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# Making Rhetorical Scents: An Olfactory Grammar of Motives Based On Kenneth Burke's Pentad

Janet Miller

Clemson University, janetm@clemson.edu

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MAKING RHETORICAL SCENTS:  
AN OLFATORY GRAMMAR OF MOTIVES  
BASED ON KENNETH BURKE'S PENTAD

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in Professional Communication

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by  
Janet Miller  
May 2010

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Accepted by:

Dr. Steven B. Katz, Committee Chair

Dr. Cynthia Haynes

Dr. Jan Rune Holmevik

## ABSTRACT

Scent is inherently persuasive, but the language of scent is largely missing from rhetoric's vocabulary. This is because language cannot express the "truth" of an odor. Identification of odor as substance is dependent on consubstantiality between the author and reader. We instead describe smells using metaphorical language, or by invoking episodic memories and emotional reactions. In this way, scent is dramatistic. In order to consider the possibility of a grammar of scent beyond metaphor, the author develops an olfactory pentad (Sniff, Context, Emanation, Odor Object, and Response) by applying the framework of Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad. In this way, scent is exposed as a powerful rhetorical substance separate from human motive, but motivating in and of itself. The author then explores implications for a rhetoric of scent beyond the literate tradition.

## DEDICATION

This olfactory exploration is scented with sacrifice. I abandoned my husband of over thirty years in order to sniff out new knowledge and mold a new career more than eight hundred miles away from our comfortable home. My feminist attitude caused me to bristle when Tom, during particularly trying moments of separation would remind me: “not many husbands *let* their wives leave home to go back to school.” But I bristle because what he said, although it stinks, is a reality for many women. I love my husband who supports my ambition and encourages my independence.

Our sweet children have also borne the scent of sacrifice. While they are young adults now building their own lives, they were undoubtedly affected by their parents’ separation and the upheaval of their traditional family. Their eagerness to support my effort to earn a Master’s degree, Kyle by helping me produce a film about the rhetoric of golf, and Erin by reviewing and commenting on every bit of my writing over the past two years, is inspiring and a daily reminder that motherhood is the most fragrant and enduring of all gifts.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I did not venture out on this journey of olfactory exploration unaccompanied. Dr. Steven Katz, my professor with the dapper hat, inspired me to think and write in new ways before our class's tea olive-scented conversation in the South Carolina Botanical Gardens took place. His Style Analysis class opened my senses to a clandestine atmosphere of language and thought, and it was in this space that I became enthralled with the unspeakable yet rhetorical nature of scent and my thesis was born. In a different sense, Dr. Katz grappled with many of the same questions I have been trying to work through, and even proposed some answers in his book *The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric*. Dr. Cynthia Haynes has guided my understanding of how rhetoric and composition enable the writer to create a version of reality that can be shared with others. Her insights and words of experience will linger throughout my new career as a teacher of writing. Dr. Jan Rune Holmevik embraced my skeptical nature and positively redirected it toward academic research. He also eased me into the virtual world of avatars and animation. Although not a member of my thesis committee, Dr. Martin Jacobi taught my first graduate class in rhetoric and it is his voice that echoes in my head when I revisit the work of theorists from Plato, Aristotle and the Sophists, to Foucault and Burke. I have, since our introduction, taken full advantage of his time and knowledge.

The downside of achieving my dream of earning the Master of Arts in Professional Communication is that I will no longer dwell among these brilliant and generous professors. They will, however, continue to inspire me as I venture out on new journeys of exploration.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### *Making Rhetorical Scents*

*In the fall of 2009, I meandered through the South Carolina Botanical Gardens with a few of my fellow graduate students discussing thought, language, and meaning with our professor, who carried only a book by Ludwig Wittgenstein. He wore a long coat and a dapper hat; he was not wearing a robe. He wanted to have this conversation with us, he said, in this place surrounded by evidence of taxonomy, by classification and language, a place where everything was not only named, but labeled.*

*During our discussion of George Orwell and Benjamin Lee Whorf and Wittgenstein, our professor asked us to ponder which came first, thought or language. Wittgenstein believes there can be no thought without language; Orwell believes that faulty language leads to faulty thinking. I argued that thought came before language, but that language created meaning. My deepest thoughts were disrupted, though, when the elusive scent of a tea olive bush wafted through the air and into my nostrils and addled my brain. I stopped in my tracks, trying to locate a spot where I could drench myself in its delicious scent. I'm not sure anyone else noticed the smell, but everyone did notice that I stopped. "It's tea olive," I said. "It's intoxicating."*

*Throughout the remainder of the stroll, my mind would be wrenched from the discussion of language and thought and meaning whenever the tea olive fragrance bumped my nose. I get wrapped up in the smell and it muddles my thinking. Later, making our way alongside a short hedge of rosemary, I illicitly reached down and pinched a tip of the herb and crushed it between my fingers. I held it up to my nostrils and inhaled its rich, piney aroma. Before leaving the garden, I parked myself once again amidst the branches of the tea olive tree to immerse myself in its scent. I said to my professor: “I can’t find a language to describe the scent of the tea olive bush.”*

*“That’s why we have metaphor,” he said. We use metaphors and poetry to describe such things.*

*I’ve been thinking about that. I described the tea olive scent as “intoxicating,” and as it clearly disrupts my thoughts and addles my brain, it is an apt metaphor. But it doesn’t tell my friend Susan what it smells like. I plucked a sprig of a branch in flower, dropped it into a stamped envelope on which I’d written her address, and walked it straight to the post office box.*

*She opened the envelope, pulled out the twig, stuck her nose inside, inhaled, and smelled – paper. Later, she wrote back: “I have seen a leather leaf fern before, which looks like it’s made out of leather. I thought this is so perfect it looks artificial. It was. You are a goof!*

*Having me intently smell fake flowers and dreaming up science experiments to unlock the essence. You got me!”*

*So not only was I unable to describe the scent of tea olive to my friend, I stood accused of playing an out-of-season April Fools’ joke.*

All who have ever tucked themselves into a stand of tea olive bushes, followed a scent into a bakery shop, or buried their nose in a loved one’s hair, would agree that scent is inherently persuasive. Most will also agree that trying to describe the smell of the tea olive bushes, the bakery shop, or their loved one’s hair, especially to one who has never smelled such a thing before, is quite difficult. This may be why olfactory description does not often play an integral role in rhetorical composition. The problem with including scent as a rhetorical device in oral or written communication is that there is no language that takes us to the “truth” of scent. So when it comes to communicating any semblance of olfactory reality, the language of scent is largely missing from rhetoric’s vocabulary.

During a recent trip to the drug store, I noticed the language of scent to be so paltry that any attempt to describe the scent of various brands of hand soaps and women’s shaving products was augmented by a scratch and sniff tab. The same is true for most perfume ads in magazines; despite their rich descriptions, their soliloquies of experience, memory, and even anticipation, what they’re counting on to get you to open your wallet is the peeling back of the adhesive paper strip in order to release the molecules of fragrance tucked inside. No matter that you might be peeling back several panels within

the same magazine, mixing up all those carefully concocted elixirs of passion into one olfactory conglomeration.

Neither scratch and sniff tabs nor scented adhesives are to be found in *The New Yorker* issue of January 25, 2010, which features a smell tour steeped in memories of scented places from author David Owen's childhood. Owen relies mostly on simile as he writes of trees that smelled like summer camp, a grandma that smelled like paint, and a closet that smelled like his grandfather's old Bell & Howell slide projector in its black "alligator-y" case (33-35). He makes mention of "pleasing" and "powerful" and "concentrated" smells and offers an interesting analogy of a dime store "which had once been flavored mainly by dust, plus a sort of comforting over-scent that was related to mildew in the same way that cognac is related to wine" (34). Owen also stirs up emotional memories, linking the smell of clean hair with adolescent sex, and being "almost knocked over by ... a physical memory" of his father courtesy of Old Spice deodorant in the "Original Round Stick Formula" (37).

A feature article in a recent Sunday edition of the New York Times, "Masculinity in a Spray Can," discussed the marketing of fragrant grooming products to adolescent boys (Hoffman). The subtitle attached to author Jan Hoffman's essay reads: "That smell wafting through middle school hallways? It's tween boys trying on manhood." What does manhood smell like? Well, there is no olfactory description anywhere in the lengthy article, just an expression of desire and references to the delivery of scent through "clouds," "dousing," "spritz," and "spray," or the odorous products themselves: exfoliating cleansers, body washes, body hydrators, deodorants, shaving creams,

shampoos, conditioners, and gels. Direct olfactory references include “spray-on macho” and “testosterone-infused.” Even the names of scented products steer away from real descriptions of smell, focusing instead on ethereal emotional and physical characteristics like Old Spice’s “Swagger,” and Anthony’s Body Essentials’ “Energy,” “Strength,” “Spirit,” and “Courage” and Abercrombie & Fitch’s “Fierce” (8). Instead of offering any description for what masculinity might smell like, this story is about how desire is manufactured and marketed to boys, to persuade them to smell like men by dousing themselves in manliness, in order to attract the opposite sex.

*Picture this: a number of Professional Golf Management majors are assembled in a university lecture hall for a class on landscape design. My son is among the students, all young men, who are listening to their “in his seventies” professor lecture about plants and trees. He tells the group of boys about the tea olive shrub planted outside his bedroom window and about the effect of opening that window at night to let the fragrance in. “How many of you boys,” my son mimics his teacher’s heavy Southern drawl, “have had it seven times in one night?” Perhaps the manufacturers of “manliness” should consider scenting their products with the fragrance of tea olive.*

Scent can certainly be persuasive. After hearing that particular tale, who wouldn’t want that tea olive tree outside their bedroom window? Who wouldn’t want to go out and

discover that seductive scent? Yet the ability of scent to communicate, to persuade, has been downplayed from the beginning of rhetoric's history, subjugated by Plato and Aristotle and others, while the senses of hearing and seeing and touch (spatiality, shape and tactility) seem to have been elevated as appropriate and useful vehicles for making meaning. Most will agree that knowledge is derived from our perception of the world around us. What we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell, how we process what we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell, contributes to our making of knowledge, contributes to how our senses make sense. Perhaps, because we have more fully developed a grammar for their expression, we rely on the senses of sight, sound and touch as arbiters of reality and vehicles of persuasion. James Berlin says that, for Aristotle, reality was "knowable through sense impressions" and that language offered "an unproblematic medium of discourse" (767). Berlin posits that "to teach writing is to argue for a version of reality" (766). Therefore, the uneasy relationship between language and reality, and thus smell and language, is relevant to the teaching of rhetoric and composition.

When we try to make scents rhetorical, to consider scent among Aristotle's "available means of persuasion," we generally begin by naming the smell – but we don't really name the smell – we name its source. I can try to tell my reader what something smells like by identification of this odor object, but my success depends on consubstantiality, whether the reader has previously smelled the odor, or object, I name. This naming is scientific.

But I am interested not so much in our scientific knowledge of the senses, especially the sense of smell, but the rhetorical quality of the senses. I'm not interested in

what we sense, especially what we smell, but what we do with it, how it affects us. I'm more interested in how we make sense of what we sense, how we share it with others, and how we attempt to create a version of reality that can be comprehended by others. Therefore, I will argue that the rhetorical quality of smell is rooted not in its scientific nature; it is rooted in the reader's response to it. This response is based in memory and emotion, which are both steeped in context. In that sense then, I argue that smell is dramatic.

Kenneth Burke, in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, proposes a tension between identification and persuasion that seems to mirror that of the tension between reality and rhetoric. In *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke regards this tension in terms of scientific (naming) and dramatic (action). Taken out of context, Burke's remark that "persuasiveness varies with the resources [each has] at hand" (*ROM* 25) might offer us a whiff of sense toward this tension as it relates to olfactory descriptions, for an inability to create the reality of a smell through language will likely impact its rhetorical affect, its persuasiveness. These "resources at hand" are rooted in Burkean notions of identification and consubstantiality. We seek consubstantiality with others both in the sharing of reality and in the response to that reality.

Where smell differs from sight and hearing and touch is in our epistemic access to its metaphysical properties. We seem to have scientific access to the properties of sight and hearing and touch, a shared identification that brings us closer to consubstantiality in the dramatic response to the property, which makes it rhetorical. Perhaps this access is encouraged by the scientific and logical proof located in the color spectrum, the sound

spectrum, the spatial and textural environment humans share. Even the sense of taste has been whittled down to a primary pentad of sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and “umami,” a savory quality associated with meat extracts and flavor enhancements like monosodium glutamate (Light 37). But in the case of scent, there is no ready scientific access to a spectrum of scent, although there is a dramatic response to it. Therefore, any calculated dramatic response, the essence of rhetoric, is compromised.

I recently explored this rhetorical conundrum by conducting a metaphor analysis of Patrick Süskind’s novel *Perfume, the Story of a Murderer*. Süskind’s fictional protagonist Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, who by birth carried no scent of his own and was thereby eerily “invisible” to the nose, set out to capture and reproduce scents in order to subjugate others to his will. My purpose in reading the novel was to capture the way in which metaphors reproduced scents. While collecting the metaphors in the novel that Süskind used to describe odors, I discovered that metaphors of all of the senses were used in an attempt to do so. I isolated metaphors of seeing, hearing, touching, and tasting. But what I found were metaphors that were most successful at describing one’s response to the odor, either physically or emotionally. I came to the conclusion that metaphors cannot accurately describe scents; proffering a metaphor for the smell of the tea olive does no more to share my reality of it with Susan than sending it to her in the mail.

The most successful descriptions of scent relied on the use of simile, which is dependent on a shared identification of substance between reader and author. So if I write that the tea olive smells like apricots, or that it has a peach-like fragrance, you may get a sense of what I mean if you have ever smelled, or eaten, apricots or peaches. But the tea

olive is not edible and doesn't actually smell like apricots or have a peach-like fragrance; the fragrance of the apricot or the peach has never caused me to feel "intoxicated." I could tell you the tea olive smells closer to white ginger, or jasmine, or gardenia, perhaps, not because you might have familiarity with these scents, or even because I think it does, but because those are fragrances I also find "intoxicating." As I tried to explain my difficulty in describing the smell of the tea olive to Dr. Martin Jacobi, the instructor of my first graduate-level class in rhetorical theory, he suggested the following analogy: tea olive is to apricots as Heineken is to O'Douls (non-alcoholic beer, thus no intoxication). Again, that descriptive ratio relies on feelings rather than on the sense of smell. When I say a smell makes me gag or wretch or swoon or even plug my nose, I can share my reality only of the sense of pleasure or revulsion that smell gives me; you can only imagine what I might be inhaling based on your own experience, your own memory. In no way does my language share with you the reality, the duplicity, of the odor.

It is one thing to consider how writing, as Berlin asserts, offers us a means of creating a version of reality. But writing and speaking, written and oral communication, are no longer defined as they were throughout most of the history we use to study rhetoric. After all, current communication is multimodal and encompasses much more than the solely visual sense of communicating through alphabetic symbols or the orality of speech. In its earliest form, communication relied on physical proximity. One had to be present to hear another speak. It is no wonder speech, so long after Plato's exhortation, is still often deemed superior to writing. The very nature of the proximity that speech required assured the audience of access to the speaker's array of sensory perception,

which would have included smell. It would, in Charles Peirce's vocabulary, put the *interpretant* within smelling distance of its *representamen*, its odor *object*. Even the earliest written communication, arguably that proposed by Denise Schmandt-Besserat in "The Earliest Precursor of Writing," had to accommodate the physical and very personal exchange of inscribed stone objects.

But today we have a broader scope of epistemic access; we've created proximity through technology. The senses of vision and hearing have been made scientifically "real" by the invention of technology that can, for all practical awareness, reproduce sight and sound to a near duplication of the author's own "reality." In order to share the beauty of the tea olive with my friend Susan, for example, I could take a photograph of the sprig with a camera or mobile phone. If the tea olive made a sound, I could hold the sprig up to my cellphone and she could hear it. Or, I could record its sound and transmit it to her digitally, using readily available technology on my laptop computer. But unlike sights and sounds, scent cannot be sustained and communicated digitally with modern technological devices like cameras and recorders. Even multimodal compositionists cannot capture and share the reality of smell with a remote audience. We rely on language, on grammar alone.

