

Studia theodisca

ISSN 2385-2917

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Olfactory Experiences and an Unknown Force in Patrick Süskind's «Das Parfum: Die Geschichte eines Mörders»

ABSTRACT. Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum: Die Geschichte eines Mörders* presents a sort of Janus-figure, gazing backwards toward the primitive form of life (Grenouille's Romantic deliverance) and forward toward an Enlightenment anthropocentric mechanism (an allusion to negative aesthetics) which reveals the formation and dissolution of political power through the olfactory experiences of the protagonist. In other words, it concerns the two worlds between which there is an unknown force transforming all olfactory manipulation/experimentation into nothingness: as men scheme their evil business through objects or scents, a greater force then deconstructs those schemes.

An Unknown Force that Men Fear

Heinrich Zimmer in *The King and the Corpse* remarks upon the sociohistorical movement towards humanity since the rise of Christianity:

The ideal hero of the Greek civilization – paving the way to Christianity and the age of modern man – rid the mind of its archaic reverence for those animal features and forms that had been so conspicuous in the earlier mythologies and religions of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Moses and the Prophets, in their establishment of the Jewish faith of the Old Testament, effected a comparable transformation when they resolutely battled, time and time again, against the relapses of their people into the worship of the local bull-shaped divinities of the Mediterranean; the “golden calf” of the Bible, and the other beast gods of the surrounding pagan world. The Greeks and the Hebrews brought to pass a humanization of the sphere of the divine, which represented the dawn of a new age and was to lead to modern man, a decisive break with the thenceforth archaic tradition that had been

inherited by the ancient world from primitive man, who felt and revered in himself an intrinsic kinship with the animal domain. (127-128)

Certain values in the archaic tradition have been suppressed since the establishment of Christianity, and they are often connected with superstitious notions or negative images such as devils, monsters, and cannibalistic beasts. Unknown force in nature is defamed as satanic possession or rituals of ghastly gods that do nothing but threaten humanity. Animals revered in archaic cultures are explained as agents of an evil force. In other words, there is a deliberate vilification of the archaic tradition, and this is done for the elevation of humanity above nature.

Süskind's *Das Parfum* exists in a sociohistorical context regarding a critique on Western enlightened thinking that values anthropocentric episteme over archaic tradition. His characters (such as Father Terrier), seemingly confident in the enlightened episteme, actually shudder over an unknown force, knowing well that such a force that has been suppressed for a thousand years still exists and dominates the earth in its way unknown to men. As he is informed by a wet-nurse that the infant (Grenouille) might be possessed by the devil because it has no smell, Father Terrier denies the claims and attributes the nurse's statement to the type of superstitious notion which he despises.

[...] it was really quite depressing to see how such heathenish customs had still not been uprooted a good thousand years after the firm establishment of the Christian religion! And most instances of so-called satanic possession or pacts with the devil proved on closer inspection to be superstitious mummery [...]. The worst sort of superstition, straight out of the darkest days of paganism, when people still lived like beasts, possessing no keenness of the eye, incapable of distinguishing colors, but presuming to be able to smell blood, to scent the difference between friend and foe, to be smelled out by cannibal giants and werewolves and the Furies, all the while offering their ghastly gods stinking, smoking burnt sacrifices. How repulsive! (*Perfume* 14-15)¹

¹ “[...] es war ja tief deprimierend zu sehen, daß solche heidnischen Gebräuche nach

Yet, as he shows contempt for paganism, particularly the smelling ability of primitive men, he is terrified over the infant's odd demeanor; the latter scrutinizes him with piercing eyes, sniffing hard as if he could detect something filthy emanating from him. At that moment, Father Terrier is probably aware that the unknown force – the force that was not uprooted thousand years ago – will demonstrate its effects through the innocuous-looking infant, and he might know that something suppressed in modernity is not superstitious, but real – a fact that he eschews.

Appropriation or manipulation of the olfactory in this novel alludes to suppression of the power of odors that the primitive men harnessed in the archaic tradition. For primitive men, it was the olfactory sense that they depended on most as their major receptor for information from their surroundings. Grenouille's "intense olfactory experience"² in his childhood exemplifies the primitive capability of coming into contact with his surroundings. Grenouille cannot speak until the age of four, when he blurts out his first word: fishes. Fish were the first things he ever smelled when he was just newly delivered in a fish booth. Later, he speaks the word "wood" as he sits on beechwood logs, smelling the odor of the wood. He learns the surrounding objects by smelling their scents, rather than depending on language, as most children do. "[He] even knew how by sheer imagination to arrange new combinations of them, to the point where he created odors that did not exist in the real world"³. Presented in contrast to Grenouille's

über tausendjähriger fester Installation der christlichen Religion immer noch nicht ausgerottet waren! Auch die meisten Fälle von sogenannter Teufelsbesessenheit und Satansbündelei erwiesen sich bei näherer Betrachtung als abergläubisches Spektakel [...]. Schlimmster Aberglaube, wie in dunkelster heidnischster Vorzeit, als die Menschen noch wie Tiere lebten, als sie noch keine scharfen Augen besaßen, die Farbe nicht kannten, aber Blut riechen zu können glaubten, meinten, Freund von Feind zu erriechen, von kannibalischen Riesen und Werwölfen gewittert und von Erinnyen gerochen zu werden, und ihren scheußlichen Göttern stinkende, qualmende Brandopfer brachten. Entsetzlich!" (*Das Parfum* 19-20).

