

Representing The Unrepresentable: Class And Scent In Perfume: The Story of A Murderer

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how Patrick Süskind's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* transforms scent into an ideological medium that structures class, identity, and visibility. Although often read through aesthetic or psychological lenses, this study approaches the novel from a Marxist perspective, focusing on scent and class. Grenouille's lack of personal scent is not simply a narrative oddity but a representation of ideological exclusion. Drawing on Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation, the article argues that Grenouille cannot become a subject within the dominant system because he lacks the attributes that allow for ideological recognition. His scentless body stands as a symbol of a class position that is unacknowledged, unnamed, and therefore unrepresentable. Using Fredric Jameson's concept of the political unconscious, the study examines how this narrative silence surrounding Grenouille's identity reflects a deeper historical contradiction. The novel constructs scent as both a cultural marker and a social mechanism of control, embedding ideological meaning in aesthetic form. Grenouille's production of perfume does not restore his place within the system; instead, it becomes a way of simulating subjectivity without attaining it. Through close textual analysis, the article reveals how *Perfume* questions the ideological functions of aesthetic pleasure and exposes the symbolic limits of visibility. Grenouille's final disappearance is not a defeat of the individual but the erasure of a figure that the system cannot assimilate. In this reading, Süskind's novel becomes more than a fictional account of obsession or genius; it is a literary space where the unrepresentable body confronts the structures that refuse to name it. Scent, as both presence and absence, emerges as the novel's central metaphor for class, recognition, and ideological silence.

Keywords: *Ideology, Scent, Class, Subjectivity, Representation*

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Temsili Mümkin Olmayanın Temsili: Koku Romanında Sınıf ve Koku İlişkisi

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Patrick Süskind'in *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* adlı romanını Marksist edebiyat kuramı çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Roman genellikle estetik ya da psikolojik yaklaşımlarla incelenirse de, bu çalışma kokuyu sınıf ve ideoloji ekseninde ele alan Marksist bir okuma sunar. Kokusuz doğan Grenouille karakteri, sistemin öznelleştirme mekanizması dışında kalmış, temsil edilemeyen bir sınıfsal boşluğu simgeler. Louis Althusser'in ideoloji ve çağırılma (interpellation) kuramı, Grenouille'ün neden toplumsal sistemde bir özneye dönüşemediğini açıklamak için temel alınırken; Fredric Jameson'ın politik bilinçdışı kavramı ise bu temsil krizinin edebi metin içinde nasıl sembolik olarak çözümlendiğini ortaya koyar. Çalışma, kokunun romanda nasıl bir ideolojik araç haline geldiğini, sınıfsal ayrımları nasıl görünür kıldığını ve aynı zamanda görünmez olanı nasıl maskeleydiğini analiz etmektedir. Sonuç olarak *Perfume* bireysel sapkınlık hikâyesi olmanın ötesinde, temsil edilemeyenin sistemsel olarak nasıl silindiğini gösteren politik bir anlatıya dönüşür. Grenouille'ün kokusuz bedeni, ideolojinin tanım yapamadığı bir boşluk olarak varlığını sürdürürken, yarattığı kokular geçici bir görünürlük sağlasa da, bu görünürlük temsilin yerini alamaz. Bu bağlamda roman, duyarlar üzerinden kurulan sınıf yapılarının ve estetik beğenilerin ideolojik işlevini sorgulayan katmanlı bir anlatı sunar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İdeoloji, Temsil, Sınıf, Koku, Öznelik

He gave the world nothing but his dung — no smile, no cry, no glimmer in the eye, not even his own scent.
— Süskind p. 25

INTRODUCTION

Patrick Süskind's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* is a story of a murderer who follows an extraordinary sense. However, it contains a much deeper and ideological structure beneath the surface. In this universe, where scent almost carries an ontological meaning, lacking a personal smell is not a biological deficiency but a metaphor for a class-based position that is not acknowledged as a subject and is considered invisible by society. That is why Grenouille's lack of scent cannot be regarded merely as an individual tragedy, but rather as a representation of a historically repressed, unacknowledged, and excluded class. According to Louis Althusser's definition, ideology does not simply describe reality but functions by positioning individuals as "always-already subjects," assigning them a status within the system (Althusser, 2014, p. 192). Grenouille was born outside this system and cannot become a subject because he lacks both a defining scent and an identity. Here, identity refers not merely to personal individuality but to a form of subjectivity ideologically shaped and sanctioned by the system.