However, the availability of proximity through technological means may soon include the transmission of scent. The delivery of scent through non-literate means encompasses the academic turn from literacy to "electracy" (Ulmer, Rice and O'Gorman). The common denominator for future technologies that would enable the rhetorical communication of smell, though, is a *selected* delivery of sensuous olfactory

“reality.” Future audiences would likely not be subjected to the smell of an actual environment, but to an idealized olfactory vision of the author/producer, which leads us to consider the rhetorical implications of scented technologies. Think of the persuasive power behind the advertisement, the cooking show, the e-mail or text endowed with scent, the popcorn smell of the cinema pumped out along with the film. Now, think of the sweat and blood of the boxing match, the antiseptic and gruesome odors emanating from the hospital drama, the pheromonic overtones of a steamy love scene. For lovers of the ever-burgeoning trend toward reproducing “reality,” it could be sensory paradise. For those (like me) less inclined, it could be sensory hell, inducing nostalgia for the days of suffering under a paucity of olfactory language.

But whether we attempt to make use of rhetorical scents through speech, writing, or through multimodal composition, it behooves us to consider the means for doing so. It is time to elevate the sense of smell to a rightful place beside sight, sound, touch, and even taste, to rescue it from what Whorf calls “the straitjacket presented by language” (23). Is the way to do this through metaphor? I believe it is, but not in the singular way one would apply the figure of speech.

Because I claim the rhetorical quality of smell is based in dramatism, I will use Kenneth Burke’s “Pentad,” outlined in his book *Grammar of Motives*, to describe a structure of scent as rhetorical. Others have used Burke’s Pentad to make sense of language, as a means of critical analysis, and toward rhetorical ends. Hans Lindquist, from Lund University, has applied Burke’s “Theory of Rhetorical Form” to the composition of a gourmet experience, but one that focuses on the development of a menu

for a gastronomical delight, somewhat dealing with the sense of taste, but hardly with smell (Lindquist).

My purpose in considering the language of scent against the backdrop of Burke's Pentad will be to capture a whiff of dramatistic olfactory grammatology, a structure that goes beyond the notion of smell as metaphor. I will focus my exploration of making rhetorical scents within the conventions and conventionalism of literacy, especially in composition, my area of pedagogical interest. However, I will offer some consideration for the implications of making rhetorical scents beyond the realm of literacy, as composition itself has expanded beyond literacy to encompass multiple modalities.

## CHAPTER 2

### Scents and Sensibility

#### *Style Analysis of "Perfume: the Story of a Murderer"*

*All these grotesque incongruities between the richness of the world perceivable by smell and the poverty of language were enough for the lad Grenouille to doubt if language made any sense at all.*

— Patrick Süskind, *Perfume: the Story of a Murderer*, p. 26.

The walk through the South Carolina Botanical Gardens marked the beginning of my search for how language, the means by which humans are able to convey their thoughts into meaning and share that meaning with others, makes scents. Which comes first – the scent or its description? Parallel to my “thought before language before meaning” argument with Wittgenstein, I claim that the scent comes first, and it is left to language to describe it. Even if there is no need to describe a smell, it can certainly still be borne and enjoyed (or condemned) by its recipient. Most importantly, this walk compelled me to consider whether, as my professor claimed, it is through metaphors that human beings make sense of scents. How could I share the scent of the tea olive with my friend Susan?

The rhetorical “turn to the visual” (Blair, George, Kress, Norman, Seward-Barry) as a means of interpreting reality seems to subordinate the senses of hearing and touch, and especially smell and taste, to the sense of sight. This subordination is rooted in linguistic history, says Annick Le Guérer: “unlike sight and hearing, which are viewed as higher senses and are endowed with a rich and specific vocabulary,” smell suffers from

the “paucity of the olfactory vocabulary,” a condition she attributes to ancient philosophers and rhetors like Plato and Aristotle. Plato, she says, had difficulty “arriving at any precise description of odors. In his view, the only distinctions that can be made with any validity are affective, that is based on the pleasure or displeasure to which they give rise.” Aristotle and more modern philosophers, St. Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, and Cournot, “variously described the sense of smell as ambiguous, bastard, vague, and nonautonomous” (4).

David Howes agrees that the sense of sight has been given more prominence than the sense of smell as it is the sense most “closely allied with reason” in Western culture and was, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, further deemed to be the “sense of civilization” after “evolutionary theories propounded by” Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud” (68-69). This shift belies an etymological link between the senses of smell and words for knowledge like “nose-wise,” “sagacious” and “sapient” (cf Classen 1993) that have lost muster due to the more contemporary view uniting sight with thinking (Howes 70).

Both Donald Norman and Ann Marie Seward-Barry discuss how humans respond first viscerally, then emotionally, before thinking rationally, before making sense of a stimulus and possibly reconsidering their affective response. This recklessness of thought, this backwards way of responding can be blamed on the physiology of the brain and its sequence of response to sensory stimuli. That an emotional response to a sensory stimulus can elicit meaning before rational thought, specifically in the case of odors, seems to underscore the efforts of perfumers and helps explain the tendency for humans

to describe smells by their response to them, such as when I refer to the tea olive as “intoxicating.”

The recognition that perfumers attempt to trigger emotional and physical responses when they concoct their scented elixirs, however, still begs the question of whether language can describe these scents. It calls to mind the Sophistic dilemma by Gorgias of Leontini’s *On the Nonexistent or On Nature*: “... first and foremost, that nothing exists; second that even if it exists it is inapprehensible to man; third, that even if it is apprehensible, still it is without a doubt incapable of being expressed or explained to the next man” (*Gorgias* 42). It is, perhaps, a resistance to Gorgias’ abandonment of language to describe the inapprehensible that inspires us to seek out ways to describe the indescribable, to make sense of the scents we encounter and to share them with others.

### **Metaphors of Sense**

*... there were no real things at all in Grenouille’s innermost universe, only the odors of things. (Which is why the “façon de parler” speaks of that universe as a landscape; an adequate expression, to be sure, but the only possible one, since our language is of no use when it comes to describing the smellable world.)*

— Patrick Süskind, *Perfume: the Story of a Murderer*, p. 125.

In a manner of speaking, *façon de parler*, the writer and orator must figure out a way to traverse the landscape of scents to create a version of reality recognizable to others. Does the key to scents and sensibility lie in the magic of metaphors as my professor suggested that fall day in the South Carolina Botanical Garden? If so, perhaps this subordination of the sense of smell throughout history and the resultant paucity of

language has resulted in a metaphorical vocabulary based in the other more highly esteemed (by Western standards) senses. In order to explore this option I set out to categorize metaphors that attempt to describe scents into the sensory areas that lie outside the landscape of smell. To do so, I chose an apt artifact, a book recommended to me by my professor when he learned of my interest, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, by German author Patrick Süskind. Surely this book would be awash in olfactory descriptions as it tells the story of a young man, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, who although he has no odor of his own (and is thus somewhat “invisible” to those around him), possesses a keen sense of smell which he exploits to murderous ends in order to affect the ultimate human emotional reaction — love.

There is one caveat regarding my choice of artifact—the book is a translation of the original novel in German, *Das Parfum*. However, contrary to denigrating its choice, I believe the subsequent translation of the rich descriptions of scents from German to English, and the inclusion of the French-language terms from the perfumeries of Paris and Grasse which form the backdrop of the novel only augment the efforts by which we struggle to make scents meaningful to the audience beyond our own noses.

*My attempt to exploit the use of metaphors to describe scents was bolstered early in my research when I had a serendipitous encounter in an Italian restaurant I visited, novel in hand, so I could catalogue metaphors while surrounded by the odors of – and partaking in delicious food. With highlighter in one hand and a glass of Chianti Classico in the other, I*

*skimmed through the pages of “Perfume.” Near me was a table of three people whom I noticed because the man, who was sitting with two women, was very familiar to me, his very white hair and toothy smile being a regular fixture on a series of highway billboards advertising legal services in the area. As they were leaving, one of the women stopped at my table and inquired about my book. Was I was reading about perfume, or was it a novel? It turned out she had worked for ten years in the perfume division of L’Oreal. I told her what I was doing, how I believed it was impossible to describe the reality of a smell, and she cried, “Oh, tell me about it!” although she claimed to have been describing perfumes for years. So I asked her how she did it – with metaphors? She said she did, but mostly she saw scents as emotional, and tried to use language that, like perfume, would evoke an emotional response.*

Much like Grenouille sniffed out “pubescent maidens” to extract their scent and fulfill his sensual desires, I pored through Süskind’s 255-page novel to extract the metaphors used to describe odors, then sorted them into sensory categories of sight, hearing, touch, and taste.

## THE SENSE OF SIGHT

Metaphors used to describe scents in *Perfume* related to the sense of sight include both colors and shapes (see Table 1). These colors and shapes sometimes overlap, as in

the following passage: “The scents of the garden descended upon him, their *contours* as *precise* and *clear* as the *colored bands* of the *rainbow*” (169).

To describe scents metaphorically with shapes and colors demonstrates the primacy of vision in the hierarchy of senses. That scents are shaped may have its roots in the scientific acknowledgement that odor is made up of particles, thus making sense of terms like shred, crumb, scraps, cloudlike, and even atom. The notion of a scent as a “pretty, rounded pastry” (72), however, seems to tend more toward a desire to gobble up the source of the smell. Authors Donald A. Wilson and Richard J. Stevenson, in their book *Learning to Smell: Olfactory Perception from Neurobiology to Behavior*, also refer to odors by using visual metaphors of shape: objects, patterns, images, scenes, sheets, a prism; they even introduce odors within a figure-and-ground framework.

**Table 2.1: Metaphors of Sight (colors, shapes) in *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer***

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| perfume            | rich brown depth (61)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                    | gold-scented cloud (127)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                    | fragrant, diamond-studded fireworks (127)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                    | Grenouille’s purple salon (127-131)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| men                | reeked of gold (168)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                    | fine golden sweat (169)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| the scent of Laure | “What a year before had been sprinkled and dappled about was now blended into a faint, smooth stream of scent that shimmered with a thousand colors and yet bound each color to it and did not break. And this stream... was fed by a spring that grew ever fuller... would gush over... and he would come to cap it and imprison the wild flow of its scent” (190) |
|                    | golden thread (211)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| garden             | contours as precise and clear as the colored bands of a rainbow 169)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| scent              | pure beauty (42)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                    | shred; crumb; atom (38)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                    | pretty, rounded pastry (72)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                    | scraps (133)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                    | cloudlike (133)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

The sensual notion of odor as color and its accompanying metaphors, however, seems to lie outside the actual perception of scent to an association with its perceived source. When Grenouille says men “reeked of gold” (178) or exude a “fine, golden sweat” (179), and clouds are “gold-scented” (127), this seems to refer more to the awareness of richness or wealth behind the odor. Grenouille’s reference to perfume having a “rich, brown depth” (61) is similar to the “murky brown smell” a chemist described as emanating from the factory where she worked, “... like when you were a kid and you mixed all your paint up” (Khatchadourian 97). The same chemist refers to a “sweet brown note” that “gives an impression of sugar” (99). This metaphor seems to refer more to depth rather than color, as one might contrast it with a yellow or white smell, something brighter or lighter.

When Grenouille retreats into a sensual reverie during a period of isolation in a cave high in the mountains, he imagines himself to be surrounded by purple: “His heart was a purple castle... a thousand elegant salons, among them one with a purple sofa...” (128). His fantasy involves servants bringing him glasses of scents from which he drinks, like liqueurs, the rich odors stored in his memory. This reverie of scents situated among the color purple calls forth the richness of royalty, and the dream situates Grenouille as a monarch enthroned in a royal abode surrounded by servants and holding dominion over an olfactory paradise (127-131).

Empirical research has also uncovered an association between color and smell. An ethnographic study of the Kwoma people of Papua New Guinea by David Howes involved the presentation of odor samples, “plastic cards, each impregnated with a

different scent and corresponding color” (76). Howes’ participants matched scents to local specimens and artifacts, ranging from tree bark to herbs to laundry soap, but Howes soon found that the color of the plastic cards influenced his subjects’ olfactory determinations and resorted to enclosing the samples in envelopes, thereby “eliminating color as a variable” in his research study (77).

I remain unconvinced, though, that describing the waxy green, sharp-edged leaf and delicate clusters of tiny white blossoms of the tea olive will give my friend Susan any access to comprehending its fragrance.

#### THE SENSE OF HEARING

All sense of hearing or sound metaphors that describe scents in *Perfume* are centered on music. Because odors are so often referred to as “notes,” as in the descriptions of wines, spirits, and other flavors, I expected to find more than the few listed below (see Table 2). Again, the musical metaphor seems to respond more to the smeller’s reaction to the scent than the odor itself, as if experiencing a symphony in a concert hall.

**Table 2.2: Metaphors of Hearing (music) in *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer***

|                    |                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| scents             | virtuoso odors, executed as wonderful little trifles that of course no one but he could admire or would ever take note of (185) |
| perfume comparison | ... the blend of odors was almost unbearable, as if each musician were playing a different melody at fortissimo (47)            |
|                    | full and harmonious (60)                                                                                                        |
|                    | as a symphony is to the scratching of a lonely violin (85)                                                                      |

There seems no way to imagine how the actual sound of a single instrument or musical note could allow someone to know what something, perhaps the tea olive, smells like. Nonetheless, writer Raffi Khatchadourian in his science essay in *The New Yorker* about “the secret world of the flavor factory” (84) uses metaphors of music to describe the “Mini Virtual Aroma Synthesizer, or the Mini-VAS” a machine for creating or recreating aromas. “... each key contains a solid filter with an aroma embedded in it... . By forcing air through the keys at different intensities, flavorists can combine notes, like an organist playing a chord...” (98).

The relationship between sound and language and the development of writing from speech, the transition of orality to literacy as a process of “‘understanding’ the affective experience of language” (Katz 85), might be redefined in the case of adopting music as metaphor for sensuous odors as one of aurality to literacy. But whether this attempt to relate the pleasure of listening, an aural affect, to the pleasure of smelling, an olfactory affect, can deliver to Susan, who lives outside the realm of its proximity, a knowable description of the scent of the tea olive, remains questionable.

## THE SENSE OF TOUCH

Metaphors used to describe scents in *Perfume* related to the sense of touch include shapes, weights, and feelings – tactile rather than emotional (see Table 3). Some of the shapes listed in the sense of sight category (Table 1) could also be repeated here, as the consideration of shape, edges, and contours may be tactile as well as visual.

**Table 2.3: Metaphors of Touch (shape, feeling) in *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer***

|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| babies' feet     | smooth warm stone (12)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| dog              | moist, fresh (187)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| bedrooms         | greasy sheets, damp featherbeds (3)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| wet nurse        | fleeting wooly, warm milkiness (13)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| odor             | building blocks (44)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                  | system (44)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                  | catalog (44)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| scent of a girl  | freshness (35)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                  | as fresh as the sea breeze (41)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| glass            | clayey, cool (99)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| heat             | lay leaden, squeezing its putrefying vapor (4)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| wood pile        | overpowering (24)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| scent of a woman | delicate and fine (38)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                  | masked, blocked, fragmented, crushed (38)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                  | freshness, warmth (39)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                  | evanescence and substance (39)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                  | undiluted (42)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                  | delicacy, power, stability, variety (44)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| perfumes         | coarse, ponderous (36)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                  | balanced (41)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                  | heavy, undulating (83)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| odors            | edifice: "and soon he began to erect the first carefully planned structures of odor: houses, walls, stairways, towers, cellars, rooms, secret chambers . . . an inner fortress built of the most magnificent odors, that each day grew larger, that each day grew more beautiful and more perfectly framed" (44) |

Again, as in the previous metaphors of sight and hearing, the relationship between the metaphor and the actual scent is largely one of experience, the attempt to build a similarity between the item emitting the scent, not the scent itself, and the reader. For instance, I could agree that caressing a baby's foot may conjure up the feeling of a "smooth, warm stone," (12) and that bedroom sheets, especially those recently slept in, may feel "greasy" and "damp" (3); therefore, by association with these familiarities, I may conjure up their olfactory qualities. It is more difficult, however, to conjure up the

“clayey, cool odor of smooth glass,” a scent that, along with water dipped from the Seine, Grenouille attempts to extract through a process of distillation, but to no avail (99).