² "intensive[s] Geruchserlebnis" (33; 25).

³ "[Er] sie sogar in seiner bloßen Phantasie untereinander neu zu kombinieren verstand und dergestalt in sich Gerüche erschuf, die es in der wirklichen Welt gar nicht gab" (34; 26).

olfactory capabilities, Madame Gaillard has been deprived of the sense of smell due to serious abuses imposed by her father in her childhood (25; 19). As Freud argues, the rise of civilization is associated with the suppression of olfactory stimuli (Gray 491). Madame Gaillard is a typical victim in the age of the Enlightenment that attempts to suppress the primitive sensory impulse. She is also a typical Enlightened thinker with merciless order and rationality (Gray 495). The olfactory system connects not merely to the recognition of the visible world, but the memory and the realm of imagination. Grenouille's primitive sensory forte reaches its ultimate state of deliverance after he stays in the cave for seven years. If human effluvium in the city where Grenouille grows up is intrinsic to the system of Enlightenment, the cave "devoid of humanity"⁴ is a place unbounded with the mechanic system; it is also a place where Grenouille feels "peace, olfactory peace"⁵.

There was not the least notion of God in his head. He [Grenouille] was not doing penance nor waiting for some supernatural inspiration. He had withdrawn solely for his own personal pleasure, only to be near to himself. (123)⁶

At the moment of peace, Grenouille disengages from dissecting the odors, since what he longs for is the primitive odor of the sea.

It had a simple smell, the sea, but at the same time it smelled immense and unique, so much so that Grenouille hesitated to dissect the odors into fishy, salty, watery, seaweedy, fresh-airy, and so on. He preferred to leave the smell of the sea blended together, preserving it as a unit in his memory, relishing it whole. The smell of the sea pleased him so much that he wanted one day to take it in, pure and unadulterated [...]. (35)⁷

⁴ "menschenlee[r]" (149; 116).

⁵ "Ruhe [...] geruchliche Ruhe" (154; 120).

⁶ "Er hatte mit Gott nicht das geringste im Sinn. Er büßte nicht und wartete auf keine höhere Eingebung. Nur zu seinem eigenen, einzigen Vergnügen hatte er sich zurückgezogen, nur, um sich selbst nahe zu sein" (158).

⁷ "Es roch simpel, das Meer, aber zugleich roch es groß und einzigartig, so daß Grenouille zögerte, seinen Geruch aufzuspalten in das Fischige, das Salzige, das Wäßrige, das

Grenouille's feeling of peace and deliverance in the cave is temporary⁸. He eventually leaves the mountain. Nevertheless, the cave that contains an unknown force deconstructing the system of the enlightened episteme still functions as a counterforce against modernity in Grenouille's subsequent olfactory adventures.

Epistemic environment

This novel set within the historical framework of eighteenth-century France reveals a satirical critique of the age of Enlightenment. It debunks modernity as a horrible age that "subjugates all matter to its design" (Donahue 38) through a form of mimetic appropriation and de-differentiation.

Tangige, das Frische und so weiter. Er ließ den Geruch des Meeres lieber beisammen, verwahrte ihn als ganzes im Gedächtnis und genoß ihn ungeteilt. Der Geruch des Meeres gefiel ihm so gut, daß er sich wünschte, ihn einmal rein und unvermischt [...] (46).

⁸ According to Judith Ryan, under Süskind's "masterful blending technique", the Romantic influence manifests in Grenouille's isolated mountaintop (equivalent of Goethe's *Faust*, Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, Job's "sore boils", and the "alchemic power" of Baudelaire and Rilke), superstitious notes, revolutionary notion, as well as classical models and ancient myths. The pastiches of romantic themes/multiple allusions, however, function as an "insertion of quotations" (Ryan 399) that facilitates the effect of parody in post-modern text. Süskind's *Das Parfum*, in other words, appropriates the existing texts of Romanticism while "cannibalizing" or evaporating them via the technique of parody. See Judith Ryan's "The Problem of Pastiche: Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*". Manfred R. Jacobson reads *Das Parfum* as a parody of the "artist's novel" (*Künstlerroman*) of Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger*; he identifies the protagonist as a monster-criminal artist. According to Jacobson, there is no epiphany in the cave of the mountaintop; it is merely a place where Grenouille hibernates (survival instinct) till fear strikes him, as he is aware of his lack of an odor. See "Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*. A Postmodern *Künstlerroman*". In contrast, Bruce E. Fleming reads *Das Parfum* as a parable rather than a parody: Grenouille represents a typical (post)romantic artist alternating between the "innermost" and the social life (79). The cave in the mountain, characteristic of romantic vision "impervious to change and dissolution" (Fleming 81) of reality, provides artists with self-sufficiency. Yet Grenouille leaves the place since he swings back to the world of the other, where he appeals to technique (language/rationality/principles) for self-expression to others. See Bruce E. Fleming's "The Smell of Success: A Reassessment of Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*".

