

# Self-Differentiation and the Marginalized Idol of Love in Patrick Süskind's *Perfume*

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**Abstract** The German writer Patrick Süskind symbolically projects the power of scents in his historical fantasy novel, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*. The protagonist, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, has a supernatural ability to identify the odors of almost everything around him, yet he remains an undifferentiated self in psychiatric terms, seeking love, influence, and acceptance. Using Murray Bowen's concept of self-differentiation, this article investigates the theme of marginalization in Süskind's *Perfume* by examining emotional webs of interrelationships between Grenouille and those around him in different social, institutional, and cultural capacities. In his quest to have a unique personal scent, Grenouille becomes an obsessed murderer of twenty-five girls. However, he ends up tragically by being devoured with lust rather than love, ironically because of his special concocted perfume. Adopting a psychiatric approach, the article examines the functional level of Grenouille's differentiation in three emotional systems and relationship processes: with Madame Gaillard, the tanner Grimal, and the perfumer Giuseppe Baldini. Grenouille, it is concluded, has a low level of self-differentiation, i.e. a weak range of self development. Accordingly, he is guided by his emotions in

his contact with others and not autonomous in his thinking. His life goal is to be loved as an idol. However, his level of self-differentiation does not allow him to be an idol; instead, he remains in the margin, and his life remains ephemeral, as evanescent as “perfume.”

**Key words** Patrick Süskind; *Perfume*; Bowen family systems theory; self-differentiation; marginalization

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## Introduction

Literary scholars have not paid adequate attention to Murray Bowen’s family systems theory, specifically the concept of self-differentiation, for understanding the dynamics and interpersonal interactions among an emotional system. In this regard, the protagonist Jean-Baptiste Grenouille in Patrick Süskind’s horror, historical fantasy novel *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (1985) can make an interesting case for analysis. Bowen’s psychiatric theory, it is argued, can be used to examine an individual’s satisfaction in life, maturity, decisions, managing stress, and balancing one’s position with relation to others. Striking a balance between one’s individual identity and relation to society and leading an orderly successful life are the main challenges faced by Süskind’s protagonist in *Perfume*, and this is attributed to lack of self-differentiation in Bowen’s theory. Grenouille’s gift of smell and his life ambitions, we are told, “were restricted to a domain that leaves no traces in history: to the fleeting realm of scent” (3). Accordingly, he is both insignificant and marginalized. As Bowen maintains, differentiation of self, as a system for categorizing people, “defines people according to the degree of *fusion*, or *differentiation*, between emotional and intellectual functioning” (362; emphasis original). Ephemerality, marginality, emotionality, and dissatisfaction are indicators of Grenouille’s undifferentiated self. An undeveloped self entails more dependence on others for approval and acceptance, more emotionality, anxious behavior, and

apparent self-contradictions. For Bowen, those at the low extreme of the self-differentiation scale fuse emotions and intellect and have their lives dominated by emotional functioning: "Whatever intellect they have is dominated by the emotional system. These are the people who are less flexible, less adaptable, and more emotionally dependent on those about them. They are easily stressed into dysfunction, and it is difficult for them to recover from dysfunction. They inherit a high percentage of all human problems" (362). Such a definition of the less differentiated people (who fuse emotional and intellectual functioning) is essential for our discussion of Grenouille's character, especially emotional dependence and lack of adaptation.

Previous readings of the novel have not employed Bowen's theory on self-differentiation to analyze Grenouille's character, although they have covered significant psychoanalytic, feminist, social, and existential perspectives. Critics have studied issues like homicide, patriarchy, and gothic elements in the novel. Unfortunately, much criticism available on the novel was published in German and is unavailable to most English readers. Some studies available on the novel in English include graduation projects or unpublished MA theses. Hence, this article is both legitimate and original. In one study, Edith Krause associates Grenouille's existential conflict with the theme of the absent mother and brings in a feminist discourse to reflect the circumstances and path of his life. Krause argues that "born in the overlapping space of a cemetery turned market square, Grenouille's entrance into being instantly evokes the poles of life and death associated with the feminine" (349). Furthermore, Grenouille's early childhood, Krause claims, is marked by "the crucial lack of the maternal care necessary to stabilize the physical and emotional growth of a child" (352). Krause concludes that "growing up speechless, disfigured, and unnoticed, Grenouille is a figure on the social margins" (356). On the other hand, Jeffrey Adams remarks that *Perfume* focuses on an emotionally and physically abused orphan "whose supernatural sense of smell guides him in a perverse search for the lost origin of his identity" (259). In Adams's opinion, Grenouille's deficiency of a personal scent implies an absent identity and individuality. In a psychoanalytic study, Tamer Lokman introduces Grenouille as a psychopathic murderer "who usually constitutes a threat to his social surroundings" and is likely "to bring severe damage and ruin the life of those who cross path with him" (82). Significantly, Lokman contends that Grenouille becomes "a love seeking self-centered monster using his olfactory gift to achieve his goal of a glowing social acceptance" (81). However, Lokman never attempts a psychiatric understanding of Grenouille's motivation or nature as we intend to do in this article.

