer to Grenouille. He stinks often of sex and enjoys a great deal of wine, leaving most of the work to Grenouille. He's arrested and executed in place of Grenouille for the murders of the 24 village girls and Laure Richie.

Father Terrier – The monk who handles Grenouille's return to the local cloister by Jeanne Bussie. He despises technical details and difficulties and is in charge of administering the cloister's charities. He's of the belief that children cannot be possessed by the devil due to their undeveloped souls, but admits that there's something strange about the infant Grenouille.

Antoine Richis – The father of Laure Richis. He is a high-ranking official in Grasse and a learned, modern man. He catches on to the impetus behind Grenouille's serial murders of the girls in Grasse and realizes Laure must also be a target. Though he's heartbroken at her death, when he smells the perfume Grenouille creates with her scent, he is instrumental in saving Grenouille from execution and asks to adopt him as a son.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Girl from the rue de Marais – The victim of Grenouille's first murder. She is a young teenager, very beautiful, and has a scent that Grenouille finds superior to all others.

Madame Arnulfi – Grenouille's final employer; Druot's lover. A widow who runs a perfumer's workshop in Grasse, she's described as relatively prosperous and possessing sound business sense. Even after she marries Druot, she retains her first husband's last name and control of her business and its finances.

Jeanne Bussie – Grenouille's final wet nurse who is paid by the local parish to care for him. After a few weeks of nursing him she returns him to Father Terrier, insisting that since Grenouille has no scent, he's possessed by the devil.

Grenouille's Mother – A Parisian fishmonger. Grenouille is her fifth baby and the only one to live more than a few minutes. She is described as young, pretty, and relatively healthy. When she faints following Grenouille's birth and Grenouille is discovered, she's tried, found guilty of multiple infanticide, and is decapitated.

Chénier – Baldini's shop assistant. While not a young man, Chénier is young enough to entertain hopes of inheriting Baldini's perfume business following Baldini's death.

Doctor Procope – The very expensive doctor whom Baldini calls when Grenouille falls ill.

Pélissier – Baldini's rival, a young perfumer who is immensely talented and innovative. Many of his clients and customers came from Baldini in favor of Pélissier's more modern scents.





He's only ever mentioned by name and never appears in person.

Gabriel Tagliasco - Captain of the Guard in Grasse.

Monsieur Papon - The executioner of Grasse.

La Fosse – The police officer who turns the infant Grenouille over to the cloister of Saint-Merri.

Runel – A perfumer in Montpellier. Grenouille uses his shop to create his first human-scent perfume.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



GROWING UP AND BECOMING HUMAN

Perfume takes the form of a bildungsroman, or a coming of age novel. The reader follows Grenouille from birth to death through the four parts of the

novel, and experiences with him how he learns about the world, begins to conceptualize his place in it, and struggles with his identity.

Children are described throughout the book as sub-human for a variety of reasons. Religious teachings, according to the novel, state that infants are completely worthless before their baptism, and even after baptism don't understand sin. Baldini the perfumer also insists that children are simply sub-human despots, always demanding things. With these starting points, coming of age for all children entails the process of becoming not just adult but truly human. This is complicated in the case of Grenouille, however, for even though he was baptized, he never develops any sense of morality. Thus, Grenouille is never seen to be fully human in the eyes of church officials with whom he comes in contact later.

While Grenouille is obviously less than human emotionally and morally, the individuals who care for him, especially as a child and a teenager, are similarly cruel to him and others. Essentially, by being treated like he's less than human, Grenouille learns to treat others the same way. This poor treatment, along with his eventual realization that he's actually repulsed by people, not the city of Paris itself, is an important turning point in Grenouille's development and results his intense misanthropy (hatred of other people). Once he realizes that he truly hates humanity, he can begin the process of self-discovery and plot his takeover of the people he hates so much (and in the process allow himself to grow ever more detached from his own "humanity").

Several characters, including Father Terrier and Grenouille

himself, tie the passage from child to adult to the development of an adult scent. In Grenouille's case, then, he only passes the threshold from boy to man when he manufactures and then wears a faux human perfume. However, Grenouille finds himself attracted specifically to the scents from lovely girls undergoing puberty. While it's indicated that their intoxicating scents would continue to develop had the girls lived to adulthood, it's this "special time" of development that becomes the focus of the novel. Because Grenouille uses the scents of these girls to manufacture his most intoxicating and powerful perfume, Grenouille essentially comes of age and becomes the "god" he dreamt of being at the expense of, and thanks to, the 25 nearly-adult girls he murders. However, this acquisition of power comes at a price to Grenouille as well as the families of the girls, as Grenouille finds his misanthropy is still far too intense for him to enjoy his power. Rather than enslave the world, Grenouille opts to take himself out of it using his newly created and superhuman—adult—power.



POWER AND CONTROL

Perfume is, at its heart, a novel about power. It explores how people obtain power, and then how they keep it or fail at doing so. A combination of

religion and bureaucracy is introduced as the first avenue through which an individual can enjoy power. It's this combination that made sure that the infant Grenouille stayed alive in the first place. Later in Grasse, this same combination attempts to exert its power and do away with Grenouille, the serial murderer of young girls. It should be noted that in the case of the excommunication of the murderer in Grasse, Grenouille uses the people's faith in religion to his advantage. By ceasing his experiments after the excommunication, he lulls the residents of Grasse into a false sense of security.

While religion and government play powerful roles in the novel, the novel's logic and Grenouille himself asserts that the true ruler of a population is not the king or God, but scent, and more specifically the person who possesses the most intoxicating scent. Scent, as the "brother of breath," is inescapable as long as one keeps breathing. With this guiding logic, Grenouille presents the idea that while Laure is certainly a beautiful girl, the power over both men and women that she would enjoy later in life would come primarily from her intoxicating scent. This realization about how scent functions in relationship to power further supports Grenouille's belief that he's superior to those around him, as he believes he's the only one who is aware of this relationship, or indeed the only one who can even detect differences in individuals' odors. Thus, when this knowledge is paired with his ability to create sublime perfumes, it allows him to exert control over others without their conscious knowledge.

The massive extent of Grenouille's power, which is still a mystery to those around him, comes to life at his execution.



Using his sublime perfume, Grenouille is able to turn himself truly into a god, incite an orgy that leads to his release, and, incredibly, make Antoine Richis offer to adopt Grenouille as a son. However, Grenouille cannot experience pleasure or satisfaction when he achieves this goal and finds himself in possession of absolute power. Rather, he uses his power of scent to commit suicide in Paris. In death, and in this method of death in particular, Grenouille simultaneously creates an intense show of power and destroys both himself and his tool or method for obtaining this power.

CREATIVE GENIUS VS. CONVENTION AND ASSIMILATION

Grenouille is described as a wunderkind (a young prodigy), a genius who knows instinctively how to mix fabulous scents. As such, he doesn't require instruction in how to make a good perfume; rather, he only needs to learn the rules and conventions of perfumers and of people in general in order to effectively function in the world and achieve his goals. Essentially, Grenouille's creative genius is what sets him apart from other people, but it's his willingness to adapt to rules and learn conventions that allows him to function effectively enough in the world to not be written off as a monster.

Throughout Grenouille's childhood and adolescence, he struggles to integrate with society in part because others find him repulsive, but also because he's so caught up in his own olfactory world that he sees no point in being a real part of society. In this way, Grenouille begins life by differentiating himself from those around him, even before he's known by others to be a genius. He, as well as the other children in the orphanage where he's raised, knows he's different, and he simultaneously ostracizes himself and is ostracized by others because of his weirdness. This difference, born of his genius, is what leads Grenouille to an intense hatred of humanity. His disdain of the greater populace stems from what he perceives as a willingness or biological imperative to be led blindly by scent.

The way in which Grenouille acquires language, both spoken and the language of perfume, and goes on to use it encompasses his struggle between genius and convention. Grenouille begins talking late and struggles to understand how spoken language even works, since he finds the spoken word inadequate to describe his world. However, as he grows, he begins to understand that by accepting language, social customs, and the practices of perfumers, he can pass as normal in society. This epiphany first grips Grenouille when the marquis de la Taillade-Espinasse dresses him in gentleman's clothes. Grenouille discovers that despite his lack of scent and his badly scarred body, he is capable of passing as normal by accepting the conventions of how polite gentlemen dress. He continues this facade with the faux human scent, and his total facade allows him to move through society without fear of his

true evil genius being discovered.

It should be noted that at the time the novel takes place, French society itself was undergoing a similar struggle between new ways of thinking and old institutions of power and structure. Both Father Terrier and Baldini discuss this change explicitly. In this way, many characters besides Grenouille are essentially grappling with the same issues that he is. While their struggles are very different from Grenouille's micro struggles of scent and misanthropy, every character in the novel is attempting to either keep up with the times and create progress, or preserve old ideas and structures in favor of convention.

UPWARD MOBILITY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Over the course of the novel, Grenouille moves steadily up the social ladder from the lowest depths

of society to a journeyman and finally, in his eyes, a god. Everyone else with whom Grenouille comes in contact is similarly dreaming or actively working on achieving similar types of upward movement, making this type of movement a central concern to the novel. Grenouille realizes early on the importance of attaining some degree of social status, as he was born the lowest of the low. By virtue of his birth and the rules and regulations of the time, even reaching the success of becoming an apprentice after being born an orphan was a great achievement.

With the status afforded to Grenouille when he obtains his journeyman's papers, he's able to accomplish his goals without raising suspicion. However, it's important to note that Grenouille's appetite for advancement as made official by the government has a ceiling. Since his goals are purely personal, there's no need for him to climb the social ladder any higher, as his goals aren't monetary or fame-based. This ties into Grenouille's conception of himself as a god-like figure or a supreme ruler. Grenouille's state of being a god isn't achieved through titles or government but through scent, which transcends class and status.

Many of the individuals who play roles in Grenouille's life are "climbers" like he is, but they seek financial success or social recognition rather than the purely selfish pleasure that Grenouille gains from creating his ideal perfumes. Notably, a number of these individuals suffer some form of a miserable or untimely death after they're rid of Grenouille. Most of these deaths are caused by the very things that motivated the characters to climb in the first place, as when Baldini's death occurs when his shop, the fanciest address in town, falls into the river. Similarly, while Grenouille's death is a suicide rather than an accident, it's his goal of creating the perfect perfume that brings about the situation in which he can commit suicide in the way that he does.

Despite their different goals or motivations, almost all the



characters see those around them as means to an end or means to advancement. In this way, the characters are reduced to mere tools rather than considered as full human beings. This becomes apparent when Grenouille is a child, as he survives by proving useful to Grimal and Baldini. Later, Grenouille uses this way of regarding people to work towards his own goals. He actively manipulates the marquis into allowing Grenouille to create his human perfume, and then goes on to use the girls of Grasse as tools and materials to create his final perfume.



SCENT, SIGHT, AND THE GROTESQUE

While the novel's focus is on scent more than anything else, it relies heavily on descriptions of scent that are highly visual in nature. This

combination works to create a grotesque landscape, simultaneously repulsive and beautiful, that draws the reader in and pushes them away in turn.

The entire premise of the novel is based on the idea that scent is more powerful than anything else, and most importantly, that this power isn't known or accessible to the average person. Grenouille then becomes a strange combination of a genius, as he's aware of and able to manipulate this power better than anyone, and a monster, as he possesses no scent himself. Further, even after the marguis introduces him to cosmetics, Grenouille doesn't have the looks to inspire anything but disgust or sympathy, if anyone even takes notice of him. Directly opposite Grenouille, then, are the 25 girls he murders, and specifically Laure. She not only has a powerful and alluring scent; she's extremely physically beautiful as well. In this way, the murders of the girls by Grenouille can be seen as more than just murders in the name of creating the perfect perfume; they're an attempt to obtain and control something that Grenouille himself is entirely incapable of being: irresistibly appealing, both physically and in an olfactory sense.

Despite Grenouille's purposeful rejection of sight in favor of scent throughout his life, he finds that the two senses are connected, and experiences varying degrees of awe and horror at this discovery. Part of Grenouille's early fear and later hatred of people stems from the fact that, as a child, he passed through crowds entirely unnoticed. However, once Grenouille creates a personal perfume for himself, he finds that he attracts neutral attention while in public. Notably, Grenouille's personal perfume is made from a horrific combination of ingredients including moldy cheese and cat feces. The description of these ingredients serves to offend the reader on multiple fronts and heighten the sense of the grotesque.

In particular, the combination throughout the novel of descriptions of scent and sight create an almost oppressively disgusting yet fascinating reading experience, which then works to suggest a sense of absurdity and black humor. Grenouille as a child and an adolescent almost inspires sympathy from the reader, as do figures such as Madame

Gaillard, but their actions (such as Grenouille's murder of the girl from the Rue de Marais) also serve to repel and disgust the reader. One can almost laugh at Grenouille attempting to ascertain if he has a personal scent, but the consequence of Grenouille's discovery leads him down an unimaginably horrific path.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE TICK

Grenouille is described as a "tick," in that he is ugly, lies in wait without being entirely aware of what he's waiting for, and "drops" when he scents blood (or in Grenouille's case, perfume). The tick, then, represents how Grenouille is seen by the outside world (compared to how Grenouille sees himself; compare the tick to the Grenouille that exists in his **inner** palace). In a very literal sense, the comparison of Grenouille to a tick alludes to his vampire-like tendencies. Like a tick or a vampire, Grenouille metaphorically sucks his victims dry of their lifeblood in the form of both their scent and their lives, without any conception of morality, right, or wrong. Like a tick, robbing victims of their blood or scent is just what he does, and seemingly what he must do to survive.



GRENOUILLE'S INNER WORLD

Grenouille's inner world (also referred to as his fortress, inner palace, or purple room) is where

Grenouille keeps all of his scents catalogued and is a place where he has complete control as "Grenouille the Great." Thus, Grenouille's inner world can be seen to represent both how Grenouille conceptualizes himself and illustrates how he'd like the world to be. Grenouille the Great is capable of molding this inner world to look and smell exactly how Grenouille wants, a power that Grenouille seeks to gain over the outside world. Further, while Grenouille the Great's world has servants to wait on him, they're invisible and don't smell, and in the same vein, the girl from the rue de Marais features in Grenouille's world as bottles of scent to be drunk. This fleshes out and illustrates Grenouille's misanthropic view of people; he sees them as items to be used and enjoyed rather than as actual beings.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Publisher edition of *Perfume* published in 0.



Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

•• Wasn't it Horace himself who wrote, "The youth is gamy as a buck, the maiden's fragrance blossoms as does the white narcissus..."?—and the Romans knew all about that! The odor of humans is always a fleshy odor—that is, a sinful odor. How could an infant, which does not yet know sin even in its dreams, have an odor? How could it smell?

Related Characters: Father Terrier (speaker), Jeanne Bussie, Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: 233





Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Father Terrier is rationalizing to himself why the infant Grenouille doesn't smell. Note here the implication that children don't smell, but adults do; this assertion helps later to raise the question of whether Grenouille truly comes of age, as while he manufactures a human scent for himself, his body never naturally produces one. Further, Father Terrier mentions explicitly the blossoming of the "maiden's fragrance," which provides some foreshadowing for later events. Grenouille comes to realize later in life that these "blossoming" maidens possess the best scents, and possessing these scents himself then becomes Grenouille's goal. Father Terrier also equates this odor with sin specifically. This becomes more complicated as Grenouille begins to construct his final perfume, as the young women he victimizes are all virgins, and so traditionally are still devoid of sin. This raises the question of whether the maidens' scents themselves are sinful, or if the sin comes with the love that the scent inspires.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

•• But to have made such a modest exit would have demanded a modicum of native civility, and that Grenouille did not possess. He was an abomination from the start. He decided in favor of life out of sheer spite and sheer malice.

Related Characters: Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes:





Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator is describing Grenouille's first minutes of life, where his cry saved him from a death of neglect directly

following his birth. The description here begins to develop Grenouille's character as a misanthropic "abomination," even as an infant. While Grenouille doesn't truly understand his own misanthropy until he's an adult, and while Grenouille's lived experiences certainly teach him to hate people, the narrator posits here that this misanthropy was inherent to Grenouille from birth. This idea helps to further distance Grenouille from the reader, as the idea of an infant who is already malicious and inhuman is both strange and disturbing. It also makes it very clear that Grenouille cannot be saved or redeemed; this quality is inherent to him, so there's no use for the reader to hope that someone or something might encourage Grenouille to experience or act in the name of love.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

•• With words designating non-smelling objects, with abstract ideas and the like, especially those of an ethical or moral nature, he had the greatest difficulty. He could not retain them, confused them with one another, and even as an adult used them unwillingly and often incorrectly...

Related Characters: Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: 🚌







Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator is describing how Grenouille learned to speak and acquired language. It was a slow process, as only words that denoted objects that smelled held Grenouille's interest. The problem of language follows Grenouille throughout his life. While he does eventually learn enough spoken language to function in the world, he never becomes a great conversationalist, because people don't hold interest for him. He later learns the language of perfume and learns how to write out formulas and measure ingredients, but he only learns these skills because he understands that possessing these skills will allow him to pass for a normal, conventional perfumer. This is how Grenouille decides to learn things throughout his life: only if it truly interests him, or only if it will allow him tools to advance his goals and interests or proves absolutely necessary for his existence.



Part 1, Chapter 8 Quotes

•• Grenouille knew for certain that unless he possessed this scent, his life would have no meaning... the mere memory, however complex, was not enough.