As the sense of smell is a primitive ability of human beings in their communication with divinity, “he who rule[s] scent rule[s] the hearts of men”⁹; “Odors have a power of persuasion stronger than that of words, appearances, emotions, or will. The persuasive power of an odor cannot be fended off, it enters into us like breath into our lungs, it fills us up, imbues us totally. There is no remedy for it”¹⁰. To control men’s emotions and consciousness, the usurper blends and fabricates odors that in some way replicate the original odors capable of evoking enlightened spirits. Nevertheless, it is ridiculous and ironic for those who desire to manipulate or earn profits through olfactory experimentation or techniques, since the essence of odor extracted from its matter is evanescent, transitory, and temporary – a reality that no man can alter.

Baldini is one of the typical enlightened thinkers indulging in “hectic mania for novelty”, “experimentation”, and “speed”¹¹. He warns himself, “Baldini! Sharpen your nose and smell without sentimentality! Dissect the scent by the rules of the art! You must have the formula”¹². Baldini has no talent for distinguishing smells; he can progress within the perfumery business since he depends on his mechanic replication skill, a skill applicable to the age of mechanism: “the art of perfumery was slipping bit by bit from the hands of the masters of the craft and becoming accessible to mountebanks, at least a mountebank with a passably discerning nose, like this skunk Pélissier”¹³. Baldini underscores formula as exact instruction for his apprentice Grenouille. As he succeeds in beating down his rival Pélissier, he desires

⁹ “wer die Gerüche beherrschte, der beherrschte die Herzen der Menschen” (199; 155).

¹⁰ “Es gibt eine Überzeugungskraft des Duftes, die stärker ist als Worte, Augenschein, Gefühl und Wille. Die Überzeugungskraft des Duftes ist nicht abzuwehren, sie geht in uns hinein wie die Atemluft in unsere Lungen, sie erfüllt uns, füllt uns vollkommen aus, es gibt kein Mittel gegen sie” (107-108; 82).

¹¹ “hektische Neuerungssucht”, “Experimentierwut”, “Geschwindigkeit” (72; 55).

¹² “Baldini! Die Nase geschärft und gerochen ohne Sentimentalität! Den Duft zerlegt nach den Regeln der Kunst! Bis heute abend mußt du im Besitz der Formel sein!” (81; 62).

¹³ “[...] entglitt die Kunst des Parfümiers nach und nach den wenigen universalen handwerklichen Könnern und stand Quacksalbern offen, sofern sie nur eine leidlich feine Nase besaßen, wie zum Beispiel diesem Stinktief Pélissier” (72; 55).

to expand his perfumery enterprise, circulating scents in the greatest quantity as well as the fastest speed (131; 100). He believes that as he holds the inscription of perfumery production that Grenouille offers, odors can be replicated via a form of mimetic appropriation. The untalented Baldini dominates the shop as a master, and the genius Grenouille initiates as an apprentice since he “lacks norms for expression” (Fleming 80). However, Baldini’s principles and formula reflect the fantasy of the enlightened episteme. His skill is unnecessary, even superfluous for Grenouille, who (before assimilating with the social mechanism) creates perfume via his olfactory talent and imagination. As Baldini arrives at the summit of business, the Pont-au-Change where his shop is located suddenly collapses, and this greatest of perfumers vanishes along with his dream. As Süskind allows the diverse odors of Baldini’s shop to “float high above the Seine from Paris to Le Havre”¹⁴ for several weeks, the sociohistorical movement towards catastrophe is teeming with satire on rationality and mechanism.

The Marquis de la Taillade-Espinasse, whom Grenouille encounters as he has just left his tranquil cave, fetishizes no less over experimentation and mechanical means than does Baldini. He deduces that “life could develop only at a certain distance from the earth, since the earth itself constantly emits a corrupting gas, a so-called *fluidum letale*, which lames vital energies and sooner or later totally extinguishes them”¹⁵. Obsessed with the theory, he contributes to the development of *fluidum vitale* with “mechanical and dietetic means”¹⁶ that he believes can help living creatures “grow away from” the corrupting earth. Just as Baldini uses Grenouille to beat down his business rival, so the marquis uses Grenouille to support his *fluidum letale* theory, as the latter is an ideal example for proving the condition of having

¹⁴ “[...] Lauf der Seine von Paris bis nach Le Havre überschwebte” (145; 111).

¹⁵ “[...] Leben nur in einer gewissen Entfernung von der Erde entwickeln könne, da die Erde selbst ständig ein Verwesungsgas verströme, ein sogenanntes *fluidum letale*, welches die Vitalkräfte lähme und über kurz oder lang vollständig zum Erliegen bringe” (179; 139-140).

¹⁶ “mechanischen und diätetischen Mitteln” (202; 158).

been “completely encapsulated by the corrupting element of the earth”¹⁷. The marquis successfully convinces the public of the healing power of the *fluidum vitale* through the process of transforming Grenouille from a “brutalized beast” to a “civilized, properly proportioned human being”¹⁸. Indulging in hectic mania for *fluidum vitale*, he believes he can be rejuvenated by the high elevation of the Pyrenees mountains. However, he has never returned since his adventure in the highest mountain. The Marquis de la Taillade-Espinasse represents the age of Enlightened episteme of (pseudo)-science and medicine, engaging in his flawed theory with which he eventually kills himself.