The novel opens with a vividly described image of France, specifically the fish market where Grenouille is born; a space filled not only with filth and poverty but also encoded with the spatial markers of class-based exclusion. By opening with the line “[i]n the period of which we speak, there reigned in the cities a stench barely conceivable to us modern men and women” (Süskind, 2006, p. 3), the narrative does more than evoke an atmosphere of the past; it constructs a historical mechanism of exclusion through the senses, the most fundamental medium for perceiving class differences. As Alain Corbin notes in *The Foul and the Fragrant*, scent in eighteenth-century France functioned as an ideological tool that demarcated physical, cultural, and moral boundaries (Corbin, 1986, p. 141). This process reflects how the rising bourgeois class used scent as both a sensory experience and a means of moral and social control, since scents encoded not only individuals but also the city itself as a class-based space (Corbin, 1986, p. 141). In this narrative, scent functions as an invisible weapon of bourgeois culture and its aesthetic values. As Terry Eagleton argues in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, aesthetics is never innocent, as it is always an interpretation shaped by the dominant class (Eagleton, 2003, p. 15–16). Through the aestheticization of scent, *Perfume* shows how the bourgeois class sustains its ideological dominance.

This article examines how Süskind’s *Perfume* constructs class distinctions and ideological control through sensory representation, especially scent, within a Marxist framework. In this sense, *Perfume* stands out for treating scent not as an aesthetic motif but as a tool of ideological encoding. This reading focuses on how scent reproduces class differences as an ideological tool. Within this framework, the novel’s translation of smell from a sensory experience into an ideological construct calls for its evaluation as both a literary form and a political structure. This study offers an original contribution to the analysis of Süskind’s novel by approaching the sensory element of smell as both an aesthetic phenomenon and a vehicle for ideological and class-based structuring. The theoretical framework of this study will be built upon Louis Althusser’s concept of ideological state apparatuses and his theory of subject formation, along with Fredric Jameson’s notion of the political unconscious.

Jameson argues that literature should be understood as a symbolic act, one that performs a social and political function by leaving historical traces within the unconscious (Jameson, 2006, p. 5). In this sense, *Perfume* is not the story of an individual deviant but the narrative of a class-based identity that is systematically excluded, repressed, and reshaped. Grenouille’s scentlessness becomes a form of otherness that society cannot tolerate, symbolizing the veiled resolution of a historical contradiction. This contradiction lies between the invisibility of the lower classes and the normative authority of the bourgeois order.

Throughout the novel, the perfumes created by Grenouille are not only pleasant scents that appeal to aesthetic taste but also ideological instruments that control desire and reinforce authority. The description of his perfumes as having the power to command love, to awaken lust, to inspire admiration (Süskind, 2006,

p. 180) demonstrates that the scents he creates are not merely tools of persuasion but instruments of domination. From this perspective, scent becomes more than a sensual experience; it functions as a symbolic discourse on class and power. Grenouille's final "success" does not grant him visibility; instead, he is absorbed into ideological codes and re-naturalized to fit the system's norms.

This study argues that in Süskind's *Perfume*, scent is far more than an aesthetic pleasure; it is a medium through which class, ideology, and visibility are reproduced. In this narrative, scentlessness marks existential crisis, while producing scent becomes a path to power. The novel allows the reader to examine the distorted relationship between an individual cast out of the class structure and society, not merely on a psychological level, but on an explicitly ideological one. This article moves beyond psychoanalytic and aesthetic readings, centering scent as an ideological mechanism. Unlike previous studies that have primarily focused on aesthetic or psychological interpretations of scent in *Perfume*, this analysis emphasizes scent as an ideological instrument that organizes class structures and regulates subjectivity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: IDEOLOGY, SUBJECTIVITY, AND THE POLITICAL UNCONSCIOUS OF NARRATIVE

Defending a literary work is not only a way of individual expression; on the contrary, it is a space where historical and ideological structures are reproduced and reinforced, which is one of the main purposes of Marxist literary criticism. Within the framework of this study, Süskind's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* will be evaluated in this theoretical context. The theoretical structure will be built upon Louis Althusser's theory of ideology and subject formation, as well as Fredric Jameson's concept of the political unconscious.

