**SAMPLE ESSAY - ACHIEVED**

**To what extent do you agree that personal weakness is to blame for what happens to the central character in a novel?**

The gifted yet abominable Jean-Baptiste Grenouille is the ambiguous protagonist in Patrick Süskind’s novel Perfume. One cannot wholly blame his personal weakness for the circumstances he ends up in, as he displays strength in perseverance and determination to fulfil his goals, be they immoral or not. Society’s vanity and cruelty are reflected in Grenouille’s character and amorality, however one could interpret him as being inhuman or even superhuman, and these points are heavily conveyed by Süskind through animalistic references and biblical allusion when alluding to Grenouille.

Although it could be argued that Grenouille’s weakness of character is responsible for the 26 murders he commits, the commitment and perseverance he displays are in fact his major strengths. As his story develops Grenouille becomes very focused on his sole ambition to create the perfect perfume, and this is demonstrated in Chapter 20 when he believes this would be impossible and falls violently ill, but upon discovering a possible method miraculously recovers in a week. This shows how important perfume is to Grenouille and gives the reader an indication of how other concepts such as morality are insignificant to him in comparison to scent. Grenouille viewed the murder of the girls as collection of scents rather than slaughter, which indicates he valued fragrance over life, and this point reinforces his mental strength to complete his life’s sole ambition. This paranormal strength is also shown when a young Grenouille develops anthrax while working at a tannery, but recovers against all odds. The immunity he develops from surviving this illness make him even more useful to the tanner, which follows the trend of people using Grenouille’s abilities for personal gain.

The way in which Grenouille is manipulated by several people throughout Purfume parallels society’s selfish and egotistic nature in 17th century France. This weakness of society is more to blame for unfortunate events in the novel than weakness of Grenouille, because it was society itself that created the amoral and monstrous character he became. Had it not been for society’s vanity Grenouille would have felt more accepted, but because of his differences he became an outcast, and took on the personality traits associated with this character. Upon contact with humans after a seven year stay in the mountains Grenouille was not greeted kindly, but because of his appearance “The first people he met … ran off screaming at the sight of him.” Such vanity and cruelty hardly quelled the hatred for other humans Grenouille had developed throughout his life, but solidified his belief that the creation of the perfect perfume justified the sacrifice of 26 virgins. The relative narrative distance from Grenouille in comparison to other minor characters further emphasises his alienation from society. Throughout his time in the mountains the narrative voice was particularly distant from Grenouille, to emphasise his alienation and choice to be alienated, most probably because of the cruelty he experienced at the hands of human company.

Throughout his novel, Perfume, Süskind uses animalistic language when referencing Grenouille, to give the reader the impression that he is subhuman in nature, and possibly naïve towards the consequences of his actions. By describing Grenouille as a “spider” Süskind may be hinting that Grenouille’s actions are purely convulsive, and have no thought regarding the effects of such acts. This description further distances Grenouille from society to exaggerate his abnormality. Biblical allusion is also frequently used throughout Perfume to convey Grenouille’s inhuman nature, but in this case acting as a superhuman Christ figure. An example of this is when Grenouille dies when he is eaten alive in the street after dousing himself with perfume, as he acts as the Eucharist, with people consuming his body in the same way that the disciples ate Jesus’ body metaphorically. This biblical allusion gives the impression that Grenouille has a higher purpose in his creation to justify his decisions, rather than just personal weakness being to blame.

To conclude, it is not Jean-Baptiste Grenouille’s personal weakness which is to blame for the circumstances he finds himself in, but the weakness of society which is reflected in him. What appear to be weaknesses on Grenouille’s behalf are in fact his strengths, his perseverance and determination to follow his ambitions even through hardships. Süskind also gives hints that Grenouille is more animal in nature, and that his actions are purely instinctive and uncontrollable rather than calculated, however through the use of biblical allusion Grenouille can act as a supernatural Christ-like figure, to make the reader believe he has a higher order of thinking, and is essentially above morals to justify his actions.

**Feedback from marker**

**Strong essay, in spite of what I wrote about your final paragraph. You develop and unpack the ideas well and then discuss – unpack cited details well.**

**Next aim – try to select info that will advance your central thesis/argument rather than for the sake of it. Some bits are “well-learned notes” rather than a purposeful argument.**

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