Süskind’s criticism of enlightened rationality is thoroughly expressed in Antoine Richis. Ostensibly, Süskind shapes Richis an image of a protective parent. In reality, what the author emphasizes is that Richis’ fatherly love for his daughter Laure is “tied to her utility for his self-serving ambitions, since her blossoming beauty provides him with an efficient means to accomplish his plan for sociopolitical advancement” (Gray 502). Richis and Grenouille are rivals, since both of them compete to appropriate Laure for their specific aims. “Although Richis thinks in visual metaphors while Grenouille follows olfactory pursuits, the structure of their thought remains the same” (Gray 502). Just as the perfumers like Baldini and Grenouille employ the technique of enfleurage extricating essence from the matter – which is a process of abstraction – so Richis enacts the abstract idealism in his plan of marrying Laure to an aristocrat (Gray 502). Richis, in this rivalry, loses his commercial treasure to Grenouille. To some degree, *Das Parfum* mysteriously binds the father together with the murderer. It deliberately engages Richis in the position of accomplice: this father’s anxiety for the security of his daughter in previous days vanishes at the moment of Laure’s approaching danger, and he sleeps well that night when Laure is falling victim to murder. Through revealing a mysterious destiny, Süskind integrates Richis

¹⁷ “also völlig umschlossen vom Verwesungselement Erde” (179; 140).

¹⁸ “geschundenes, verrohtes Tier”; “wahrhaftig ein zivilisierter, wohlgestalter Mensch” (202; 158).

into an epistemic sociohistorical environment that establishes despotism and destruction.

Grenouille's Progress

Patrick Süskind's novel *Das Parfum* elicits contemplation over the compatibility of art and society. Bruce E. Fleming argues in "The Smell of Success: A Reassessment of Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*" that the novel concerns the parable of the (post)romantic artist: the artist is anxious to engage in some type of self-expression, as conforming to his nature – solitary and alienated – no longer suffices his desires. The protagonist, Grenouille, though resenting the outside world, desires to be accepted in society, and he looks for a form of expression in art. In other words, he searches for an outlet that can conflate his art with his society. In his quest for the definition of the self through a certain format, he becomes a serial killer – his art co-exists not simply with the world, but also with violence. In his study of reader reactions to the novel, Damon O. Rarick in "Serial Killers, Literary Critics, and Süskind's *Das Parfum*" argues that the novel *Das Parfum* engages in a certain "ritual violence" stemming from "a traditional dis-ease in conflating aesthetics and violence" (211). This conflation reflects the dark aspect in eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought that undermines humanist ideals, and is influenced by twentieth-century media representations and promotion of violence and barbarity. If violence, as Rarick observes, penetrates through media into a fiction world embedded with aesthetics and parodic allusions to its precursors so as to achieve the effect of pleasure on its readers, then the same violence is represented when it reflects back from fiction into the media. Patrick Süskind's novel exemplifies a conflation of aesthetics and violence through political allusion to one's quest for political identity. Grenouille, in his quest for the essence of love, elicits the formation of power through an anthropocentric political mechanism which penetrates the artist's consciousness as well as the collective consciousness of society.

The sociohistorical movement towards humanity that has existed since the rise of Christianity involves the suppression of the value of archaic tradition that held reverence for animals or even regarded them as the intrinsic

kin of human beings. Süskind's *Das Parfum* reveals man's contempt for, or objectification of, animals as an ingrained bias in Enlightened culture. Grenouille, before his progress into the enlightened society, is seen as a beast – a toad (17, 96, 97; 13, 73, 74), a tick (29, 41, 90, 114, 168, 242-244; 21, 31, 69, 87, 131, 190-192), a spider (24, 30, 99; 17, 23, 75-76), etc. The dichotomy of human beings and animals reflect a hierarchy of social status enacted through political discourse of the anthropocentric machine. In "Tick"¹⁹, Agamben describes the confinement of animals, echoing Heidegger's concept of *Umwelt*: the invertebrate animal's environment is a domain where it can reside as a parasite, drawing in the blood of its host until its lifespan comes to an end. In contrast to animals, man does not perpetually remain in such relationships with other species: host and parasite, predator and prey. Man, having started out as an animal, intends to elevate himself from a place on food chain to that of "humanity" – from the animal's environment to the man's world as a world builder. By the time Agamben sees the binary division between animal and man, he sees the animal-man binary narrative as a discourse stemming from the frame of an anthropological machine. Süskind's *Das Parfum* opens with the scene of the fish market where Grenouille is born as a base animal at a fish booth. His mother is about to dispose of him as she did for her previous stillbirths, which for her are merely "the bloody meat", not greatly different from "the fish guts that lay there"²⁰. Though rescued and later fostered in an orphanage, Grenouille lives in solitude; children fear him and keep distance from him. Before acquiring his journeyman papers – a necessary certification for possessing human rights for work with dignity, he works for those (e.g., Grimal) who take him in and exploit him to the full. Grenouille has no human identity; he lives as a parasite animal or insect in a world of utilitarianism where his exploiters accept him for his unusual capability of smelling odors – a talent that helps them make a fortune. In other words, Grenouille is endowed with two double identities: an undesired base creature and a useful animal. He is

¹⁹ See Agamben's *The Open: Man and Animal*, page 45-48.