According to Althusser, ideology is a system that structures the relationship individuals form with social reality (Althusser, 2014, p. 256). However, this system does not accept individuals as they are. It defines them, assigns them a position, and transforms them. Therefore, becoming a subject is not an identity that naturally belongs to the individual; it is the result of ideology hailing the individual, assigning them a place, and forcing them into a role (Althusser, 2014, p. 264). Grenouille is born outside of this hailing. He has no scent because he is not included in the system's mechanism of identification. His scentlessness is thus not simply biological, but functions as a sign of his exclusion from the system's mechanisms of recognition and power. In this regard, Althusser connects ideology to institutionalized structures that operate within material practices (Althusser, 2014, p. 259). Institutions such as literature, family, religion, and cultural production are all components of this ideological structure. In *Perfume*, these ideological mechanisms operate directly through scent. Even though Grenouille's lack of scent leaves him outside of the system, he deciphers the society's logic of resemblance and enters the ideological structure in an unusual way. Therefore, the perfumes Grenouille creates can be interpreted as ideological tools with the power to produce subjectivity and to shape the system's structure

of desire, since in this system, individual desires are not natural impulses but ideologically constructed and regulated by dominant social values.

Unlike Althusser, Jameson views literature as a space where ideological contradictions are symbolically resolved. According to his approach, every narrative is a structure that conceals historical and class-based contradictions, while simultaneously revealing them on a symbolic level (Jameson, 2006, p. 64). From this perspective, *Perfume* is not merely a personal narrative about Grenouille's deviance; it is a historical and ideological resolution of a figure who is cast out of the class structure, unrecognized, rendered invisible, and trapped in a pathological relationship with society. This resolution sustains the ideological order by repressing the other, which society cannot allow to exist within the system. Another key claim made by Jameson is that literary texts reproduce what has been repressed at a symbolic level, attempting to resolve underlying societal conflicts. By stating that:

the political perspective [is] not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today—the psychoanalytic or the myth-critical, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural—but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation. (Jameson, 2006, p. 1)

he emphasizes that every literary text is inevitably political. This emphasis allows the novel to be treated as a text that simultaneously implies historical repressions and reconstructs them at a structural narrative level. Thus, the representation of scent in *Perfume* will be regarded as an ideological form that regulates class differences, visibility, and the process of becoming a subject. Moreover, within this theoretical framework, the following sections of the study will interpret the novel through the representation of scent in relation to social class, the ideological distinctions constructed through aesthetic taste, and the literary portrayal of the body that fails to become a subject. This approach aims to reveal the deep ways in which ideology shapes narrative structures and symbolic representations.

SCENTLESS BODY, NAMELESS SUBJECT: GRENOUILLE'S CLASS POSITION

Jean-Baptiste Grenouille's birth is not merely a biological beginning, but also the first traumatic encounter between a system-excluded subject and society. He is born in one of the dirtiest and most hidden corners of Paris, surrounded by the stench of fish and blood. His lack of reaction in the birth scene, such as not crying, not looking, and most importantly, being without a scent, suggests that his bodily existence has no place within the social system from the very moment he enters the world (Süskind, 2006, p. 3–4). The absence of scent can be interpreted not as a physical deficiency, but as a representation of the character's ideological inability to be named, defined, and consequently, to become a subject. Therefore, Grenouille's lack of scent holds significant importance within Althusser's theory of subject formation. According to Althusser, a person becomes a subject when they are hailed by ideology through institutions (Althusser, 2014, p. 264).

However, Grenouille is not hailed by any ideological structure; institutions such as family, school, or religion have no effect on him. This suggests not simply that he is pushed outside the system, but that he exists beyond its field of recognition, in other words, he remains undefined. The fact that he is not hailed indicates that he has an existence that cannot be recognized by any system. Althusser explains this through the concept of ideological recognition. According to ideology, one of the fundamental conditions for becoming a subject is that the individual must be defined within a specific social role (Althusser, 2014, p. 188). Grenouille, however, is not positioned within any such role; his lack of scent confirms this state of indefinability.