Sense of touch metaphors categorized by weight and temperature seem more accessible than those of tactility and shape, for although they do not translate the smell of a thing, they do give the reader a sense of the power, volume, or density of a thing. Descriptive qualities of fragrance like “delicate and fine” (38), “balanced” (41), “heavy” and “undulating” (83) are all relative to common experience and add to the sense of being in the room where Grenouille mixes his fragrant concoctions. Even the sensory description for heat, “squeezing its putrefying vapor ”in the graveyard at Montmartre (4), forces a somewhat visceral reaction, although unaccompanied by the invocation of a specific smell.

The structure of an odor is first described by Grenouille as an “edifice” and finally as “houses, walls, stairways, towers, cellars, rooms, secret chambers . . . an inner fortress built of the most magnificent odors, that each day grew larger, that each day grew more beautiful and more perfectly framed” (44). While this metaphor becomes one of the most tangible within the sense of touch category, again, it does not lend itself to letting the reader know anything about how it smells. Any attempt to structure the scent of the tea olive for my friend would likely be as futile.

## THE SENSE OF TASTE

The senses of smell and taste are very closely related. Smell is considered a more sophisticated or higher-order sense than taste, as, without smell, the perception of taste is

diminished: “... food flavors are provided by olfaction rather than taste cues” (Hermans and Baeyens (119). The metaphors for scents specifically related to taste (see Table 4) include most of the basic five distinct sensations or qualities as well as the soapy and metallic accessories to the basic taste palette recognized by chemists (Light 38).

Much like the previous sense metaphors, the ones for taste also rely on a familiarity, in this case, with gustatory experiences, memories of mishaps or successes in the kitchen. The exception, perhaps, is the description of the sea as a “repulsive aperitif” (124), leaving one to wonder about subsequent courses on the menu. I am also left to wonder about any probability for success describing the scent of the tea olive by relying on a taste metaphor; A tea olive’s smell has no similarity at all to the smell or taste of any variety of edible olive.

**Table 2.4: Metaphors of Taste in *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer***

|                 |                                                                 |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| chamber pots    | pungent, sweet (3)                                              |
| unaired parlors | stale (3)                                                       |
| heat            | burnt animal horn (4)                                           |
| babies’ bodies  | griddle cake that’s been soaked in milk (12)                    |
| babies’ feet    | curds, butter (12)                                              |
| wood pile       | sweet, burnt (24)                                               |
| men             | all sour sweat and cheese (41)                                  |
| sea             | repulsive aperitif (124)                                        |
| air             | a spicy gust... as if borne here from springtime meadows; (125) |
| sea breeze      | bitterness of salted almonds (125)                              |

### **When Senses Overlap —Synesthesia**

*And yet—there was a basic perfumatory theme to the odor of humanity, a rather simple one, by the way: a sweaty-oily, sour-cheesy, quite richly repulsive basic theme that clung to all humans equally and above which*

*each individuals' aura hovered only as a small cloud of more refined particularity.*

— Patrick Süskind, *Perfume: the Story of a Murderer*, p. 149.

As seen in the previous examples (Tables 1-4), it is not uncommon for the language of sensory metaphors to overlap. But there is another blending of sensory perception that is a physiological reality for some human beings. *Synesthesia* is a rare phenomenon in which “one sensation *involuntarily* conjures up another” (Cytowic 6). People physically experience combined senses, for example: some read certain letters and numbers and see shapes or colors; some hear music and see colors, feel pain or smell odors; some see colors and feel shapes or smell odors; and others actually taste colors and shapes, even feeling them. Neurologist Richard Cytowic, in his book *The Man Who Tasted Shapes*, says the most common form of synesthesia is colored hearing, but with five senses, opportunities exist for twenty permutations of one-way synthetic pairings. “Some pairings have never been witnessed,” says Cytowic, and, interestingly, he has never had a patient in which smell has triggered a paired sensory response (53).

The language used by the synesthete to describe his or her experience sounds like metaphor, but it is actually a description of that individual's perception. Cytowic recounts A. R. Luria's description of a rare instance of synesthesia across multiple senses: “I heard the bell ringing . . . a small round object rolled before my eyes . . . my fingers sensed something rough like a rope . . . I experienced a taste of salt water . . . and something white” (120). I do not have synesthesia, but I have been known to refer to certain Chardonnay wines as tasting too round for me — I don't like the taste of round. The tea olive does not smell round.

## Scents and Memory

*... he first conjured up those that were earliest and most remote: the hostile, steaming vapors of Madame Gaillard's bedroom; the bone-dry, leathery bouquet of her hands; the vinegary breath of Father Terrier; the hysterical, hot maternal sweat of Bussie the wet nurse; the carrion stench of the Cimetière des Innocents; the homicidal odor of his mother.*

— Patrick Süskind, *Perfume: the Story of a Murderer*, p. 124.

“Odor objects [note the shape metaphor] are learned through experience” (Wilson and Stevenson 2). Memory is a key component of the sense of smell. While it is generally agreed that odor has a structure, that it is molecular, particular, and that it must be comprised of a substance that is “volatile (able to evaporate and exist as a gas) and be able to be carried by inhaled air into the nasal cavity” (Light 49), neurobiologists and psychologists now place more emphasis on the perception of smell as experiential (Wilson and Stevenson (8). The examples below (see Table 5) include both experiential metaphoric soliloquies as well as specific emotional responses to both pleasant and unpleasant odors. Certainly these metaphors do not describe the scent. While the reader can imagine that the scent is exquisite, in the case of Baldini’s reverie in response to Grenouille’s initial attempt at perfumery and his subsequent naming of the scent for the place he describes (Süskind 85), the reader cannot ascertain what Baldini is actually smelling. In the second case, the smell of caramel (the top of a baby’s head) as described by Bussie, the wet nurse (13), may easily be recalled by many readers as it actually names and describes the source, the hot sugar and cream composition of the odor; most of us have smelled caramel before. Egon Peter Köster asserts that memories are “episodic,” not “semantic,” and explains: “We can remember where and when we encountered an

odor before, but in most cases we cannot call up the name of the odor, and if we do, it is often by deduction” (33). The remaining examples in the table are solely based on emotion and offer no olfactory referents; these metaphors are specific only to Grenouille, and are based solely on his own memory, experience, and emotion. It would hardly be commonplace for a significant number of people to say that the past smells *evil*, children *insipid*, and men *ruinous*. We can, though, relate to good smells as *magical*, *heavenly fine* and *glorious*. I could attribute all those metaphors to the scent of the tea olive.

**Table 2.5: Memory/experience/emotion in *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer***

|                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Perfume Nuit Napolitaine | “Baldini closed his eyes and watched as the most sublime memories were awakened within him. He saw himself as a young man walking <sup>20</sup> through the evening gardens of Naples; he saw himself lying in the arms of a woman with dark curly hair and saw the silhouette of a bouquet of roses on the windowsill as the night wind passed by; he heard the random song of birds and the distant music from a harbor tavern; he heard whisperings at his ear, he heard I-love-you and felt his hair ruffle with bliss, now! now at this very moment!” (85) |
| caramel                  | “But once I was in a grand mansion in the rue Saint-Honoré and watched how they made it out of melted sugar and cream. It smelled so good that I’ve never forgotten it” (13).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| past                     | evil (126)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| children                 | insipid (41)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| men                      | ruinous (41)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| scent                    | magical (41)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                          | heavenly fine; glorious (85)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

### Scents as Simile

*Her sweat smelled as fresh as the sea breeze, the tallow of her hair as sweet as nut oil, her genitals were as fragrant as the bouquet of water lilies, her skin as apricot blossoms ...*

— Patrick Süskind, *Perfume: the Story of a Murderer*, p. 41.

It seems most common to describe scents by using similes, as seen by the sheer quantity of examples extracted from the pages of *Perfume*. I selected these descriptions (see Table 6) on the basis of the usual qualifier, “like,” but also “of,” and “as.”

**Table 2.6: Similes “as,” “of,” “like” in *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer***

|                          |                                                                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| streets                  | of manure (3)                                                               |
| courtyards               | of urine (3)                                                                |
| stairwells               | of moldering wood and rat droppings (3)                                     |
| kitchens                 | of spoiled cabbage and mutton fat (3)                                       |
| chimneys                 | of sulfur (3)                                                               |
| tanneries                | of caustic lye (3)                                                          |
| slaughterhouses          | of congealed blood (3)                                                      |
| people                   | of sweat and unwashed clothes (3)                                           |
| people’s mouths          | of rotting teeth (3)                                                        |
| people’s bellies         | of onions (3)                                                               |
| people’s bodies          | of rancid cheese and sour milk and tumorous disease (3)                     |
| the king                 | like a rank lion (4)                                                        |
| the queen                | like an old goat (4)                                                        |
| the monk                 | of sweat and vinegar, <i>choucroute</i> (cabbage) and unwashed clothes (17) |
| the wet nurse            | of milk and cheesy wool (10)                                                |
| child with pox           | like horse manure (10)                                                      |
| child with scarlet fever | like old apples (10)                                                        |
| child with consumption   | like onions (10)                                                            |
| babies’ heads            | like caramel (12)                                                           |
| scent of a girl          | the tallow of her hair as sweet as nut oil (41)                             |
|                          | genitals as fragrant as the bouquet of water lilies (41)                    |
|                          | her skin as apricot blossoms (41)                                           |
| fireworks                | monotonous mixture of sulfur, oil, saltpeter (38)                           |
| women                    | of rancid fat and rotting fish (41)                                         |
| sea                      | like a sail whose billow had caught up water, salt, and sun (35)            |
|                          | a mild May wind wafting through the first green leaves of beech; (125)      |
| perfume                  | like a melody, cheerful, wonderful (61)                                     |
|                          | like rotten fruit (61)                                                      |
|                          | like pure civet (62)                                                        |
|                          | like just a whiff of cat piss (62)                                          |

This determination between metaphor and simile is somewhat ambiguous. Therefore, I have included the qualifier as part of the description so the reader might also consider whether the scent is described by metaphor or simile, or even analogy, and whether the choice of figure matters.

In many cases, the simile seems to contain a metaphor, for instance, when Grenouille claims that people's bodies smell "of rancid cheese and sour milk and tumorous disease" (3). Most people will have smelled rancid cheese and sour milk, but the scent of tumorous disease, while it would certainly be beneficial and the gift of such ability is sometimes attributed to animals, is beyond human comprehension.

The tendency for one of us to describe what is familiar to all of us could be related to Kenneth Burke's notion of *consubstantiality* (*LSA*) or to Aristotle's interpretation of *common sensibles* in *De Anima* (Cytowic 85). As humans, we accept certain truths, that we see the same things — that red to you is the same as red to me, and in the same realm, that the smell of a lemon to you is the same as the smell of a lemon to me. Science has also given us an empirical basis for accepting these truths. Empirical research provides us with elaborate charts showing us the measurement of sound waves; we are offered another showing us the spectrum of color, even the color that is unseen; we are taught at an early age that all substance can be broken down to atoms and sub-atomic particles. It is just this scientific basis for the measurement or categorization of smells and its accordant lack of generalized knowledge or taxonomy for the chemical or organic components that forces us to generate similarities to other items with which we have more intimate and experiential familiarity. Regarding the reality we carry of our

own experiences, says Burke, “the whole overall ‘picture’ is but a construct of our symbol systems” (*LSA* 48). For me, in the case of the tea olive, this taxonomy would include the previously stated gardenia, jasmine tree, white ginger plant, and mock orange, all of which I would classify as “intoxicating.” I might offer these similes to Susan, however, I could not rely on this knowledge being consubstantial, a generally accepted warrant on which most humans could agree, unlike more common smells such as peppermint or perspiration or even putrefaction.

### **The Affective Power of Scents**

*The persuasive power of odor cannot be fended off, it enters into us like breath in our lungs, it fills us up, imbues us totally. There is no remedy for it.*

— Patrick Süskind, *Perfume: the Story of a Murderer*, p. 82.

Using reader response criticism as an analogy, in which one interprets meaning based on the reader’s response, perhaps scents are best described by the sniffer’s reaction. This reaction might be the “intoxicated” feeling I describe when I smell the tea olive. But when Khatchadourian’s flavorist describes the taste of Dr. Pepper as “beautiful” and a citrus rind as “buggy” and another fruit peel scent as “girlie pink” and “kid-friendly” (92), are these socially constructed, learned meanings, or emotional responses, responses triggered by memory? Like the meaning of a sentence is subjective to the reader who interprets it, perhaps the description of a scent is also subject to the reader’s memory or emotional response. The physical and emotional reactions that Grenouille and the many victims of his aromatic concoctions suffer (for *Perfume* is a story of victimization and

suffering under Grenouille’s gift of keen scent), often are, like the examples of simile, embedded with metaphors (see Table 7).

**Table 2.7: Metaphors for Reaction in *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer***

|                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| fish stall               | an unbearable numbing something (5)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| wood pile                | about to suffocate him (24)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                          | completely fuddled (24)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| morning                  | “He caught the scent of morning. He was seized with an urge to hunt” (33)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| scent of a woman         | “Grenouille suffered agonies... his very heart ached” (35)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                          | (35)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                          | “... collecting himself, for he was brimful with her” (43)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                          | terrifying, irresistible (44)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                          | “Grenouille turned hot with rapture and cold with fear. Blood rushed to his head as if he were a little boy caught red-handed, and then it retreated to his solar plexus, and then rushed up again and retreated again, and he could do nothing to stop it. This attack of scent had come on too suddenly” (170). |
|                          | He dared not intoxicate himself with that scent prematurely (172)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                          | he made love to it (190)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| perfume shop             | “the prevailing mishmash of odors hit him like a punch in the face” (47)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                          | exalt (47)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                          | daze (47)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                          | confusion of senses (47)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                          | “Errand boys forgot their orders. Belligerent men grew queasy. And many ladies took a spell, half-hysterical, half-claustrophobic, fainted away...” (47)                                                                                                                                                          |
| perfume                  | went crazy (53)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                          | “... a mysterious mixture that could set a whole city trembling with excitement” (60)                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                          | puts you in a good mood (61)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                          | drugged him (63)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                          | groaned with pleasure (85)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Perfume Nuit Napolitaine | “It was something completely new, capable of creating a whole world, a magical, rich world, and in an instance you forgot all the loathsomeness around you and felt so rich, so at ease, so free, so fine...” (86)                                                                                                |
|                          | as if bewitched (89)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Grenouille               | And he wallowed in disgust and loathing, and his hair stood on end at the delicious horror” (124)                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Grasse tanners           | the odor was so pungent that many a guest lost his appetite for his meal (167)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

|                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| the crowd at Grenouille's execution | "The ten thousand ... grew weak as young maidens who have succumbed to the charms of a lover ... overcome by a powerful sense of goodwill, of tenderness, of crazy childish infatuation... . It was like a fit of weeping you cannot fight down, like tears that have been held back too long and rise up from deep within you, dissolving whatever resists them, liquefying it, and flushing it away. These people were now pure liquid, their spirits and minds were melted; nothing was left but an amorphous fluid, and all they could feel was their hearts floating and sloshing about within them ... they loved him" (237). |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The affective power of scents described above, like the previous examples, does little to bring the reader to an understanding of the odors that cause these emotional reactions. We bear witness only to the resulting havoc wreaked by the perfume. Of course, this is a novel, a creative work of fiction, and the responses the people of Paris and Grasse have to the exquisite smells conjured up by Grenouille's masterful concoctions are generally realizable only in our imaginations.