Yanna Popova provides a non-traditional reading of the novel, examining the novel's representation of smell based on a study of perception verbs and a general cognitive-linguistic principle of metaphorical "embodiment" (135). Popova argues that Grenouille's discernment of the objects (through smell) offers a different "cognitive model of the external world" we often construct through the sense of vision, which thus requires "alternative ways of expression" (135). Abby Hodge compares and contrasts the novel and the film adaptations in terms of themes and medium limitations (novelistic graphic description vs. camera's eye): "Though both deal with identity, humanity's flaws, and death, Süskind's Grenouille shows the absolute evil that exists in an absolutely evil world, while Tykwer's [film] interpretation shows how a world of absolute evil can pervert the naïve people who inhabit it" (95). Fulvio Marone presents a psychoanalytic Lacanian reading of the novel with Grenouille's lack of personal odor taken to represent "the lack of the phallic signifier" and "an olfactory other" (113). However, this current article pursues neither the traditional psychoanalysis of Freud nor the Lacanian interpretations of the French school of psychoanalysis. Instead, it employs psychiatric theories, in particular those of Bowen and Kerr, to unravel the role of emotional, family units in individual behavior and development.

Despite these significant, theoretically oriented readings of *Perfume*, no literary study has examined Grenouille's level of self-differentiation and its role in his marginality. Consequently, this article argues that Grenouille, with a low functional level of self-differentiation, has a high level of chronic anxiety and, therefore, his dysfunction is emotional, physical, and social. Moreover, smelling and odors will be mainly equivalent to feelings and emotions because they are connected with love rather than objective reason. Thus, Grenouille—as an unloved solitary orphan—seeks love, acceptance, and happiness. However, he remains depressed, frustrated, and suicidal because of what he lacks at the level of personality. The result is a low level of self-differentiation, as indicated by his lack of personal scent contra his gifted nose, a critical perspective which available readings of the novel have not addressed. According to Kerr and Bowen, "The more differentiated a self, the more a person can be an individual *while in emotional contact with the group*" (94; emphasis original). This means that Grenouille's lack of solid self impacts his individuality and relations with others. He remains an anxious pauper who is exploited and emotionally dependent on others for satisfaction.

*Perfume* depicts the story of the gifted Grenouille who is marginalized in his society of eighteenth century France. After his birth, his mother is found guilty of four previous infanticides and decapitated accordingly. Grenouille's lack of personal

scent originates from his mother's lack of love to her infants. The circumstances of Grenouille's birth are surrounded by heat and suffocating odors of decay coming from the nearby graveyard. From the beginning of the novel, the reader perceives the events by the dominant sense of smell. Süskind emphasizes this point to designate that odors have a powerful effect on us. Furthermore, odors are more connected to different types of feelings: love, hatred, happiness, sadness, joy, fear, and disgust. *Perfume* is divided into fifty-one chapters in four parts regarding Grenouille's psychological and moral development. Grenouille's life can be traced to his birth in squalid surroundings; attending church; meeting the nurse Jeanne Bussie; going to the orphanage with Madame Gaillard; working for a tanner named Grimal; assisting Giuseppe Baldini (a master perfumer who grants Grenouille journeyman perfumer papers); getting imprisoned for seven years in a cave; being taken in by a nobleman; returning back to Grasse where once again he encounters a fragrance like the one of the girl he murdered in Paris; and finally ingloriously dying in the neighborhood of his birth in Paris. Grenouille's self-differentiation will be examined according to these life stages, especially the early formative ones.

### **Self-Differentiation and the Marginalized Idol**

Self-differentiation is the main concept in Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory. The theory consists of eight interlocking concepts: differentiation of self, triangles, family projection process, the nuclear family emotional system, multigenerational emotional process, sibling position, emotional cutoff, and societal emotional regression. Self-differentiation is defined by Kerr and Bowen as the individual's ability to differentiate between thoughts and feelings in order to guide his or her functioning in the family system (100). The function of any individual in the family system is not related to culture, social class, ethnic differences, or being normal, neurotic, and schizophrenic. Self-differentiation applies to every individual regardless of one's religious principles, cultural ideals, and social values. Cultural behavior is not totally ignored in this concept, but the individual's function in the emotional system depends on thoughts and emotions (Bowen 364). Grenouille's level of self-differentiation will be examined according to his thoughts and feelings regardless of his cultural and social beliefs. Furthermore, Grenouille's level of anxiety or emotional reactivity (to a real or imagined threat) will also be examined in order to assign him a specific level of self-differentiation. Generally speaking, however, when anxiety is intense, "people become more reactive and less thoughtful" (Kerr and Bowen 99). This decline in system functioning leads to a lower level of self-differentiation.