Grenouille's absence of scent is directly linked to the novel's class structure. Alain Corbin states that fragrance functions as a tool of distinction between social classes, and argues that the bourgeoisie legitimizes its class-based status through scent (Corbin, 1986, p. 141). Nonetheless, Grenouille carries neither the scent associated with the lower class nor the refined fragrance of the upper class; thus, he becomes an entity that cannot be represented within any class hierarchy. In this context, his existence can be seen as a void that lies outside the map of social class. Even though he is within the system, he represents a body that cannot be placed within any class position. Therefore, his lack of scent also signifies a symbolic void. Jameson's notion of historical repression offers a way to analyze how this symbolic void reflects deeper structural tensions within the narrative. Through Grenouille, *Perfume* constructs a figure that cannot be defined, is excluded, and cannot be incorporated into the semantic map of the system. Grenouille's existence carries the trace of a contradiction that the system fails to represent. This unrepresentability does not refer to someone excluded by the system but rather to an Other whom the system cannot recognize. Jameson defines such figures as semantic absences, as they are symbolic constructs that push the limits of the text's meaning system (Jameson, 2006, p. 33).

The exclusion Grenouille experiences throughout his childhood can be interpreted as the social manifestation of this semantic absence. For instance, Madame Gaillard's indifference towards him represents this semantic absence at the societal level. In the book, Madame Gaillard says, "[t]his baby makes my flesh creep because it doesn't smell the way children ought to smell" (Süskind, 2006, p. 13), implying that Grenouille is not even included in society's definition of a human child. His association with neither love nor direct rejection reflects his unrepresentability within the system. In this context, his lack of scent is not merely a sensory deficiency, but a sign of his exclusion from social recognition. This subject who cannot become an object of desire is also unable to shape the desires of the system, as he exists outside the norms established by that very system.

Grenouille's production of fragrances in the later chapters has no effect on his class status. This act of production does not integrate him into the system; on the contrary, it transforms him into a figure who manipulates the system's tools.

Even with the perfumes, he can only be temporarily recognized and ideologically classified. Althusser's emphasis on ideology as not merely conceptual but also operative through material practices becomes particularly relevant here (Althusser, 2014, p. 186). Grenouille attempts to compensate for his lack through the production of fragrances; however, this substitution does not lead to subject formation, as becoming an ideological subject is only possible through representation. In the end, his absence of scent renders him unrepresentable.

Consequently, Grenouille's class position cannot be explained through a classical notion of exclusion. He is not a figure actively excluded by the system, but rather one the system fails to identify. As such, he is both repressed and rendered invisible. *Perfume* not only represents this invisibility; it also presents it as a bodily form of existence that remains outside the ideological frame. When the novel is examined through Jameson's concept of the political unconscious, Grenouille's scentless body emerges as a structural contradiction that the system refuses to acknowledge (Jameson, 2006, p. 246).

SCENT AND AESTHETIC TASTE: THE IDEOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF BOURGEOIS PLEASURE

In Süskind's novel, scent is both a determinant of class differences and a tool for reproducing aesthetic orders. The novel examines, within the historical and cultural context of eighteenth-century France, the aesthetic and social functions of scent. As Neil H. Donahue states, Süskind's *Perfume* integrates the sense of smell into its historical and cultural framework, opening a sensory gateway to the social dynamics of its time (Donahue, 1992, p. 37). In this way, scent creates not only the atmosphere of the novel but also the ideological codes underlying class relations. The novel's construction of class codes through sensory perception parallels its reproduction of class belonging through aesthetic preferences. These codes determine social positions and simultaneously shape the way individuals construct their self-image within the aesthetic domain. Bourdieu's theory of aesthetic taste is crucial for understanding the novel. According to Bourdieu, "[t]aste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (Bourdieu, 2010, p. xxix). This implies that aesthetic preferences and tastes not only distinguish social differences but also play a role in the reproduction of class identity. Süskind's *Perfume* explores this mechanism through scents, demonstrating that perfumes in bourgeois culture function both as markers of identity and as instruments of power. Aesthetic taste thus functions as a class-distinguishing factor; this is evident in the sharp contrasts between bourgeois bodies and spaces associated with clean, pleasant scents and the lower-class environments depicted through foul odors. In this context, being clean is an expression of class-based superiority rather than hygiene.