It is during his time of seclusion in his cave on the mountaintop that Grenouille realizes he has no odor of his own. Upon leaving the cave and arriving at Grasse he first concocts his own human odor; he is no longer "invisible." He then develops an arsenal of personal scents, which he uses as a weapon against humanity, inspiring pity, revulsion, or whatever benign emotional response suits his purpose. Later, he develops his ultimate personal scent, a concoction to "inspire love" (188) using the cold-oil enfleurage, digestion, lavage, and distillation techniques he has learned in the perfumery at Grasse to extract the essences from the skin, bodies, hair, and clothing of twenty-five pubescent girls he has sniffed out and murdered. This cannibalistic fragrance stirs the emotions of the throng on hand to witness his execution. The scent excites in the crowd not only

passion, resulting in an orgiastic public display, but also love, and his execution is thus thwarted.

*The ten thousand ... grew weak as young maidens who have succumbed to the charms of a lover ... overcome by a powerful sense of goodwill, of tenderness, of crazy childish infatuation... . It was like a fit of weeping you cannot fight down, like tears that have been held back too long and rise up from deep within you, dissolving whatever resists them, liquefying it, and flushing it away. These people were now pure liquid, their spirits and minds were melted; nothing was left but an amorphous fluid, and all they could feel was their hearts floating and sloshing about within them ... they loved him.*

— Patrick Süskind, *Perfume: the Story of a Murderer*, p. 237.

Süskind's macabre story ends when this cannibalistic metaphor reaches its pinnacle. Grenouille returns to the Cimetière des Innocents of Paris, empties his bottle of scent over his body, and is attacked, ripped apart, and devoured by the “riffraff: thieves, murderers, cutthroats, whores, deserters, [and] young desperadoes” (253).

### **Scents and Sensibility**

I pored over the pages of *Perfume: the Story of a Murderer* to sniff out and extract the language that attempts to describe a plethora of all things olfactory. I then sorted this language based on the sense of smell into seven categories. Four of these categories were based on the remaining four human senses, sight, hearing, touch, and taste. Two more categories encompassed the scientific notions of scent as experiential and affective. A collection of similes comprised another category.

The similarity between all the categories is metaphor. Whether singular or embedded in similes or soliloquies, *Perfume* author Patrick Süskind relies heavily on

metaphors to relate his story of scent. The function of metaphors, says Richard Boyd, is much the same as that of “similarities and analogies” (363). Perhaps that is why, in all of these categories, in all of these examples, I still question whether metaphoric language can actually bring the reader to the reality of the scent emitted by any olfactory source.

In the case of the tea olive, it seems that there is not much more I can do than wax eloquently and metaphorically in a manner that could give my friend Susan any real knowledge of its scent. It simply smells like tea olive – and nothing else. It is easy to reproduce it visually; its image can be captured with a camera and digitally transmitted via e-mail or a computer link. One cannot hear the music of a tea olive; the exquisite harmonies I could attribute to its scent would likely be meaningful only to me, not to my friend. I gave Susan access to the touch of a tea olive; she felt its sharp edges and waxy surface and deemed it to be plastic. I hope she didn’t taste it, although I have not read that the tea olive is poisonous. All I can do is persuade her to come smell the tea olive in bloom, but as it only blooms in the fall, more than my poverty of language prevents her from inhaling its aroma.

More than the other four senses, scent is elusive, the least tangible. Besides a smell being sometimes nonexistent, like the tea olive in winter, spring, and summer, the sense of smell itself does not tend toward constancy; sometimes I have to walk away from the tea olive for a while before I can once again pick up its fleeting scent. It seems the best I can do is continue to describe my reaction to the scent of the tea olive, which I still deem “intoxicating.” Intoxication is a generally consubstantial notion for humans, and has a generally pleasant association unless taken to extremes. Beyond “intoxicating,”

the language to describe the scent of the tea olive remains as fleeting and elusive as the scent itself.



## CHAPTER 3

### Review of Literature

#### *The Straitjacket of Olfactory Language*

#### **Knowing and Sensing**

Metaphors give readers “epistemic access,” says Richard Boyd, a way for a reader to comprehend the reality of a thing (358). However, metaphors for scent, such as those exposed in *Perfume: the Story of a Murderer* are not the “theory-constitutive metaphors” defined by Boyd. The scent metaphor achieves a reader’s comprehension of the odor not by its reality, but by its relationship to reality, or by its relationship to the odor object. This type of epistemic access is passive rather than active: we understand it, but we don’t really know it, and can’t do anything with it. Le Gu  r  r asserts we are forced to resort to metaphor to describe odors because “we lack the rigor of language required for more precise description” (4). Metaphors, according to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, may actually exacerbate linguistic ambiguity; a metaphorical concept can prevent our ability to recognize other aspects of the thing that are inconsistent with the metaphor, thus camouflaging the experience (10). As seen in *Perfume*, this passive knowledge is also accessed through linguistic forms like similes and analogies. While philosophers found analogy to be a necessary tool of reasoning, Cha  m Perelman remarks that it is no substitute for scientifically based knowledge; it differs from mathematically derived fact in that it offers only *simultude*, not *equality*, between two things (114). In that sense, says Perelman, analogy is “part of a theory of argumentation and not of ontology,” which I

posit as being rhetorical, not knowable. Perelman goes on to describe the difference between analogy and metaphor with an analogy of his own – as a syllogism is to an enthymeme; both of the latter require the audience to supply missing terms (120-122). The problem with the reader supplying these missing terms is the writer’s assumption of the commonly held warrants or shared values, the “premises which everyone knows” (37), in essence, consubstantiality. Thus the metaphor becomes, like the enthymeme, a rhetorical device.

In *On Rhetoric, Book 1, Chapter 1*, Aristotle calls the enthymeme “the ‘body’ of persuasion” (30). Aristotle says rhetoric is a counterpart to dialectic, because both are concerned with common knowledge and no particular subject (science). Both are arguable but some succeed in winning arguments by learned habit (heuristic knowledge), and some by accident (randomly), and since both ways are possible, an observer must agree that rhetoric is an art (techne) that can be taught, and not a “knack” as Plato contended in the *Gorgias*. (29). He goes on to say that this is the function of no other art, as it does not preclude one having technical knowledge, only given knowledge of any subject (37).

Richard Leo Enos and Janice M. Lauer examine the ways in which Aristotle’s rhetoric is heuristic in that meaning is “cocreated between rhetor and audience” (203) as opposed to epistemic, relating to knowledge or validity. By this measure, the odor object could be considered ontological and the odor rhetorical. To Aristotle, proof is either atechnic, known or tracked down beforehand, or entechnic, invented by the author (Aristotle 37-39). This invention, however, forms a kind of new proof as it is adopted and

accepted by an audience. In this way, say Enos and Lauer, Aristotle contends that rhetoric doesn't create reality; it gives meaning to reality, a distinction that coincides with Burke's view of dramatism (207). Wittgenstein says words are connected to "the primitive, the natural expressions of the sensation" (89e). We talk about and give names to sensations, and, in this way, our behavior becomes an exclamation of the sense (89e). This would certainly hold true when I say the tea olive smells intoxicating, or in contrast, when the smell of spoiled food is nauseating.

Steven Katz talks about the sensuous experience of language and describes knowledge as sensuous form; we rely on our senses for knowledge (15). We can't communicate reality, only language (92-93). Katz has navigated the persuasive nature and epistemic access of both sound and its associative temporal dimension in his book, *The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric* (Katz) and it seems the impetus for his effort and his reflections somewhat mirror the thoughts that propelled me to my own exploration of the rhetoric of scents.

*On a clear and balmy winter afternoon, my husband and I took our two children to the annual auto show at Toronto's SkyDome. Following our exploration of the 1995 models, we walked along King Street past a long line of souvenir kiosks and an array of concession stands. My seven-year-old daughter suddenly stopped in her tracks, gave a big sniff and cried, "Powder pies! Let's get powder pies!" My husband and I looked at each other, aware of the heavy smell of fried grease in the air, a result of*

*the numerous chip wagons lining the street. (Although Canada is home to many French-speaking citizens, there are no French fries – just “chips.”) But powder pies? Whatever was our little girl talking about? It took a long city block’s worth of Q and A before we narrowed down her request for funnel cakes, the tangled mess of fried dough doused in powdered sugar (although Canadians call it “icing” sugar). She’d once had funnel cakes at Canada’s Wonderland, an amusement park that, despite its pleasant memories, must also have reeked of fried grease.*

That sensory knowledge is ambiguous stems from the notion of sophistic relativism and the “man – measure doctrine” put forth by Protagoras and argued against vociferously by Socrates in Plato’s *Theaetetus*. Kerferd discusses this ambiguity of sensory perception and its relation to language (logos) in the cases of sight, especially color, hearing, and taste – the sense most akin to smell. Words come to us from the things outside us as we perceive them.

“... so from our encounter with flavour there arises within us the logos which is the expression that accords with this quality, and from the incidence of colour, the logos which is in accord with this colour. But this will not do either. The logos does not have the function of displaying the external object which provides us with the information about (the meaning of) the logos.” (98)

Kerferd goes on to consider logos in two different ways, the first as thought, and the second as speech (98). This presents, he says, “a three stage analysis – the object itself together with its qualities, what we acquire from such an object, and the spoken words which we attempt” (98).

Certainly, while we could still agree with Aristotle that reality is a sensory experience, our ability to communicate it is far from being unproblematic. Berlin notes that Plato found sense perceptions to be problematic (771); in fact, Plato had no use for any of the senses, except perhaps for sight when it beholds beauty, as in the *Phaedrus*. Plato’s philosophical belief that the “truth” was harbored in man’s soul and could not be communicated seems an apt explanation for the language conundrum with which we consistently grapple. Le Guérer blames our philosophical heritage in general, and both Aristotle and Plato specifically for the long-standing subordination of scent and taste to the senses of sight and hearing and feeling. Aristotle, she says, believed the sense of smell to have no intellectual benefit, and Plato had difficulty “arriving at any precise description of odors. In his view, the only distinctions that can be made with any validity are affective, that is based on the pleasure or displeasure to which they give rise” (4). Cournot, adds Le Guérer, agreed with Plato, saying that both taste and smell are related to feeling, not representation, and therefore make no determination of knowledge, either theoretically or scientifically. Cournot even goes as far as to assert, “scientific advances would in no way be hindered were this sense to be done away with completely” (Le Guérer 4-5).

While I generally agree with Plato that scent can only be described by its affective power, I would argue that this particular restrictive attribute is what makes scent rhetorical. Yet I have encountered few rhetorical or literary theorists that bother to mention it. A simple skimming of the index of relevant rhetorical literature rarely exposes an "odor" or "olfactory" or "scent" or "smell" entry. Cicero says that when we speak/write, we are communicating a sense experience, but confines specific examples to "sounds that give us pleasure" and "countless number of pleasures" collected visually. He lumps together "the rest of the senses" that "enjoy gratifications of various kinds..." (*De Orator*, III. vii. 25). Reading through Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (after all, he was somewhat responsible for putting me on this path), I found that when he talked about senses and language, he made only one direct reference to smell:

Describe the aroma of coffee.—Why can't it be done? Do we lack the words? And for what are words lacking?—But whence come the idea that such a description must after all be possible? Have you ever felt the lack of such a description? Have you ever tried to describe the aroma and not succeeded?

((I should like to say: "These notes say something glorious, but I do not know what." These notes are a powerful gesture, but I cannot put anything side by side with it that will serve as an explanation. A grave nod. James: "our vocabulary is inadequate." Then why don't we introduce a new one? What would have to be the case for us to be able to?)) (159e)

## The Language Game

Grenouille's lament in *Perfume* echoes that of Wittgenstein as well as many other scholars and rhetors throughout history who have acknowledged the inadequacy of language to communicate thought and experience. Yet this "poverty of language" (Süsskind 26) doesn't impede our trying to wriggle from its "straitjacket" (Whorf 23). On the contrary, I believe this struggle, the ceaseless activity of creatively constructing meaning from a vast lexicon of arbitrary and ambiguous terms, contributes to the rich variety of writing in all its forms. For as Burke points out, every selection of reality also functions as a deflection of reality. Every choice of word eliminates another (*LSA* 45). Burke distinguishes the ambiguity of words between scientific nomenclature and dramatic language: "The dramatic view of language, in terms of 'symbolic action,' is exercised about the necessarily suasive nature of even the most unemotional scientific nomenclatures" (*LSA* 45). In fact, says Michael Hasset, Burke "revels" in the ambiguities of language," the points at which action, or change can take place (380).

Whorf also cautions that a word's meaning is based only on its surroundings. Any word by itself does not lead to meaning; a word only has meaning due to its connection with other words. It is the body of language in which a word is structured that gives it its meaning. (269-270). Whorf seems compelled to unearth the mysteries of language by scientific, particularly mathematical means, asserting that language has both geometrical and algebraic bases (255-257). He shares his conception with Edward Sapir that the ability of language to reveal reality or experience is dependent on the linguistic structures of a particular community (134), although Peter Farb and others are now "wary" of the

findings attributed to the “Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis,” saying that these structures are not so much linguistic as ethnocultural (Farb 185).

Whorf distinguishes this “connection” between deliberately structured words, though, from the “association” that might be made from the structure, an association that has an “accidental character” (36). Like Burke, Whorf’s distinction seems to dwell upon the ambiguity between the scientific and dramatic, or rhetorical nature of language. Wittgenstein calls the whole process of “language and the action into which it is woven” a “language-game,” (5e) and also contends the relationship between the name and the thing named is ambiguous (18e). Ostensive definition, which gives us direct access to the reality of a thing, can only be useful, says Wittgenstein, if it cannot be misunderstood, yet “ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in *every* case” (14e). Wittgenstein suggests expert judgment, such as in the case of color or as expressions of feelings, requires experience (227e). Sense impressions depend on testimony, for example: “I don’t see anything violet here but I can shew [sic] it to you if you give me a paint box” (118e-119e). But there is no ready paint box for smell – yet.

The ambiguity of language fosters the wordplay that enamored the Sophists and seemingly rankled Plato. G. B. Kerferd writes: “Thought in the fifth century B.C. was concerned, not ... with logical structure, but with ... a one-on-one relationship between things and names, on the basis that the meaning of any name must always be the thing or things to which it refers” (73). But the Sophists believed that the things encountered in experience are cognitively unreliable in that they always both *are* and *are not*” (76). Plato devised the Forms to unite naming and experience, says Kerferd, “altering reality to fit

the needs of language, instead of the reverse” (76-77). Sophistic relativism was a form of phenomenism, says Kerferd, and for the Sophists, while the structure of language exhibited the structure of things, the fact remained that those things in the realm of experience were ambiguous (72). But even Plato bows to the relationship between the word and its surroundings in the *Theaetetus* when Socrates says: “... For the essence of speech is the composition of names” (Wittgenstein 21e). Wittgenstein himself argues: “The rules of grammar may be called ‘arbitrary’, if that is to mean that the *aim* of the grammar is nothing but that of the language” (138e). “What is most difficult here is to put this indefiniteness, correctly and unfalsified, into words” (217e). In fact, Wittgenstein even compares finding the right words with comparing nuances of different smells: “*That* is to . . . . ., *that* is too . . . . ., —*this* is the right one” (218e). The “language game” recalled by Wittgenstein and others rejects the philosophical and Platonic ideal of an absolute truth and embraces the Sophistic view of “life as a playful arena in which language can bring enjoyment and delight” (Hasset 376).

The relationship between the thing and the thing named is presented in various analogies [meaning : reference]; [thought : language]; [*nomos* : *physis*]; and [scientism : dramatism]. Nevertheless, the ambiguity between the thing and the thing smelled would place scent, an emanation, in tandem with its odor object, which may not always be possible. We assign causality to odor, but we may have no proof of its cause, its odor object. Yet the majority of odors are described by the names of their sources rather than through abstract terms (Köster 31). The use of a “veridical label” implies that names refer (truthfully) to odors as color terms refer to colors, say Daniele Dubois and Catherine

Rouby, but unlike colors, odors have no specific names, “at least not in English or in French.” The correct linguistic form for an odor then becomes “the odor of X,” X being the name of the odor object (49).