Related Characters: Girl from the rue de Marais, Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: (23)







Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Grenouille has discovered the girl from the rue de Marais, who possesses an intoxicating scent, and he decides that he must possess the scent himself by killing her. While it's been obvious from the beginning that Grenouille is strangely obsessive about scent, this takes that obsession to a sinister extreme. His disregard for humans and life itself becomes apparent, as he later suffers no remorse nor even acknowledges that he murdered the girl.

Further, this event becomes a turning point for Grenouille and his life. The discovery of this scent allows him to begin to plan for his future and starts him on his guest for selfknowledge.

•• 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.

Related Characters: Girl from the rue de Marais, Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: 🔠 🌘







Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Grenouille is in bed after killing the girl from the rue de Marais. It becomes obvious that killing the girl and possessing her scent is a turning point for Grenouille, as it catapults him onto his journey of self-discovery. It provides him with a higher power, essentially, with which to organize both his life and his vast mental collection of scents. His conception of himself as a genius (and thus set apart from the general human population) also begins to develop Grenouille's misanthropy as something conscious, and that he's even proud of. While Grenouille asserts that everyone

will love both this girl and, later, Laure for their intoxicating scents, Grenouille alone can understand how their scents work and how to harness them for his own use.

Part 1, Chapter 11 Quotes

•• The man was indeed a danger to the whole trade with his reckless creativity. It made you wish for a return to the old rigid guild laws. Made you wish for draconian measures against this nonconformist, this inflationist of scent.

Related Characters: Giuseppe Baldini (speaker), Pélissier

Related Themes: (1)









Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

Baldini is on a mental rant against Pélissier, a rival perfumer, but he also rails against the changing times in which he finds himself. Here, Baldini specifically recalls the guild laws of the middle ages, which set out strict guidelines for the creation of perfumes. Following those guidelines, presumably, Pélissier wouldn't be able to access the success he enjoys in the mid-18th century, and Baldini would still be considered a successful and well-established perfumer.

This passage also highlights Baldini's love of rules and regulations in general. He later insists that Grenouille learn to write out formulas and measure ingredients, which allows Baldini to feel more in control of Grenouille's process (which Baldini would, interestingly, surely describe as "nonconformist" as well). Baldini isn't interested in creating new things, necessarily; rather, he holds tight to the craftsman origins of the perfume profession and guards these traditions carefully, as they provide comfort and meaning in these quickly changing times.

• Man's misfortune stems from the fact that he does not want to stay in the room where he belongs. Pascal said that. And Pascal was a great man, a Frangipani of the intellect, a real craftsman, so to speak, and no one wants one of those anymore.

Related Characters: Giuseppe Baldini (speaker)

Related Themes:





Page Number: 55



Explanation and Analysis

Baldini is considering the changing times in which he finds himself, and he feels threatened by man's desire for progress, speed, and discovery. Baldini's entire monologue sets the reader up to understand him as someone who is very interested in convention and conformity. He takes comfort in rules and regulations, as they offer him power and control. Baldini isn't interested in breaking rules for the sake of invention; he'd rather things just not change. When Baldini takes in Grenouille, however, the reader watches Baldini slowly but surely embrace "leaving the room" via Grenouille's creativity. While Baldini certainly molds and channels this creativity and achieves success by working within existing rules and regulations, Grenouille's presence helps shift Baldini towards a more artistic way of being. However, when Baldini dies after Grenouille's departure, the reader is asked to consider if the responsibility lies with Grenouille as a sort of bringer of death, or Baldini's rejection of true artistry is to blame.

Part 1, Chapter 14 Quotes

•• But he at once felt the seriousness that reigned in these rooms, you might almost call it a holy seriousness, if the word "holy" had held any meaning whatever for Grenouille...

Related Characters: Giuseppe Baldini, Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes:







Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

Grenouille is delivering skins from Grimal to Baldini and is now inside a perfume shop for the first time in his life. Here, the reader is asked to consider Grenouille's relationship to religion itself and religious ideas in general. While Grenouille is said to have never understood words that signify non-concrete ideas, this alludes to the idea that he has some understanding of the ideas themselves if not the language that describes them.

This also begins to draw a connection between scent, religion, and power. In Baldini's shop, Baldini (or Grenouille) has the power and ability to create scents. While Grenouille doesn't begin creating his most powerful scents until years after this moment, it's in Baldini's shop where he learns the language and the processes through which he can manufacture this power.

• 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.

Related Characters: Giuseppe Baldini, Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: (23)





Related Symbols: (**)



Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Grenouille is in Baldini's perfume shop for the first time and is possessed with the thought that he belongs there. The narrator likens Grenouille to a tick throughout the novel, most often when Grenouille is a child and a young teenager. By comparing Grenouille to a tick, the narrator is able to build the narrative that Grenouille is not only ugly and a parasite of society, but functions and makes decisions based on little more than instinct and base desire. In this case, we see that Grenouille understands immediately and instinctively that he can learn everything he needs to know from Baldini and working in a perfume shop, and the skills he could learn there will allow him to fulfill his desires. Further, the comparison helps dehumanize Grenouille in the eyes of the reader. This creates a push-pull effect, as the reader is drawn towards empathizing with Grenouille in one moment, and in the next is seeing him as a parasitic, evil tick.

• Your grandiose failure will also be an opportunity for you to learn the virtue of humility, which—although one may pardon the total lack of its development at your tender age—will be an absolute prerequisite for later advancement as a member of your guild and for your standing as a man, a man of honor, a dutiful subject, and a good Christian.

Related Characters: Giuseppe Baldini (speaker), Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: 🔠







Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Baldini has decided to allow Grenouille to try and create a copy of the perfume "Amor and Psyche," believing full well that Grenouille will fail. This passage sets out a number of



Baldini's misconceptions about Grenouille. While Baldini is certainly correct that Grenouille experiences nothing close to humility (and never will), he incorrectly assumes that Grenouille desires to advance in the way that Baldini lays out here. Grenouille comes to understand that obtaining journeyman's papers through the guild is necessary for carrying out his goals, but he doesn't wish to be a famous perfumer per se. Honor is also a specific word that Grenouille doesn't understand, and will never possess. Finally, Grenouille also doesn't understand the ideas of religion or what it means at all to be a "good Christian." Rather, Grenouille conceptualizes himself as a god and a supreme ruler.

Despite Baldini's gross mischaracterization of Grenouille, the fact that he does so provides Grenouille with an easy cover later. By pretending to want all these things that Baldini lays out here, Grenouille can deflect attention from his true goals, which would certainly horrify anyone, including Baldini.

•• ... [he] looks just like one of those unapproachable, incomprehensible, willful little prehuman creatures, who in their ostensible innocence think only of themselves... if one let them pursue their megalomaniacal ways and did not apply the strictest pedagogical principles to guide them to a disciplined, self-controlled, fully human existence.

Related Characters: Giuseppe Baldini (speaker), Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: (23)



Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

Baldini is watching as Grenouille sets about creating his copy of Amor and Psyche. Grenouille is a young teenager at this point, and Baldini begins to think of Grenouille as much younger and indeed, as a child. This passage as a whole highlights the novel's general portrayal of children as subhuman, or in this case, pre-human. By casting children as less than human, growing up and coming of age logically entails becoming truly human. In particular, the thoughts Baldini experiences about children here call Grenouille's later "coming of age" into question. While Grenouille does live to the age of 25, he remains selfish, willful, and is a menace to society until his death. By comparing Grenouille's character traits as an adult to what the novel posits constitutes adulthood, the reader is asked to question whether or not Grenouille truly comes of age, or if he

remains a child (or some other non-human entity) in an adult's body.

Part 1, Chapter 17 Quotes

•• He believed that by collecting these written formulas, he could exorcise the terrible creative chaos erupting from his apprentice.

Related Characters: Giuseppe Baldini, Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes:





Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

Baldini has forced Grenouille to allow him to write down formulas for the perfumes Grenouille creates. Baldini finds a great deal of comfort in enforcing rules and order, and dislikes unrestricted creativity and invention. Thus, he finds Grenouille's ability to mix perfumes without measuring them to be both terrifying and miraculous in turn. By writing down the formulas, Baldini begins to exert some control over Grenouille's chaotic creative process. This is also the primary way in which Baldini uses Grenouille for his own gain. While Baldini certainly could've allowed Grenouille free rein to create as he so chose, getting the formulas in writing insures that Baldini can still recreate the perfumes in case something happens to Grenouille. Baldini cares little for Grenouille's desires or even his well-being, but will do whatever it takes to make sure he can keep using Grenouille's genius for his own gain.

• But by using the obligatory measuring glasses and scales, he learned the language of perfumery, and he sensed instinctively that the knowledge of this language could be of service to him.

Related Characters: Giuseppe Baldini, Jean-Baptise

Grenouille

Related Themes: (A)







Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Grenouille has just made the move to work for Baldini as an apprentice, and the narrator is describing how Grenouille



acquires the language of perfume. Remember that Grenouille doesn't need this language at all to make exceptional perfumes; his superhuman sense of smell is enough for him. However, to exist and move freely within the world and not raise suspicion, he needs to know this language, as it allows him to pass as normal. Grenouille understands that in order to accomplish his goals, he must exist alongside the rest of humanity.

The acquisition of the language of perfume mirrors his process of acquiring spoken language. Grenouille realizes that it's a necessary thing he must learn, but he only realizes this as it becomes extremely obvious, and only because ignorance of it might hinder his personal goals.

Part 2, Chapter 27 Quotes

•• ... he clapped his hands and called his servants, who were invisible, intangible, inaudible, and above all inodorous, and thus totally imaginary servants...

Related Characters: Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: (23)







Related Symbols:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator is describing Grenouille's evening activities in his imaginary "inner fortress." While Grenouille's inner empire provides insight into what Grenouille wishes the world would be (odorous in a way he finds pleasing; himself as the god or ruler), the particulars of Grenouille's servants indicate how Grenouille feels about humanity. Notably, Grenouille wishes to be served. He wishes for someone else to fetch him things and perform menial tasks. However, in his perfect world, these people simply perform tasks without actually existing in any way. This indicates just how intense Grenouille's self-involvement is, as he cannot even bring himself to imagine what actual servants in the real world might be like (and would presumably be displeased by their human scent). While Grenouille is eventually able to recreate much of his fantasy world in real life, these servants and the existence of humanity in this particular way stand as one thing that he's never able to bring about.

• That odor had been the pledge of freedom. It had been the pledge of a different life. The odor of that morning was for Grenouille the odor of hope. He guarded it carefully. And he drank it daily.

Related Characters: Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes:







Related Symbols:



Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator is describing Grenouille's daily "debaucheries" he takes part in within his inner palace, which include drinking bottles of scent collected in the past. Returning to the time this drink was collected (Grenouille's first walks around the city without permission while employed by Grimal), the reader begins to understand how important freedom is to Grenouille. While this desire for freedom is entirely related to Grenouille's misanthropy, it also functions to humanize him for the reader. Freedom is a common desire, and the circumstances of Grenouille's employment were inarguably inhumane and cruel. Thus, by indicating that this sense of freedom is essential to Grenouille, both as a teenager and now as an adult, the reader is asked to consider whether he is a true "abomination." and has been from the start, or if he learned to be that way through his inhumane treatment as a child.

Part 2, Chapter 29 Quotes

•• What he now felt was the fear of not knowing much of anything about himself... He could not flee it, but had to move toward it.

Related Characters: Jean-Baptise Grenouille



Related Symbols:



Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

In his cave, Grenouille has just experienced a terrifying dream in which he was nearly suffocated by his own nonexistent body odor. After thinking about it for a while, he feels this new fear—that he has no self-knowledge. This realization then begins to alter Grenouille's planned path



from one of simple domination of scent to one in which he seeks to understand something about himself and figure out his place in the world. This places Grenouille's later development of faux human perfumes as a marker of adulthood and coming of age, as this moment suggests the idea that Grenouille is less than human, and definitely less than adult, because he doesn't possess a personal scent.

Part 2, Chapter 30 Quotes

• "You will realize for the first time in your life that you are a human being; not a particularly extraordinary or in any fashion distinguished one, but nevertheless a perfectly acceptable human being."

Related Characters: Marquis de la Taillade- Espinasse (speaker), Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes:







Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

Following Grenouille's departure from the volcano, he is taken in by the marquis and provided with clothes and makeup, which the marquis is here offering Grenouille a mirror to look at.

Notice the language used here, specifically the use of "human." By following the logic of the novel, coming of age and becoming an adult naturally entails becoming fully human, as children are treated as less than- or sub-human. This moment, then, stands as a stepping-stone in Grenouille's quest to come of age and become human, as this is the first time another person calls to his attention that he is, indeed, human. Grenouille's process of coming of age isn't quite complete, however, as for Grenouille's personal journey to adulthood, discovering his personal scent is a necessary part of the equation.

Part 2, Chapter 32 Quotes

P For people could close their eyes to greatness, to horrors, to beauty, and their ears to melodies or deceiving words. But they could not escape scent. For scent was a brother of breath... He who ruled scent ruled the hearts of men.

Related Characters: Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes:







Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

Grenouille is sitting in a church in Montpellier after successfully testing his human perfume. He realizes now that he has the power to control people through scent. This passage gets at the underlying premise of the novel: that scent is the most powerful sense of all, and most importantly, that it is inescapable and works subconsciously. This explains both Grenouille's power, as well as the draw of the girl from the rue de Marais and Laure Richis. The girls' scents work subconsciously to make people love them and find them exceptionally beautiful, and Grenouille specifically states that while the girls are indeed lovely, what truly is at work is their scents. Later, we also see the truth of this idea when Grenouille begins manufacturing different scents for different purposes. He's able to convince women to take pity on him and offer him food scraps, or to convince people to ignore him, simply by changing his perfume, further supporting this basic premise of the novel.

Part 3, Chapter 35 Quotes

No, he wanted truly to possess the scent of this girl behind the wall; to peel it from her like skin and to make her scent his own. How that was to be done, he did not know yet. But he had two years in which to learn. Ultimately it ought to be no more difficult than robbing a rare flower of its perfume.

Related Characters: Laure Richis, Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes:







Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

Having just arrived in Grasse, Grenouille catches the scent of Laure Richis, whose scent is very similar to that of the girl from the rue de Marais. Grenouille then vows to possess this scent. While this stands primarily as a moment of foreshadowing, it also provides evidence of Grenouille's maturation and scientific mind, as he chooses not to murder Laure and rob her of her scent immediately. Essentially, he conceptualizes his last murder as childish and clumsy, which sets this one up to be significantly more sophisticated. While he doesn't yet know how to truly possess this scent, he's conducted precise experiments before and certainly has the ability to do the same again.

Further, the language here develops both Grenouille's misanthropy and the generally grotesque feeling of the



novel. The description of peeling scent from the girl "like skin" creates a sense of horror, while his comparison of taking Laure's scent to taking that of a flower indicates how little he thinks of humans. He doesn't regard this girl as a valuable individual; he sees her only as a scent that exists for his pleasure and possession.

Part 3, Chapter 38 Quotes

•• What he coveted was the odor of certain human beings: that is, those rare humans who inspire love. These were his victims.

Related Characters: Laure Richis, Girl from the rue de Marais, Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: (4)







Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator has finished describing Grenouille's process of learning how to take scent from humans, and this final statement sets the stage for Grenouille's future endeavors in working with human scent. Remember that Grenouille's first cry as an infant was a cry for life but against love. Here as an adult, by robbing young girls of their lives and robbing those around them of inspirations of love, Grenouille further brings this relationship between life and love into question. Undeniably, Grenouille doesn't understand love. He never feels it or experiences it. Rather, his misanthropy is what leads him to embark upon this endeavor to steal from these girls their love-inspiring scents. As love is something that he cannot actually possess in a meaningful way, he must then deprive everyone of love and turn these unique scents into a perfume that allows him to exert control over the populace.

Part 3, Chapter 40 Quotes

•• The farmer who discovered her was so disconcerted by the gruesome sight that he almost ended up a suspect himself, when in a quivering voice he told the police lieutenant that he had never seen anything so beautiful—when he had really wanted to say that he had never seen anything so awful.

Related Characters: Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: (1)



Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

Grenouille has just committed his first murder in Grasse. He murders young girls by clubbing them on the head, and the girls are found naked and with their heads shaved. The farmer's difficulty upon discovering the girl gets at one of the primary devices of the novel, which is exposing the often fragile relationship between beauty and horror. This relationship creates a push and pull effect on the reader throughout the novel, in which one moment the reader is drawn into a description of something fascinating and beautiful, and the next moment is repelled when it takes a turn for the grotesque or violent. The effect is that the reader is both roped into empathizing with Grenouille in light of his mistreatment, and being repulsed by his deeds and thoughts.

Part 3, Chapter 48 Quotes

•• He was also disgusted by the murderer. He did not want to regard him as a human being, but only as a victim to be slaughtered.

Related Characters: Jean-Baptise Grenouille, Laure Richis, Antoine Richis

Related Themes: (4)









Page Number: 232

Explanation and Analysis

Following Laure's murder, Grenouille is arrested, tried, and sentenced to a gruesome death. While Grasse prepares for the execution as if for a festival, in his grief Richis experiences only sadness, failure, and disgust at the murderer.

While Richis is developed primarily as one of the "good guys" in the novel, Süskind also draws a number of comparisons between Richis and Grenouille. In this instance, Richis wishes to be able to regard Grenouille in the exact same way that Grenouille thinks of his victims—as something less than human, a creature that needs to die in order to accomplish a goal.

Part 3, Chapter 49 Quotes

•• He was in very truth his own God, and a more splendid God than the God that stank of incense and was guartered in churches.