Early in the novel, Grenouille is defined by the wet nurse to the monk in terms of negation and anonymity as “[t]he bastard of that woman from the rue aux Fers who killed her babies!” (8), which immediately signals a potential low level of self-differentiation in the growing child whose father is absent and whose mother is a convict. Grenouille’s early stages of life, especially with Madame Gaillard, have a great effect on his level of self-differentiation because she represents the custodian and, likewise, the emotionally absent mother. In Bowen’s theory, the parents’ level of self-differentiation influences their children. Additionally, a child’s level of self-differentiation could be higher or less than that of their parents. Richard Gray contends that “the three persons largely responsible for Grenouille’s childhood development—his mother, Father Terrier, and Madame Gaillard—represent the values Süskind associates with enlightened society in the mid-eighteenth century: egocentrism, calculating rationality, emotionlessness, orderliness, ‘justice’” (495). The monk, Father Terrier, who represents religious tolerance at the Enlightenment era does not have a big role in shaping Grenouille’s level of self-differentiation. The level of self-differentiation transcends cultural and social values. Consequently, the Enlightenment culture of the eighteenth-century France should not be overlooked as it sheds light on the difference between thoughts (reason) and feelings. However, such an enlightened culture (ironically) does not seem to have changed Grenouille’s low level of self-differentiation.

Madame Gaillard and Grenouille’s mother have some common characteristics such as emotionlessness, mercilessness, and a weak sense of smell, unlike Grenouille who is an odor genius differentiating all types of scents. During the labor of her son, Grenouille’s mother “perceived the odor neither of the fish nor of the corpses, for her sense of smell had been utterly dulled” (5). She does not recognize that her four previous stillbirths are human beings, not a kind of “bloody meat that had emerged had not differed greatly from the fish guts that lay there already, nor had lived much longer” (5). Grenouille’s mother, still in her mid-twenties, has some thoughts and hopes “to live a while yet, perhaps a good five or ten years, and perhaps even to marry one day and as the honorable wife of a widower with a trade or some such to bear real children” (5). Krause clarifies that against such dreams, “her life ends when the unwanted and hence ‘unreal’ child enters the world on the grounds of the former cemetery. Physically impaired, *socially marginalized*, and never identified by a name, she remains a mere shadow with dreams that degenerate into nightmares” (5; emphasis added). She has ambition to settle down and be an honorable wife with real children, which indicates that she does not consider her multiple “stillbirths, or semi-stillbirths” (5) as real children. Although Grenouille’s

mother is merciless, she is driven by her emotions rather than thoughts to have a low level of self-differentiation that emotionally transmits to her son. She is devoid of love, tenderness, sympathy, and tolerance. The wet nurse, Jeanne Bussie, refuses to keep baby Grenouille because he does not have a smell like other babies (10). She thinks that he is even possessed by the devil (10). Thus, Grenouille is rejected from his infancy as different, and as undifferentiated in Bowen's terms.

Madame Gaillard has a greater effect on Grenouille's level of self-differentiation than his actual mother because he lives with her for eight years. Her role in shaping Grenouille's personality is typically unnoticed by critics. When she was a child, "her father had struck her across the forehead with a poker, just above the base of the nose, and she had lost for good all sense of smell and every sense of human warmth and human coldness—indeed, every human passion" (20). Madame Gaillard lacks not only the sense of smell but also human warmth and passion. She is even worse than Grenouille's mother when it comes to emotions. She had "a merciless sense of order and justice" because "of her total lack of emotion" (20). She neither discriminates nor prefers any one of the children in her orphanage. She lacks emotions, yet she is "aware of" only two sensations: "a very slight depression at the approach of her monthly migraine and a very slight elevation of mood at its departure. Otherwise, this numbed woman felt nothing" (20). Her main concern in life is to afford a private death because she fears public death among strangers. If she has such fears, then Madame Gaillard is unable to think clearly or to feel any kind of emotions because she is so frightened of death. She is emotionally numb by fears from future and shock rooted in her father's past violence to her.

Kerr and Bowen mention that individuals with a low level of self-differentiation are "so sensitized to the world around them that they have lost the capacity to feel; they are numb. Emotionally needy and highly reactive to others, it is very difficult for people in this range to maintain long-term relationships" (100-101). Therefore, it could be argued that Madame Gaillard's level of self-differentiation is very low because she is driven by emotions of fear that control her thoughts on the idea of receiving a "private death." Consequently, her diminished level of self-differentiation emotionally transmits to all the children in her orphanage, including Grenouille, even though she is not their actual mother.

As a child, Grenouille requires nothing other than food and clothes. He lives with Madame Gaillard with the minimum basics of living, yet for "his soul he required nothing. Security, attention, tenderness, love—or whatever all those things are called that children are said to require—were totally dispensable for the young Grenouille" (21). He seems an existential character that does not care about spiritual

requirements of typical human beings such as care or love. He had given up such requirements “just to go on living-from the very start” (22). Or rather, he had dispensed with these necessities because of his birth and harsh circumstances. He was born without a soul or scent, i.e. without a distinct personality. “Every other woman,” we are told, “would have kicked this monstrous child. But not Madame Gaillard” (23). The cry that announces his being and attracts people’s attention to his murderous mother is “not an instinctive cry for sympathy and love. That cry, emitted upon careful consideration, one might almost say upon mature consideration, was the newborn’s decision against love and nevertheless for life” (22). The newborn has to existentially choose between love or life but not both. He is detestable among the children at Madame Gaillard’s household who try to suffocate him several times using a pile of rags or their hands. As he grows older, he is more deserted by other children. Surprisingly, the children do not hate or envy him, but they are afraid of him (24). Even our fears of something can ultimately create a feeling of hatred. The amount of fear and hatred feelings in Madame Gaillard’s household are absorbed by Grenouille and consequently affect his level of self-differentiation. They could be the reason behind Grenouille’s loveless and guilty state.