In addition to the ambiguity between the thing and the thing named, the reliance of the writer, even the multimodal communicator, on language calls forth a constant struggle of semiotics, the relation of a thing to its symbol or sign. “Grammar does not tell us how language must be constructed in order to fulfil its purpose, in order to have such-and-such an effect on human beings,” says Wittgenstein. “It only describes and in no way explains the use of signs” (138e).

Some claim that smell, in itself, is semiotic. Doctors and psychoanalysts are witnesses to powerful odors emitted by their patients in response to both fear and sickness and such olfactory clues can lead to diagnosis of pathological illness (Le Gu er 12). Corbin writes about how smells of death and disease were perceived as a threat to society. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, death was described as escalating from a “sweetish odor” similar to a “vinous fermentation” at its inception, to a “stronger acidic odor... quite often similar to that of decaying cheese” (19). The odor progressed along with the decay of the body from “stale, without pungency,” but “nauseating,” then to “penetrating,” then to “bitter and abominable. Interestingly, the description of the body’s final decay contained a reference to “putrid taste... followed by a herbaceous taste and the odour of amber” (19).

When the fictional wet nurse in *Perfume* referred to the smells of various diseases, like smallpox to horse manure, scarlet fever to old apples, and consumption to onions

(Süsskind 10), her observations mirror those “elements of medical semiology” described by Théophile de Bordeu, an expert on glandular systems, in Corbin’s *The Foul and the Fragrant*:

Invasion by disease could be diagnosed both by a loss of a healthy odor and by the appearance of a morbid one. The progression from disease and then to death went from the acidic to alkaline condition of the putrid matter. *While deploring the dearth of an appropriate vocabulary to define the odors perceived*, Bordeu stated that the medicine of his day “assessed the essence of the parts and their healthy or diseased state by the sense of smell.” (40) (emphasis mine)

But before a doctor could become a bedside master of mephitism, he had to learn to “smell reflectively,” to know how the “issues” (stool, blood, breath, pus, etc.) of a patient of that particular age, sex, occupation, etc., “ought to smell” (40).

*My friend is intimately familiar with the level of sweetness in the exhalations of both her diabetic daughters, a first warning of insulin imbalance, which usually triggers the action of the far more technological prick of the skin and subsequent blood test. Another friend told me of a time she rushed to embrace her teen-aged son as he snuck furtively into the house just past his curfew, then as she held him fast, sucker-punched him in the midsection to release his liquor-scented gasp, generating a*

*simple off-road breathalyzer test to justify the imposition of a lengthy sentence in the adolescent detention center otherwise known as home.*

Certainly the recognition of a healthy smell, or at least a smell that is different from a usual smell, continues its semiotic nature today. Olfaction functions as a warning system against immediate dangers like toxic air or spoiled food, urging us toward breathable air and preventing us from eating contaminated foods (Köster 28). But despite smell being seen as semiotic, as a symbolic warning, it fails to be universal: not all food, such as that contaminated with life-threatening salmonella or E. coli, smells bad; poisonous gases, like carbon monoxide or radon, and natural gas (which is scented with mercaptan for household use), have no discernible odor and require alternative warning systems like high-tech detection devices in domestic dwellings, or low-tech caged canaries in coal mines.

Ferdinand de Saussure, like Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, discusses semiotics in terms of the sign, the signified, and the signifier. To Saussure, the bond between the signifier and the signified that results in the sign is not just ambiguous, but arbitrary (66-67). Perelman describes a sign as “a phenomenon which is capable of evoking what it designates to the extent that it is utilized in a communication designated for this evocation” (42). An index, however, refers to something other than itself “after a fashion that can be called ‘objective,’ independently of all [subjective] intention of communication” (43). Charles Peirce refers to a sign as a *representamen* – part of a triad that includes an *object* and an *interpretant*. The sign represents the *object*, but cannot be a

*representamen* until it has an *interpretant*. It is this *interpretant* that resolves the ambiguity or arbitrariness of the sign.

Peirce offers three classifications of *representamens*: icon; index; and symbol. An icon, according to Peirce, possesses the character that renders it significant even though its *object* does not exist. He cites as an example, the pencil streak representing a line (104). But Peirce's "existence" leaves one to ponder whether something like a geometric line does not exist, although it can't be seen. Scent cannot be seen, but it is not invisible in the sense that it can be sensed. The geometric line cannot be seen, but it, too, is not invisible in the sense that it can be sensed spatially – a sense of touch, perhaps, although not tactual. Therefore, does an odor exist? Of course, but it is invisible (like the geometric line). By that definition, an odor would not be an icon.

An index, according to Peirce, loses its character as a sign if the *object* it represents is removed, but would not lose its character if there were no *interpretant*. (This contradicts Peirce's earlier assertion that a sign isn't a *representamen* unless it has an *interpretant*.) He uses as an example a bullet hole in a surface, which represents a shot; without the shot there would be no hole; but there is a hole, whether anybody interprets that it resulted from a shot or by some other means (104). In that sense, an odor could be an index (unlike a hole, an odor cannot be seen, but a hole also cannot be seen, only its edges, its surroundings can be seen) as its source is not always apparent or seeable; therefore its source is ambiguous, subject to interpretation.

A symbol, according to Peirce, loses its character as a sign if it has no *interpretant*. (This is consistent with Peirce's earlier assertion regarding the

*representamen* being dependent on an *interpretant*.). He uses as an example “any utterance of speech which signifies what it does only by virtue of its being understood to have that signification” (104). In this case, it seems that the symbol no longer represents the *object* of the sign. Therefore, an odor, by Peirce’s logic, could not be a symbol.

Defining the odor as an index, in Peirce’s terms (but not by Perelman’s definition), seems consistent with my initial assertion that the cognition of scents is completely subject to the sensor’s interpretation, which is ambiguous, and dependent on memory, experience, and consubstantiality, familiarity with a similar memory or experience or odor object. Like the bullet hole, the odor is identified by its affect, or by its effect, not by its cause, or by its source. The evidence or sign of an odor often prompts a visual response; the sniffer begins looking around for the source of the odor, but the result of such a search is often fruitless.

Peirce says that the task of “pure grammar” is to determine what is universally true about a sign in order for it to hold meaning. The task of “pure rhetoric,” he says, is to determine how one sign creates another, how one thought breeds another (99). Peirce claims that thought is the chief, if not only, mode of representation (100), a claim that is of little use as none among us is a mind reader.

### **Science and Neurology**

Before discussing how it is possible for language to make meaning of scents, meaning that can be comprehended by those not privy to the odor itself, it seems reasonable to explore how the human brain processes its sense of smell. Is this what is

required of a rhetoric of odor: mind-reading (as in the case of my friend Susan, or my daughter)? How do the characteristics of scent differ from those of the other senses?

As I delved into the science and rhetoric of scent, a singular source became one of my most helpful resources: an edited collection of essays, *Olfaction, Taste, and Cognition*, from researchers in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and linguistics. In the preface to the book, the editors explain:

Unlike the other senses, olfaction and taste do not have a learned discourse dealing with elementary aspects, that is, sensory processing, as well as the most abstract aspects, that is, symbolic processing. The purpose of cognitive science is to orient these processings into a continuity, and particularly to find out to what extent higher-order processes interact with the sensory level in order to produce *sufficiently reliable representations* of the world (emphasis mine). We are still quite unaware of the nature of gustatory and olfactory representations, as compared with what we know about vision and audition, for example. (Rouby et al xv)

The sense of smell is fundamentally different from sight and sound. Vision is most accessible; hearing next; touch after that, although sense of space might be less so; taste is available when the taste object is available; scent – not so much. Smell is invisible. We cannot locate it like our other senses. And because the scent is separate from its odor object, there always remains an ambiguity of cause and effect. Is it that object placed in front of us we smell? Or what is it that I smell? If the object isn't in front of us – we really do not know.

Unlike smell, sound and music can be visualized through musical notation, notes, symbols, and sign language. Seeing and hearing can even be felt through the Braille language of touch. Sound waves can be “described mathematically” and vision is comprised of different wavelengths of light (Lanier np). But unlike sight and sound and touch, taste and smell are chemical senses (Rouby et al xv). Unlike images or sounds, says Jaron Lanier, smells are molecular, “not patterns of energy. To smell an apple, you breathe hundreds of thousands of apple molecules up your nose” (np). The five distinct qualities of taste sensations or qualities recognized by chemists, sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and umami, and their soapy and metallic accessories (Light 37), are “nothing to sneeze at,” says author Avery Gilbert, but they can’t hold a candle compared to “350 different receptors and two dozen perceptual categories” for smell (91). In addition to being less complex, taste is more tangible. There is a direct association between the taste object and the taste when the object touches the tongue. For smell, however, there is an interruption of direct contact, which makes the source ambiguous. The cause of the smell and its semiotic characteristic is somewhat open to both interference and interpretation and can be affected by both context and other sensory stimuli. For example, the ability of Howes’ research subjects in New Guinea to match the scents embedded into plastic cards was impacted by the colors of the cards, forcing him to resort to “blind” testing (77). Lanier also asserts that context affects sensory interpretations when it comes to smell:

If you are blindfolded and asked to smell a good French cheese and you know you’re standing in a bathroom, your interpretation of the odor will most likely be very different than what it would be if you were in a

kitchen. Likewise, if you can see the cheese, you can be fairly confident that what you're smelling is cheese, even if you're in a restroom. (Lanier np)

This ambiguity of smell calls to mind the light-hearted adage of the duck: If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck... it's probably a duck. Well, if it looks like a duck and walks like a duck... it probably smells like a duck. However, one would first have to know what the duck smells like. And the smell of the duck would depend upon its context. The odor of the wet duck in the pond will be somewhat different than the odor of the dry duck in the farm enclosure, and quite different than the duck, defeathered and eviscerated, sizzling in its own hot fat in the roasting pan.

Discernment between smells may also be attributed to our sense of touch, the harshness of the smell in the nose, whether it causes discomfort or even pain. And while we might recognize a difference between chemical smells and mineral smells and good smells and bad smells, we don't readily know the chemistry — the ability to interpret “flowery ( $\beta$ -phenylethyl alcohol), etheric (benzylacetate), musky (ring ketones), camphorous (camphor), sweaty (butyric acid), rotten (hydrogen sulfide), and pungent (formic acid)” (Light 48). In addition, unlike the fictional Grenouille, who had no scent of his own, we do not have a blank canvas on which to work our rhetorical magic. Just as a perfume will react/smell differently on each individual's body, the smell we perceive is a Gestalt of scent, like a finely crafted perfume, a “complex perceptual structure ... that yields more than the sum of its components” (Holley). In the same way, our description

of scent relies on each person's individuality, which is also a Gestalt – comprised of a diverse array of memories, experiences, cultures, social constructions.

Köster refers to smell and taste and even touch as lower order “senses of the body” and sound and sight as higher order “intellectual senses” (27). While hearing and seeing are “vital human activities” he says, smell and taste “seem rather subjective and less universal – more related to feelings and emotions than to thoughts and decisions (27).

So what happens when the scent of the tea olive bumps the nose? How does the brain respond? Unlike visual stimuli, smells pass through a nasal cavity coated with a vast landscape of moist cilia, hair-like structures that significantly expand the exposed surface area of the nasal cavity to a measure similar to the surface area of the entire body (Light 47). Odor molecules are then absorbed into the olfactory epithelium, which contains olfactory receptor cells. They continue to make their way to the mitral cells in the olfactory bulbs housed at the base of the brain. The basal end of each olfactory cell tapers to become an axon, a nerve cell that sends electrical signals called “action potentials” (Light 48). This olfactory nerve directs these electrical impulses (like visual stimuli) to the brain's limbic system, the amygdala, hypothalamus, and thalamus, the area of the brain in which emotions are triggered (Light 46-52).

Unlike the eyes open to see and the ears are always open to hearing, the nose, while open, does not necessarily open itself to smelling. Only two percent of the air breathed during normal, relaxed inhalation enters the olfactory region (Light 46). Olfaction requires an action of its own; one must actively engage the mechanism by

sniffing. Surprisingly, sniffing in response to seeing an olfactory image, even a word designating an odor object, can influence the perception of an odor and activate the primary olfactory cortex, even when the odor doesn't exist (Arshamian et al 242-243).

Another characteristic of smell, unlike its visual and auditory counterparts is its inconsistency; sometimes the smell mechanism disengages – it's had enough!

“Adaptation in olfaction, which is loss of sensitivity as a result of prolonged stimulation, is very strong and often complete” (Köster 31).

The subcortical limbic system where the “bond between odors and emotions” takes place, “was originally known as the rhinencephalon or the ‘smell brain’” (Hermans and Baeyens 119). This influence on the emotions may also induce physical responses like salivation or sexual arousal, even before cognitive awareness of an odor is detected and synthesized, an action which takes place only after the olfactory stimulus, the product of the sniff, reaches the cerebral cortex (Light 46-52).

### **Synesthesia and Grammar**

Interestingly, just sniffing at olfactory words and images can trigger physical and emotional responses in the primary olfactory cortex – the odor object or its emanation need not be present. A group of Swedish researchers (Arshamian et al) presented subjects with verbal cues from ninety common words denoting visual or odor objects, and asked them to rate the vividness of the evoked images. They then randomly and selectively blocked sniffing (using a nose clip) or vision (using an eye mask) to measure the same responses. While an eye mask did not affect the vividness of the responses, the removal

of the subject's ability to sniff negatively impacted the vividness of the perceived odor (242-246). That olfactory language can compel a reader or listener to sniff, and that this sniff can trigger both smell memory and a subsequent emotional response, is exciting and meaningful for developing a rhetoric of scent.

Wittgenstein reminds us, though, that “memory-*experiences* are accompaniments of remembering. Remembering has no experiential content” (231e). Köster asserts that smell memories are based on events, not logic, when he explains that we can remember an odor encounter more than the odor itself, “and if we do, it is often by deduction” (33). Each individual's deduction is based upon personal experience, or a multitude of experiences. For example, there are several smells that, for me, will trigger memories of my grandmother: jasmine tea; freshly baked bread; lavender perfume (but not lavender from my herb garden); and lilacs. But although we cannot assure consubstantiality within our audience, we can evoke memory and emotion. Whether the reader smells the same scent I have in mind is no different than when someone says or writes “red” that the reader is “seeing” the same color the writer has in mind. Wittgenstein refers to this as “private experience” and remarks that it is really not that important that each person may have “his own exemplar” for the color red or some other thing, but that one (say the writer) has no way of knowing whether another person's is the same or something else (95e).

Colors and patterns or shapes and structures, all visual cues, seem to breed the acceptance of the version of reality someone else places before us. If we could provide a universal visual cue for a particular scent, perhaps we would have more success sharing

an olfactory experience or securing a desired response. Neurologist Richard Cytowic, in his book *The Man Who Tasted Shapes*, discusses synesthesia, the ability of some individuals to experience overlapping sense perceptions upon the application of one sensory stimulus. Christopher Tyler, himself a synesthete, notes that while synesthesia is “often associated with a limited subset of sensory associations, particularly colors with music, colors with numbers, and sounds with shapes” the term is also applied to “cross-modality association within specific senses...” Tyler argues that the pairing of assigning a synesthetic color to a number, after all, is that of a sensory attribute to a conceptual one, since a number (although it can have a shape) “is not associated with any specific sense” (34).

While Cytowic claimed to find no subjects in which smell was the primary trigger for a synesthetic pairing (53), author and synesthete Sean Day disagrees: to Day “the smell of almonds is pale orange” (11). He adds that there are some synesthetes who have no sense of smell, a condition known as anosmia, but still “smell” color or music, and blind people can still “see” colors, although these types of synesthesia resulted from injury (17). Nonetheless, these examples offer more proof that smell memory can reproduce the perception of odor even when the smell or the physical odor object are nonexistent. Day’s list of synesthetes for whom smell triggers a paired sensory response (less than one percent) is miniscule compared with those (almost seven percent) who see colored odors, and paltry compared to those who see colored numbers and shapes, or hear colored music (15). Cytowic and others suggest that these “cross-modal associations present in synesthesia,” probably contributed to the evolution of language (122). “When

we say that red is a ‘warm’ color or that a certain cheese tastes ‘sharp,’ we speak metaphorically. No one pretends to have a thermal sensation to the color or a tactile one to the cheese” (120). Noam Sagiv agrees that metaphors may have a “neural basis” and cites research that shows nonsynesthetes display “consistent patterns of cross-sensory associations (e.g. brightness and pitch: Marks 1974)” (4). Lanier goes beyond that when he proposes a link between olfaction, the way the human cerebral cortex processes chemical information, and the earliest origins of language: “Perhaps the grammar of language is rooted in the grammar of smell” (np).