Related Characters: Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: 🔐 🚺





Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

Grenouille has just incited an orgy at his execution with his perfume, and finds himself the most powerful person for miles around. For many characters in the novel, God and religion in general are the most powerful entities they believe in. Grenouille is consistently put in opposition to the church, however, as education in the church is believed to instill morals in a person—something that never happened for Grenouille. And though Grenouille doesn't necessarily understand the idea of God, he does understand the idea of a god in that it is all-powerful, and he also makes a connection several times between the smell of incense in churches and God's power. While Grenouille comes to detest incense, particularly when he notices that it isn't pure, he finds his own god-like power in the overwhelming influence of his personal incense, which is the perfume he created with the odors of the 25 virgins of Grasse.

Part 4, Chapter 51 Quotes

•• And though his perfume might allow him to appear before the world as a god—if he could not smell himself and thus never know who he was, to hell with it, with the world, with himself, with his perfume.

Related Characters: Jean-Baptise Grenouille

Related Themes: 🔠





Page Number: 252

Explanation and Analysis

Grenouille is traveling back to Paris to die after using his perfume in Grasse. His experience in Grasse was supposed to be a fulfilling one in which he experienced immense power and domination over the town's residents, but instead, he finds himself very disillusioned. We see here that while Grenouille wanted some combination of love or hate from his perfume, what he truly wanted was to understand himself. As Grenouille's understanding of the world is so intensely tied up in how he experiences it in terms of scent, Grenouille feels he cannot understand himself unless he can understand how he smells. Thus, as Grenouille both lacks personal scent and wasn't able to create a perfume that allowed him to understand his lack of scent, he gives up on life and the world. Further, this indicates that even though Grenouille comes of age in some ways, because he's deprived of this very important way of knowing himself, he never fully completes the process of becoming an adult.

●● They were uncommonly proud. For the first time they had done something out of love.

Related Characters: Jean-Baptise Grenouille





Page Number: 255

Explanation and Analysis

When Grenouille returns to Paris, he uses the entire bottle of his perfume to commit suicide. The people referenced here, a group of prostitutes and thieves, are suddenly inspired to dismember and eat Grenouille when they smell his perfume. This, then, is final line of the novel, which drives home the importance of Grenouille's relationship to love (and the novel's perception of love and passion in general). Grenouille never experienced interpersonal love himself, but targeted those individuals who inspired love in others (and whose scent inspired a kind of love in him). Consequentially, the perfume he created from the scents of his victims was capable of inspiring love in anyone who smelled it. And though Süskind clearly isn't advocating for murder and cannibalism, he does seem to suggest that the kind of purity of passion inspired by Grenouille's final perfume does have its own value. The people who kill him are even proud of their murderous act afterward, because they feel fulfilled in a certain way—they have embraced the deepest level of their humanity.





SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

The narrator begins by saying that the story that will be told in the novel is that of Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, one of the most "gifted and abominable personages" of 18th-century France. The narrator continues that his name has been forgotten (unlike figures such as Napoleon Bonaparte) not because he was any less awful than any of the other abominations of the era, but because he dealt in scent, which doesn't leave a trace.

The idea that scent leaves no trace will be an important idea throughout the novel, and given later events, the reader will be asked to question the actual truth of this. Grenouille is introduced from the start as an abominable figure, which drives the reader away from identifying with him to begin with.





In 18th-century France, everything stank disgustingly in a way the narrator deems inconceivable to the modern person. Rich or poor, summer or winter, every person and every place, particularly Paris, smelled horrible. However, the Cimetière des Innocents, which housed 800 years' worth of bodies from the surrounding parishes and hospitals, stank the worst.

The cemetery mentioned here will be an important location in the novel at several points. Further, notice the narration style here as the narrator describes the stench of the city. The description has a visceral quality to it, despite the assertion that "modern people" couldn't conceive of such a stench.



Jean-Baptiste Grenouille is born here on July 17, 1738. Grenouille's mother is a fishmonger, and Grenouille is her fifth baby. All her babies were born in her market stall, although none of the others lived. The narrator notes that Grenouille's mother is still young, pretty, and relatively healthy, and entertains a hope of one day marrying a widower and bearing "real children." When she finally gives birth to Grenouille, she cuts the umbilical cord with her butcher knife, and, affected by the heat and the smell of the market and cemetery, faints.

Note here Grenouille's mother's desire to go on and have "real children." Throughout the novel, children are described as subhuman in different ways, and Grenouille in particular is seen as not truly human. This quote then indicates that Grenouille, along with his mother's previous dead children (who are presumably born out of wedlock, and therefore not seen as "real" or legitimate either), aren't important or worth bearing in the first place. This idea will follow Grenouille throughout his life, as he remains unloved and unvalued.







This draws a crowd and someone calls the police. When Grenouille's mother comes to, she stands up and goes to wash. Grenouille begins to cry under the table in the market stall and the crowd discovers him. He is given to a wet nurse and his mother is arrested, tried for multiple infanticides, and decapitated a few weeks later.

Here we see the judicial system of the time at work. There are very real consequences for (perceived) infanticide, and in a way Grenouille is punished for his mother's wrongdoing by being deprived of any family from the start.







By the time his Grenouille's mother was decapitated, Grenouille had had three different wet nurses, all of whom said that he was too greedy for milk. La Fosse, the police officer in charge of Grenouille's case, wants to send Grenouille to a halfway house that sends baptized orphans to Rouen, but since Grenouille is at this point still nameless and not baptized, La Fosse instead turns him over to the cloister of Saint-Merri. They baptize him with the name Jean-Baptiste and give him to Jeanne Bussie, a wet nurse, who receives three francs per week to feed him.

Notice the irony here: while Jean-Baptiste was a popular name at the time, the historical John the Baptist was beheaded, just like Grenouille's mother. Grenouille then essentially has to carry his mother's act of wrongdoing with him for his entire life. While this turn is tragic, it's also humorous in a very dark way, setting the novel up for further instances of dark comedy.



PART 1, CHAPTER 2

Several weeks later, Jeanne Bussie stands at the gates of the cloister of Saint-Merri with a market basket. Father Terrier opens the door, and Bussie explains that the basket contains Grenouille. When Father Terrier inspects the infant and proclaims that he looks good, Bussie states that he's gorged himself on her milk and she will no longer feed him.

Remember that Jeanne Bussie is Grenouille's third midwife, and all of them have described him as "greedy"—even as a baby he's portrayed as vaguely monstrous and having an insatiable appetite. In this case there's no sense of motherly love for Grenouille; he's merely an economic loss, as a wet nurse can't feed more than one baby if the greedy Grenouille is one of them.





As Father Terrier stands up he notices that Jeanne Bussie smells of milk and cheesy wool. He tries to offer Bussie more money and the two argue. Bussie finally says that Grenouille is possessed by the devil, and she knows this is true because he doesn't smell at all. Father Terrier insists that infants aren't yet human and therefore can't be possessed. He lifts the basket and smells Grenouille, stating that the only thing he smells is a soiled diaper. Bussie holds firm, and Terrier, annoyed, explains that only sick children smell (like onions, horse manure, or old apples, depending on the affliction). Bussie asserts that children are supposed to smell like children, and this one doesn't smell.

The reader has already been told that scent is Grenouille's realm, but here we're introduced to the idea that it's not his alone—indeed, in the vaguely fantastical world of the novel, most people place a lot of importance on scent. Father Terrier can recite off the top of his head what sick children smell like, and Jeanne Bussie's dislike of Grenouille is partly because of his lack of smell. Grenouille's lack of smell will be a defining trait of his, and becomes a primary motivator for his actions later in the novel.







Father Terrier, growing angry at Jeanne Bussie, turns the argument into a theological one. Bussie, peeved at this turn that means she can't possibly win, states simply that Grenouille doesn't smell right and she doesn't want him. Father Terrier demands to know what babies are supposed to smell like. Bussie struggles for a moment and then details what babies smell like (fresh butter, caramel). Father Terrier asks Jeanne Bussie when she's ever had caramel, and then gives up. He grabs the basket with Grenouille in it and goes to his office.

Here, Jeanne Bussie's low social and economic standing is made abundantly clear to the reader. Caramel would've been a luxury and because of her low class, she's only ever smelled it. Father Terrier, as a religious figure, is somewhat outside of the social ladder, but still is able to use Jeanne Bussie's status to put her down and express his displeasure.









PART 1, CHAPTER 3

Father Terrier is a learned man who has studied theology as well as philosophy, and thinks highly of himself in this regard. He combats fiercely the folk superstitions that plague his parish, the persistence of which he finds depressing. He thinks that Jeanne Bussie is very wrong in her assessment of Grenouille, particularly since she came to her conclusion with her nose. Father Terrier believes this is a nod to primitive paganism (which believed in smelling blood and offering stinky sacrifices to the gods) and not rooted in Christian reason.

In this instance, knowing already that Grenouille will become a master of scent, we see a divide being drawn between scent and the church, and indeed, according to Father Terrier, against instinct and civilization. The reader is again reminded of Jeanne Bussie's social standing, as she too is compared to the "primitive paganism" that so irritates Father Terrier.





Father Terrier rocks the sleeping Grenouille's basket on his knees and strokes Grenouille's head, talking to him about Bussie's nonsense ideas. He smells his fingers that were stroking Grenouille's head and smells nothing. He lifts the basket, expecting to smell milk or sweat, but finds he smells nothing at all. He reasons that clean infants just don't smell until the child reaches puberty, and an infant that has no conception of what sin is cannot possibly smell.

Despite his qualms, Father Terrier is still curious about the smell of babies. Notice Terrier's assertion that children don't smell until puberty; this foreshadows important plot points later. Also, note here that sin is equated to a personal scent, which adds another instance of black humor, as we know Grenouille is "abominable."





Father Terrier, still rocking Grenouillee's basket, entertains the fantasy that he hadn't become a monk, but instead took a wife and is rocking his own child. He feels especially cozy about the thought.

This is an uncharacteristically tender moment for Grenouille, and possibly the only time throughout the novel he's ever regarded with even passing affection.





Grenouille begins to wake, nose first. His nose sniffs and snorts and his eyes open and appear to not even perceive Father Terrier. Father Terrier, however, has the uncomfortable impression that Grenouille is "seeing" him with his nose, and in his mind likens the infant to a meat-eating plant in the botanical gardens. Terrier feels ill and exposed. He stands and thinks he wants to get rid of the "thing" immediately.

Grenouille here becomes truly sub-human in Father Terrier's eyes. He's no longer an innocent infant; he's a "thing." This is developed further with the comparison to a plant, which occurs several times throughout the novel.







Grenouille begins to cry, chilling Father Terrier's blood. Father Terrier begins to think of the child as a devil, but stops short. He quickly thinks of where the infant could go, and settles on the home of Madame Gaillard, just outside the city. He carries Grenouille there and pays a year in advance. Returning home, he undresses, scrubs himself, and climbs into bed, crossing himself and praying until he falls asleep.

Father Terrier and Jeanne Bussie will likely never know that they were right about Grenouille being a "devil." The comparison is developed further as the novel goes on, and especially as Grenouille begins committing actual evil acts. Yet we also must question to what extent Grenouille's "abominable" character is a result of being treated as monstrous since his very birth.









PART 1, CHAPTER 4

Madame Gaillard, while not yet 30, has already lived her entire life. As a girl her father hit her across the face with a poker, damaging for good her sense of smell and her ability to feel any emotion. As such, she has a great sense of order and justice, shows no preference for any of her charges, and cares for them without emotion. She saves her money so that in her old age, she can afford to die at home rather than in the Hôtel-Dieu like her husband did.

Madame Gaillard's establishment is a blessing for Grenouille. He thrives despite poor nourishment, a variety of childhood illnesses, and some physical mishaps. The narrator likens him to a contented **tick**, living quietly on blood drank years ago. He requires no attention or love.

The narrator states that Grenouille's first cry as an infant stood as a decision against love, but for life, since demanding both would have resulted in an early death. Grenouille was an abomination from birth and made this decision out of spite and malice. The narrator observes that Grenouille is like the aforementioned **tick** in a tree, hibernating and waiting for the scent of blood so it can then drop and bite an animal.

Grenouille's lack of scent or soul doesn't bother Madame Gaillard, as she can neither smell nor experience emotion, but the other children immediately realize that he's creepy and strange. Some of them try to kill him with little success, and finally give up. They don't hate him; they simply fear him and find him disturbing.

Madame Gaillard's inability to smell and sense emotion means that she doesn't recognize that Grenouille doesn't smell, or that his emotional development is limited. As a somewhat grotesque character herself, her only goal in life is to die a private death and save herself the "embarrassment" of dying in public.









Grenouille will be compared to a tick throughout the novel. It's a fitting comparison, as both Grenouille and the tick are vampires of sorts, robbing their victims of blood or scent. It also alludes to his emotional deficiencies and the general portrayal of him as a kind of sub-human creature.





Süskind sets up the idea that "love" and "life" are in contrast to each other, and in choosing "life" purely out of spite Grenouille chooses to reject human connection in favor of his own experience of his senses and, later, his "art." He's again portrayed as a parasite, as it's indicated that he's hibernating and waiting for his first victim to appear.









Thus far in his life Grenouille has already been rejected by adults; here he's rejected by his own peers. He's designated a loner while still an infant, and simply repels people for no apparent reason.







PART 1, CHAPTER 5

The narrator indicates that objectively, there was nothing scary about Grenouille, as he was never big, strong, exceptionally ugly, or seemed particularly smart. He didn't begin walking until age two and began to speak at age three. His first words were concrete nouns that were especially odorous.

Here, the narrator gets at the most important premise of the novel: that scent silently and secretly controls everything. The children can't place why Grenouille is scary, but the reader can infer that it's because he has no scent.









sense at all.

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One day, Grenouille sits on a cord of wood and says the word "wood" for the first time. He already understood the idea of wood, but it had never truly captured his interest. But on this day, he closes his eyes and simply smells the wood for a half hour and gets lost in the smell. The experience is confusing and intense, and he mutters "wood" over and over again for the next few days.

Grenouille learns to speak in this way, but never fully grasps the concepts of words that express objects that don't smell, particularly words that express abstract or moral ideas. Even as an adult he will use them incorrectly. The language he does possess at this point soon becomes inadequate to express his olfactory experiences. He is able to differentiate between milk from different cows, or smoke from different burning materials,

and since language doesn't provide enough words to describe these differences, he soon begins to doubt if language makes

By age six, Grenouille has grasped his entire surroundings by smell. He has tens of thousands of smells in his memory and can imagine how different scents combine. The narrator likens him to a musical wunderkind (child prodigy), but for scent. He grows more secretive and disappears for days to smell the meadows and vineyards. Punishments have little effect on him.

Madame Gaillard begins to notice that Grenouille has potentially supernatural qualities, such as being able to detect worms in uncut vegetables and an apparent ability to see through walls. At one point, Madame Gaillard forgets where she hid her money, and he finds it within seconds. He also seems to be able to tell the future, as he can predict storms hours away. While we know that he could simply smell all these things, Madame Gaillard believes he has the "second sight" and therefore will bring misfortune and death. She decides he has to go, and coincidentally, the cloister of Saint-Merri ceases their payments when Grenouille is eight.

Madame Gaillard walks Grenouille to the tanner Grimal, who is always in need of cheap labor to do the most dangerous parts of the job. She knows that Grenouille will likely not survive, but feels no responsibility or remorse. She walks home satisfied.

We see here how engrossed Grenouille is in his olfactory world, and how this immersion influences how he interacts with the outside world. The word "wood" only presents itself as a thing worth learning or remembering once it enters his mind as something of interest scent-wise.







Grenouille's belief in language only goes as far as it's useful to him. Remember that he's emotionally deficient and hateful of the world, so his unwillingness or inability to learn, understand, or use words that express higher moral concepts demonstrates his emotional state. Further, he doesn't even know for sure that language has a true point, since even the words for smelling objects aren't even enough to articulate the world he experiences.







Grenouille is increasingly portrayed as a kind of genius, but also as extremely emotionally deficient. Punishments don't work because his world just doesn't include anyone aside from himself, and so there's no impetus for him to please anyone but himself.









As the fantastical nature of Grenouille's genius is emphasized, he is once again believed to be in league with the devil, and again because of his relationship to scent. By addressing the reader directly in this situation, the narrator encourages us to feel sympathy for Grenouille and to feel somewhat superior to Madame Gaillard. It's not yet truly apparent that Grenouille is evil; at this point he seems simply strange and troubled.







Again the reader is asked to feel sympathy for Grenouille as he's sold into what's essentially slavery. We know it's Madame Gaillard's injury that makes her feel no remorse, but it's still no less awful.









The narrator says that since Madame Gaillard will not appear again, we should find out how she dies. She lived to be very old and gave up her business and purchased her annuity in 1782, and set about waiting for death. However, the French Revolution came first, and while it didn't affect her at first, she was later forced to auction off her belongings and then her home. By 1797 she'd lost her entire fortune and contracted cancer. She spent her last three weeks in the Hôtel-Dieu in a communal bed with five other women, and was buried in a mass grave in 1799.

Many, many years in the future, Madame Gaillard experiences the death she explicitly wanted to avoid and spent her whole life working against. While a long life is usually celebrated, in Madame Gaillard's case, it ended up being her downfall. The inclusion of Madame Gaillard's death raises the question of Grenouille's part in it. Was she right, and he did bring misfortune upon her?