In the book, Grenouille's first encounter with perfumes is described immediately following an extended depiction of the peasants' smells, which symbolize their poverty: "Through the wrought-iron gates at their portals came the smells of coach leather and of the powder in the pages' wigs, and over the high walls passed

the garden odours of broom and roses and freshly trimmed hedges” (Süskind, 2006, p. 41-42). What emerges from this is that scent aesthetics is one of the core elements of class discrimination, with the notions of “cleanness” and “royalty” deeply intertwined within bourgeois ideology, and the setting coded accordingly. Rindisbacher’s study demonstrates how representations of scents become functional in social and historical contexts. According to him, the lower-class scents in *Perfume* are associated with dirt, decay, and images of poverty to reinforce social exclusion and humiliation (Rindisbacher, 2015, p. 87-89). In this context, it becomes clear that scent can be considered an ideological tool operating through social power relations marked by discrimination. *Perfume* reveals the class-based structures hidden behind aesthetic tastes associated with scent. Fragrances serve as a means of perpetuating bourgeois culture, and Grenouille’s lack of scent positions him outside this aesthetic-ideological order. The perfumes he creates go far beyond aesthetic objects; they are tools that shape desires and reinforce social authority. However, this process of production does not incorporate him into the system; instead, it turns him into a figure who manipulates the system’s desires and, in doing so, exposes the ideological function of aesthetic production.

In Süskind’s *Perfume*, scent is not just a sensory experience but a visible signature that social structures and power relations cannot be without. Scents draw the boundaries that determine class differences; the elegance and superiority of the upper class and the exclusion and “filth” of the lower class are continuously reproduced through these boundaries. Grenouille’s lack of scent is a living symbol of being outside this order and rejected from social belonging. However, the perfumes he creates appear as tools to reverse social codes and manipulate power. In this way, scent becomes a playground and a stage of authority in the text, where aesthetic pleasure and social control intertwine. *Perfume* thus makes readers reflect on both visibility and invisibility through scent, showing how class identities are shaped and how aesthetics draws ideological boundaries. These boundaries are legitimized through aesthetic tastes, and class differences are naturalized through the senses. With this unique perspective, the novel goes beyond sensory perception to reveal a fundamental part of social order and conveys the multilayered political discourse of scent.

THE PROCESS OF PRODUCTION AND ALIENATION: THE SOCIAL ESTRANGEMENT OF GRENOUILLE’S SCENTLESS BODY

The absence of scent in *Perfume* appears not only as a problem of ideological unrecognition but also as a form of alienation connected to the production process. According to Marx’s theory of alienation, the individual becomes estranged from their own labor, the product of that labor, and ultimately from themselves, because production is integrated into the functioning of the system by being separated from the individual’s existence (Marx, 1975, p. 327). In Grenouille’s case, this process operates through sensory production rather than material labor. The production of scent lies at the center of his contradictory relationship with both the social order and his own existence. Although Grenouille demonstrates extraordinary mastery in perfume production, this process does not enable him to

become a subject within the system. On the contrary, while he can shape others' desires and perceptions through his perfumes, his own body remains scentless, undefined, and outside the system. The novel emphasizes this contradiction through Grenouille's grotesque awareness of his own body:

He could smell nothing. He could not smell anything in his armpits, nor on his feet, nor around his genitals when he bent down to them as far as he possibly could. It was grotesque. He, Grenouille, who could smell other people miles away, was incapable of smelling his own genitals not a handspan away! (Süskind, 2006, p. 156)

In this scene, Grenouille's sensory ability, which guides his perception of his own body, reveals his representational crisis. While he becomes a figure who can control society's perception through his superior sense of smell, his inability to comprehend his own existence signifies both an ontological void and ideological unrecognizability. Even though Grenouille's perfumes hold symbolic power for others, this production does not make him visible. On the contrary, his scentless body keeps him outside representation. In accordance with Marx's theory of alienation, Grenouille's labor produces social value; however, this process alienates him from his own product, his body, and his recognition within the system.