All this points to scent being a powerful rhetorical tool, but one that has, perhaps, been ignored due to the inability for us to describe it beyond the scientific definition, beyond naming. Unlike the other senses, scent is dramatic, poetic. Scent, itself, tells a story. And the way to describe scents, to make scents rhetorical, is to utilize language in the same way I have utilized it in the anecdotes interspersed throughout this discussion. Each anecdote is a drama in itself. Each effort to bring the reader a sense of scent is a play comprised of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. Scent is metaphor, but the metaphor is embedded in the Gestalt of the olfactory play.

## CHAPTER 4

### A Whiff of Olfactory Grammar

#### *The Play's the Thing*

#### A Whiff of Olfactory Grammar

So far, this discussion of a rhetoric of scent has generated a number of assumptions. Unlike the other senses, especially vision, hearing, and touch, scent is elusive, the least tangible. Sometimes the watermelon is just watery, the perfume overpowered by the sweat of its wearer, the rose, by any other name, might smell – well, not at all. Language, even metaphorical language, does not adequately describe odors. We place more trust in the description of odor objects, and familiarity with those objects leads us to anticipate their familiar emanation. As a culture we make a habit of ignoring smells, hiding smells, and covering up smells, especially unpleasant smells, or natural human odors – the smells associated with intimacy and bodily functions – the smells we do not speak of, or willfully ignore. Perhaps this correlates to the persistent lack of a language for the perception of scent as a way of knowing and as a way of sharing what Berlin calls our “version of reality.” While smells are inviting and persuasive and a lucrative industry, perfumes, air fresheners, flowers, and incense are many times used to mask natural or unpleasant odors. According to Peirce’s categorization of signs, odor, like the bullet hole, is indexical – evidence of something – but that something may no longer be present or able to be ascertained. Therefore, scents are often described by the reaction they incite. But this affective power of scents, while describable, still does not

bring the reader to the “truth” of the odor; it may not even bring the reader to the “truth” of the odor object. However, the affective power of scent, its ability to evoke memories and stir emotions, is essentially rhetorical.

We seem to readily accept a persuasiveness of language based on a sense of sight. “Seeing is believing.” The vocabulary for sight and its “grammar of visual design” (Kress and van Leeuwen) far exceeds the Western vocabulary for smell. We also readily accept metaphorical language. As we have *seen*, however, metaphors are not much use for bringing a reader to the “truth” of an odor. Olfactory metaphors are useful for describing other things, albeit often derogatively, and often in a semiotic context. One sniffs out crime, smells a rat, something stinks, or smells fishy. Let’s sniff out the facts. She has a nose for news. That has a whiff of truth. It’s a smelly situation. It makes you want to plug your nose. (Sometimes we do plug our nose in response, not to a smell, but to an idea.) Success smells sweet, and we might come out smelling like a rose (which, by any other name, would smell as sweet).

Boyd says theory-constitutive metaphors give readers epistemic access and that this access can be active or passive. He argues:

... the employment of a metaphor serves as a nondefinitional mode of reference fixing which is especially well suited to the introduction of terms referring to kinds whose real essences consist of complex relational properties, rather than features of internal constitution. (358)

When metaphors are used to describe smells, readers do not gain any ostensive or referential knowledge of substance; metaphors describe relationships between smells or

between the human and the smell. Metaphor brings the reader closer to comprehension of the odor if the reader's interest and experience is joined with that of the writer, if the two, in a Burkean sense, are consubstantial. This type of epistemic access is passive. But scent itself is active, in motion, motivating, "dramatistic." Odor, itself, can motivate the reader. In addition, the physiology of the brain enables the reader to respond to scent whether the odor object is present or not, whether the scent is present or not; even olfactory images, words or pictures, are rhetorical because, neurologically, the action of the sniff enhances odor memory and ignites the brain's affective response. The reaction of the reader to the rhetoric of scent, like other sensory rhetoric, depends on consubstantiality to fulfill what Boyd refers to as "the task of *accommodation of language to the causal structure of the world*" (358).

A grammatical structure that enables the writer/orator to compel the sniff that ignites the brain's affective response, will help release scent from its straitjacket of language and elevate it to a higher status in the realm of rhetoric. I propose that it is possible to construct an olfactory grammar, and because I have deemed the language of scent to be not ontological, but rhetorical, to be not scientific, but dramatistic, it seems that Burke's pentad, his five key terms of dramatism, may bring me closest to the sweet smell of success: a rhetoric of scent. I will use Burke's pentad as a terministic screen, as a means of beginning to sniff out an olfactory grammar.

To that end, I give a nod to my esteemed professor's assertion that fall day in the South Carolina Botanical Gardens – that metaphor is the key to describing scents. Scent is metaphor, but the metaphor is embedded in the Gestalt of the olfactory play. The

metaphor is the drama – the metaphor is the play. Smell is climactic. Smell has a denouement, an outcome of a complex sequence of events. In order to affect a reader’s response to smell, you must incorporate the act, the scene, the agent, the agency, and the purpose.

*This perfume was not like any perfume known before. It was not a scent that made things smell better, not some sachet, some toiletry. It was something completely new, capable of creating a whole world, a magical, rich world, and in an instant you forgot all the loathsomeness around you and felt so rich, so at ease, so free, so fine. . . .*

— Patrick Süskind, *Perfume: the Story of a Murderer*, p. 85-86.

### **An Olfactory Pentad**

What do the five key terms of dramatism have to do with smell? Burke contends that his pentad of Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose, has to do with people, what people do and why they do it. These forms, he says, are omnipresent in human experience (*GOM* xv). As Burke sees these five key terms as a “generating principle” of a grammar of motives, so do I view them as a possible generating principle for a grammar of scents, an olfactory grammar, a grammar that compels the reader to engage in a cognizant act – to sniff – not just to breathe. For it is the act of the sniff that stimulates the brain’s smell memory and evokes an emotional response. Unlike Burke’s pentad, the terms in the olfactory pentad are not necessarily human motivations; my terms denote the motivation of substance to incite a human act and a rhetorical response. I intend to view the terms through a lens of substance, to address the semiotic, symbolic, and rhetorical nature of smell and to elevate its significance as a sensory tool of persuasion for multiple modes of

composition. Like Burke, along the way, I am certain to encounter the ambiguities and uncertainties inherent in the range of permutations and combinations of terms (*GOM* xvi). In *Grammar of Motives*, Burke suggests a formula “for the outwitting or cajoling of one another” (*GOM* xvii). My intent in the case of olfactory grammar is not to deceive or seduce, but to expose odor’s rhetorical power. This intent is more in line with the functions of rhetoric Burke describes in *Rhetoric of Motives*: “... the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (*ROM* 41) and “[t]he use of symbols, by one symbol-using entity to induce action in another...” (*ROM* 46). Can an olfactory grammar, like Burke’s grammar of motives circumscribe both the rhetorical and symbolic? Of course it can. The semiotic quality of scent not only makes it possible, it makes it autonomously capable.

I have already addressed the ambiguity and arbitrariness of language as well as scent, so I am confident that the terms in my olfactory pentad, like Burke’s are “essentially enigmatic” and that “inevitable ambiguities and inconsistencies” (*GOM* xviii) will become apparent. Nevertheless, like Burke, I anticipate the points at which these difficulties arise, for it is at those junctures that the “language game” is played.

Burke states, “the explicit and systematic use of the dramatist pentad is best designed to bring out the strategic moments of motivational theory” (67). I intend to use the structure of the dramatic pentad to construct my olfactory pentad in order to elicit the strategies inherent in developing a rhetorical theory of scent.

My proposed olfactory pentad is comprised of: Sniff (as a deliberate act of inhalation); Context (as scene or background); Emanation (as agent); Odor object (as

agency); and Response (as rhetorical purpose). I will begin by defining each component and comparing it to its Burkean pentadic counterpart before moving on to the permutations, ten possible pairings of olfactory pentadic ratios.

**Table 4.1: Comparison of terms between Olfactory and Dramatistic pentads**

| <b>Olfactory Pentad</b> | <b>Dramatistic Pentad</b> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Sniff                   | Act                       |
| Context                 | Scene                     |
| Emanation               | Agent                     |
| Odor Object             | Agency                    |
| Response                | Purpose                   |

While the olfactory pentad, like the dramatistic pentad, encompasses the realm of human motive, its parts are both human and non-human, both animate and inanimate. This is especially apparent in terms of the Emanation, the agent, which would be organic, but inanimate and invisible; the Odor Object, the agency, could be human, plant, animal, mineral, or other (and also unknown). Without exception, though, in the olfactory pentad, the Sniff is a human act; the act (as in a drama) requires an actor. And in the olfactory pentad, the Response, without exception, is a human response; the Response (like the applause at the end of a drama) requires an audience. But in the olfactory pentad, the actor and the audience become one.

*Sniff (as act of inhalation)*

In the case of the olfactory pentad, the Sniff – the act – is central, for as Burke would say, it is from the action in the scene that the “magic” is derived (*GOM* 66). “Our act [sniff] itself alters the conditions of action as ‘one thing leads to another’ in an order

that would not have occurred had we not acted [sniffed]” (*GOM* 67). Burke uses the Christian creation as an analogy for the act, as it is not motivational in itself, but action derived from motive (from agent, agency, scene, or some combination). The act in the dramatic pentad has no specific actor; the actors are implied among the agent/co-agents and the agency. However, the ambiguity of the key terms in the pentad, says Burke, opens the door for locating motive in the act itself (*GOM* 69). In the olfactory pentad the Sniff is an act in itself. Although the act requires a human presence, the locus of the power of smell lies outside the human as agent (unless the Odor Object, the agency, is itself human). Through the deliberate human Sniff – compelled by the Emanation and/or the Odor Object – scent, the rhetorical substance, becomes consubstantial with the actor. The act of the Sniff is motivated by substance, the odor, and also by the actor/reader; in the case of the reader, the urge to act, to sniff rather than breathe, is self-motivated.

*Context (as scene or background)*

The Context, or scene, while it contains the act, also lends a significance to the act and may determine its subsequence. As Lanier suggests, the aroma of a ripe cheese sniffed in a bathroom will likely be perceived quite differently than that same odor sniffed in a kitchen or at the market. The olfactory Context, the setting for the Sniff, provides one with an expectation of the odor, and in this way, might even subvert the act of the Sniff. If the Context is unpleasant, or even unfamiliar, the urge to act, to Sniff, is often suppressed.

The Context also contains atmosphere, not only the atmosphere of the scene itself, but the atmosphere of the Emanation (agent) and perhaps the Odor Object (agency). It may be that more than just Odor Objects have atmosphere; body temperature, for example, is often apparent by proximity, especially in the case of high fever as many mothers claim, although I question whether that sense is simply one of touch/feeling as it seems possible to smell heat over and above its fuel source. Both animate and inanimate objects may have an atmosphere, or corona, as suggested by images of Kirlian photography (electrophotography). Day suggests, though, that the colored auras some people claim to see (and “read”) around human subjects may actually be “synesthetic interactions between facial recognition ... and color processing centers of the brain, or perhaps between those portions of the brain that recognize overall human body form and those parts that see color” (14-15).

Burke states that both act and agent require scenes that ‘contain’ them (*GOM* 12) and this holds true in olfactory pentad, as the Context will always contain the Sniff and the Emanation. As the terms in the pentad merge and separate, they may also be contained by the Context, or by each other.

#### *Emanation (as agent)*

The mystery of whether the tree falling in the forest makes any sound could apply to the Emanation, the odor agent. For if there is no sniff, is there a smell? While it doesn’t require a full-out sniff, per se, for odor molecules to enter the nasal cavity and stimulate the olfactory bulbs at the base of the brain’s limbic system, research has shown

(Arshamian et al, Lanier, Light) that a purposeful sniff, one that accelerates a larger concentration of odor molecules through the nasal passages, significantly increases the perception of an odor, and subsequently enhances its physiological response. The purposeful sniff is a willful act, one that is compelled by the initial stimulation of the receptors in the nasal cavity that occurs through relaxed inhalation. In the same way, if the inhalation foreshadows an unpleasant or dangerous scent, the willful act will be to stifle the sniff, a reminder that the power inherent in the rhetoric of scent can be dissuasive as well as persuasive.

Burke cites rhetoric specifically when he notes “one may deflect attention from scenic matters by situating the motives of an act in the agent” (17). In olfactory terms, this would mean the context might be superseded by the odor itself. Within the confines of literacy, I think it would be difficult to isolate the emanation from its environment as it is indescribable save for the linguistic form (“the odor of X,” X being the name of the odor object”) offered by Dubois and Rouby (49), or the context in which it is contained.

For Burke, the agent term is synonymous with a vast collection of words for people, professions, or nations as well as non-entities like functions or properties or states of mind (20). I will posit that an Emanation as agent, while an entity, can only be a property, for any other description that would parallel Burke’s synonyms, would be the source of the Emanation, the Odor Object, which in the olfactory pentad, is the agency. The agency, however, may in itself be an agent, as the Odor Object, without any notable Emanation, may motivate the actor to sniff.

*Odor Object (as agency)*

The Odor Object in the olfactory pentad is the supplier of the odor (as agent), which incites the act of the Sniff. However, we have to remember that the object, in some cases, may be invisible (like the agency) or not apparent, or unknown. This is due to the indexical attribute of odor as determined by Peirce's semiotic definition. While the sign is evidenced, its source may not be apparent.

The agent, says Burke, is the cause for the act; the agency provides the means (*GOM* 228-229). Burke situates his discussion of agency against the "essentially dramatic nature" of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, especially in the latter's comments on Aristotle's "four [material, efficient, final, and formal] causes" (in pp. 154-163 of the *Everyman's Library* edition). Aristotle claims that "material cause" is how something comes into being; "efficient cause" is "the initial origin of change or rest; e.g. the adviser is the cause of the action, and the father a cause of the child"; "final cause" is "the end, i.e. that for the sake of which a thing is"; and "formal cause" is "form or pattern, i.e. the formula of the essence" (*GOM* 228). Burke applies Aristotle's four causes as follows: "material cause" to the scene; "efficient cause" to the agent, as it incites the act; "formal cause" to the act itself; and predictably, "final cause" to the purpose (*GOM* 228). In the case of the olfactory pentad, these applications would seem to hold true except in the case of the "material cause" being applied to Context (scene). "Material cause," defined as how something comes into being, holds true for the Odor Object, the agency in the olfactory pentad. But Burke offers that Aristotle had a "fifth" cause, one that Burke would apply to agency. Aristotle's description of this additional cause is

ambiguous and lumped together within his discussion of “final cause,” as “all the means that intervene before the end” (*GOM* 228). Burke suggests that the agency term might be better applied to something like “instrumental cause” (*GOM* 228), which would be an appropriate alliance for the Odor Object as agency in the olfactory pentad.

*Response (rhetorical purpose)*

It seems superfluous to discuss Response or purpose, in either the olfactory or dramatic pentad, because purpose seems inherent in any act. However, in the olfactory pentad, the Response is always a human response to the act of the Sniff, which is a human act. And while the writer enacts the drama which motivates the actor to sniff (or to stifle), the Response is situated in the actor, the reader. The writer’s motive or intent can be either positive or negative; it may encourage or discourage, persuade or dissuade, compel or repel or even dispel. In the case of an olfactory grammar, the reader/actor’s affective Response is the smell memory, episodic memory, and emotion evoked by the Sniff. In the case of the olfactory pentad, the purpose is rhetorical, but the locus of control is situated in the act, the actor.