PART 1, CHAPTER 6

Grenouille understands immediately that Monsieur Grimal only values Grenouille's life as long as it's useful to him, and Grenouille never resists him. The narrator states that Grenouille bottled up his defiance in a **tick**-like way. In the evenings, Grimal locks Grenouille in a closet to sleep on the floor, and during the day, Grenouille works as long as there's light. After a year Grenouille contracts anthrax, which is usually fatal, but Grenouille survives and is now immune to the disease. This makes him significantly more valuable as a worker, and he's finally allowed a bed and better food.

Here, even more so than Grenouille's other caregivers, Grimal sees Grenouille only as a means of profit. Grenouille is treated as little better than a domestic animal, and is forced even more than before to bottle up his humanity in order to stay alive. This makes the reader remember the narrator's earlier assertion that Grenouille chose life over love, and encourages consideration of how that idea works throughout the novel.











Beginning at age 12, Grimal allows Grenouille time to himself every week to explore the city. Grenouille "the **tick**" feels triumphant and alive, and experiences the urge to hunt for scents in the smelly city of Paris.

Note the language used to describe Grenouille. Even at this young age, he's "hunting" rather than exploring, making his actions seem predatory.







PART 1, CHAPTER 7

Grenouille's world of the surrounding neighborhoods is a utopia of scent. He revels in the human and animal smells and can dissect the mixture of odors into individual scents, which gives him immense joy. He often stands and waits for an interesting scent to pass his nose, and then follows it to its source. When he is finished smelling the streets, he goes to the market of Les Halles, the bustle of which he can experience through scent even when it is empty. From the west comes the scent of the sea, which Grenouille finds immensely wonderful. He often thinks about sitting in the crow's nest of a ship, experiencing the smells one day, but (the narrator says) Grenouille will never see the ocean.

For the first time, the reader sees Grenouille as being close to happy, getting to follow his nose and the scents of the city. This is another instance where the narration of the scents is graphic and visceral, adding to the sense of grotesque magical realism. The reader is also again asked to feel sympathy for Grenouille, as we're allowed to see his dream of being at sea, but we know now that this is something that will never happen.









When Grenouille exhausts the smells of his neighboring quarters, he expands and begins exploring the other side of the river, where rich people live. This is where Grenouille first smells perfume. He is immediately able to dissect these perfumes as he'd done with other smells, but he finds most of them coarse and thinks he'd be able to do better if he had access to ingredients.

Grenouille doesn't differentiate between "good" or "bad" scents; he simply desires to possess all that he can. In his mind he creates and destroys new scents with the basics he's gathered, similarly to how a child plays with blocks.

Grenouille hasn't yet used the term "genius" to describe himself, but he's already feeling superior to those around him. This feeling of superiority will develop into his raging misanthropy later in the novel, and help him flesh out his conceptualization of other people as stupid.







Grenouille already shows his genius for constructing an "inner world" and his aptitude for creating perfumes, as he mixes his own scents in his mind.









PART 1, CHAPTER 8

On September 1, 1753, Paris sets off fireworks to celebrate the anniversary of the king's coronation. A great crowd mills along the river, Grenouille among them on the right bank. the fireworks bore him, as he finds their smell monotonous. As he prepares to leave, he catches a whisper of a delicate scent that nearly eludes him. Grenouille is in agony as his heart aches for the scent. He feels it's the key to assigning order to all the other odors, and feels sick with excitement.

Grenouille decides the scent is coming from across the bridge and follows the scent through the crowd. He thinks that the scent has a freshness and a warmth like nothing else he's ever experienced. Grenouille feels as though the scent is drawing him in, and he continues his hunt through the empty streets.

Grenouille turns onto the rue de Marais and the scent gets stronger and purer. Finally, after a series of courtyards, he sees a girl, 13 or 14 years old, sitting at a table, cleaning and pitting plums by candlelight. Grenouille realizes that the scent is coming from the girl and is confused, as he knows humans to smell repulsive. He consults his eyes for only a moment and returns to enjoying the smell of the girl, finding that every scent he'd mentally created up to this point is meaningless in light of this girl's scent.

Grenouille decides that he has to possess this scent or his life will have no meaning. He approaches the girl slowly and stops right behind her. She has red hair and very white skin. She doesn't see Grenouille, but notes a chill of fear. She turns around and comes face to face with Grenouille. In her terror, she doesn't cry or fight him as he strangles her. He doesn't notice any of her physical beauty, as he keeps his eyes closed.

This is the first time we see Grenouille experience real emotion. Notice, however, that what this scent inspires is the desire to hunt and control, to possess; in short, for Grenouille to exert dominance over this scent, whatever it is. Despite previous chapters in which the reader has been asked to feel sympathy for Grenouille, this feels sinister.









Grenouille's inability to figure out what the scent is only adds to the drama of this scene. Combined with his belief that the scent is drawing him in, rather than him hunting it, it makes it seem as though the source of the scent is complicit, and Grenouille himself has no agency in the matter.







This is wholly unexpected for Grenouille. Up to this point his experiences with people have been unmentionable in an olfactory sense, and he's been neglected or abused physically and emotionally. This is the first time that a person has meant anything important to him, and realizing this is a difficult thing for Grenouille.







Note the color of the girl's hair; this will be important later. Remember too that Grenouille's lack of personal scent is what makes him so terrifying. On an instinctual, primal level, this girl wasn't able to detect the presence of another person, according to the premise of the novel.











When the girl is dead, Grenouille tears off her dress and smells her bare skin from head to toe. When her scent finally fades, he collects himself for a bit and then blows out her candle. He begins his walk home as the crowd from the fireworks disperses. By the time the girl's body is discovered, Grenouille is already across the river.

This scene is simultaneously horrific and fascinating. Grenouille becomes more of an object than a person here, as he transitions from being a potentially sympathetic protagonist into something wholly inhuman and unemotional, adding to the novel's grotesque nature.









That night, Grenouille thinks of his closet as a palace and can't sleep for bliss. He feels as though he's been born for the first time, as now he realizes that he's a genius and must "revolutionize the odiferous world" by using his talents to become the greatest perfumer of all. Grenouille also takes time that night to inspect and arrange the scents in his memory, and over the next week he refines his system. He begins to construct an **inner fortress** of smell. Grenouille feels no remorse at having murdered the girl; all that matters to him is that he now possesses her scent.

Grenouille now has a goal, and he takes immediate personal steps to get there by constructing his "fortress." This inner fortress will be important going forward, as it's where Grenouille's ideal world plays out. It allows him to exercise his misanthropy and hatred of the people around him, and revel in the scent world he takes so much pleasure in.











PART 1, CHAPTER 9

At the time of the story, the narrator says, there were thirteen perfumers in Paris; six on each bank and one on the Pont-au-Change, the bridge connecting the right bank with the Ile de la Cité. This street was one of the finest addresses in the city, and the perfumer Giuseppe Baldini lived there.

Baldini stands still in his shop, surrounded by a cloud of perfume he's created for himself. He has thousands of perfumes and cosmetics in his shop, as well as anything else that has smell, like honey, marinated tuna, and scented stationary.

Baldini's shop doesn't have a cellar, so the entire four stories are packed with his wares and the blend of all the scents in the shop is nearly unbearable. While Baldini, his assistants, and his wife no longer detect the odors, anyone else who enters the shop is hit by an intense punch of scent. Many faint or become forgetful, and as such, fewer and fewer customers enter the shop.

The thirteen perfumers of Paris feels like a mythical number, and draws on the history of thirteen being an unlucky number in Western culture. It foreshadows what later will happen to Baldini.







The description of Baldini's shop hearkens back to Grenouille's inner fortress. It's a fantastical building filled with smells, but manifested in real life, and seemingly not nearly as organized.







Baldini's slow descent is made clear here. His obscene-smelling shop simply is too much for most customers, despite continuing to hold Baldini's interest, if not his actual ability to smell it. We're again asked to compare Baldini's physical shop to Grenouille's inner fortress.









PART 1, CHAPTER 10

Baldini cries for Chénier, his shop assistant, and tells him he'll be in his study and shouldn't be disturbed. Baldini explains that he's going to create a perfume to use on Spanish hide for a count, and that the count wants something similar to Amor and Psyche, a popular perfume by Baldini's rival Pélissier. The two decide that the scent is truly vulgar and assert that Baldini certainly won't take his inspiration from the "bungler" Pélissier. Baldini heads for his study while Chénier thinks that Baldini will, per usual, not be struck by inspiration, but rather curse and rave and create terrible mixtures, and several hours later, Baldini will reappear and Chénier will suggest that they send someone to discreetly purchase Amor and Psyche from Pélissier.

This exchange between Baldini and Chénier is humorous, as it's obvious that it's all for show, and it's implied that Pélissier is likely a very successful perfumer, and Amor and Psyche is likely a fine perfume despite all Baldini's negative talk about it. This indicates that the business of perfume is a competitive and personal one, and often about keeping up acts and facades.







Chénier thinks that Baldini is no longer a great perfumer, despite how great he'd once been, and can no longer keep up with current trends. Chénier thinks that this is a shame, as Baldini is sure to ruin his shop and Chénier will be too old to take it over by that time.

Once again, characters only see each other as means of achieving some kind of advancement. Chénier sees Baldini only as a way through which he can someday own his own perfume shop, and he worries about his chances given Baldini's decline.









PART 1, CHAPTER 11

In his study, Baldini removes his coat. He knows better than Chénier that inspiration won't strike, as it never has before. The narrator likens Baldini to a competent cook who makes great dishes, but has come up with no recipes of his own. Baldini isn't an inventor and doesn't want to be, as he doesn't like inventions because inventing means breaking rules.

Baldini's respect for rules and regulations is made very clear from the start, setting him up as a figure standing for "convention" and order, in contrast to the wild creative genius of Grenouille.







Rather than create a new perfume for the count, Baldini intends to copy Pélissier's Amor and Psyche. Baldini thinks of how awful it is that he, an honest man, must do something so crooked in order to keep such an important client. Most of his clients have ceased purchasing products from him, and he's only surviving by selling door-to-door.

While Baldini sees Pélissier as a rival and inferior, he also can't help trying to copy Pélissier's perfume. We see how important this copy is, as Baldini's business is failing and his success depends on it.









Baldini attributes his fall to Pélissier's reckless creativity, which leaves Baldini unable to keep up with demands each season. Baldini wishes for the strict old guild laws, which would punish Pélissier, who isn't even a trained perfumer. Baldini continues his mental rant and considers the history of perfume, where originally a perfumer had to be fluent in Latin and able to perform many different tasks related to the creation of perfume and cosmetics. However, once it was discovered how to bind scent to alcohol, the craft began to slip from the grasp of masters and into the hands of anyone, like Pélissier.

The social anxieties of the times intersect with the characters here, as Baldini is nervous that anyone can experience success now that a social system exists through which individuals can climb and become successful. The guild laws, which once would've protected Baldini, no longer exist. This setup is important to remember when Baldini meets Grenouille, as Grenouille will turn Baldini's thoughts here upside down.











Baldini laments the changing times, where speed is of the essence. He asserts that man doesn't want to stay where man belongs, which causes all sorts of trouble. Baldini also laments the rise of scientific papers that posit that God maybe didn't even create the world, among other things—women are reading books now, and the king himself is interested in such nonsense.

Baldini expands his anxieties to encompass the entirety of man's current lot in life, where women and the king himself are not only interested in these advancements, but have access to them. While education is still quite elite and exclusive, it's significantly more accessible than before.







Baldini stands at the window and regards the river below. The narrator states that Baldini made a mistake buying a house on this side of the bridge, as the river appears to flow away from him, carrying his wealth with it. Sometimes, Baldini crosses one of the bridges with no buildings and looks up the river, imagining that the river is carrying prosperity towards him.

Baldini sees the river as a metaphor for his life. Baldini's relationship to the river will be important going forward, as the river will both be a source of distress and a source of fortune and inspiration.





PART 1, CHAPTER 12

Baldini sits at his desk with a flacon (small bottle) of Amor and Psyche, and sets about trying to identify its components. He thinks it's disgustingly good as he sprinkles drops on a handkerchief and passes it under his nose. Angry at his delight at the perfume, he thinks of Pélissier as a wolf in sheep's clothing and vows to copy the perfume perfectly. Baldini collects paper and ink and begins to dissect the perfume.

The reader here is asked again to compare Baldini to Grenouille. We know already that this task would be insanely easy for Grenouille, but we see that Baldini has to work for it. This will provide Grenouille with another way in which he can feel superior to the rest of humanity.







PART 1, CHAPTER 13

Baldini works for two hours and by then can barely smell anything, but he continues the motion of sprinkling the kerchief and passing it under his nose. He knows continuing is pointless, as he never learned how to dissect scent in this way. Finally, Baldini's nose swells with an allergic reaction to the perfume, and he gratefully quits and decides to send for some Amor and Psyche the following morning.

Despite Baldini's attempt at a different method, the outcome appears to be just as Chénier predicted all the same. Again, compare Baldini's reaction to scent to what we know of Grenouille. An allergic reaction such as this isn't something that makes sense for Grenouille to ever experience.





As the sun sets, Baldini thinks that one day his last customer will die, he'll have to sell the shop, and he'll move to Italy with his wife in bitter poverty. Baldini goes to the window and opens it, and it seems as though the river has changed direction in the fading sunlight. Suddenly, Baldini flings the flacon of Amor and Psyche into the river. The room is filled with fresh air and the night falls suddenly.

Baldini finds release in the absence of scent once the river appears to have changed direction. The fall of night acts as a falling curtain on this part of Baldini's life.









Baldini vows that he won't send someone to purchase Amor and Psyche in the morning. Rather, he decides to sell his shop, and he suddenly feels very happy and relaxed. He can live modestly in Messina by selling now. Baldini decides to tell his wife and then light a candle at Notre-Dame. He puts on his wig and hears the shrill servants' entrance bell as he heads out of his office. Nobody answers the door, so Baldini heads downstairs to answer it himself. Outside is Grenouille, cowering, with goatskins from Monsieur Grimal.

Baldini is evidently a religious man, which will be an important thing to remember later. We're again reminded of the appearances that a perfumer (and indeed, a gentleman at this time) must keep up as Baldini dons his wig. This façade of civilization and gentility is then contrasted with the servile, animalistic Grenouille.





PART 1, CHAPTER 14

Baldini remembers that these are the goatskins for the count. He considers sending Grenouille back with the goatskins, but decides to accept them.

Baldini's casual decision here begins a turning point in Grenouille's life.





Baldini leads Grenouille through the shop. This is the first time Grenouille had been in a perfumery, and while he knows every scent in the place, he still had yearned to see it up close. He feels the seriousness of the rooms and is gripped with the thought that he belongs in this place. The narrator asserts that there is nothing to justify Grenouille's belonging here as a tanner's helper, but Grenouille the **tick** had scented blood and was letting itself drop.

By again comparing Grenouille to a tick, Süskind asserts that Grenouille isn't exactly making these decisions consciously—instead these are things that he instinctively knows in an almost bestial sense. We see too that Grenouille is beginning to behave like those who have "cared" for him thus far, as he sees Baldini and his shop as solely a means to advancement.











Baldini instructs Grenouille to lay the skins on a worktable. Baldini inspects the goatskins and finally tells Grenouille that he'll come pay for the skins in a few days, but Grenouille doesn't leave. Baldini asks if he needs something else, and Grenouille tells him that he'd like to work for him. Baldini takes Grenouille's hunched posture for timidity, when it's actually the exact opposite. Baldini explains he has no need for a tanner's apprentice, and Grenouille asks Baldini if he wants to make the skins smell good with Amor and Psyche by Pélissier. This terrifies Baldini. Grenouille continues that Baldini reeks of the perfume and it's not very good, and then rattles off a list of elements that are in the perfume.

Here, Grenouille's lack of social skills (hunched posture, not leaving when it's implied he should) works in his favor, as it comes across as simply being strange and timid. Essentially, his lack of knowledge of how to truly deal with people provides a disguise for his more sinister plans. Also, it's confirmed that Grenouille is easily able to dissect the perfume, but his talent hilariously scares Baldini, as Grenouille's genius again seems supernatural to other characters.









Baldini is perplexed and thinks that Grenouille is either possessed, an imposter, or very gifted. Three of the ingredients listed by Grenouille were indeed the ones that Baldini hadn't been able to come up with earlier. He's curious and wishes to test Grenouille to see if he can provide the recipe, thinking that even if he won't use the result, he's still interested in knowing the recipe, as well as curious about Grenouille.

Baldini masks and justifies his curiosity with professionalism. Notice that while the reader knows Grenouille is already a killer, he's still a simple curiosity for other characters in the novel at this point. Like his lack of social skills, this will protect Grenouille and help him advance.











Baldini states that Grenouille has a fine nose, and when Grenouille replies that he has the best nose and knows thousands of odors, Baldini yells that that's impossible, and says that anyone with a passable nose could've parsed out the ingredients of the perfume. Baldini then lists the qualities of a master perfumer, and asks Grenouille if he could provide the exact formula for Amor and Psyche.

Grenouille thinks highly of himself (and we know that he's correct in his self-assessment), but his lack of social skills means that he doesn't realize that saying so violates all social convention.









Grenouille finally replies that he doesn't know what a formula is. Baldini explains sternly, and Grenouille states that he doesn't need a formula. He just asks to mix the perfume. Baldini is again perplexed as Grenouille points out where the bottles of the ingredients are in the room, and Baldini accuses him of being a spy. Baldini figures that it won't make any difference since he's going to sell the shop anyway, and Grenouille may be a genius.

Here Grenouille's rudimentary grasp of language works against him. While a formula is a concrete thing to those who know how to use one, for someone like Grenouille a formula is entirely unnecessary and not worth his time to learn about.