Because Grenouille rarely communicates with the other children, it is difficult for him to retain or name things and objects without odor or fathom abstract ideas such as “justice, conscience, God, joy, responsibility, humility, gratitude, etc.” (26). If they are classified to thoughts or feelings, the majority of these notions and concepts are thoughts. Thus, his cognitive learning is sensual rather than thoughtful. He uses his senses (smell in particular) to recollect some thoughts about things. At the age of six, he becomes “an autodidact possessed of a huge vocabulary of odors that enabled him to form at will great numbers of smelled sentences” (27). Madame Gaillard notices that the self-taught Grenouille has supernatural qualities. He does not fear darkness; he makes his way back and forth without any wrong move; he can catch the smell of visitors before they arrive; and he can predict a thunderstorm before it happens. He is able to perform all of these feats with the aid of his prodigy of smelling. In this regard, Süskind makes Grenouille’s sense of smell replace that of his eyesight. Such abilities are dreadful to Madame Gaillard because she thinks that he can see through locked doors, brick walls, wood, paper, and cloth. Grenouille lives with Madame Gaillard for years, which means that his basic level of self-differentiation is already shaped. Nonetheless, his functional level of self-differentiation will be enhanced or undermined during the course of his life. Madame Gaillard believes that whether Grenouille is a “feeble-minded” or not, he has second sight. Being a feeble-minded person and having second sight

are qualities associated with thoughts rather than feelings. However, Grenouille is neither feeble-minded nor a man with second sight. His character is too mysterious and introverted. Furthermore, to use Bowen's family systems theory, self-differentiation "transcends categories such as genius, social class, and cultural-ethnic differences. It applies to all human forms of life" (364).

Grenouille turns eight when he is sent by Madame Gaillard to work with a tanner named Grimal. Madame Gaillard knows that "by all normal standards Grenouille would have no chance of survival in Grimal's tannery" (30). Grimal has "a notorious need for young laborers-not for regular apprentices and journeymen, but for cheap coolies ... about whom there would be no inquiry in dubious situations" (30). Grimal abuses vagabonds and homeless children in his tannery. Children at his tannery, including Grenouille, scrap the meat from stinking hides, dye them with poisonous chemical substances, and tan pits with caustic fumes. After a year in Grimal's tannery, Grenouille has anthrax, but he resists death. Grimal is happy that Grenouille survives because the latter cannot be replaced by other workers. Accordingly, when Grenouille turns thirteen, Grimal allows him to leave on Sundays evenings. With Grimal, Grenouille proves to be "a docile and productive worker" (33). This is because Grenouille realizes from his first glance or from the first sniff of the amount of odors in Grimal's shop that the tanner is as cruel as the fatal odors enveloping the tannery. Grenouille perceives life through the sense of smelling, which is mainly considered a feeling rather than a thought. To assign a level of self-differentiation relying on the sense of smell is still not enough at this stage because Grenouille is involved in Grimal's emotional system regardless of the fact that we do not know about Grimal's family or emotional system. Nevertheless, and in Bowen's family systems theory, to assign one's level of self-differentiation, emotions and relationships are all that is demanded. However, Bowen explains: "People in the lower half of the scale live in a 'feeling' controlled world in which feelings and subjectivity are dominant over the objective reasoning process most of the time" (473-474). Such feelings, it can be observed, shape Grenouille's life and crucial decisions.

During weekends, Grenouille is released to do what he likes. He roams Paris sniffing all kinds of odors and saving them in his mind. When he turns fifteen and in the thirty-eight anniversary of the king's coronation, Grenouille is faced by a unique delicate odor of a red-headed girl who confuses him:

For the first time, it was not just that his greedy nature was offended, but his very *heart* ached. He had the prescience of something extraordinary-this scent

was the key for ordering all odors, one could understand nothing about odors if one did not understand this one scent, and his whole life would be bungled, if he, Grenouille, did not succeed in possessing it. He had to have it, not simply in order to possess it, but for his *heart* to be at peace. (40; emphasis added)

This quotation connotes three important points about Grenouille's level of self-differentiation. First, the sense of smelling equals emotions and feelings because Grenouille feels that he should possess it to understand the quality of all other odors and "for his heart to be at peace." Second, Grenouille is guided by his emotions in the emotional system rather than his thoughts. In the same situation, heart is connected to what Grenouille feels at the presence of the scent. Grenouille feels his heart pounding, and he expects that the reason behind this pounding is "his excited helplessness in the presence of this scent" (41). Third, Grenouille cannot differentiate between his thoughts and feelings. When he follows the odor, "his fearful heart pounding, for he suspected that it was not he who followed the scent, but the scent that had captured him and was drawing him irresistibly to it" (42). And when he discovers that the source of that odor is the girl in the rue des Marais, he thinks that he has never seen anything beautiful like that girl. Grenouille means that he has never smelled anything as beautiful as the odor of this girl:

For a moment he was so confused that he actually *thought* he had never in all his life seen anything so beautiful as this girl-although he only caught her from behind in silhouette against the candlelight. He meant, of course, he *had never smelled* anything so beautiful. (43, emphasis added)

This turn, the sense of smelling is equivalent to thought. Grenouille's thoughts in such situations create his feelings and even his decision to kill the girl. Therefore, smelling represents Grenouille's feelings and thoughts but it is, once more, a matter of feeling rather than actually thinking. His confusing of thought and feeling is indicative of low scale self-differentiation in Bowen's theory on emotional relationships.