Burke proposes the “most realistic” synonymic term for purpose would be “Aristotelian ‘happiness’ (eudaimonia)” (*GOM* 292). This seems optimistic, and upon further analysis of Burke’s investigation of Aristotle’s happiness, I would argue that it is more simply stating the positive as opposed to the negative or a reiteration of the Sophistic tenet that “those things that are also are not.” Of course this optimism is also based in the Aristotelian and Sophistic notion that the purposive (deliberative) rhetor is

virtuous – an assertion with which we endlessly grapple throughout the study of rhetoric and composition. In fact, later in Burke’s philosophical discussion of purpose, he proposes “the *negative*” as another synonym for his term (*GOM* 295). The most important distinction for purpose in either Burke’s or the olfactory pentad, is that the purpose term is dramatic, not scientific, not a condition or label, but an action.

*Chicago has one of the most beautiful downtowns as any city in the world I’ve visited. Its architecture is both elegant and historically important; a boat trip along its eponymous river offers a mirror image of the spectacle as the facades of the buildings reflect in the ripples of the water. As I describe this beauty to my friends, urging them to come visit me by promising to show them the sights, I offer another persuasive catchphrase: “It’s not only beautiful – what other city in the world smells like hot cocoa?” For in the heart of Chicago’s “Loop,” there is a chocolate factory, and the scent of melting chocolate wafts its way through the downtown core, beckoning you to enter whatever drink or sweet shop you might walk past to fulfill the craving it induces.*

### **Olfactory Pentadic Ratios**

Burke’s pentadic ratios allow for ten pairings of terms. Burke claims that the relationships between the terms can be found everywhere, but the ambiguity and overlapping of terms complicates their distinction. Distinctions arise out of the pentad as

a whole entity in which the five terms are merged and each may, by turn, emerge from the whole, and then merge again with the “causal ancestor” (*GOM* xix). In either pentad, the terms lend themselves to both merger and division (*GOM* 7), and in this process, each term may become consubstantial with another. This is especially true as each entity in the pentad must be recognized as being in the environment of the other and, as such, could at any time be considered being the context of another term. I am assuming the same character for the olfactory pentadic ratios described below. While Burke provides a comparative guide for my exploration through a detailed inspection of scene-act, scene-agent, scene-purpose, agency-purpose, and act-agent ratios, he glosses over the others saying, “... the rest will figure in passing” (*GOM* 15). I will inspect the relationships between all ten pairings.

**Table 4.2: Comparison of Olfactory and Dramatistic Pentadic Ratios**

| <b>Olfactory Pentadic Ratios</b> | <b>Dramatistic Pentadic Ratios</b> |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Context – Sniff                  | Scene – Act                        |
| Context – Emanation              | Scene – Agent                      |
| Sniff – Emanation                | Act – Agent                        |
| Context – Response               | Scene – Purpose                    |
| Odor Object – Response           | Agency – Purpose                   |
| Sniff – Odor Object              | Act – Agency                       |
| Sniff – Response                 | Act – Purpose                      |
| Context – Odor Object            | Scene – Agency                     |
| Emanation – Odor Object          | Agent – Agency                     |
| Emanation – Response             | Agent - Purpose                    |

*Context – Sniff (Scene – Act)*

In any dramatic production, the action takes place in a setting. Thus, as Burke states, the scene contains the act (*GOM* 3). The Sniff is contained in the Context,

therefore one would expect the Context to reflect the quality of the Sniff. Burke says: “From the motivational point of view, there is implicit in the quality of a scene the quality of the action that is to take place within it... the act will be consistent with the scene” (*GOM* 6-7). The Context and the Sniff, like the scene and the act, are therefore interdependent. In the olfactory pentad, the reader is the actor, therefore the reader also becomes contained within the Context. Due to the act, the Sniff, the Context then also becomes contained in the actor; the human becomes the scene of the scent.

However, dramatic license allows that these two things may be at odds with each other, says Burke, “reaffirming the same principle of consistency in its very violation” (3). In this way, the writer may introduce such an inconsistency between the Sniff and its Context toward rhetorical purpose, affecting a particular Response.

#### *Context – Emanation (Scene – Agent)*

Burke defines the scene-agent ratio as a “synechdochic” relationship between person and place. The agent shares the quality of the scene (*GOM* 7-8). In the olfactory pentad, the agent is not a person; the agent is an Emanation, perhaps from a person if the human is the Odor Object. In this way, the rhetoric of scent, the power of scent, is situated in the Emanation, and determines the quality of the Context. I suppose there is allowance for the personification of an agent (and of a scene) metaphorically, in the action of the Emanation perhaps enveloping or wrapping or dousing an entity, perhaps the scene itself. Or, at the extreme, perhaps the agent is depicted as something other than

an Emanation, an atmosphere, as in the antiperspirant commercial where the agent (body odor) is portrayed as a fountain of spray spewing from the human scene, the armpit.

The Context provides the reader with an expectation of the agent, a phenomenon subscribed to by Lanier when he asserts that an odor is perceived differently depending on the scene in which it is situated (np). This expectation provides the writer with an opportunity to introduce a dramatic element of surprise, an aura of unknown, or the very semiotic incongruence of odor and scene that signals a warning, a sign that something is not quite right.

*Sniff – Emanation (Act – Agent)*

Burke asserts that both the act and agent must be contained in the scene and an initial assumption would render the same finding for the olfactory pentad. But while I will agree that the agent is contained in the scene, unlike Burke, I am restricting my act, the Sniff, to a specific human action, one that is compelled by the scene, but takes place outside the scene. The Context and Emanation are determinants of the sniff.

To Burke, the act-agent ratio differs from the scene-act and scene-agent ratios in that “[t]he agent does not contain the act, though its results might be said to ‘pre-exist virtually’ within him (*GOM* 16). He adds that “the act does not ‘synecdochically share’ in the agent, though certain ways of acting may be said to induce corresponding moods or traits of character” (*GOM* 16). Here again an antithesis between the dramatic and olfactory pentads is exposed in that the act of the Sniff certainly synecdochically shares in the Emanation, the rhetorical substance. There is no doubt, however, that the way of

the Sniff is intended to induce corresponding moods or traits of character, in the evocation of smell memory and emotion. But as Burke would allow for his act-agent pairing, the relationship is sequential; the act is derived from the agent; the Sniff is derived from the Emanation.

*Context – Response (Scene – Purpose)*

The Context contains the Odor Object and the Emanation, and as such, all merge to comprise the scene. In this sense, the Context is generative in that it compels the sniff that transforms and extends the scene to the actor, the sniffer, and sets the Response in motion.

*Odor Object – Response (Agency – Purpose)*

It is difficult to ascertain how Burke's now time-worn and sexist analogy of man's purposeful turn from his maternal agency (mother/utility) to erotic purpose (desire) and the woman's circular reversal to maternal agency as a means to raising a man's family (*GOM* 284) might be translated to a reasonable sense of the relationship between the Odor Object and Response. The latter relationship seems less convoluted. The Odor Object is the supplier of the Emanation, and therein lies its purpose. In an etymological sense, the Odor Object is certainly substantive, in that it stands behind or supports the Emanation. It sets in motion the sequence of events that follow from Emanation to Sniff to rhetorical Response.

*Sniff – Odor Object (Act – Agency)*

As the Sniff is an action in response to an Emanation, it would seem the relationship between the Sniff as act and the Odor Object as agency would be indirect. However, when Arshamian et al. presented their research participants with images of odor objects or words denoting odor objects, people who actively sniffed in response to those objects reacted the same as if they were in contact with the substance – the emanation itself. The smell center in the human cerebral cortex has the capability of activating smell memory and emotion in relation to an image or word representing the odor object without the odor object being present as long as the odor object is consubstantial, as long as it has been smelled before; the presence of an odor object without an emanation may still ignite a response. Another characteristic of the relationship between the Sniff and the Odor Object is the latter's control over the Emanation. The Odor Object, as the creator, the manufacturer of the odor, releases the Emanation at whim. This characteristic is especially noticeable in the case of fragrant plants which, like the tea olive, restrict their odors to a particular season, or a particular stage of flowering.

*Sniff – Response (Act – Purpose)*

The relationship between the Sniff and the Response is tacit. This represents a departure from the notion of purpose and its relationship to the act in the dramatic pentad. The Sniff propels the agent through the nasal cavity and stimulates the nerves in

the olfactory bulbs at the base of the brain. The quality of the Sniff correlates directly with the Response to the action. Conversely, the quality of the Response may compel the act; the actor, the sniffer, pleased with the Response, reenters the scene and acts again, further accentuating the Response.

*Context – Odor Object (Scene – Agency)*

The Odor Object is contained in the scene or Context and as such, may merge to become the scene. From my own experience drawn from fragrant memories of fishing vacations in Northern Wisconsin, I will use an example of a pine leaf as fractl, a piece that builds to form the whole, whether it becomes the forest floor or the forest itself. In this way the Context becomes the Odor Object.

*I once lived in a city that had a vibrant downtown core. At the cusp of the coffee boom for which we might credit Starbucks, the number of coffee and dessert shops on its main street grew from two of my favorite haunts to a seemingly inordinate number for its range of just five or six city blocks. One particularly grass-roots establishment anchored in the city square even roasted its imported beans onsite. The aroma of coffee was apparent in every step you took down the boulevard as the smell from one caffeine-laden storefront blended with the next.*

*Emanation – Odor Object – (Agent – Agency)*

The relationship between the Emanation and the Odor Object is one I consider the most playful in the olfactory pentad. For though one can exist without the other in a linguistic sense, there is a causal relationship between the two that begets ambiguity. The Odor Object is substantial to the odor, and although it is easy to accept that the odor is invisible as the human eye cannot see molecules, at times the Odor Object, the source of the odor, may also not be apparent, whether simply not in proximity, or itself invisible, as in the case of a gas, which may be felt (if it is an irritant), though not seen. To revisit Wittgenstein's declaration of the indescribable aroma of coffee, given that coffee is in one's smell memory, such an aroma may exist although the source is not evident. Within the scene, one might try to "sniff out" the object of the odor by engaging in a visual search for a steaming mug or container of beans, but such a search is not always fruitful.

*Emanation – Response (Agent – Purpose)*

Like the relationship between the Sniff and the Odor Object, there might seem to be a disruption between the Emanation and the Response. In this case, that disruption would be real if the odor failed to compel the Sniff, thereby diminishing the quality of the Response. Emanation, however, is atmosphere, a scenic quality that contributes to its ability to evoke Response. To the extent that normal inhalation, according to Light, still succeeds in delivering a minimal olfactory hit, the Response can be attributed to Emanation.

## **Permutations Beyond the Ratios**

In contrast to the ten pentadic ratios given for the five terms here (and in Burke's pentad), when Cytowic discusses the five senses in the context of synesthesia, he offers a possibility of twenty permutations, as each sensory perception may trigger more than one paired sensory response in some individuals. This difference poses an opportunity for the olfactory pentad, as multiple entities may overlap and fuse. (I wonder whether Burke considered this opportunity for his dramatic pentad.) In an olfactory pentad, it seems appropriate to consider the possibility of expanding the permutations beyond the duality of the ratio. This seems especially applicable in the case of the Sniff, Emanation, Odor Object, and Context, since in the case of sensory perception, they are so closely interwoven.

The Sniff does not take place in a vacuum; the Odor Object does not exist in a vacuum; the Emanation does not exist in a vacuum. All three, the human, the Emanation and the Odor Object exist in a Context. Therefore, the possibility for counter emanations or co-emanations exists just as this possibility exists for counter and co-agencies in the dramatic pentad. Using this proof, one would have to say that the counter emanations' or co-emanations' existence would be extrinsicities of competing odor objects, both contained in the Context and forming the Context. Then again, a simple description of a scene, the Context in which the actor is compelled to sniff, may call forth a competing Emanation unintended and unforeseen by an author. Beyond that, the act of the Sniff itself is extrinsic to the author's composition as the reader acts outside the author's scene. This introduces yet another context to the reader. The Sniff does not belong to the author;

the Sniff is the act by the reader in response to the contained elements in the Context. Thus the Sniff, while derived from a Context, will take place in an extrinsic context, not only jeopardizing the writer's rhetorical purpose – to evoke a Response based on consubstantiality, but leaving it susceptible to all matter of indeterminacy.

### **Ambiguity of Terms**

The relationships between the terms of the pentad, Burke's pentadic ratios, are mired in ambiguity. Burke says:

Since no two things or acts or situations are exactly alike, you cannot apply the same term to both of them without thereby introducing a certain margin of ambiguity, an ambiguity as great as the difference between the two subjects that are given the identical title. ... we shall deal with many kinds of transformation—and it is in the areas of ambiguity that transformations take place. ... Distinctions, we might say, arise out of a great central moltenness, where all is merged." (*GOM* xix)

Burke's application of ambiguity of terms in the dramatistic pentad certainly holds true for the olfactory pentad. In fact, I think it may be even more pronounced as, unlike the dramatistic pentad, which is based in human motive, the olfactory pentad is centered about the seemingly autonomous motive of a substance, an assemblance of matter that compels a human action, the Sniff, toward the purpose of evoking an affective, essentially human Response. The Response itself is ambiguous, at least for the writer who composes the assemblance toward a specific end, since the reader's response

is based upon consubstantiality and subjective experience, both essentially human. In addition, if language is not the only means used to invoke the act of sniffing, if the Odor Object is present and especially if the Emanation is physical, the Response could be complicated even further. Katz suggests that if affect is physical—“located in the body”— (smell is located/felt in the nose) the experience may induce physiological responses, “affective or intuitive factors,” beyond those foreseen by the writer that may influence interpretation (61).

Like the dramatistic pentad, the terms of the olfactory pentad, Sniff, Context, Emanation, Odor Object, and Response, are “attributes of a common ground” (*GOM* xix). And as Burke suggests, “if you reduce the terms to any one of them, you will find them branching out again; for no one of them is enough” (*GOM* xxi). Unlike the dramatistic pentad, the olfactory terms are most apparent in the relations between Emanation, Odor Object, and Context, which overlap, fuse, and, in the case of the Odor Object, the agency, may be indefinite or even invisible.

### **Paradox of Substance**

Substance is paradoxical in meaning, says Burke, in that its etymology calls for it to be not the essence of a thing unto itself (intrinsic), but to be something that supports a thing, in other words, something outside the thing (extrinsic), which in the case of the pentad, would make it scenic instead of an agent or agency (*GOM* 22). He blames the loss of the term’s “prestige” and its subsequent banishment from the modern philosophical lexicon on John Locke’s treatment of the concept in *An Essay Concerning*

*Human Understanding* (Chapter XXIII, “Of Our Complex Ideas of Substances”) but Burke asserts: in “banishing the *term*, far from banishing its *functions*, one merely conceals them” (*GOM* 21).

This paradoxical and ambiguous notion of substance gets very interesting when considering scent. For indeed, what I would consider the substance of scent, the intrinsicity of the Emanation, is supported by the extrinsic Odor Object. This takes us back to the linguistic formula for odor proffered by Dubois and Rouby, “the odor of X,” X being the name of the odor object” (49). But, of course, the Odor Object is intrinsic in its own right. And in this case, its Emanation is extrinsic. Burke defines this point where the extrinsic and intrinsic trade places as contextual and he calls on Spinoza’s argument with Aristotle to validate his definition:

Hence, starting from the Aristotelian notion that a substance, or being, is to be considered “in itself” ... Spinoza went on to observe that nothing less than the *totality of all that exists* can meet this requirement. ... no single thing could be considered “by itself.” ... Thinking contextually, Spinoza held that each single object in the universe is “defined” (determined, limited, bounded) by the other things that surround it. ... Spinoza meant precisely that we should consider each thing in terms of its total context, the universal scene as a whole. (*GOM* 25).

Then again, neither the Emanation nor the Odor Object, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, can exist outside of the totality of the Context until it is encompassed by the act of the Sniff. The paradigm for Burke is that the scene must contain the act, and in the case of scent,

the Context (scene) must contain the Sniff (act), as well as the Emanation (agent), and, it must be assumed, the Odor Object (agency).