Baldini agrees to let Grenouille mix the perfume, saying that his certain failure will teach him humility. He begins to set up the tools of the trade on the table as Grenouille grabs bottles and jars, having heard Baldini's "yes" and nothing else, and knowing that he's won.

Grenouille takes in conversation similarly to how he acquired language in the first place, only paying attention to parts that interest him or he finds important. Baldini, however, is still considering appearances and conventions as he sets out the tools.











Grenouille asks how much to make, horrifying and infuriating Baldini. Baldini finally asks for half a beaker, and Grenouille states that he'll mix it his own way, which he knows is the "wrong" way. Baldini thinks there is only one right way, but what happens next is truly a miracle.

Grenouille finally exhibits a sense that he has some awareness of "right" and "wrong" ways to do something, which sets him up to develop these skills later in the novel. Grenouille's genius is again presented as something fantastical and "miraculous."







PART 1, CHAPTER 15

Grenouille pours alcohol into the mixing bottle, horrifying Baldini from the start. In what seems like a haphazard way, Grenouille grabs different bottles, sniffs them, and pours them into the mixing bottle, ignoring the pipettes and test tubes. Baldini thinks that he looks like a selfish child, and is caught up in his own disgust at Grenouille and the age that has allowed individuals like Grenouille to exist; he only comes to when Grenouille begins to shake the mixing bottle vigorously.

Baldini keeps a running mental narration of the correct way to mix a perfume, which allows the reader to follow along and join in his horror. We see again Baldini's anxieties about the age he's living in, where individuals like Grenouille have a chance to be more than street beggars.











Baldini yells for Grenouille to stop and calls him a brat and crude, adding that Grenouille may never again enter a perfumer's shop. However, as he speaks, he smells Amor and Psyche in the air. The narrator says that odors are powerful and cannot be fended off, and as Grenouille steps back from the table, Baldini slowly stops his tirade. He tests the concoction on a handkerchief and says "incredible."

The reaction here relies on the novel's premise that scent governs everything, whether we are conscious of it or not. Baldini's reaction here is due to the fact that he cannot escape the scent of Amor and Psyche in the room, and cannot control how it affects him.









While Baldini sniffs the handkerchief in stunned silence, Grenouille asserts that the perfume isn't very good, and says he'll make it better. Baldini doesn't interfere as Grenouille mixes right into the beaker of Amor and Psyche. Grenouille then swirls the mixture delicately, rather than shaking it, and pronounces it done. When asked, however, Baldini declines to test it and shows Grenouille to the door.

Grenouille shows off what he's been doing for fun in his head for years. Grenouille's swirl instead of a shake of the finished perfume is possibly a nod to Baldini's sense of order and how things should be, which might help to turn Baldini in his favor.





Grenouille again asks Baldini if he can work for him, and Baldini, still stunned, says he'll think about it. Grenouille disappears, and Baldini is frightened by what's just occurred. He returns to the laboratory and tests the new perfume, which he finds glorious. Silently he begins to trim the leather and starts the process of scenting the skins. Upstairs later he says nothing to his wife, and he forgets to light a candle at Notre-Dame, and forgets for the first time to say his prayers.

It's important that Baldini forgets to say his prayers. Characters all along have equated Grenouille with the devil, and his ability to mix this perfume has definitely had enough of an effect on Baldini to effectively lead him away from religion. We also see that Baldini's earlier decision is evidently reversed now, and it's obvious that Baldini will indeed take Grenouille on.









PART 1, CHAPTER 16

The next morning, Baldini goes to Grimal, pays for the goat leather, and invites Grimal to share wine and negotiate Baldini's purchase of Grenouille as an apprentice. He offers an enormous sum of money and Grimal accepts. When they return to the tannery, Grenouille is waiting with his clothes, and he and Baldini leave.

Grenouille's tick-like "knowing" is evident here, as he was never told that he was going to work for Baldini for sure. We also see Grenouille being treated like a slave or animal once again, as he is "sold" from one master to another—a fact that perhaps contributes to his conception of himself as something other-than-human.









Grimal, convinced he's just made the best deal of his life, continues drinking throughout the day. That night, confused, he falls face first into the river and drowns instantly. The river draws his body downstream.

This asks the reader to recall what happened to Madame Gaillard, who also died a horrific death after breaking off contact with Grenouille. Grenouille's very presence seems to bring bad fortune and even death.





As Grimal's body flows under the Pont-au-Change, Grenouille is going to bed in a bunk in a corner of Baldini's laboratory. As Grenouille falls asleep, he dreams of a victorious entrance into his **inner fortress** where there's a banquet and an orgy with clouds of incense and myrrh held in his honor.

Grenouille's celebration in his inner fortress indicates just how important this move will be for him. Notice the specific mention of an orgy; this will be a recurring motif throughout the novel, adding to the overall sense of decadence, sin, and the grotesque.











PART 1, CHAPTER 17

With Grenouille working for Baldini, Baldini's perfumery begins its climb to European fame. The first evening Grenouille is tasked with creating a huge batch of his first perfume, of which 80 flacons are sold the next day. Chénier sells bottles to some of the most powerful individuals in Paris.

It's made very apparent that Grenouille is indeed a genius. His perfumes are so powerful that he can draw customers into a shop that's been going downhill for years in one day. The power of scent is again presented as something both ubiquitous and almost magical.











While Chénier mans the shop, Baldini and Grenouille remain in the laboratory to manufacture a new scent per week, or whatever's needed to take on Pélissier and the other perfumers. Chénier doesn't bother asking questions and stays on, taking a cut of the massive profits. Every product Baldini creates is a success, and money is no object for the customers.

The reader is reminded that scent controls everything, specifically money. People have no problem paying an inordinate sum of money for a new perfume, and following the logic of the novel, it's the beauty and power of the perfume that makes people helpless to resist it.









Grenouille, the "gnome," as Chénier thinks of him, is responsible for this rise of fame. Baldini can barely keep up with Grenouille's creativity. Finally, he demands that Grenouille start using scales and measuring ingredients for his concoctions, which allows Baldini to follow along and write down the recipes. Baldini eventually forbids Grenouille from creating new perfumes unless Baldini is there to write down the formulas. He compiles the dozens of formulas into two small books, one of which he keeps in his safe and the other on his person at all times.

Baldini begins to temper Grenouille's genius and direct it so it's easier to manipulate. Grenouille is still allowed and encouraged to be a genius and create perfumes, but only if he does so "correctly" according to Baldini. The two books are a way for Baldini to further control Grenouille and insure himself against any ill fate that might befall Grenouille.









Grenouille is helped by Baldini's insistence on measuring, as it teaches Grenouille the language of perfume. Soon Grenouille is able to write the formulas himself, and eventually can simply write out a formula for a new scent with no experimentation at all. Grenouille's growing knowledge and seeming normalcy keeps Baldini from suspecting anything strange about him. Grenouille makes mistakes on purpose to further the façade.

As soon as a kind of language becomes useful and necessary for him, Grenouille seems to have no trouble learning it and using it. We also see how smart Grenouille is, as he understands that this is all a ruse to fool Baldini so that Grenouille can learn what he needs to from him. Both men use each other as means of advancing their own ends.











Grenouille knows that while he doesn't need instruction on creating a good perfume, he does need social standing in the form of journeyman status. He also needs knowledge of the craft of producing scents.

Essentially, Grenouille is aware that to accomplish his personal creative goals, he has to work within the existing system of society.









PART 1, CHAPTER 18

Baldini instructs Grenouille in all the arts of being a perfumer, from soap making to sewing gloves. Grenouille really only enjoys instruction in producing tinctures and extracts. Baldini's workshop isn't appropriate for doing any of this on a large scale, if only because it's hard to come by large enough quantities of one plant in Paris, but when materials did become available, Baldini would pull out his alembic to distill the material.

Grenouille's progress is hindered by being in Paris, which sets Grenouille up to leave Paris at some point in the future. However, using the alembic is a very useful skill for Grenouille and one that he will store for later use.







The process of distillation relies on speed, and fascinates Grenouille. The alembic needed to be attended all night, and Grenouille and Baldini would sit up, with Baldini drinking wine and telling stories. Grenouille doesn't listen to them; he's too engrossed in the process. He imagines himself as an alembic, his stored scents simmering away, that would one day make the world bearable for him. He soon abandons this fantasy and begins thinking about how to use his knowledge to achieve his goals.

Again, Grenouille doesn't bother paying attention to anything that doesn't interest him (like Baldini's stories), and instead devotes himself to his fantasies. These fantasies will grow more detailed as Grenouille gets older, and as his goals grow larger and more fantastical.







PART 1, CHAPTER 19

Once Baldini deems Grenouille experienced enough, he allows him free use of the alembic. Grenouille spends his nights attempting to distill a variety of items. He's successful with plant matter, but fails with things like glass, porcelain, and water from the Seine. The narrator notes that Grenouille is unaware that for substances without essential oils, distilling is impossible. After months of failing to produce scents present in his memory, Grenouille falls deathly ill.

While Grenouille's gaps in knowledge are obvious, his very scientific process of testing out what he can distill is a nod to the growth in scientific interest of the times. His illness then makes it very clear how important learning these processes are to Grenouille, as his inability to produce these scents leads to a physical affliction.







PART 1, CHAPTER 20

Grenouille develops a high fever that after a few days develops into pustules and boils. Baldini is understandably worried, as he's considering opening a small factory where popular scents could be mixed and sent all over Europe. While technically an illegal venture, Baldini has the possibility of a royal patent thanks to one of his clients, which would allow him to skip pesky restrictions. Baldini is also entertaining the idea of having Grenouille create individual perfumes for a select few clients.

We see that Baldini is poised to conquer his competition through scent and be the reigning perfumer of Europe, but the reader (as well as, and most importantly, Baldini) is forced to realize that this success is all due to Grenouille and his genius.









In light of these dreams, Baldini decides to do whatever it takes to save Grenouille. Grenouille is moved to a clean bed on the top floor and fed chicken broth and wine. Baldini sends for Dr. Procope, a very expensive physician. With a brief look, the doctor diagnoses Grenouille with syphilitic smallpox, complicated by festering measles, for which there is no treatment. Interestingly, Grenouille's body doesn't exhibit the characteristic stench of the disease, but he's still likely to die within 48 hours.

Others once again pick up on the fact that Grenouille doesn't smell, although note here that he specifically doesn't smell like decay or death. Baldini's desperation is obvious, as this is the best care Grenouille has received in his life. Note, though, that this care isn't for Grenouille's sake—Baldini is taking care of Grenouille like this only because he needs him to accomplish his goals.





Baldini is distraught at this turn of events. He considers making a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame to light a candle, but decides instead to attempt to take Grenouille's "perfumatory confession" and get one last formula out of his dying apprentice. Baldini whispers to Grenouille that this final perfume will have Grenouille's name engraved on the bottle and be given to the king, but Grenouille doesn't stir.

Grenouille again comes between Baldini and religion. We're reminded here that Grenouille's goals don't necessarily include fame or fortune, as Baldini's whisper of Grenouille's fame doesn't even cause Grenouille to stir.











Baldini sits all night with Grenouille. At dawn he gives up, but suddenly Grenouille speaks and asks if there are other ways of extracting scent besides distillation. Baldini, thinking this is surely the end, tells Grenouille that there are three other methods, and all are superior to distillation. He says that these processes are carried out primarily in Grasse, in the south of France. Baldini gets up to leave and thinks he should call a priest, but Grenouille's body has actually begun healing. In a week, he's fully recovered.

Knowledge is finally what makes Grenouille wake and begin healing, and the reader can assume that Grenouille will eventually end up in Grasse to learn these other methods Baldini mentions. Knowledge that will allow Grenouille to accomplish his goals is a strong enough promise to overcome deathly disease (especially when the disease itself seemed to spring from Grenouille's frustration with his lack of knowledge).







PART 1, CHAPTER 21

While Grenouille would've loved to leave for Grasse as soon as he recovered, as an apprentice he's still a nobody. Baldini explains that technically, Grenouille is less than a nobody, as a proper apprentice needs to be of legitimate birth, among other things. Baldini says that if he one day decides to help Grenouille obtain his journeyman's papers, it would be only based on Grenouille's talents and good behavior, and Baldini's own kindness.

Here, the acquisition of journeyman's papers is a marker of personhood, and by the logic of the novel, adulthood. Grenouille remains a "tick" and a nobody until he obtains these papers and makes the shift from valueless child to a fully human adult with agency and independence.







This would come to pass within three years. During that time, Baldini achieves his dreams of building the factory, receives a royal patent, and starts selling perfumes across Europe. By 1756, Baldini is Europe's greatest perfumer.

Baldini has achieved the fame he dreamed of, and sees that he has no more use for Grenouille (remember that Baldini has Grenouille's formulas recorded).







At this time, Baldini tells Grenouille he'll release him on three conditions. Grenouille must not produce any of the perfumes he'd made for Baldini; he must leave Paris and not return until after Baldini's death; and he must keep the first two conditions secret. Grenouille agrees without question, as he needs his journeyman's paper to travel and live inconspicuously, and feels no love for Paris. Grenouille, the narrator states, isn't out to make his fortune through perfume—he simply wants to create in the real world the perfumes that he holds in his mind.

Baldini's conditions here hinge on Baldini's incorrect assumption that Grenouille is a social climber in the same way that Baldini is, and that Grenouille desires money and fame. This assumption will be made by several individuals over the course of the novel, and serves to differentiate between Grenouille and the rest of humanity.









Grenouille sets out in May of 1756 with some food and money from Baldini. Baldini, a chronically kind person, requires nothing more than a small severance fee. He wishes Grenouille luck and watches him go. He doesn't shake Grenouille's hand, though, as he senses an infectious danger in Grenouille.

Upon Grenouille's departure, Baldini finally admits that there's something strange about Grenouille, as if seeing him as a person (rather than a money-making machine) for the first time.







PART 1, CHAPTER 22

Once Grenouille is out of sight, Baldini feels relieved. He thinks he never liked Grenouille, and all those years had felt guilty and uneasy, as though someday it might catch up with him the way he used Grenouille. Baldini rationalized that God will forgive him, and that others have cheated their entire lives without suffering punishment. But with Grenouille's departure, Baldini feels secure in his fortune. He vows to give money to Notre-Dame that day in thanks.

Again the characters of the book all seem to have murky morals and see each other mostly as means to achieve their own ends. Baldini understands that the way he used Grenouille was wrong, but feels as though he'll be spared paying a price for his actions because others commit similar crimes daily.





That afternoon, however, Baldini hears a rumor that the English have declared war on France, which interrupts a shipment of his perfume to London. That night, in bed, he decides to create a new perfume named after the colonies, which should make up for the monetary loss that will come with the war.

Note that Baldini neglects church for the third time, as he instead spends his evening figuring out how to make money without Grenouille in the depressed economy the war will certainly bring.







Baldini falls asleep, never to wake again, as the west side of the Pont-au-Change collapses and falls into the river. Baldini, his wife, and their buildings are the only casualties, as all the servants were out. When Chénier returns drunk, he suffers a nervous breakdown when he realizes that he'll no longer be able to inherit Baldini's shop. The bodies are never found; all that remains for several weeks are a variety of dissipating scents.

Baldini, like all those Grenouille has come into contact with before him, dies an unlucky death—perhaps also as a punishment for the way he exploited Grenouille (as the others did as well). We're reminded that Chénier is just as selfish as Baldini, as his reaction to the tragedy is not sadness at Baldini's death, but panic that his economic fortune is gone with Baldini.





PART 2, CHAPTER 23

Grenouille heads south to Orléans, and as he gets further away from Paris, the simplicity of the natural scents allows him to nearly breathe freely (he never truly breathes freely, as he's constantly wary of the air he lets into his body, and has always preferred exhaling over inhaling). Nonetheless, he's able to carry himself upright instead of hunched, and appears normal for stretches of his journey. Even more importantly, Grenouille feels freed from the press of human stench in Paris. He realizes it's people rather than the world that he finds oppressive.

The realization that it's the people in the world rather than the world itself that offends Grenouille will begin to lead him towards raging misanthropy later in life. Notice though how he focuses on the stench of people; this will be important to remember later when he begins creating human-scented perfumes. As usual, he perceives life primarily through aromas, and so his hatred of humanity manifests itself as a hatred of human scent.





As Grenouille approaches Orléans, he changes his plan and decides to skip the human smell of the city. Soon he begins avoiding not just cities but villages as well, and finds the clear air intoxicating. Within weeks even fellow travelers become too much for Grenouille's nose, so he does what it takes to avoid running into them, eventually traveling only at night.

This is proving to be a period of immense growth and change for Grenouille. He transitions from living in one of the most densely populated cities to avoiding even solo travelers, which only adds to his isolation and misanthropy.







The sight of the landscape during the day is nearly overwhelming for Grenouille's eyes, but he is fascinated by moonlight. The view at night is gray, and the narrator likens it to the world of Grenouille's soul.

Grenouille begins to retreat within himself as he starts to feel overwhelmed by the outside world as a whole. His world revolves around pure, non-human scent and nothing else.





Grenouille travels south and meets no other people, although he's aware of their existence thanks to his sense of smell. He begins to search out progressively more remote regions in order to escape the human smell, which increasingly repulses him.

The reader begins to question whether Grenouille will ever reach Grasse and accomplish his goals, as we find that now Grenouille is unable to handle being around others at all.