Althusser's understanding of ideology states that the process of subjectivity is related to both bodily and symbolic visibility (Althusser, 2014, p. 264). Louis Althusser's theory of ideology demonstrates that subject formation is related not only to recognition but also to visibility. Grenouille's scentless body signifies a body that is unrepresentable and for which such visibility is impossible. However, Süskind constructs this unrepresentability not merely through exclusion, but through the transformation of the body into a symbolic void. In the scene where Grenouille attempts to smell his own body, what he experiences is not only an absence but a profound repulsion from himself. This repulsion expresses not exclusion from the system, but a transformation into an entity that the system cannot comprehend. Additionally, Jameson's notion of semantic absence is crucial to understanding Grenouille's invisibility. According to him, repressed conflicts can be discerned through the leaks and fragments within a literary work (Jameson, 2006, p. 4). Grenouille's body, which cannot be acknowledged by either society or himself, embodies this contradiction. He is not merely an outcast unable to find a place within the system; rather, he is repressed to ensure the continuation of that system, as the unknown poses a threat. Süskind's depiction of Grenouille's seven years in the cave, marked by silence and stasis, highlights the radical extent of his separation from the ideological system (Süskind, 2006, p. 153-154). This suggests that Grenouille has become a removed subject, both socially and narratively. This absence reflects the failure of the system to acknowledge him, and even the narrative appears to gradually erase his presence. In this way, Grenouille retreats not only from the external world but from the space of representation itself.

Grenouille, who impresses the masses and renders them powerless through the perfumes he produces, ultimately seeks to end his own existence. The expression “[h]e was overcome with a desire to abandon his plans, to walk out into the night and disappear” (Süskind, 2006, p. 227) not only conveys fatigue but also reflects the dissolution of the unrepresentable subject under the pressure of the system. At this point, the novel moves beyond the classic Marxist narrative that establishes a direct connection between production and visibility; here, production signifies not subject formation but erasure. Ultimately, *Perfume* goes beyond the individual deviation and expresses how the modern ideological structures deal with figures they cannot define. Grenouille is not simply a representation of a body outside class boundaries; rather, he is a symbolic excess, an entity that cannot be defined by the existing discourse of the system and wanders through the narrative’s political unconscious.

POWER AND COLLAPSE: THE AUTHORITY OF SCENT AND IDEOLOGICAL VOID

Grenouille’s rise throughout the novel is not about aesthetic satisfaction or revenge, but about how scent becomes an absolute means of control. However, at the peak of this domination, acceptance by society does not occur. On the contrary, the height he reaches through his perfumes marks the moment when he is ideologically erased and his invisibility becomes certain. This collapse in Süskind’s novel carries a silent glory because, even at the moment when Grenouille is able to control others’ desires and appears god-like to them, he cannot develop a definition for himself. The collective hysteria scene in Grasse Square can be seen as the clearest moment of this rupture. In this scene, Grenouille enchants the crowd with his perfect perfume:

A flesh-and-blood bishop was on his knees before him, whimpering with pleasure. The rich and the mighty, proud ladies and gentlemen, were fawning in adoration, while the common folk all around — among them the fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters of his victims — celebrated an orgy in his honour and in his name. A nod of his head and they would all renounce their God and worship him, Grenouille the Great. Yes, he was Grenouille the Great! (Süskind, 2006, p. 278)

However, this divinity is not recognition of the individual; rather, it is a temporary acceptance of a figure trapped in a symbolic void, sustained by illusion. Grenouille in this scene is not simply a representation but the lived presence of what cannot be represented, brought vividly to the stage. Thus, the function of scent is not to make a body visible, but to conceal the absence of that body. Using Jean Baudrillard’s theory of simulation, this scene can be interpreted not as reality but as an ideological reflection of desire. Grenouille is scentless; however, through scents, he creates a simulation of identity. This simulation does not grant him acceptance; it merely allows society’s desires to be projected onto this void (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1). When approached through Baudrillard’s theory of simulation, the identity Grenouille constructs through scent is not a reflection of reality but a fabrication shaped by desire, and this construct functions as a

deceptive illusion rather than an authentic self. Althusser's claim that ideology functions through material practices should be reconsidered here: Grenouille's scent moves the system's senses; however, it still does not produce any institutional or ideological interpellation (Althusser, 2014, p. 264). The illusion he creates actually proves that he still cannot be acknowledged by the system; therefore, he must be temporarily transformed. This means he remains invisible, and his ideological void is perfumed only briefly. Like a perfume, he becomes noticeable for a moment and then disappears.