### **Consubstantiality and the Substance of Smell**

*Seville, Spain, is the best-smelling city I have ever visited. Upon disembarking the high-speed train from Madrid, my daughter and I waltzed into an urban expanse of Moorish architecture bathed in a garden of rich scent. I'm not sure if the trees were actually in bloom, but the air was saturated with the smell of what I determined were orange blossoms. The fragrance reminded me of the mock orange trees my parents had planted outside the bedroom windows of my childhood home in Illinois. I called my sister nine time zones to the west and said, "I wish you could smell through the phone." Nevertheless, the scent did not make me feel homesick.*

In *The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric*, Katz alludes to the subjectivity of the sense experience by recalling Immanuel Kant's quest to "establish a metaphysical foundation that accounts for all knowledge in the world, making a pure science of nature possible" (281). Katz says, "[However,] for Kant, we can, and do, always know our own sense experience of the world, as distinguished from the world itself. Thus, we can say with some certainty, that what we experience is not the world itself, but the world as it appears

to our senses” (282). But how we perceive the world around us is a singular exercise, for by the time we are old enough, cognizant enough, to begin to make sense of the knowledge we build through our perceptions, our minds are no longer a *tabula rasa*.

Were they orange blossoms I smelled in Seville? I know of Seville oranges because I am fond of orange marmalade and have read that this bitter orange variety makes some of the best tasting preserves. However, I had never smelled orange blossoms before and neither had my daughter. But the shrubs of my childhood that were called “mock orange” fostered in me the assumption that they were thus named because they smelled like the real thing (having a smell *like* X, X being the smell of the orange blossom). There is no shared genealogy between the two species, the bitter orange tree being of the genus *citrus aurantium*, the mock orange being of the genus *Philadelphus*. While the smell of Seville was consubstantial with the smell wafting through the bedroom windows of my youth, if I did not know that Seville was famous for its eponymous oranges, would I have made the connection, or might I have investigated the source of that delicious scent by other means?

Smell is but one example of the subjective sense experience, and describing a smell to another with the linguistic “...X being the odor object” (Dubois and Rouby 46) depends on the reader’s familiarity with or knowledge of that odor object, thus my difficulty in describing the scent of the tea olive to my friend, who has never seen a tea olive tree. And even if she did, what are the chances of her seeing the tea olive in bloom, the brief period of time at which it releases its emanation? Out of season, her sensory

experience would be no more enlightening (or intoxicating) than smelling a plastic facsimile, or the paper of the unimpregnated envelope in which it was mailed.

The linguistic “X-factor” posited above is an example of consubstantiality. As the Emanation is identified with its Odor Object, the two are consubstantial. And yet, they are each substantive. The Emanation is the offspring; the Odor Object is the parent. This is the paradox or ambiguity of substance that forces us to reconsider our terms.

Burke says in *A Rhetoric of Motives*:

A doctrine of *consubstantiality*, either explicit or implicit, may be necessary to any way of life. For substance, in the old philosophies, was an *act*; and a way of life is *acting-together*; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*. (*ROM 21*)

But Burke’s discussion is centered around consubstantiality and identification among human individuals – the ways in which they both identify with each other and are at odds with each other. In a rhetoric of scent, we are also interested in the ways in which humans identify with each other and their experiences, because this certainly impacts the success of our rhetorical venture – to bring someone closer to the truth of our own sense (scent) experience. But there also forms a paradox of sorts in the identification and consubstantiality of the Emanation and the Odor Object, the agent and agency terms in the olfactory pentad. For on the surface, it is easy to consider them congruent with each other, to apply a certain cause-and-effect relationship, to assume the Odor Object is the cause of the Emanation. But is it always?

Consider the durian, a fruit native to Asia that is revered for eating and baking due to its unusual creamy texture and unique and pungent sweet taste. Yet the durian is banned in most public places due to its horrific smell, described by various witnesses as “rotting garbage,” and most descriptively, by travel writer Richard Sterling, as “pig-shit, turpentine, and onions, garnished with a gym sock” (Koski np). One would hardly consider such a smell consubstantial with an edible fruit, even one resembling a prickly pear. Even more incongruent might be the semiotic odors that, like Peirce’s indexical sign, the bullet hole, are evidence only that something else exists somewhere. We can attribute, but there is no proof that an Emanation is produced from a specific agency. The source, the power of the smell, is concealed.

### **Attitude and Atmosphere**

Several times in *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke refers to attitude; a formal application of attitude to his explorations of human motives would change his dramatic structure from a pentad to a hexad. Burke says attitude is often “*preparation* for an act, which would make it a kind of symbolic act, or incipient act. But in its character as a state of *mind* that may or may not lead to an act, it is quite clearly to be classed under the head of *agent*” (GOM 20). But what is the distinction between an act and a motive? The distinction, says Burke may dwell in attitude.

Action-motion ambiguity is important to the olfactory grammar because we are assigning a human act to a thing, the Sniff, and the impetus of the Sniff also to a thing, an Emanation, which is in turn caused by a thing, an Odor Object, an agency (perhaps

human, but not necessarily so). Such an assignment of feelings or attitudes to things is called a pathetic fallacy (*GOM* 233).

When the tea olive releases its scent, is it an action or a motion – an act or a motive? Even though the tea olive is a living thing, it is non-human. Yet the act of releasing its emanation surely must be, by nature, motivated towards a purpose. (Perhaps, like Burke’s man in his transition from maternal woman to erotic woman, this motive is one of reproduction.) Burke notes the importance of “any source of ambiguity that has great bearing on the structure of language in all its levels: Grammatical, Rhetorical, and Symbolic” (*GOM* 234).

In the olfactory pentad, the Emanation being the agent and motivator of the Sniff, the Emanation would be the bearer of attitude. Making that assumption, I am compelled to revisit Wittgenstein’s limited discussion of scent as he wrestles with the indescribable aroma of coffee. Wittgenstein assigns the term “atmosphere” to a mental act, to the intangibility of the mental state. He further defines atmosphere as an “an indescribable character” and claims one can attach it to anything (159e). As opposed to ascribing the character of action to this atmosphere, Wittgenstein discusses it in terms of “a willing to action” and explains: “Willing is not the name of an action; and so not the name of any voluntary action either.” The “use of a wrong expression,” he says, comes from “our wanting to think of willing as an immediate non-causal bringing-about” (159e).

While the language is ambiguous and even redundant, for it is difficult not to think of Emanation as an atmosphere in itself, it is the “incipient attitude” (*GOM* 20) for Burke, and the “atmosphere” for Wittgenstein, that situates the olfactory Emanation, the

agent, as the “causal nexus” (Wittgenstein 159e-160e), that motivates the reader to sniff. In the olfactory pentad, there is a sense of disregard for the audience. The power is situated in the Emanation; smell is its own rhetoric.



## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

#### *The Rhetoric of Scents: Beyond Literacy*

In the olfactory pentad of Context, Sniff, Emanation, Odor Object, and Response, the terms are both substantial and consubstantial. The reason scent is so powerful is that it physically enters the nose and permeates the smell membrane; smell interpenetrates and even enters the human, and the human is fused with the scent. However, while the terms are consubstantial, the response to the Sniff may, like other sense impressions, not be consubstantial with the author. Consubstantiality depends on shared knowledge and experience. The language game, the play between words and meaning, the writer's struggle with sharing a version of reality with the reader, continues. The metaphorical language of smell leads us to an understanding of emotional response and triggered episodic memory, but it never provides us with referential access to the substance itself. The indexical quality of smell mires it in perpetual subjectivity. Smell and human, like human and human can only be consubstantial at best. The reader's affective response is still shrouded in ambiguity; consubstantiality, at least with the writer, is not assured. Each individual member of an audience comes with a stockpile of scent memories, memories that are episodic, and tied to a particular spectrum of emotion personal to that individual.

I doubt there is much argument to my proposition that scent is persuasive. By a simple application of Aristotle's *topoi* of argument by opposition, we can all agree that scent can be repulsive. Of course, repulsion is also persuasive; dissuasiveness is as much

a persuasive tool as persuasiveness. And yet, throughout the literate application of olfactory rhetoric, the locus of control is ultimately situated in the Emanation; the Emanation is the writer; the act and the actor merge to become the audience, the reader. This locus of control changes considerably upon the potential for the delivery of scent electronically, through television or computer or other future technological innovations. No longer will the rhetorical scent, the version of reality delivered by the rhetor be imagined by the reader, drawn from previous experience; the reader, instead, will be confronted with an odor, concocted in the manner of a fine perfume, an odor the writer has chosen to endow (or inflict) upon his audience. The “reality” becomes much more the writer’s reality than the reader’s interpretation of reality. The “reality” as odor, becomes much more “substantial,” much more real.

As a culture we make a habit of ignoring smells, hiding smells, covering up smells, especially bad, albeit natural human odors, and we generally take advantage of our capability to do so. This is in contrast to the lack of capability in fairly recent times, when life among any significant populace assured an olfactory familiarity with what Alain Corbin describes as “social emanations” ... strong-smelling excremental vapor ... putrid effluvia, products of menstruation, sweat, urine, and fecal matter ...” and even the odor of the dead as human bodies decayed in urban cemeteries (35-56).

*For a time, I was employed by an organization with a predominantly female workforce. On occasion, flowers would be delivered to the office, a memento of an anniversary or birthday, a congratulatory*

*gesture, or perhaps a token of appreciation for a great night out (or in). One of our co-workers was horribly allergic to flowers of almost any persuasion, and we generally kept these fragrant deliveries out of the common areas. Rarely were such gifts able to be kept at the office (keeping an illicit liaison a secret was, therefore, quite impossible), especially if one worked in a cubicle rather than in a room with a door. The feminine workplace created an atmosphere of competing personal fragrances – a collection of lotions, hair pomades, and perfumes – some powerful, some less so, some appealing, some not (although the appeal often seemed to correspond with one's appreciation of the wearer).*

*A new CEO with a sensitive nose and an allergy to flowers of the lily family arrived; she soon ordered all perfume-wearers to cease and desist. I found this an interesting bit of tyranny; after all, we all were subjected to the smell of coffee in the common area – and not everyone loves coffee. Even worse, nearly every afternoon a band of women got together at break and microwaved one or two bags of popcorn. I abhor the smell of microwave popcorn; I designated it to be toxic. Upon the ban on perfumes, I requested and received a moratorium on the preparation of microwave popcorn at the office, much to the annoyance of my co-workers. Nonetheless, my reference to its toxicity was proven true shortly thereafter; the manufacture of butter-flavored popcorn was halted after*

*numerous workers in Southern Illinois factories became sick from diacetyl, a synthetic butter flavoring linked to lung disease.*

The technology of my home television's "surround-sound" system includes settings that simulate, among other things, a concert hall, a sports stadium, an auditorium, or the cinema. On the television or on a computer screen we can experience a laugh track, music, graphics, and more, all as a means of enhancing or altering our experience. On Skype, an Internet telephone service, I can talk to my daughter across the ocean; I can see her and hear her, read her body language and make eye contact and decipher her facial expressions, all in real time, and even from an iPhone or other Personal Digital Assistant (PDA). All of these accoutrements bring an audience closer to the iconic reality that many network producers already claim we enjoy when we view "reality television." But again, these new technologies are driven by the senses of sight and hearing. This is where I think things are soon to get interesting. There is already a machine, the "Mini Virtual Aroma Synthesizer," used by flavorists that absorbs and analyzes the chemistry of odors emitted from objects to create or recreate aromas (Khatchadourian). A new layer of sensory reality, scent, may be just around the corner. Surround-sound technology, the web cam, the PDA, may soon include a scent synthesizer.

This movement toward scented technologies has its inception in the earliest days of silent films. These odors and scents, however, which have ranged in technologies from scented papers to scratch and sniff devices to "fan-blown airmasses" (Gilbert 147-169), seem to offer as much reality to the audience as the scripted reality of prime-time

television. The common denominator for these future technologies enabling the rhetorical communication of smell, though, is the *selected* delivery of sensuous olfactory “reality.” The title of a 1993 article in *USA Today* predicted a “sweet future for the fragrance industry,” and as one might discern from the genteelness of the term “fragrance,” it largely considered only the pleasant and “anxiety-reducing” technological introduction of appealing fragrances (*Sweet*). Future audiences would likely not be subjected to the smell of an actual environment, but to an idealized olfactory vision of the author/producer.

Gregory Ulmer talks about electracy, the evolution of language beyond literacy. Ulmer discusses how the Internet encourages the creative process and stimulates imagination and creativity and, ultimately, critical thinking. He introduces electracy, specifically the “EmerAgency” as a practice for invention (28). In this way, electracy is focused on the creator, not on the reader. Electracy becomes a new way of writing, of teaching writing.

In the evolution of language, I see electracy as circular. Despite its reliance on new technologies, electracy has more in common with the ancient oral tradition than with the literate tradition. As literacy transformed orality, it further removed the audience from the writer and expanded, even eliminated, the proximity between writer and reader; it also further compromised the shared experience, making “reality” even more subjective. As electracy transforms literacy, the past tradition once again becomes the future. Electracy is much more closely allied with orality than with literacy. With the Internet and other digital technologies, proximity re-emerges and the subjectivity of the shared experience is again diminished as “reality” is enhanced. Ulmer claims electracy enhances

the creativity and imagination of the writer. But the imagination and creativity of the reader/user may thus be diminished; he or she becomes a consumer of information instead of a processor of information.

When smell molecules are transmitted through the Internet or television or cinematography, or phone, will our ability to smell the writer/producer's "reality," like perfume, be so different than the sights and sounds of "reality" we now "enjoy?" Of course, we see things that don't appeal to us; we hear things that we don't appreciate; there is generally a means of avoidance, an ability to suspend delivery, to change the channel.

Scent is different because it is substance and atmosphere. And because it is particular and volatile, odor can linger, and it can be dangerous. In the way scent can be persuasive, in the sense of the antiseptic and pleasant smells our culture has deemed to be appropriate and comforting, scent can be invasive. There is not only a matter of displeasure, but harm. Chemical compounds present in scent act as allergens in certain individuals, as irritants for others. More than a decade ago, I was sickened with respiratory inflammation after a day of spreading hardwood mulch over my landscape beds. I can no longer pass by a freshly mulched area without experiencing a severe tightening in my chest. Every so often a walk in a botanical garden will, for me, trigger an asthma attack; I have yet to figure out the source. The odor of peanut butter can cause an anaphylactic response in allergic individuals. Will the odor molecules used to transmit "real" smells contain the same irritants and allergens? Will new formulas for "rhetorical

scents” be concocted in the way Baldini and, especially, Grenouille concocted perfumes toward specific ends? Are new odors yet to be born?

The act of taking a simple breath delivers only two percent of the air breathed to the olfactory region (Light 46). This very limited saturation of scent determines the act of sniffing. The emanation compels the act. The detection of odor in a normal, relaxed inhalation generates one of two responses: a stifle, or a sniff. Stifling is difficult – impossible – as it requires the suspension of breathing. Unlike we close our eyes or attempt to plug our ears, a normal human reaction to a bad smell is usually an attempt to leave the scene, like one attempting to get out of the rain. The alternative is to plug the nose and breathe through the mouth, an action that is difficult, if not impossible, to sustain.

Aristotle says in Book I, Section 5 of the *Rhetoric*: “Men, individually and in common, nearly all have some aim, in the attainment of which they choose or avoid certain things. This aim, briefly stated, is happiness [*eudaimonia*] and its component parts” (Aristotle). Burke suggests that Aristotle’s “common places” evolve from this purpose, “typical hopes, fears, and values” the orator uses to persuade the audience. Aristotle, says Burke, attributes action to “seven causes (*aitia*): chance, nature, compulsion, habit, reason, anger, and desire—showing how these commonplaces likewise offer resources for the orator to exploit” or use as stylistic devices (292). Much has been made about Aristotle’s assertion that aim or purpose is for good.

The elevation of the rhetoric of scent as a literate means for evoking the emotions and memory of an audience, as a means for making the reader consubstantial with the

writer, although mired in ambiguity and not guaranteed, still seems to offer hope toward a virtuous rhetorical end. But when the locus of control is wrested from the reader through invasive technologies, or through the rhetorical power of scent itself, when the producer controls the audience experience, the virtuous end is no longer assured.

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