PART 2, CHAPTER 24

The most distant part of France is located in the Massif Central of the Auvergne, at the peak of a volcano called Plomb du Cantal. The surrounding land is barren and uninhabited. Grenouille reaches this mountain in August of 1756. He sniffs in every direction and smells nothing but stone and grass. It takes him a full day to realize that he is truly alone, that there is no human presence or scent on the top of the volcano. He finally believes it as the sun sets, and erupts with joy at his solitude. He dances and yells with glee and triumph late into the night.

While Grenouille has previously been said to have experienced some moments of contentment, hope, or happiness, those moments pale in comparison to this jubilant celebration of his solitude. This drives home just how much he truly feels disconnected from, and even antagonistic to, humanity.





PART 2, CHAPTER 25

Grenouille spends the next few days settling in, as he has decided to stay on the mountain. He finds water in a crevasse and salamanders and ring snakes to eat, supplemented with lichen and mossberries. This is perfectly acceptable to him, as he requires no comforts but smells.

Descriptions like this keep the reader from empathizing with Grenouille, as he is again presented as something foreign and unhuman.





Near the crevasse, Grenouille discovers a tunnel in the mountain that twists back 100 feet. At the end, there's a space large enough to sit and lie down. It's also quiet, dark, and doesn't smell of anything living. When Grenouille spreads his blanket, he is overcome by a sense of sacred awe, and feels entirely secure. He cries for joy.

Grenouille finds immense joy in discovering a place devoid of all the things he's spent the last few months avoiding: people, light, and sound. His joy at having found this place entirely alienates him from others, though.





The narrator discusses the people who seek solitude (saints, failures, prophets), who retreat to deserts or caves to be nearer to God. Grenouille, on the other hand, had no conception of God; rather, he sought solitude for his own pleasure and enjoyed life and himself immensely.

The comparison of Grenouille to people who seek comfort in religion will begin to develop more in the coming chapters, as Grenouille too finds meaning in an "inner world" apart from the rest of humanity.







PART 2, CHAPTER 26

Grenouille's "debaucheries" take place in his **inner fortress**. He begins by thinking about scents from his childhood, and if his disgust at them isn't quite enough, he thinks about the smell of Grimal's tannery or the stench of thousands of Parisians in the summer. Finally his hate explodes, extinguishing all the obnoxious smells and giving Grenouille a sense of righteousness.

Afterwards, Grenouille stretches out inside his cave. In his mental fortress, he dozes and enjoys pleasant scents. In the late afternoon of Grenouille's inner world, he rises and admires his inner empire like a conqueror. Grenouille's inner self strides through the fields, sowing seeds of fragrance, and then brings on a downpour. The scents bloom like flowers and mix together, and Grenouille is satisfied with his work. All the created scents celebrate their creator with songs and more wonderful smells. When Grenouille gets tired of the celebrations, he retreats to his heart and his inner fortress.

Grenouille is essentially masturbating by wallowing in his own hatred of humanity, as malice, scent, and sex are again mingled in Süskind's descriptions. In hating others with this degree of intensity, though, Grenouille is seemingly able to experience some love of himself, and a sense of power over things he finds inferior or repulsive.







Here, we see Grenouille's true dreams and desires. In his inner world, he has total control and can revel in his sense of smell—he can create scent and destroy it on a whim. His people celebrate him with perfumes and he's made to feel powerful. These afternoons in his mental fortress will be important later, as they will influence what Grenouille's real-world goals become.







PART 2, CHAPTER 27

The inner Grenouille, "Grenouille the Great," is tired after his day of destruction, creation, and celebration. His heart is a **purple castle**, and in his private castle Grenouille simply exists as Jean-Baptiste on a purple sofa in one of the thousands of rooms. The rooms contain floor-to-ceiling shelving filled with Grenouille's collected odors. In the cellars his finest scents are kept, bottled like wine. Grenouille the Great calls his invisible (and non-smelling) servants to fetch bottles of scent for him to drink.

When the servants arrive with the bottle of scent, Grenouille the Great pours himself a glass. Daily, he drinks a scent he collected while in Grimal's service, on the first night Grenouille went out to explore Paris without permission. This scent is the smell of freedom and hope.

After two glasses of this scent, Grenouille the Great begins to read from books of odors he finds revolting, primarily human odors. He continues to drink, making it through several bottles of pleasant scent and becoming increasingly drunk. Finally, he opens the bottle of scent of the girl from the rue de Marais, his most precious scent. When he finishes the bottle, he sits still for a minute and finally falls sideways and sleeps. The Grenouille in the real world falls asleep as well.

Grenouille's palace has scents on display rather than paintings or taxidermy animals, indicating again scent's immense importance to him. Notice too that Grenouille's servants are invisible and scentless. He wants to be served and have others underneath him, but can't stand even the imaginary "real" person with scent and form.











It appears safe to assume that what got Grenouille through his years of servitude was this scent or the idea of freedom. Essentially, he's now living out that freedom in his cave, where he can control every aspect of his life.











Grenouille has created a world for himself that is everything he ever dreamed of, where everything that he hates exists in such a way that he can pick it up and choose to engage with it, and then put it down at will (suggesting that he partly enjoys the sensation of despising something). The girl Grenouille murdered clearly remains intoxicating even in his memory.







When Grenouille wakes, he wakes up in his cave rather than in his **fortress** or his inner empire. He feels as miserable as if he'd truly been drinking, and crawls out of the cave for water and food. The scents of the world are overly sharp to him, and the narrator notes that Grenouille "the **tick**" has grown extremely touchy. When Grenouille finishes taking care of his needs outside the cave, he retreats back inside and begins the process inside his inner empire over again.

Grenouille essentially spends his days wallowing in his hate for the world and the belief, which he can entertain here, that he is a god and in total control of his world. The realities of the outside world, however, are a harsh reminder that Grenouille still is, technically, a human, and cannot entirely lose himself in his inner fortress.









PART 2, CHAPTER 28

Grenouille's days unfold in this way for seven years. In the outside world, war continues to rage and France loses its colonial empire. One winter, Grenouille nearly freezes to death without realizing it. He lies in his **purple room** for five days, and when he finally wakes, is so cold he can't move. He is saved only by a turn in the weather. Grenouille would've lived forever within his empire on the mountain if disaster hadn't struck and driven him back out into the world.

The style of writing here leads the reader to question what could've possibly happened to make Grenouille leave. He was happy enough in his cave that he nearly froze lounging in his inner world and rejecting the outside world entirely. The outside world, meanwhile, is changing drastically.





PART 2, CHAPTER 29

The disaster wasn't an external one, the narrator says, but rather one that took place in the deepest part of Grenouille's dream fantasies. One night he lies on his sofa in his **purple fortress**, asleep after drinking a huge amount, including two bottles of the scent of the girl from the rue de Marais. While Grenouille's sleep is usually dreamless, on this night he experiences wisps of dreams floating past. The wisps begin to grow thicker and finally, Grenouille feels as though he's standing in rising fog. The fog wraps around Grenouille and he can't catch his breath. The fog is Grenouille's own body odor, and with horror, Grenouille realizes he can't smell it.

Finally, in a dream, Grenouille realizes what others have realized since his infancy and finds that he doesn't smell. The knowledge of this is terrifying and threatens to kill him, an apt and symbolic representation of what's to come. Notably as well, it's his continued desire for the scent of the girl from the rue de Marais that gets him drunk enough to experience dreams like this.





Grenouille begins to scream, and the scream wakes him. He thinks that the fog would've suffocated him and he would have died, and he feels very afraid. Grenouille resolves to change his life so that he won't have to experience such a frightening dream again. He creeps out of his cave and squats in the sunshine, still shaken by his dream, thinking that it's a good thing the outside world still exists. After a few hours Grenouille has calmed down and returned to normal.

For the first time, Grenouille's inner world is a dangerous place rather than someplace safe and wonderful, which leads him to a greater appreciation of the outside world.





Grenouille smells his fingers and smells nothing but the spring air. He tries the crook of his elbow, his genitals, armpits, his feet, and smells nothing. He rationalizes that he's dulled to his own scent and if he could wean himself from his scent for a while, he'd then be able to smell it. He strips off his clothes, leaves them in a pile, and climbs to the top of the mountain. He stands like a diver about to jump and allows the wind to cleanse him of his smell for several hours.

This entire sequence, while deadly serious for Grenouille, is comic for the reader as we might imagine Grenouille attempting to smell himself at the top of the mountain. While the novel is a very serious one, it's these moments that remind the reader that the story is also ridiculous and absurd, despite its underlying horror.







When evening comes, a very sunburnt Grenouille returns to his pile of clothes. He performs the sniffing test he learned from Baldini and still smells nothing aside from the natural world he's inhabited for the last seven years. He becomes alarmed and afraid. This fear isn't the same fear he experienced in the dream; rather, it's the fear that he knows nothing about himself.

Finally we learn what Grenouille's fear is truly about: it's about coming of age and not knowing who or what he truly is. This is a quest for self-knowledge more than anything else, which situates the novel as a whole as a kind of twisted bildungsroman.







Deciding he must know if he has a scent, Grenouille crawls back into his cave, fighting the fear from his dream and the fear of knowing nothing about himself. At the back of the cave, he squats for a long time and smells nothing but the cave. Grenouille nods to himself, exits the cave, pulls on his clothes, and begins to head south.

While before Grenouille's journey was one to learn and understand about scent, the reader is now aware that the following part of his journey will also consist of attempts to learn about himself.





PART 2, CHAPTER 30

When Grenouille first encounters other people, he looks so horrifying that people run from him screaming. When he enters the town of Pierrefort, he's treated as a sensational curiosity and is taken directly to the mayor. Grenouille presents his journeyman's papers and invents a story that he was attacked by robbers and held captive. This isn't so wild of a story, as similar attacks are relatively frequent in the area. The mayor passes his report on to the marquis de La Taillade-Espinasse, a local nobleman.

We see in Grenouille's process that he's using people in a very similar way to how he was once used by people like Grimal and Baldini. His narrative of being a captive allows him to extract the people's curiosity and then kindness, propelling him toward a person who can help him move on and accomplish his goals.









The marquis had left life at Versailles at age 40 and retired to his estate. There he wrote important scientific works on various topics including experimental agriculture. This topic inspired the marquis' research into the relationship between one's proximity to the earth and vital energy, with the belief that living beings seek to distance themselves from the earth to escape poisonous gas concentrated at ground level and below. The marquis, upon hearing about Grenouille's last seven years, finds his theories confirmed by Grenouille's horrific state. He offers to take Grenouille to Montpellier with him to save him from the poisonous gas in exchange for money.

As usual, the marquis sees Grenouille in exactly the same way that Grenouille sees others—as useful. The marquis' ideas seem patently absurd, but he can seemingly twist any kind of evidence to fit his theory. Notably, the marquis offers Grenouille money in exchange for being a research subject, which will certainly help Grenouille later.







Grenouille and Taillade-Espinasse make the journey in two days. The marquis is excited to present his find to an audience, and when they arrive, sends invitations to local societies to come view Grenouille. A week later, Taillade-Espinasse lectures to a huge crowd on his theory of "fluidum letale" (the supposed poisonous gas of the earth), while Grenouille stands on a dais as a research subject. The marquis asserts that Grenouille is closer to death than life, and the lecture is a success. Grenouille contributes to the success, as he feels perfectly healthy, but pretends he can't speak from exposure to the gas.

It's let on to the reader that this supposed "proof" of that marquis' theory is entirely fabricated—Grenouille is only acting unhealthy. His time in the mountain (which was, furthermore, an "airy" place) was actually a time of great internal growth and discovery for him.









Back at Taillade-Espinasse's manor, Grenouille is locked in a "vital ventilation machine," which is supposed to surround Grenouille with air from higher regions. The marquis feeds him foods from "earth-removed" regions, primarily poultry dishes. Grenouille is treated for five days and then is allowed to bathe, trim his nails, and soften his skin. The marquis calls for a tailor and a cobbler to fit clothes for Grenouille, and the marquis himself applies makeup to Grenouille's face. Finally, the marquis applies violet perfume to Grenouille and steps back to admire his handiwork.

The care Grenouille receives here is reminiscent of the care Baldini lavished on him when Grenouille fell ill. As usual, Grenouille is only treated as a valuable human and cared for when his health and existence are useful for someone else.









Taillade-Espinasse addresses Grenouille as "Monsieur," states with delight that Grenouille now looks like a perfectly normal man, and offers Grenouille a mirror. Grenouille, seeing a gentleman in the mirror, ducks instinctively, but realizes it's his reflection and stands to regard himself. Grenouille is struck by his normalcy, and thinks that except for lacking a human scent, he isn't unusual at all. Grenouille realizes that this isn't because of the marquis' "treatment"; his appearance of normalcy is purely thanks to the clothes and the makeup. He thinks that this figure in the mirror could have an effect on the world.

While it's obvious that the marquis' theory has nothing to it, what's important here is that Grenouille learns that he can pass for normal, save for his lack of scent. By donning the clothes and the makeup of a gentleman, Grenouille understands that he can now exist in society without raising questions as his appearance once did. Further, he realizes that the person in the mirror can have an effect on the world, which sets him up to cultivate a personality and persona.











PART 2. CHAPTER 31

The following day, Grenouille fakes a fainting spell and collapses. The marquis, entirely beside himself, calls for servants and fans Grenouille with a fan drenched in violet perfume. Grenouille thrashes and is finally able to say that the perfume will kill him. As he calms, he explains that violet perfume, while lovely, is made from violet roots and must have an effect on someone suffering from fluidum letale poisoning. He asks if he may concoct a perfume that's light and airy, saying that the new perfume would make him immune to future fainting spells.

Again, this moment drives home the idea that Grenouille is both acting for the sake of the marquis and using the marquis to accomplish his own goals. It's not clear yet to the reader exactly what Grenouille is after by asking to create a new perfume, but by using the marquis' theory for his own gain, Grenouille is guaranteed to get his wish.





The narrator notes for the reader that Grenouille's speech was recorded using proper speech, but in reality Grenouille's outburst was an eruption of blubbering, coughing, and gasping, accompanied by rolls of the eyes.

While Grenouille learned language in order to pass for normal, here he knowingly forgets it in order to add to the drama and effect of the outburst.





Taillade-Espinasse, impressed, thinks that he too is probably infected by the violet perfume. He feels great affection towards Grenouille for bringing it to his attention, and screams at the servants to remove all violet perfume from the manor and for Grenouille to be taken to a perfumer in the city, which the narrator notes is exactly what Grenouille's intent was.

Taillade-Espinasse now attributes his own ailments to the use of violet perfume, following Grenouille's plan exactly. This plays into the idea that scent and perfume have great power over people.









In the local perfumer Runel's shop, which isn't well equipped by any means, Grenouille sets about creating the scent of a human being. Grenouille creates a disgusting base for his perfume of cat feces, old cheese, rotten egg, and civet, and then adds fresh scents such as peppermint and eucalyptus, which temper the awful smell. The floral and oily smells on top of the horrific base smell like life. Grenouille quickly creates a copy of the floral half of his perfume, puts it into bottles, and then applies his first perfume to himself.

The components of Grenouille's human base only serve to reinforce his misanthropy. The ingredients are disgusting, which allows the reader the opportunity to regard the scent of humans in a similar way to how Grenouille regards them. Further, it heightens the grotesqueness of the novel by making humans appear especially disgusting.







PART 2, CHAPTER 32

As Grenouille leaves the laboratory, he feels afraid to be giving off an odor for the first time. He decides to test his perfume in an anonymous environment, so he decides to walk through the town.

Grenouille doesn't identify with his humanity or feel human, hence his fear to smell like one.





Grenouille is used to being ignored in public, as many people simply aren't aware he exists thanks to his lack of smell. However, here in Montpellier, Grenouille sees that he's being noticed in the first time, and not in a bad way. Grenouille passes a wedding leaving the cathedral and joins the crowd waiting to see the bride. The crowd doesn't notice he's any different, and Grenouille feels immense joy. He feels a child at his knee and lifts her up so she can see. Both the child and the child's mother are thrilled.

Grenouille's façade of "passing" as normal and human is complete, and further, the acquisition of a smell can be seen as one way in which Grenouille is beginning to attain true adulthood and coming of age. The child's reaction here shows just how effective Grenouille's perfume is, as it even makes him seem kind and trustworthy.









When the bride and the wedding party finally walk through the crowd, Grenouille's joy turns to a "wicked feeling of triumph." He finds he's no longer afraid of people and hardly hates them, but his contempt for humans remains strong, because they smell and are so easily fooled.

It's important to note that Grenouille's success at passing means that he sheds some of his fear of people. He understands now that he can control them and they no longer hold power over him.







When the crowd disperses, Grenouille enters the church and sits down. He feels content at his awareness of his genius and his newfound power. Grenouille knows now that he will be able to create a superhuman, angel's scent, which will make anyone who smells it immediately love Grenouille. It will be like his inner fantasies in real life, and his power will be inescapable, as inhalation is necessary to live.

Grenouille is unique in that he has an acute awareness of the power of scent, something that the novel posits is merely instinctual and unconscious for other people, and more importantly, Grenouille has the skills to manipulate this power for himself.











Grenouille sits plotting and decides that he wants to create this perfume purely because he's evil. Inhaling the incense in the church, Grenouille thinks that God stinks and is either being swindled, as his incense in the church isn't pure, or is a swindler just like Grenouille is.

As Grenouille grows and comes of age, his self-knowledge grows too. Here he explicitly sets himself as equal or superior even to God, based on God's perceived acceptance of impure incense.











Taillade-Espinasse is thrilled with the perfume Grenouille created for him, and is also thrilled to see the effect of the earth-removed perfume on Grenouille, who appears to have acquired a personality in the last few hours.