²⁰ "das blutige Fleisch"; "dem Fischgekröse, das da schon lag" (8; 5).

nothing more than a monster shunned by human society; even when he is exploited, he is still classified as an animal separable from the *qualified life*. His animal-like existence is reduced to a repulsive monster-beast or devil, or in Agamben's term a *bare life*²¹ in the anthropocentric social/political mechanism.

There is always an underlying innuendo of the term *bare life* and the “anthropocentric machine” in Süskind's *Das Parfum* (adapted to Tom Tykwer's 2006 German crime thriller *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*.) Grenouille's lack of physical scent symbolizes a lack of identity recognized by society. The fundamental physical scent of human being is an effluvium that facilitates men to blend with their stench surrounding.

The stench of sulfur rose from the chimneys, the stench of caustic lyes from the tanneries, and from the slaughterhouses came the stench of congealed blood. People stank of sweat and unwashed clothes; from their mouths came the stench of rotting teeth, from their bellies that of onions, and from their bodies, if they were no longer very young, came the stench of rancid cheese and sour milk and tumorous disease. (*Perfume* 3)²²

²¹ In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben remarks on the banishment of the undesired in society into alienation. The term “homo sacer” in Greek refers to a criminal or an outlaw whose existence has been shunned by human society. For Agamben, *homo sacer* is a term extended to meaning “men being politically deprived of human rights”. It is not hard to find historical examples of political persecution: the Nazi concentration camps, the ruins of Yugoslavia, Cuba's imprisonment by the Spanish, etc. Such examples demonstrate the indestructible cage facing the *homo sacer*. In *The Open*, Agamben argues that there is a danger in the dichotomy between man and animal, and he quotes from Martin Heidegger's description of the state of animals in captivation/captivity (a state of being withheld in prison) as an example of the man-animal dichotomy. Agamben identifies “animal in captivation” as a discourse of political persecution: Under the frame of discourse, men are compared to “animals in captivation” or identified with men having *bare life*. As the State classifies them as *bare life* in being controlled by their biological lives, they are forced to respond to stimuli in the domain of the food chain and wait to be devoured by their predators due to their weaker nature. If they desire to gain political significance, they must motivate themselves to elevate above the state of captivation.

²² “Aus den Kaminen stank der Schwefel, aus den Gerbereien stanken die ätzenden

As Gray notes, Süskind “draws on Corbin’s social history of odor in evoking the putrid smells of civilized Paris. The infernal stench pervading the metropolitan center of the European Enlightenment parallels the infernal lovelessness Süskind attributes to the city’s populace” (494). Lacking in human odor, Grenouille’s existence is perceived as strange by others. He is shunned by human society. The fish market where he is born and abandoned symbolizes the state of exception separable from the *qualified life*. He is a *homo sacer* – a creature or an animal, rather than a *qualified life* with human rights.

Grenouille is endowed with a superhuman sense of smell that signifies dual meanings: the capability of tracing the smell of heaven and the monstrous desire eliciting corruption and violence. The first time he smells the scent of a redheaded girl, he finds it is not like that effluvium of the public which is disgusting and even unbearable to him. The scent on the girl is angelic; it possesses the power to initiate love and peace. It is the scent that enters his memories in his subsequent reclusive life in a cave (Grenouille recalls the scent on the girl as he smells the odor of the sea in the cave and detects the scent on Laure Richis in a garden.) To capture the essence of the angelic scent, Grenouille accidentally kills the girl. He does not feel guilty for her death; instead, he laments the loss of the scent. The evanescence of scent evokes his desire to “revolutionize the odoriferous world”, “like all gifted abominations, for whom some external event makes straight the way down into the chaotic vortex of their souls”²³. Overwhelmed by the desire for the aroma, Grenouille decides to “establish a pure and systematic aesthetic” (Gray 497) to “delay its loss as long as humanly possible”²⁴. This

Laugen, aus den Schlachthöfen stank das geronnene Blut. Die Menschen stanken nach Schweiß und nach ungewaschenen Kleidern; aus dem Mund stanken sie nach verrotteten Zähnen, aus ihren Mägen nach Zwiebelsaft und an den Körpern, wenn sie nicht mehr ganz jung waren, nach altem Käse und nach saurer Milch und nach Geschwulstkrankheiten” (6).

²³ “die Welt der Düfte zu revolutionieren”; “und wie alle genialen Scheusale, denen durch ein äußeres Ereignis ein gerades Geleis ins Spiralenchaos ihrer Seelen gelegt wird” (57-58; 43-44).

²⁴ “seinen Verlust so lange als irgend möglich hinauszuzögern” (245; 192).

ambition leads him to transform from a *bare life* to a *qualified life*, sustaining the life of the parasitic tick. “The parasitic ‘tick’ of the super-natural” – Neil H. Donahue notes in “Scents and Insensibility” – “is carried along and sustained by the warm body of historicism” (37).