Grenouille discovers that he is a wunderkind in making perfumes since the time he kills the red-headed girl. He "felt as if he finally knew who he really was: nothing less than a genius. And that the meaning and goal and purpose of his life had a higher destiny: nothing less than to revolutionize the odoriferous world" (46). In owning the girl's scent, Grenouille achieves utmost happiness. He feels that he is not less than a genius and realizes the purpose of his life; he possesses an "exquisite

nose, a phenomenal memory, and, most important, the master scent taken from that girl in the rue des Marais" (46). Grenouille believes that he finds the triad of his ability to create not only a scent but also a soul. The components of this triad are: his nose, his memory, and the master scent of the girl. He owns the "magic formula for everything that could make a scent, a perfume, great: delicacy, power, stability, variety, and terrifying, irresistible beauty" (46). In creating a scent with such qualities, Grenouille identifies the components of the idolized soul and the identity that he would like to possess.

It is Grenouille's life chance when Grimal sends him to the perfumer and glover, Giuseppe Baldini, to deliver the goatskins for the Spanish leather. For Baldini, perfume represents the soul of the person who makes it. He mentions that it "was the soul of the perfume-if one could speak of a perfume made by this ice-cold profiteer Pelissier as having a soul-and the task now was to discover its composition" (62-63). Pelissier is a very famous perfumer in Paris and one of Baldini's rivals. Pelissier also makes the perfume "Amor and Psyche" that Baldini is not able to emulate. "Amor and Psyche" could represent heart and mind, feeling and thought, and, therefore, low and high levels of self-differentiation in people's lives.

According to Kerr and Bowen theory, people in the very low level in the scale of differentiation of self do not have the ability "to differentiate between thoughts and feelings" because they are "so immersed in a feeling world" (101; emphasis original). At this stage, Grenouille raises his functional level of self-differentiation by balancing between his thoughts and feelings. When he hears that Baldini wants the goatskins, he does his best to be the one who delivers them. Upon entering Baldini's perfumery and walking behind Baldini's shadow, Grenouille is overcome by "the idea that he belonged here and nowhere else, that he would stay here, that from here he would shake the world from its foundations" (72). His dream is to stay at Baldini's shop. He is aware that nothing justifies "a stray tanner's helper of dubious origin, without connections or protection, without the least social standing, to hope that he would get so much as a toehold in the most renowned perfume shop in Paris-all" (72). Grenouille's immodest thoughts are not a matter of hope but certainty. He is encapsulated by his feelings of inferiority, and he makes his decision to change. Working with Baldini is a matter of certainty rather than expectation for Grenouille. This idea assigns Grenouille a higher functional level of self-differentiation that enables him to differentiate between his thoughts and feelings. He challenges Baldini in making the perfume "Amor and Psyche," and he succeeds in making a perfume that is "completely new, capable of creating a whole world, a magical, rich world fine" (90). While Baldini achieves the maximum reputation

in perfume manufacturing making use of Grenouille's olfactory organs, Grenouille becomes a specialist in distillation, and it irritates him to know that many things cannot be distilled at all. He aims to "create entirely new basic odors, and with them to produce at least some of the scents that he bore within him" (103). After months of disappointing experiments to create a fundamentally new scent, Grenouille falls seriously ill. Baldini does what he can in order to save the secret of his wealth and reputation but all in vain until Grenouille asks him about other ways to extract the scent from things "besides pressing or distilling" (109). Grenouille feels much better when Baldini provides him with the answers that he needs to succeed in perfume making. Wanting to succeed and being goal-oriented make him temporarily achieve higher levels of self-differentiation.

Baldini's thoughts are mainly about the six hundred formulas that are recorded from Grenouille in how to make totally new perfumes and that "the whole generation of perfumer would ever be able to implement" (114). In such an emotionless environment, Grenouille encounters the same history with the cold soulless Madame Gaillard and with the cruel inhuman Grimal. What Grenouille cares about is the journeyman's papers that would make it possible for him to live an inconspicuous life, to travel undisturbed, and to find a job. Producing a top-selling perfume and competing Baldini and other bourgeois perfumers are not the things that Grenouille needs. He wants to "empty himself of his innermost being, of nothing less than his innermost being, which he considered more wonderful than anything else the world had to offer" (112). He wants to empty his mind and heart of what surrounds him. His main target in this stage of his life is to reach emotional self-awareness. After a journey of five days, Grenouille reaches the peak of a mountain located in the Massif Central of the Auvergne to establish "the kingdom most distant from humankind" and even any respectable mammal (123). He wants to cut himself off physically and emotionally from the whole world. He celebrates his arrival to the mountain of solitude and makes his mind up not to leave this mountain all that soon. During this stage Grenouille seems contented, proud of himself, and majestic in the empire of "Grenouille the Great." He idolizes himself as the founder of his own empire:

Yes! This was his empire! The incomparable Empire of Grenouille! Created and ruled over by him, the incomparable Grenouille, laid waste by him if he so chose and then raised up again, made boundless by him and defended with a flaming sword against every intruder. Here there was naught but his will, the will of the great, splendid, incomparable Grenouille. And now that the evil stench of the

past had been swept away, he desired that his empire be fragrant. (130)

This narcissistic idol enjoys his empire where he can do whatever he wants, forget his painful past, and assert his will. Grenouille's thoughts and feelings are all concentrated on his greatness and the ability of his olfactory system. At such moments, his will represents his thoughts and beliefs rather than his feelings. According to Kerr and Bowen, people "can function at levels that are higher or lower than their basic level depending on the circumstances of the relationship system in which they are operating" (98). Grenouille is not thoroughly involved in a relationship system with others now. Accordingly, he cuts himself from the world and lives in more suitable circumstances that boost his "basic" self-differentiation. According to Kerr and Bowen, there is a difference between *basic* and *functional* levels of self-differentiation: "Basic differentiation is functioning that is *not dependent on the relationship process*. Functional differentiation is functioning that *is dependent on the relationship system*" (98; emphasis original). Furthermore, "The functional level of a person with a low basic level can rise and fall many times even during just few hours" (Kerr and Bowen 99). Grenouille's emotional system now is a free world as he imagines that he is a king in a castle on his cozy sofa calling his "invisible, intangible, inaudible and above all inodorous, and thus utterly imaginary servants ... to fetch something for him to drink" from "the great library of odors" (133). Trying to enhance his basic self-differentiation of independence from relations with others essentially means lowering his functional level of emotional dependence. However, Grenouille simply fails in this regard.

After seven years of a solitary life in the cave, Grenouille suddenly discovers that he has not any kind of personal scent as a human being. He decides to leave the cave and heads to Montpellier in the south. Upon his arrival, he attracts people's attention because of his awful appearance. During this stage, Grenouille succeeds in making a human-like odor to himself. He notices the effect of his "new aura" (158) from several meetings with crowds of people. He becomes more confident and arrogant because he believes in his capability to make an odor that is "not merely a human, but superhuman, an angel's scent, so indescribably good and vital" to make whoever smells enchanted and in love with the bearer to the extent of "insanity, of self-abandonment" (160-161). He is determined to become "the omnipotent god of scent" (161). Grenouille secretly leaves to Grasse after achieving certain fame as the survivor caveman. Grenouille's purpose of coming to Grasse—"the Rome of scents" and "the promised land of perfumers" (172)—is a matter of a well-planned thought to learn about the techniques of scent production. His feeling does not cling

to the beauty of the town but rather to a thought of learning more about perfume production in order to make his superhuman scent.

However, Grenouille's emotions are agitated by the odor of Laure Richis, a red-headed girl. He inhales the "fatal scent" (176) and finds it resembling the scent of the first red-headed girl from the rue des Marais. He feels dizzy, happy, and even frightened to find that scent in the world again. At this stage, Grenouille is guided by his emotions again. As Bowen confirms with respect to self-differentiation, it is typical for "low-level people to operate on feelings" rather than decide on the basis on thinking (475). Grenouille works as a second journeyman for Madame Arnulfi and her journeyman and paramour Dominique Druot. He starts to make personal perfumes for himself; first, he tries the "odor for inconspicuousness" (189), but it proves to be inconvenient for him because he is ignored in certain occasions. Furthermore, this odor gives him the quality of being unnoticeable, insignificant, invisible, and even marginal. Accordingly, he makes "a scent for arousing sympathy" that proves to be suitable with middle-aged women (190). Then he makes a nauseating odor and wears it when he wants to be avoided and left alone. These odors are worn by Grenouille according to situational demands. Finally, he dedicates himself to "his real passion: the subtle pursuit of scent" (190). Although Grenouille is guided by his emotions, he seems aware of his thoughts for the future as he "systematically" plans to "sharpen his weapons, polish his techniques and gradually perfect his methods" in perfume production (190). Nevertheless, he is still dominated by his feelings because he realizes that he can imitate human odor, but what he seeks is "the odor of certain human beings: that is, those rare humans who inspire love" (195). It is a matter of passion to achieve what he wants because odor, for Grenouille, equals love. His over-rationalization of his decisions and his sometimes exaggerated and sensitive reactions to surrounding people and events indicate his low level of self-differentiation. In the case of people with very low self-differentiation, Bowen writes, "So much of life energy goes into maintaining the relationship system about them—into 'loving' or being 'loved' or reaction against the failure to get love, or into getting more comfortable—that there is no life energy for anything else" (162).