One week after his first lecture, Taillade-Espinasse presents Grenouille at the great hall of the local university. All of Montpellier, scientific and otherwise, attends, and is shocked by Grenouille's miraculous transformation. Rather than listen to the marquis, Grenouille watches the effect of his perfume on the crowd. As his scent reaches people, their faces soften. When the crowd cheers the marquis at the end of the lecture, Grenouille knows that the cheering is really for himself, Grenouille, and his perfume.

Note the correlation here between suddenly acquiring a human scent and developing a personality. This develops the idea that one's scent is intrinsic to the kind of person they are.







Grenouille's transformation is intense. He's essentially made the transition from sub-human, scentless child to normal, powerful, and scented adult. Grenouille's scent is powerful enough to reach the back of the room and soften everyone's expressions—it doesn't just make him seem human, but also affects the emotions and even actions of others.











PART 2, CHAPTER 34

Grenouille, having achieved some fame in Montpellier, remains for several weeks. He tells his tale of being captured by robbers often, which provides him some practice in conversation (which has never been Grenouille's strong suit) and importantly, allows him to practice lying. Really, Grenouille can tell people whatever he wants because once someone inhales his perfume, they immediately trust him. The effect of this is that Grenouille becomes confident in social situations.

In March, Grenouille leaves the town unnoticed, as he goes without his perfume that day. Taillade-Espinasse makes inquiries, but eventually says that Grenouille left to deal with family in Paris. Secretly he's annoyed, though, as he had planned to parade Grenouille around the country to promote his theory, but his fame rises anyway.

After founding a lodge dedicated to his theory in 1764, Taillade-Espinasse decides to create publicity for his theory that would overshadow even Grenouille's transformation. He decides to scale the highest mountain in the Pyrenees, remain at the summit for three weeks, and return on Christmas Eve as a man aged 20. His companions give up after the last town on the mountain, but the marquis strips off his clothes and continues alone in the cold. He never returns, and his remains are never found. His theory, however, lives on, and the narrator says that even today, secret Tailladic lodges meet yearly to climb the mountain and light a bonfire in the marquis' honor.

Montpellier proves to be a safe space for Grenouille to refine his methods and techniques for passing as a normal human. He also learns how to most effectively interact with those around him, and begins to understand the extent of his power now that his fear of people has disappeared.







The reader is reminded that for the marquis, Grenouille was never anything more than a means of proving his theory to the world. However, it's important to remember that the opposite is true as well; Grenouille only wanted to profit from the marquis.





For the third time now, someone whom Grenouille came in contact with suffers a horrible death. This situates Grenouille as a true bringer of death, and adds to the grotesque and fantastical nature of the novel. However, the specifics here contribute to the underlying dark humor, as the marquis' desire to climb the mountain and return at the age of 20 is absolutely ridiculous.







It takes Grenouille seven days to reach the town of Grasse, a small city nestled in a valley close to the sea but not at all maritime. Grasse is the center for the production of scents, perfumes, and other such odorous items. Grenouille dabs himself with his human perfume and approaches the town. He wishes only to learn the methods of producing scent that Baldini told him about. After eating at an inn, Grenouille spends the afternoon wandering. He passes a number of perfumers' shops, as well as soapworks and scent wholesalers. Grenouille realizes that, despite these wholesalers' modest facades, they actually control the wholesale supply of scent, as they possess the finest materials inside. Grenouille smells that these people live in luxurious family homes at the back of the buildings.

Here, the reader is reminded that scent isn't a source of power for Grenouille alone. Perfume and scent are entire economies unto themselves, and people profit (financially) from the sale of perfume. These people, then, are accorded a great deal of power according to the social mores of the time (and within the scent-influenced world of the novel). Further, these wholesalers are attempting to "pass" as modest perfumers with their downplayed fronts. This mirrors Grenouille's desire and attempt to pass as normal, despite possessing immense and inhuman power.









Grenouille stops in front of one of these camouflaged fronts, having caught wind of a scent like something he's smelled only once before. He considers forcing his way into the front of the building, but decides to find a way along the back, walking along the wall of the city, which forms the back walls of the street's gardens. After a minute, he finds the smell coming from the building's garden, and blood rushes through Grenouille's body and he experiences a sort of attack, losing his sense of where he is and finding himself back on the rue de Marais in Paris. The scent coming from the garden in Grasse is the scent of the girl he murdered in Paris, and he finds tears of bliss in his eyes to have rediscovered the scent.

Despite the number of years since Grenouille murdered the girl from the rue de Marais, her scent holds immense power over him still. Grenouille's newfound knowledge of dealing with people and taming his more brutal instincts is apparent in his decision to not force his entrance into the house, but rather to go about finding the scent in a more covert manner.





Grenouille, dizzy, sinks into a crouch against the wall. He inhales short breaths and finds that the scent here in Grasse is somewhat different, although this girl is certainly a redhead like the last girl, with white skin and freckles, but this one is still a child. Grenouille thinks that this child, barely beginning puberty, already smells better than the girl from the rue de Marais, and once she reaches adulthood, her scent will be overwhelming to everyone, man or woman.

Note the amount of power that Grenouille asserts this girl will have in adulthood. This plays into the idea again that scent is all-powerful, and the color of this girl's hair begins to provide evidence for the idea the redheaded girls and women have the best and most powerful scents (or at least to Grenouille).







Grenouille decides he must possess the girl's scent and "peel it from her like skin," not destroying it like he did with the girl from the rue de Marais. He thinks that he doesn't yet know how to do this, but he has two years to learn. Grenouille stands and moves on, entering the town from another gate and rationalizing that he can't return to the garden, as the scent is too exciting for him. Rather, he must throw himself into learning how to extract scent.

Grenouille's choice of language is grotesque and visceral, which creates both a sense of disgust in the reader and foreshadows the violence to come. It seems likely that Grenouille will be successful in this endeavor, but the reader isn't yet sure exactly how.











Grenouille comes across a small perfumer's workshop and asks for a job. The owner had died earlier that year but his widow. Madame Arnulfi, is managing the business mostly alone. After some hemming and hawing, she finally agrees to take him on and offers him a small salary and a small cabin in which to live. Madame Arnulfi calls in Druot, her first journeyman, and Grenouille smells that he spends a great deal of time in Madame's bed. A massive man, Druot looks Grenouille up and down and agrees to his hire.

The ease with which Grenouille finds work indicates that his disguise of normalcy is working, and he's successful in appearing competent but not threatening. Once again Grenouille is able to perceive hidden or secret things (like Druot's affair with Madame Arnulfi) only through his nose.











The next day Grenouille begins work. It's the season for jonguil flowers. They're delivered every morning and dumped into melted pork lard and beef tallow, which Grenouille is tasked with stirring constantly. As the blossoms are stirred under, their scent becomes impregnated in the oil. While the work is very hard, Druot never helps stir. Grenouille is fascinated by the process and doesn't object to the arrangement.

When Druot decides the oil is saturated with scent, he and Grenouille pour the scent-laden pomade into stoneware crocks, and Madame Arnulfi comes to label and record the product. She then makes the rounds through the city, using her plight as a widow to garner sympathy and make sales. If she gets wind that there will be no future scarcity to use to her advantage, she instructs Druot to transform the pomade into an "essence absolue." Turning the pomade into essence absolue entails a complicated process that yields only a few flacons of the finest flower oil, which is worth a fortune.

The descriptions of how the scent is actually extracted from the flowers adds to the grotesque and sensuous quality of the novel, as do the descriptions of Grenouille's interpretation: it's a process of death and control.







Madame Arnulfi is evidently a smart businesswoman, and very much in charge of her business decisions. Like Grenouille and his caregivers before, she uses her situation as a widow to her advantage and uses everyone, Druot and Grenouille included, to build her fortune and her success.







PART 3, CHAPTER 37

Grenouille is willing to perform all the menial chores in the following months, but his sense of smell allows him to notice when oil is overheated, for example. Occasionally he suggests this to Druot, who sees that Grenouille is respectful of his power of first journeyman and often correct in his suggestions. As such, Druot begins to leave more decisions to Grenouille, and eventually most of the process.

During jasmine season, Grenouille learns that the flower is too sensitive to be plunged into hot oil. Rather, the flowers are spread on glass plates that have been smeared with oil, and as the flowers die, are replaced with fresh ones until the oil is saturated. Grenouille recognizes that the pomade differs slightly in scent from the flower itself, but is close enough to fool the rest of the world.

Grenouille makes this entirely about power. He appears to respect Druot and his power, and understands that playing this role will encourage Druot to give Grenouille more power. We see too that Grenouille is learning, and is certainly filing all this information away for later use.





This realization that the jasmine pomade isn't exactly the same scent as the flower itself no doubt only fuels Grenouille's sense of superiority, as it's close enough to not be noticeable by the general populace. Again, notice that the language used to describe the process is sensual yet grotesque.







Druot sees with the cold process that Grenouille is again better than he is, and as such allows Grenouille to make all the decisions. Grenouille encourages Druot to regard him as an unambitious nitwit, and eventually the two get along very well. Through the winter there is little to do in the shop, and Druot makes himself scarce. Grenouille doesn't go out except to journeymen's meetings, where he encourages the others to think that he's uninteresting. They leave Grenouille alone, just as he wants.

We again see that Grenouille is cultivating his act of being perfectly normal and uninteresting, which allows him to work on his goals unnoticed. He understands that attending these meetings is absolutely necessary for maintaining this façade, as it's important for him to be a known figure, seen in public, to then be labeled as normal.









PART 3, CHAPTER 38

Grenouille spends his winter in the workshop, supposedly attempting to invent a formula for a new cologne. In actuality, he spends his time creating a number of personal odors for himself. He makes one that allows him to be inconspicuous, one that makes people think he's in a hurry, and one that imitates Druot's odor of semen.

The reader knows that Grenouille is more than capable of creating a wonderful cologne, which draws the reader towards Grenouille's way of thinking that others are stupid and easily fooled.









With the disguise of these perfumes, Grenouille is able to exist undisturbed. He devotes himself to the pursuit of subtle scents and systematically plans how to perfect his methods. He begins extracting scent from a brass doorknob by wrapping it in beef tallow. He moves on to capturing the scent of stone, and creates a perfume of the olive grove behind the cloister in town. These scents delight Grenouille.

It's implied here that Grenouille's joy in these subtle scents and the combinations thereof is pure and innocent, although the reader is aware of what the sinister final goal is. Overall, this passage again works to draw in the reader to empathize with Grenouille.





Next, Grenouille moves on to living subjects. He hunts for small animals and drowns them in warm oil, and creeps into animals' stalls at night to drape oily cloths over them. Animals, unlike inanimate objects, he finds reluctant. Farm animals rub off the cloths, and out of fear, rats defecate and sweat as he attempts to submerge them in the warm oil, ruining it. Grenouille realizes he must kill them first.

Suddenly, Grenouille's innocent experiments turn more sinister and horrifying as he tries to drown live rats in oil. These experiments lead the reader to wonder what method Grenouille will settle on for human subjects.





Grenouille targets a puppy, luring it away from its mother and dealing it a fatal blow as it eats a scrap of meat. He sandwiches the body between two greased plates and lets it sit until it begins to stink. He then distills the oil down into a tiny tube that smells clearly of dog, and when he offers the tube to the puppy's mother, she whimpers and won't leave the scent.

Targeting a puppy mirrors Grenouille's targeting of young girls throughout the novel. This scene shows Grenouille's capacity for cruelty, as he's willing to do seemingly anything to pursue his goals.











Cautiously, Grenouille moves on to humans, concerned primarily with testing his methods. He sticks tiny scraps of oily cloth under benches in an inn, but these yield a scent more of the inn than of humans themselves. Over Christmas, Grenouille leaves similar scraps under pews at the cathedral, and the resulting odor is resoundingly human. Finally, Grenouille obtains bed sheets from a man who died of consumption, and is able to extract the man's personal odor from the sweaty sheets. He discovers the perfect type of oil to use by paying a beggar woman to wear oily rags against her skin. He stops at that, as his real goal is to extract the scent of humans who inspire love.

The process here is fascinating as well as somewhat gross, and undeniably sinister. We see Grenouille's scientific mind at work in his method of experiments that grow in complexity and focus in on specific targets. Grenouille's focus on victims that "inspire love" asks the reader to question Grenouille's motives. Does he want them purely for himself so that he might be loved as well, or just because he enjoys these scents most and wants to possess them for himself? Alternately, does he want to deprive others of their inspiration for love?



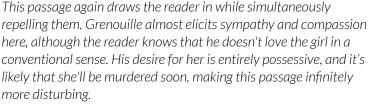






PART 3, CHAPTER 39

In January, Madame Arnulfi marries Druot, who is promoted to master perfumer and glover, although the Madame keeps her name and control of the finances. In March, Grenouille decides to see how the mysterious girl's scent is developing. He's overwhelmed by the scent when he catches it, and again stands outside the garden wall. Rather than being intoxicated, Grenouille is happy like a lover. He doesn't love the girl herself, just her scent, but he swears that he'll bring home her scent within the year.









That night in his cabin, Grenouille thinks of the girl's scent and immerses himself in it. When he begins to fall asleep, however, the scent disappears and Grenouille is terrified. He wonders what will happen when he runs out of the scent, thinking he'll have to live with the knowledge that he had at one time possessed the perfume. He wonders what he needs the perfume for at all.

This moment of questioning mirrors Grenouille's discovery that he has no scent in its scope and effect on Grenouille's goals and reasoning. We see that he's gaining self awareness here as he questions his reasoning for even following through with these goals.







At that thought, Grenouille feels chilled and wonders how long he can keep the scent. He wants to walk out and make the trek to his old cave, where he could fall asleep and die, but he resists the desire, as it's a "known" desire. Possessing and then losing a scent, however, is unknown, and he reasons that it seems more desirable. Grenouille "the **tick**," having reasoned to let himself drop one last time, lays back and thinks himself heroic.

Grenouille is overwhelmingly self-absorbed to think of himself as a hero for considering letting go of this scent. For Grenouille, though, the idea is like a religious sacrifice.





Grenouille continues his line of reasoning and considers how to make the perfume of the girl last longer. He finally sees that using the scent in pure form is crude and unsophisticated, and decides he must "set it like the most precious gemstone" in a setting of other scents, and for this he needs other ingredients.

The juxtaposition of the language of beautiful jewelry and scent with Grenouille's desire for these female scents adds to the horror at his plan. It also foreshadows his next moves to obtain "other ingredients."









In May, a farmer discovers the body of a naked 15-year-old girl in a rose field, killed by a blow to the back of her head. The girl's hair has been shaved and taken by the murderer, along with her clothes. The people of Grasse suspect the Gypsies, despite the fact that there haven't been Gypsies in the area since December, so they move on to suspecting the Italian migrant workers, and then a number of other groups. When the Italians arrive to hire themselves out for picking, they are hired but treated with caution. Not long after, two young Italian girls are found murdered in the same fashion as the first girl.

This chapter is a study of human nature and the nature of fear itself. The people of Grasse cannot conceptualize that it's possibly one of their own who is murdering girls, and so they shift the blame from one group to the next. The reader is aware that Grenouille is the murderer, of course, and we finally see his methods in action on humans, now that he has learned all he needed to.



Fear spreads like wildfire. Farmers allow the migrant workers to sleep in their barns, patrols are set up in neighborhoods, and a curfew is placed on females after dusk. However, all these measures prove ineffective, as a young girl is murdered weekly throughout the summer. All the girls are beautiful and approaching womanhood, mostly dark and "sugary."

By not including mention of Grenouille specifically, the narrator garners sympathy and identification with the people of Grasse. The reader also knows that Grenouille is so effective because of his sense of smell and lack of scent.







Anyone who can afford to do so sends their daughters away from Grasse. The police lieutenant is replaced, and his successor has the victims' bodies examined. They're all found to be virgins, which only increases the sense of horror. The town council petitions the local bishop to excommunicate the murderer, and at the end of September, the bishop does so—and the murders cease immediately. The murderer had killed 24 girls.

This moment shows the power of religion and government in action, but we also see how smart Grenouille is about these murders. By ceasing his killing spree after the bishop excommunicates the murderer, Grenouille effectively lulls everyone into believing that the church truly has power over the murderer.





In December, reports from Grenoble indicate that there is a serial murderer there strangling and tearing his female victims' clothes, and despite the very different methods, the people of Grasse are convinced that the murderer is the same. In January of 1766, security measures in Grasse are lifted. However, anyone with a daughter approaching the victims' age still fears for her safety.

Nobody in Grasse wants to believe that the murderer is still among them, choosing to believe instead something that allows them to easily sleep at night. Again the descriptions of human nature seem to confirm some of Grenouille's misanthropic views.





PART 3, CHAPTER 41

One man in Grasse, Antoine Richis, doesn't trust the peace. He's a widower who intends to remarry so that he can produce sons and climb the social ladder, but he wants to marry off his daughter Laure first. Richis is very rich, and Laure is his prize possession. She's exceptionally beautiful, and even Richis himself finds himself sexually attracted to her at times. He had increased his home's security over the summer but hadn't feared for Laure, as she wasn't quite old enough at the time. He also found the town's behavior despicable and wanted to set an example.

Richis has a very complicated relationship to Laure, whom the reader is led to assume is Grenouille's girl in the garden. Like everyone else in the novel, Richis sees Laure only as a means of advancement for himself, as he can profit from her marriage to someone of high social standing (but he also perversely sees her as a means of pleasure that he must deny himself).