In his quest for the aroma in Grasse, Grenouille is engaged in biopolitics, which is “a new technology of power...[that] exists at a different level, on a different scale, and [that] has a different bearing area, and makes use of very different instruments” (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* 242). He attempts diverse methods for the creation of the perfume – distillation, hot enfleurage, cold enfleurage, etc. – and each method is an instrument having the potential to change the bio-life of humanity. It is the desire to approach the divine aroma that urges the protagonist to create his own perfume. Unfortunately, the action does not lead to divinity, but constitutes a certain form of politics that contaminates the soul. Grenouille is then drawn into obscene activities. He kills a young lavender picker, a prostitute, and several other beautiful young women in order to distill his “thirteenth scent”. Eventually, he hunts and murders Laura Richis, whose scent he successfully distills by cutting her hair, obtaining the thirteenth scent. The process of fabricating perfume signifies a transformation within Grenouille. As Gray notes, *Das Parfum* concerns a perverted bildungsroman of a young man, relating “the progressive integration of its singular protagonist into his sociohistorical and epistemic environment” (493). Grenouille changes from an outsider of society who loathes the scents of humans to an enlightened anthropocentric thinker who appropriates things that do not belong to him. This change, ironically, facilitates his integration into a *qualified life* of the sociohistorical environment. To obtain the essence of beauty, he uses the technique of separating essence from its matter (the body of his victims). Murder for him is the most efficient means, since he believes it avoids the ruin of the scent²⁵. As he successfully obtains the scents from his victims,

²⁵ Animals, while being macerating as flowers in a container, panic, struggle, and as a result produce “Todesschweiß, die das warme Fett durch Übersäuerung verderben” “sweat whose acidity ruin[s]” the quality of the scent (236; 186). Grenouille thus kills his victims before depositing of them in the process of maceration.

he deftly applies them to himself. Sometimes, he disguises himself as *an innocent man* so as to escape his rivals or undertake certain crimes. In other situations, he disguises himself as *a good man* merging harmoniously with people. In whatever case, Grenouille's perfumery reflects an enlightened episteme for "abstraction" (Gray 502) that underscores the de-differentiation of his victims. Just as the author applies the technique of pastiche to insert the themes of romanticism into the novel for the effect of parody (see Ryan), so Grenouille obtains the essence through the technique of pastiche/combination – a means that evokes the same effect of parody. As he strives for his *Dasein* through the blending of scents into oneness (idealism/abstraction), he ironically falls into his status within the obscene world. The novel debunks a trend of the sociohistorical/sociopolitical movement towards enlightened rationality that fosters negative/horrible aesthetics²⁶.

Grenouille's biopolitical business reaches its apex as he thoroughly controls the olfactory sensibilities of the public. On the day of his execution, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille applies a drop of the perfume that he has distilled from the scent of his victims' hair, taken from them following their murders. The fragrance of the perfume Grenouille now wears stirs a clamor among the crowd. What Grenouille represents to his executioner and the crowd in attendance is no longer a criminal, but rather "an angel" or someone who is seen to bring them love and care. The scaffold waiting to taste the blood of Grenouille turns into *a sacred altar*. The executioner and the crowd declare Grenouille innocent and become insane, falling into an orgy. Even Antoine Richis, father of one of the victims, embraces Grenouille as his son. Grenouille moves to the dominant biopolitical realm through his olfactory technique. As the power of the perfume takes effect, the crowd is

²⁶ Negative aesthetics influences not merely the protagonist, but also its readers. Rarick in "Serial Killers, Literary Critics, and Süskind's 'Das Parfum'" identifies Grenouille as a perverse and corrupt literary hybrid. He perceives a "wound culture" in the reaction of the public to the novel *Das Parfum*: the major reason that makes the novel popular is that it elicits public fascination with torn and tortured bodies. Such literary works or media are popular as they arise pleasure within that segment of the public who are drawn to images of violence and barbarism.

passively affected and emotionally disturbed, slavishly obeying Grenouille. Perfume is a catalyst, a vehicle for transformation. Both Grenouille and the crowd love and need perfume. There exists an inseparable symbiotic relationship between them in the biopolitical body. Each of the men and women is satisfied in dream, in hallucination, appreciating Grenouille as a savior/angel, while Grenouille savors his victory under the frame of anthropocentric machine that not only elevates him from *bare life* (undesired one) to *qualified life*, but also endows him a control apparatus exerted over a population.

An Unknown Force that Interrupts

Grenouille's murder for plundering the scents reflects a horrible negative aesthetic in the revolutionary age that epitomizes novelty, rationality, and progress. The narrator criticizes Enlightened men as maniacs who manage to "infect the whole society with their perfidious fidgets, with their sheer delight in discontent and their unwillingness to be satisfied with anything in this world, in short, with the boundless chaos that reigns inside their own heads"²⁷. He also forecasts an age of degeneration and disintegration due to man's propagation of atheism and disbelief in oracles:

you needn't wonder that everything was turned upside down, that morals had degenerated, and that humankind had brought down upon itself the judgment of Him whom it denied. It would come to a bad end. The great comet of 1681 – they had mocked it, calling it a mere clump of stars, while in truth it was an omen sent by God in warning, for it had portended, as was clear by now, a century of decline and disintegration, ending in the spiritual, political, and religious quagmire that man had created for himself, into which he would one day sink and where only glossy, stinking swamp flowers flourished, like Pélissier himself! (*Perfume* 58)²⁸

²⁷ "geschafft, ihre eigne perfide Ruhelosigkeit, die schiere Lust am Nichtzufriedensein und des um alles in der Welt Sichnichtbegnügenkönnens, kurz: das grenzenlose Chaos, das in ihren Köpfen herrscht, auf die gesamte Gesellschaft auszudehnen" (74; 57).