During his work with Madame Arnulfi and Druot, Grenouille accepts to remain there under poor conditions. He also pretends to be very stupid while stirring, washing tubes, and cleaning the workshop but never ignores to monitor and observe every process of extracting perfumes using his nose. Furthermore, he acts as if he does not understand his own genius in olfactory powers, and he only implements Druot's orders. Likewise, he succeeds in being "conspicuous neither by his absence

nor by his presence” and being totally uninteresting (188). This is what Grenouille wants: to prepare himself for possessing the odor of Laure Richis “very gradually and with utmost caution” to be the idol who inspires love (193). However, the level of self-differentiation does not identify the amount of intelligence. Consequently, Druot who is “not fabulously intelligent, but not a complete idiot either,” realizes that his best decisions are those ones that depend on whatever Grenouille “almost thought” or “somehow had a feeling about” (185). This indicates that Grenouille’s thoughts and feelings are clear to Druot who recognizes Grenouille’s ability in perfume making. Neil Donahue mentions that in a harsh world, Grenouille succeeds “to survive and gain for himself a measure of independence while preserving his secret talent, which he now begins to refine as an analyst and collector of scents” (38). Druot knows that Grenouille is more talented than him. Grenouille encourages Druot to have this feeling of superiority displaying the role of unambitious person although Grenouille never says what he thinks or feels. This also indicates that Grenouille is aware of what he thinks and feels even at the presence of Madame Arnulfi. Druot also follows Grenouille’s opinion and advice secretly because Druot knows that what Grenouille says regarding perfume production is the right thing.

Sometimes, Grenouille has the ability to differentiate between his thoughts and feelings to some extent, yet he is driven again by his feelings to possess the odor of Laure Richis. He walks along the wall where the garden of Laure Richis is located. He is “filled with the happiness of a lover who has heard or seen his darling from afar and knows that he will bring her home within the year” (197). Grenouille has never felt love, and he does not have the ability to inspire it. He realizes that he loves the scent of the girl and makes an oath to possess it. No wonder, Bowen explains that for people on the low-scale of self differentiation, main life goals revolve around “love, happiness, comfort, and security” (474).

Grenouille’s life decisions are based on what he “feels” right. Kerr and Bowen mention that “people at this level are so immersed in a feeling world that they are mostly unaware of an alternative. Major life decisions are based on what feels right” (101). Such people’s functioning is governed by emotional reactions. Grenouille behaves as if he is the lover of Laure, and he does what he can in order to have her odor in a year. His decision in possessing Laure Richis’ odor comes as an emotional reaction to his feelings. One thought that disturbs him is what he can do if he loses the odor after possessing it. Grenouille starts a process of killing many young girls, taking their clothes, cutting their hair, and extracting their odors. In Justin Yi’s opinion, each murder is “insignificant on its own and can only be meaningful if these pieces are all combined—the lives of humans are temporary,

but when collected under the jurisdiction of a god, then the ephemeral quality of life can be set aside to produce a divine, eternal existence, which the ultimate perfume was supposed to do” (224). In killing twenty-five girls, Grenouille collects the components of the divine, eternal, everlasting, and inspiring aura. At the night of killing his twenty-fifth victim, Laure Richis, Grenouille works with “professional circumspection” (222). During the night and while he waits until he can extract Laure’s odor from her body, he does not think of the scent that is “made of the auras of twenty-five maidens, nor of future plans, happiness and success” (226). However, he thinks of his past life stations with Madame Gaillard, Grimal the tanner, Giuseppe Baldini, and Marquis de la Taillade –Espinasse. This designates that he is emotionally guided by his feelings about his miserable emotionless past rather than his thoughts about the future. When he finishes his task with Laure, he drinks up her scent, “her glorious scent, his scent” (227). In Grenouille’s opinion, Laure’s scent is the most essential component of his superhuman scent that makes people not only admire but also adore him. In Bowen’s theory, however, undifferentiated people seek love and approval or attack others for not providing such feelings (474).

When he is discovered as the criminal and at the day of his execution, he pours a drop of his perfume on himself. The miracle occurs that the crowd cannot believe that the man who stands at the scaffold is “innocence personified” and “*could not possibly be a murderer*” (244; emphasis original). They cannot resist their feelings towards Grenouille and are overcome by the influence of this god-like man; hence, the scheduled execution deteriorates into a large orgy. Grenouille manages to make the world admire him and worship his scent: “To hell with admire! Love him! Desire him! Idolize him! He has performed a Promethean feat” (248). Considering his miserable past of squalor and lack of emotional warmth, Grenouille reaches his goal but does not find real gratification in love either. He realizes that his fulfillment is in hating and being hated, and he never achieves a true emotional independence needed for a high level of self-differentiation:

He would have loved right now to have exterminated these people from the earth, every stupid, stinking, eroticized one of them, just as he had once exterminated alien odors from the world of his raven-black soul. And he wanted them to realize how much he hated them and for them, realizing that it was the only *emotion* that he had ever truly felt, to return that hate and exterminate him just as they had originally intended. (249–250; emphasis added)

He could not empty himself of the only emotion inside him, hatred. The arrogant unsatisfied idol wants to exterminate his worshipers from the world because they do not understand his needs. Grenouille mentions that “the only one who has ever recognized it [the perfume] for its true beauty is me, because I created it myself. And at the same time, I’m the only one that it cannot enslave. I am the only person for whom it is meaningless” (260). Living all his life in the margin of society, and even in the margin of the emotional system, he cannot think moderately. Grenouille becomes conscious that people do not worship him but they worship his “counterfeit aura, his fragrant disguise, and his stolen perfume” (249). Richard Gray argues that Grenouille realizes smells “as unavoidable, but it is precisely for this reason that he considers olfactory sensations the most effective medium for influencing and manipulating sensate creatures. On the basis of this recognition, Grenouille formulates his olfactory program for tyranny” (493). He is aware that odor is “the brother of breath” and people inhale it to control their hearts. He knows the connection between scent and love, and he wants to be the supreme god of scent.