However, one day in March, Richis sits in his salon and watches Laure walk in the garden. She disappears behind a hedge and takes a moment too long to reappear, frightening Richis. That night he has a terrible dream in which he finds Laure murdered in her bedroom. He bursts into Laure's room to find her asleep and alive, and returns to his bedroom.

Richis thinks that he never believed the rumor that the murderer had left the town, and decides that he's surely still around. Richis also thinks that the murderer has a system, as all the victims are beautiful and youthful. He decides that the victims are part of a grand plan to assemble a picture of absolute beauty, and concludes that Laure must be the crowning jewel and the murderer's final victim. Richis feels superior to the murderer having had this thought, and he sees the situation as though he and the murderer are business competitors. He vows to keep Laure alive, as he needs her to accomplish his goals.

The narrator is beginning to draw similarities between Richis and Grenouille with the device of the terrifying dream to incite action. Both are powerful figures, and Richis shares some of Grenouille's beliefs that the general populace is easily fooled.





Richis assumes that by simply meeting the murderer in intellectual fortitude, he can outsmart him. Note that Richis feels he must keep his daughter alive in order to further his own business and social climbing ventures, not for Laure's happiness or for the sake of believing she's deserving of life regardless of her usefulness.









PART 3, CHAPTER 43

In the middle of the night, Richis wakes his servants and tells them he plans to take Laure to Grenoble. They leave by eight in the morning, and the town of Grasse suspects that Laure will not return. Outside of Grasse, Richis instructs his servants to continue to Grenoble, and he turns the other direction with Laure and her handmaid. Richis plans to hide Laure at the monastery of Saint-Honorat, and then arrange her marriage to a baron's son on the condition that the two will be married within ten days and consummate their marriage on the day of the wedding. Richis knows the price for marrying Laure like this will be higher than if he waits a little longer, but he also knows that Laure being married and possibly pregnant will save her from the murderer.

Richis recognizes that it's Laure's youth and virginity that makes her a target for the murderer, at least based on his past murders. This raises the question, then, of whether simply not being a virgin would truly alter Laure's scent enough to save her—is there something about sexual virginity that makes one's scent especially powerful, or especially attractive to Grenouille? Richis's plan indicates just how important Laure is to his life goals, as he's willing to make this more expensive investment in order to insure both her life and his ability to use her marriage for his own gains.









The narrator says that while the plan was well thought out and Richis' logic is sound, Richis and Laure are traveling too slowly for Laure to be considered safe yet.

This statement creates a sense of foreboding. While it seems likely that Laure will not survive the novel, Richis' plan adds suspense.





PART 3, CHAPTER 44

While Laure and Richis are leaving town, Grenouille is in the Arnulfi workshop processing jonquils, in good spirits because he has 24 flacons of the perfumes of his earlier victims, and plans to possess the final scent today. He plans to sneak into the Richis house by wearing no perfume, and then sneak into Laure's bedroom that night to murder her.

The narrator is setting Grenouille up for disappointment and fear here, as Laure is slipping from his grasp unbeknownst to him. Notice that by going without perfume, Grenouille is now using his lack of scent to his advantage.







Grenouille finishes his work around noon and steps outside. Smelling the air, he knows Laure is gone and panics momentarily. Druot returns from lunch and mentions in passing that Richis and his daughter left for Grenoble that morning. Grenouille runs out of one of the town gates and smells Laure's scent coming from the opposite direction from Grenoble.

Grenouille is too powerful to be tricked by Richis's story that he and Laure are headed for Grenoble. This begins to assert Grenouille's dominance over even the very intelligent and powerful Richis.





Grenouille runs to his cabin, gathers his supplies, and follows Laure's scent south. He catches the runaways quickly. As evening comes, Grenouille goes to an inn and says he's a journeyman tanner, and they offer him a stall in the barn. Two hours later, Richis and Laure arrive at the inn. Upon hearing there is a tanner sleeping in the barn, Richis goes out to inspect the man and finds him sleeping. Later that night, he locks Laure in her room from the outside and goes to bed, satisfied with how events are playing out.

By any other metric, Richis is doing everything right to protect Laure, but it seems that Grenouille's mastery of scent makes him practically all-powerful.





PART 3, CHAPTER 45

In the stall in the barn, Grenouille begins spreading oily paste over fine linen, making it thicker in places where it will pick up the most scent. When he finishes, he folds the cloth, gathers his other supplies, and leaves the barn. He finds a ladder, props it against Laure's open window, and climbs up.

The use of animal fat to extract scent adds to the visceral, grotesque feeling that the novel cultivates.







Grenouille watches Laure sleep for a minute and then clubs her on the back of her head. He hates the sound, but when it's over the room is completely quiet, since Laure has stopped breathing. Grenouille opens his cloth, cuts Laure's nightgown off, and rolls her up in the oiled linen. Only her hair sticks out.

This murder is easy, practically speaking, for Grenouille. We see how little regard he has for Laure or her body in his rough handling of her, indicating again how little he thinks of people apart from their scents.







For six hours, Grenouille stays awake and watches Laure from an armchair, covered with her dress. He congratulates himself on how well things are going. Grenouille doesn't think of the future; rather, he thinks of his past with satisfaction. He decides that fate certainly smiled on him to allow him to harvest Laure's scent, and he thanks himself for being what he is. He closes his eyes, and at one point touches Laure's swaddled foot with his own foot.

Grenouille's process is entirely unveiled for the reader, making for a reading experience that is repulsive and fascinating at the same time. Again, the language Grenouille uses (particularly "harvest") indicates that he thinks of his victims as nothing more than ingredients, not as valuable people.









PART 3, CHAPTER 46

Before daybreak, Grenouille gets up and pulls the cloth off of Laure's body. He scrapes the last fat scraps off of her skin and wipes her down, gathers her undershirt, nightgown, and hair, and rolls them up with the cloth. He doesn't look back at her as he crawls out the window.

At this point Laure is totally dead and even inhuman, as she's devoid of scent as well. In this way she becomes like Grenouille in her scentless-ness.









A scullery maid notices the ladder a while later but thinks nothing of it. Richis awakens hours later to bright sunlight, after sleeping soundly for the first time in months. He dresses and goes to wake Laure. She doesn't answer when he knocks on the door, and he unlocks it. When he swings the door open, the room is sparkling and Laure is dead, naked and hairless, and Richis is reminded of his earlier nightmare.

All appears to be well until Richis's dream comes to life in front of his eyes. The use of dreams in the novel provides this effective tool of foreshadowing, and allows the narrator to draw on the characters' vivid dreams to add weight to what happens in real life.





PART 3, CHAPTER 47

The news of Laure's death spreads through Grasse. The fear from the summer before returns with a vengeance, and is more terrifying this time because the bishop's excommunication evidently didn't work. It's decided that the murderer must be in league with the devil. People pray in church, others in occult groups band together, and learned men employ science. Everyone awaits the murderer's next victim.

The town begins to question their faith in God and religion, as Grenouille proved to them that God and the church actually had no sway or control over the murderer. Laure's murder is even more terrifying, as it's not just God's power that was nullified, but also that of a very powerful man.





The authorities, however, don't get swept up in the hysteria; rather, the neighboring towns band together to catch the killer. They fear a civil uprising, especially since the killer had been sighted this time. Several individuals are arrested following the posting of arrest warrants, and the offer of a reward is made on Richis's behalf. Grenouille is not one of the original suspects. Finally, however, Grenouille is arrested. The police search his cabin and find Laure's and the other girls' hair and dresses, as well as Grenouille's club.

Grenouille's quick capture is suspicious to the reader, as it's obvious that Grenouille is capable of leaving town unnoticed and escaping justice. This makes the reader question what Grenouille's plan possibly is, now that he has his final scent for his beautiful perfume.





PART 3, CHAPTER 48

At first, the townsfolk don't believe that the killer had been caught, but once the town displays the dresses and the hair, they insist on seeing the murderer himself. Finally, the town judge agrees to showcase Grenouille. When he appears the crowd goes silent, thinking that this man cannot possibly be a murderer. Once Grenouille is returned to his cell, however, the crowd becomes angry and demands Grenouille's blood.

Remember the evidence we've already been given about the effects of Grenouille's perfumes (making people think he's in a hurry, or garnering sympathy). While this doesn't seem to be Grenouille's final perfume, it's evident that the crowd's reaction is due to Grenouille's purposeful use of a particular scent.





The proceedings against Grenouille move quickly due to overwhelming evidence and his free confession of guilt. When asked for a motive, Grenouille says simply that he needed the girls. He's subjected to torture and when his answer doesn't change, the judge deems him insane. In April, Grenouille is read the verdict, which states that he shall be executed within 48 hours. He will be hanged on a cross and his joints will be broken, and he'll be left to suffer and die.

Grenouille's trial and torture serve to put distance and difference between him and the general population. It's simply inconceivable to them that he just needed them for no reason, but they also never suspect the true reason why he "needed" them badly enough to kill them.







A priest is sent to hear Grenouille's confession, but gets nothing. Over the next two days, people come to see the murderer, and the guards enjoy booming profits. The guards don't allow anyone to enter the cell or offer Grenouille food, as they fear that someone will poison him.

Again, religion holds no meaning or power for Grenouille. We see how valuable of a prisoner Grenouille is, as his guards fear for his safety and know he must be kept alive in order to appease the crowd.



The parade grounds are readied for the execution. A scaffold is built, as well as a grandstand for nobles. Vendors stock up on their wares. Monsieur Papon, the executioner, has a squared iron rod built with which to strike the prisoner. The townsfolk prepare as though for a holiday, readying their finest clothes and arranging religious services for after the execution.

This is at once extremely morbid and somewhat humorous, as the execution is turned into what is nearly recognizable as a sporting or entertainment event. It's not simply the death of the murderer that's important, it's the spectacle of it.



At Richis' house, he forbids such preparations and feels disgust at the people's glee. Having been given Laure's hair and nightgown, he spreads them on her bed and keeps watch. He finds himself disgusted by the murderer and doesn't want to consider him a person; he only wants to see him perish.

In Richis's case, the narrator is drawing more comparisons between him and Grenouille. Like Grenouille, Richis doesn't want to consider another human being as a person; he simply wants power and control over him.









PART 3, CHAPTER 49

well dressed and unbound.

The execution is scheduled for five in the afternoon, but spectators begin arriving in the morning. Not long after noon, more than ten thousand spectators fill the surrounding meadows and fields. After three, Monsieur Papon appears to applause, and he and his henchmen set up the cross. The grandstands begin to fill at four, and Richis and the bishop appear last.

Ten minutes later, the crowd breaks into a frenzy when they

hear and see the police lieutenant's carriage coming down the road. The carriage is the only way to guarantee Grenouille's

safety from the bloodthirsty crowd. It stops halfway between

the cross and the grandstand, and Grenouille appears from it,

This sequence is absurd, but we're reminded of the power that Grenouille holds as all these people have come to see him die, and justice served. Notice too that Richis isn't participating in the crowd's frenzy, again holding himself above the common populace.







The crowd's bloodthirstiness necessitates Grenouille's arrival in a carriage, which continues to provide concrete symbols of Grenouille's importance. He's also unbound, alluding again to his power.





A miracle happens then, as the ten thousand people suddenly find that they truly believe Grenouille did not commit the murders. Monsieur Papon feels the same way, and doesn't think he can take his rod to this innocent man. The crowd grows weak and feels love for Grenouille.

The reader knows that the crowd's sudden and fantastical reaction is due entirely to Grenouille's perfume made from Laure and the 24 other girls. It's becoming obvious that Grenouille certainly isn't going to die today.











The footman next to Grenouille sinks until he's lying on his belly on the ground. The lieutenant and officer of the guard weep and wring their hands, and the noble ladies sigh and clasp their hands, while the gentlemen jump up and sit down again. The Bishop looks ill, but he's actually basking in religious rapture. The common folk, on the other hand, are filled with sexual desire for Grenouille. This turns Grenouille's execution into the largest orgy since before Christ. People engage with each other with no regard to who their partner is, but just as the opportunity presents itself.

The perfume is powerful enough to make grown men cry, and inspire the bishop to religious rapture for the first time. The author here equates sex and passion with love, as Grenouille's perfume inspires love in all who smell it, and this then leads to a literal orgy. By not speaking, Grenouille allows the individuals to experience the perfume individually, rather than as he might instruct them to.











Grenouille stands and appears to smile, but he's actually smirking and considering his triumph and complete contempt for the people around him. He made the people love and idolize him, and he feels greater than a god. He knows that if he asked them to, the people would renounce God and worship **Grenouille the Great** instead, who is now manifest in the real world.

Grenouille is tapping into the power of religion and passion with his perfume, and notably, his inner fortress has now come to life in the real world. He's been dreaming about this orgy for years at this point, but notice that he still experiences contempt for these people and how easily they are manipulated.









Grenouille feels terror as well as he sees the effect of his perfume, and he experiences fully his contempt for humankind, which sours his triumph. He realizes that he never wanted love and only ever found gratification in hatred, and he wishes to exterminate these people. The fog from his dream begins to rise again, more terrifying than the dream, though, as this is real life. Grenouille feels terror as well as he sees the effect of his Grenouille finally realizes that he hates people without exception, even though he now has the power to control them entirely. Grenouille's dream returning again mirrors the return of Richis's dream of Laure dying, as the dreams are many times more terrifying in real life. In this case, Grenouille faints to escape both his terror and his hatred, even at his moment of greatest triumph.









PART 3. CHAPTER 50

forgiveness. Grenouille faints.

When Grenouille wakes, he finds himself in Laure Richis's bed. Richis himself sits next to the bed. Before even opening his eyes, Grenouille smells the room and finds that Laure's scent is coming splendidly out of the perfume. When he opens his eyes, Richis explains that the verdict was overturned, and he asks Grenouille to stay in Grasse and be his son. Grenouille agrees and then pretends to fall asleep again.

that Richis will kill him, but Richis embraces him and asks for

Finally, Grenouille has achieved control over the man most like himself in his distaste for other people. This scene continues to push the limits of magical realism and absurdity in the novel, as Grenouille's perfume seems to have no limits in its power to affect people's emotions and actions.











Grenouille pretends to sleep until he smells nobody else in the house, and then gets up and leaves through the terrace. He passes through the parade grounds and takes in the forms of drunk, sleeping people, half exposed from their festivities the day before. When the people wake, they all feel hung over and disentangle themselves from their intimate embraces with their neighbors. Everyone returns home and they don't leave home until evening or the following day.

It's unclear what Grenouille is going to do now that he's become disillusioned even with his perfume. The entire town is still imprisoned by the perfume, however, but they experience intense shame once they realize what's happened—they've acted purely out of instinct and passion, totally casting aside their usual social mores.







The town council meets and decides to dismantle the scaffold and grandstand. The judges and magistrates meet and shut Grenouille's file, and the next day they arrest Druot, since he owns the cabin where the hair and clothing of the victims were found. He confesses after 14 hours of torture and they hang him the next day. Grasse returns to normal and everyone forgets that the incident ever happened.

Druot is the last person to be touched by Grenouille's curse. It's of course obvious to the reader that Druot is innocent, but the crowds thirst for bloody justice must still be appeased. Like all the others, Druot's death is gruesome, untimely, and tied to his social climbing—had he not married Madame Arnulfi, it would be her instead.





PART 4, CHAPTER 51

Grenouille travels by night. When he passes the Plomb du Cantal he considers returning to the mountaintop, but decides that life there in solitude, as well as his life with people, is unlivable. He wants to go to Paris and die. Grenouille still carries a flacon of his perfume. He used only a drop in Grasse, and knows he could enslave the world with what he has left. However, Grenouille realizes that while the perfume can inspire love in others, it can't make him able to smell himself, and if he can't know himself through smell, life isn't worth living. He thinks that he's the only person the perfume can't enslave.

Grenouille is entirely disillusioned with life as a whole, as he's discovered that despite his immense power and control over the realm of scent, it's impossible for him to truly know himself in the only way he values. At this point, while he still hasn't accomplished acquiring truly a human scent, Grenouille can be said to have "come of age." He simply knows that he can't know, and thus, his life is over.









On June 25, 1766, Grenouille enters Paris early in the morning. It's a hot day and Paris already stinks. Grenouille wanders around and settles near the Cimetière des Innocents, watching the landscape of graves and bones. After midnight, once the gravediggers leave, the cemetery comes alive with murderers, thieves, and prostitutes. Grenouille leaves his hiding spot and joins the group around a fire.

Grenouille unstoppers his perfume and pours it over himself. For a moment, the group falls back in awe, but then they are drawn in to Grenouille. They surround him, and finally begin attacking and tearing at him. They hack at him with knives, divide Grenouille's body, and eat it. Within a half hour, Grenouille is completely gone. When the cannibals reconvene after their meal, they say nothing in their embarrassment. They grow happy and then proud, and smile at each other, knowing that they've done something out of love for the first time.

Remember that Grenouille was born near this cemetery. It was his birthplace, and it's becoming obvious that it's also going to be his place of death as well. Grenouille also has completed a full geographic circle, making this place even more fitting as his place of death.





Grenouille only used a drop of his perfume in Grasse, and the effect of the rest of the bottle is infinitely more intense (and brutal) than the orgy incited in Grasse. The crowd becomes like Grenouille himself in their frenzy, so incited by passion that they kill and physically possess (by eating him) the object of their desire, destroying it in the process. Notice that Grenouille not only destroys himself as he truly comes of age, he destroys his power as well. His perfume can't be used by anyone else now that it's gone, and while Grenouille lived on hate alone, in death, he managed to inspire love in those who never truly felt or acted on it before, signifying even further the power of his perfume and of scent in general.











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