²⁸ "[...] brauchte man sich nicht zu wundern, wenn sich alles von oben nach unten

The typical Enlightened figures in the novel – Madame Gaillard, Baldini, the Marquis de la Taillade-Espinasse, and Grenouille – exemplify a century of decline and degeneration. They are encapsulated in their planning, yet they all end in sinking into stinking swamp.

Süskind's *Das Parfum* elucidates “the futility of systematic calculation and long-term planning in a world governed by unforeseeable forces” (Gray 495). Although his characters seek out prosperity through systematic calculation, they all end in (self)-destruction despite fulfilling their ambitions. Süskind illuminates an unknown force that, though having been suppressed for a thousand years, still exists and dominates the earth. It is the force that Father Terrier despises and fears as he senses it in the infant Grenouille. It is regarded as a mystery, superstition, or nonsense regarding the age of rationality; it is deliberately repressed as ineffable knowledge. Nevertheless, it is an antagonist/destructive force overwhelming the system of enlightened calculations.

Süskind dramatizes the antagonism between the anthropocentric machine of enlightened reason and the archaic unknown force. If the man-made perfume is the odor bio-politically applied in the realm of anthropocentric despotism, there is an unknown force unpredictably reincarnated into a certain form of scent that deconstructs the bio-political power. The mountain cave where Grenouille dwells for seven years is one of the places where the antagonism takes place. To shun human smells, the protagonist exiles himself from society and takes refuge in a cave. The cave is a space of Romantic deliverance, yet it is still a barrier to be penetrated by Grenouille's enlightened consciousness. As Fleming notes, the cave is a place

kehrte und die Sitten verlotterten und die Menschheit das Strafgericht dessen, den sie verleugnete, auf sich herabzog. Böse wird es enden. Der große Komet von 1681, über den sie sich lustig gemacht haben, den sie als nichts als einen Haufen von Sternen bezeichnet haben, er war eben doch ein warnendes Vorzeichen Gottes gewesen, denn er hatte – jetzt wußte man es ja – ein Jahrhundert der Auflösung angezeigt, der Zersetzung, des geistigen und politischen und religiösen Sumpfes, den sich die Menschheit selber schuf, in dem sie dereinst selbst versinken wird und in dem nur noch schillernde und stinkende Sumpfb Blüten gediehen wie dieser Pélissier!” (75-76).

where the artist believes that memory or recollection is “under the control of the individual” (81), but a life of isolation cannot satisfy the artist, and Grenouille “realizes that the danger of this solipsistic feeding off one’s self is in the loss of form” (82). As Grenouille struggles between staying in the inner world of peace and adventuring into the outer world for perfumery prosperity, a fog appears as a warning to his soul at the moment of internal catastrophe.

The fog slowly climbed higher. Soon Grenouille was completely wrapped in fog, saturated with fog, and it seemed he could not get his breath for the foggy vapor. If he did not want to suffocate, he would have to breathe the fog in. And the fog was, as noted, an odor. And Grenouille knew what kind of odor. The fog was his own odor. His, Grenouille’s, own body odor was the fog. (*Perfume* 133)²⁹

Grenouille perceives the enlightened self in his soul, and recognizes the fact that he might be killed by himself if he evolves into a thorough enlightened man. Nevertheless, he succumbs to his weakness, returning to the world teeming with smells of stench. In Grenouille’s perverse progress towards a prosperous perfumer/artist/manipulator, an unknown force continues to participate in the antagonist relationship with the anthropocentric machine, eventually destroying the manipulator-artist.

In the episode of the orgy of the crowd, when Grenouille holds a power elevating him from *bare life*, the unknown force surreptitiously penetrates Grenouille’s olfactory realm. Mysteriously, Grenouille does not continue to rule over the crowd. His identity as “an angel” admired among the crowd does not satisfy the desire of being in love. He feels himself to be, though admired by the crowd, a stranger to himself. “Fog” reappears:

A light fog, or better a haze, hung now over the fields, and the odors that came from them – grass, broom, and rose – seemed washed clean,

²⁹ “Der Nebel stieg langsam immer höher. Bald war Grenouille vollkommen umhüllt von Nebel, durchtränkt von Nebel, und zwischen den Nebelschwaden war kein bißchen freie Luft mehr. Er mußte, wenn er nicht ersticken wollte, diesen Nebel einatmen. Und der Nebel war, wie gesagt, ein Geruch. Und Grenouille wußte auch, was für ein Geruch. Der Nebel war sein eigener Geruch. Sein, Grenouilles, Eigengeruch war der Nebel” (170-171).

comfortably plain and simple. Grenouille crossed the garden and climbed over the wall. (*Perfume* 244-245)³⁰