The amount of emotions provoked by the effect of Grenouille’s perfume is massive. Grenouille could not differentiate between his thoughts and feelings because he is immersed in the world of feelings. He thinks that he is the idol who is able to eradicate these worshippers from the earth and be “the new Messiah” or “the Supreme Emperor before kings and emperors” in *Notre-Dame* (159). He thinks that it may be possible that people on the parade grounds have felt what he feels when he smells the floods of odor of the girl playing in the garden. “Then he thought no more, for thinking was not his strong point” (261), which indicates that he is more engrossed in a world of feelings. Nonetheless, he just wants to die and is driven by his emotions again. He dies at age of twenty-eight at the hands of cannibals who ironically “were uncommonly proud” that they “had done something out of love” for the first time (263). He does not want to live in isolation or with human beings. Being in the margin of life suits Grenouille more than being in the top of it or, at least, living in the middle as an ordinary person. Accordingly, he cannot be assigned in a high level of self-differentiation nor a moderate one. It never satisfies him to be an idol admired or worshipped. Instead, he is the fatalistic and existential “idol” of hate, self-alienation, and marginalization.

## **Conclusion**

The marginalized idol, Grenouille, is the prisoner of his “inferior” and ambivalent identity. He is the focus of the contradictory and terrifying world scented with fragrance yet exuding violence and cruelty. The urgent desire to search for the lost

identity, which can be realized by attacking the identities of others, is overrun at the end by his divine smell as an idol. The ideology of contempt and inferiority is the desire of the unlimited hero to prove his existence and non-existence at the same time. Feelings of inferiority have delayed his sense of heroism and intensified Grenouille's anxiety, emptiness and self-contempt. Grenouille proves his presence after being skilled in perfume manufacturing. However, his abused outcast spirit is unable to overcome the hatred and frustration ensuing from the lack of having a special smell differentiating him from others. This feeling of marginality in scents gives him a constant sense of nothingness. Because he does not have a differentiated smell (despite his attempts to do so), Grenouille does not pay attention to values, ethics, or religion. He feels neither pain or remorse nor hope or recognition of laws. Surprisingly, Grenouille has an exaggerated and short-lived form of self-importance in his divine-like new fragrance.

The ultimate fragrance represents his salvation yet his false identity. Thus, the idea of inferiority remains the dominant end of the "(anti)hero" who lived it and who finally died at the hands of other drunken, homeless and marginalized others. Within half an hour, Grenouille "had disappeared utterly from the earth" (263). Grenouille's life is as evanescent as his scent. He is a perfume addict, a murderer, a cave monster, and above all the undifferentiated marginalized idol uncontrolled by moral constraints. He is at the low scale of self-differentiation because he lives in a feeling world rather than a thinking one. He is emotionally needy and reactive to others although he appears emotionless and independent. His life energy is consumed in searching for love that he pretends to be uncaring about, and his anxiety is high as he does not feel comfortable except during the years in the cave before he discovers that he does not possess a scent. He does not have the ability to differentiate between his thoughts and feelings, and most of his life decisions in idolizing himself are based on what he feels right, as when he decides to live alone in a mountain. He murders twenty-five teenage girls in Grasse in order to own their perfume and, consequently, to make an unprecedented perfume for himself. Kerr and Bowen mention that "very poorly differentiated people, if stressed sufficiently, may murderously strike out at others, particularly at those on whom they are most dependent" (101). Grenouille is one of those undifferentiated people who violently strike out at others to possess the formula for his perfume.

When it is discovered that he is a murderer and on his way to execution, Grenouille wears the superhuman perfume that he makes from his victims to delude the crowd and convince them of his innocence. Furthermore, the crowd of people is overwhelmed by emotions to extent of participating in a huge orgy. In *Perfume*,

“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” (86–87). The entire crowd of Grasse could not resist the beauty of this undifferentiated marginalized idol who becomes their celebrated idol. In his decision to leave Grasse, Grenouille’s hatred increases, especially when he realizes that people worship him only by the effect of his perfume. Accordingly, he gives up his emotional attachment to those people and aims at Paris to die there. Kerr and Bowen remark that “when stressed into emotional disequilibrium, the dysfunction tends to be chronic and severe. The dysfunction may be physical, emotional, or social” (101). Grenouille is emotionally unstable and is socially dysfunctional. He ends his life journey at the fish market where his life story had started. Kerr and Bowen add that at “the extreme lower end of the scale are people who have given up on relationships. Typically, they are in various types of institutions or are existing marginally in society” (101). Grenouille gives up his relationship with his emotional system two times: first, when he cuts himself off physically and emotionally in a cave for years, and second when he decides to return to Paris where he finally pours the whole bottle of his magical perfume on himself to be eaten by criminals who claim that they did so “out of love.” Because feelings have no role in an enlightened rational world centered on reason, Grenouille remains the marginalized, undifferentiated, and self-annihilating idol.

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