At the end of the story, this false visibility collapses. Grenouille could have possessed everything with his essence of the absolute, but he refuses this and chooses to disappear: "He no longer wanted to live at all. He wanted to go to Paris and die. That was what he wanted" (Süskind, 2006, p. 291). These lines emphasize what the system does to the unknown. He is not rewarded with subjectivity at the end of the production process. On the contrary, to maintain his persistent absence from representation, he withdraws from the scene. As a result, the peak moment in *Perfume* is not the completion of subject formation or an ideological aesthetic of space but rather a spectacle. The power Grenouille gains through scent does not make him truly known; it only temporarily masks his invisibility within the system. Therefore, the novel goes beyond portraying scent as an ideological tool. It reveals how something deeply cherished cannot be fully represented, turning the story into a political narrative about the ultimate collapse of aesthetics.

CONCLUSION

The most lasting mark left by a scentless body is not a smell but emptiness. Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* tells a story of invisibility and absence of representation in a world where the senses have become politicized. Grenouille's lack of scent is not merely a deficiency; it is a fracture the system cannot grasp or represent, so it must suppress it. He is a point excluded from the class map, a figure silenced by ideology, an absence unable to assert its own existence yet powerful enough to shape the direction of desire. This erasure does not simply signify the destruction of an individual; it marks the suppression of everything the system fails to name or position within the ideological order. Grenouille is not merely a fictional character, but the embodiment of a void that ideology refuses to acknowledge.

This study evaluated the function of smell in the novel not only as an aesthetic or narrative element but also as a device operated by ideology. Using Althusser's theory of subjectivation and ideology, it revealed Grenouille's exclusion from the system as an uncalled-for and unnamed body. It also demonstrated how this lack of representation is symbolized within the novel's internal structure through Jameson's approach to the political unconscious. The power established by smells creates illusion rather than visibility and produces simulation instead of representation. Grenouille, who was treated like a god in Grasse Square, represents the aesthetically perfumed form of a body the system cannot comprehend. The deification presented in this scene is not an act of glorification; rather, it marks the displacement of the subject and its transformation into a collective object of

fantasy. What occurs in this moment is not the recognition of Grenouille, but the aesthetic masking of his exclusion from the system. In this ideological framework, the novel reveals the failure of the ideological system to define the subject and its attempt to compensate for this lack through aesthetic means. However, this scene does not establish power; rather, it conceals an unresolvable ideological void. The peak coincides with collapse because an entity outside the system remains unrecognizable even when producing the most perfect scent. Süskind's novel is not a tale of individual perversion but a narrative demonstrating how the unrepresentable is rendered "invisible" by the system. From this perspective, the novel is not merely a narrative; it stages the process through which a figure that exceeds the limits of recognition is rendered invisible within the ideological order. In this structure, aesthetics functions as a veil that conceals what is absent, yet can never truly fill the absence.

In light of this information, *Perfume* not only reveals how bourgeois aesthetics and ideological domination rely on the senses but also brings to the forefront the invisibility of figures excluded from the system, both in literary and political terms. In this context, scent functions not as a mere emotion, but as an ideological boundary that determines who is perceived, who is excluded, and who is interpellated by the system. Grenouille remains a blank spot on the system's map; yet that blank, much like the sharpest scent, endures in the text's consciousness. For this very reason, the unplaceable gap becomes more enduring than what the system is able to recognize. No matter how forcefully it is repressed, Grenouille's presence continues to echo within the subconscious of the text. This is precisely why his story concludes with the line "[t]hey were uncommonly proud. For the first time they had done something out of Love" (Süskind, 2006, p. 296). At first glance, this final sentence may appear to signal a moment of dissolution or purification. Yet in reality, it functions as a narrative device that seals a representational gap with an emotional curtain. What appears as visibility here is not recognition, but suppression veiled by aesthetics.

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