Different from the previous olfactory experience of sensing the fog as his odor, Grenouille now senses other odors from nature – the most simple and cleanest ones, representing the purity of the soul. The “fog” surreptitiously slips into the (un)consciousness of the protagonist and draws him back to his pre-natal state (the state before his progress into the anthropocentric world). Grenouille recognizes that his olfactory power cannot “make him able to smell himself”, though it “might allow him to appear before the world as a god”³¹. He knows that he still does not know who he is, though he has appropriated the essence extracted from others. Speculating upon the questions about his identity and the meaning of the perfume for him and others, Grenouille wanders to his birthplace in the fish market. Before him is “the cemetery grounds like a cratered battlefield, burrowed and ditched and trenched with graves, sown with skulls and bones”³². The atmosphere is gothic; the boundaries between life and death are ambiguous. The surrounding of the cemetery ground unleashes a power that Grenouille cannot control. As Gray notes, there is an ingrained “destructive impulse inherent in Enlightenment metaphysics” (503). The odor unleashed from the cemetery enacts destructive dialect that no one can escape. Grenouille is unable to unbound himself from the force that is driving him to follow the path towards death – the only path that disengages him from the Enlightenment, when he eventually recognizes what he has done in his activities of perfumery is futile or meaningless to him. He pours the perfume over his head in front of the crowd that has long been suffering from starvation. Then he is encompassed, worshiped, and devoured. Nothing is left, except for

³⁰ “Jetzt hing ein dünner Nebel, ein Dunst eher, über den Feldern, und die Düfte, die von dorthier kamen, Gras, Ginster und Rose, waren wie gewaschen, rein, simpel, tröstlich einfach. Grenouille durchquerte den Garten und stieg über die Mauer” (311).

³¹ “sie konnte ihn nicht vor sich selber riechen machen”; “mochte er auch vor der Welt durch sein Parfum erscheinen als ein Gott” (316; 252).

³² “Das Gelände des Friedhofs lag wie ein zerbombtes Schlachtfeld”; “zerwühlt, zerfurcht, von Gräben durchzogen, von Schädeln und Gebeinen übersät” (318; 253).

Grenouille's tattered clothes, blood, and the near-empty bottle of perfume holding the last remaining drop. This cannibalism in which the organs and each part of the body of Grenouille are snatched and devoured replicates Grenouille's appropriation/theft of the scents of those victims – a predatory behavior which to some degree could be seen as cannibalism. Then, the genius perfumer is forgotten as “his gifts and his sole ambition were restricted to a domain that leaves no traces in history: to the fleeting realm of scent”³³. The unknown force successfully intrudes Grenouille's olfactory realm and ruins it as much as it dissolves the ambitions of Madam Gaillard, Grimal, Giuseppe Baldini, and the Marquis de la Taillade-Espinasse.

Evil does not withdraw from the world, though Grenouille has died. Those cannibals who kill Grenouille are “all a little embarrassed” and then “smile” and feel “proud”: “for the first time they [had] done something out of love”³⁴. The last scene suggests though they just awake from the horrible act as the perfume evaporates or flees, they may commit the same type of homicide if evoked by the scent again. Evil dwells in desire, and desire dwells in human beings. Nevertheless, an unknown force perpetually traces men's evil activities and dissolves them in its way.

Conclusion

Das Parfum articulates an unknown archaic force lurking in the system of anthropocentric/enlightened culture. Though it has been suppressed in a form of superstitious notion, the unknown force still penetrates the activities of mankind and deconstructs their long-term planning. The force is not a chaotic power blindly destroying men and their schemes. Instead, it follows its own principles. One of the principles the archaic force ordains is evanescence and temporality. The essence exists on Earth only in the short-term. All the best scents or the most beautiful things (e.g., the scent of the sea and the ones from Laure Richis and the red-haired girl) are evanescent

³³ “[...] sich sein Genie und sein einziger Ehrgeiz auf ein Gebiet beschränkte, welches in der Geschichte keine Spuren hinterläßt: auf das flüchtige Reich der Gerüche” (5; 3).

³⁴ “alle ein bißchen verlegen”; “lächeln”; “stolz”; “sie hatten zum ersten Mal etwas aus Liebe getan” (320; 255).

and temporary; the essence disappears or withdraws from the Earth as its original possessor dies. Even the scent of the ambergris that possesses a longer olfactory life than the other scents such as jonquil and tuberose (*Das Parfum* 245; 192-193) cannot keep the essence with it as it is exposed to the air. In much the same vein, as Grenouille's victims holding the best scents die, the new scent extracted from them eventually loses its effect as it evaporates within a few hours into the air. Another principle concerns the inseparability of essence and matter. Grenouille's appropriation of the essence through the technique of extracting the essence of odor from its original possessor (the matter) renders the deterioration of the essence – a result that he knows well before committing a series of murders (245; 192). The essence cannot maintain its primitive form as it leaves its original possessor, even under the most advanced technique of preservation. It has lost its original essence as those original possessors have died. This is witnessed in the crowd falling into hallucination in orgy. It is also seen in the famished crowd at the cemetery ground that enacts cannibalism as the evoked desires drive them to their darkest side of humanity, rather than heavenly deliverance. What they inhale is no longer the original essence, but the deteriorated one distilled through a process of predatory acquisition. Something that the perfume inspires, as a result, is not heavenly love, but human desire and violence. *Das Parfum* describes the destructive anthropocentric machine, demonstrating the status of nothingness at the moment when the unknown force eventually deconstructs the anthropocentric system.

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