Born in 1949, Süskind was raised in Ambach, Germany, the eldest son of Wilhelm Emanuel Süskind, a writer and journalist best known in Germany for his collection of essays on language, Aus dem Worterbuch des Unmenschen. In 1968 Süskind entered the University of Munich to study history. He later completed a master of arts degree at the University of Aix-en-Provence, France, in 1974. While studying in the perfume-producing country of southern France, Süskind traveled and gathered material for what eventually became the novel Perfume. Meanwhile, in the fall of 1981, Süskind's play The Double Bass premiered, establishing him as one of the most popular playwrights of German theatre. Originally conceived as prose piece that was repeatedly rejected for publication, The Double Bass eventually appeared in novella form in 1984. Around the same time, Süskind began collaborating with Helmut Dietl on the hit German television
series, *Monaco Franze*. In late 1984 the newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* contracted Süskind to serially publish his first prose work, *Perfume*. Published in book form the following year, *Perfume* immediately became a German best-seller and subsequently sold over six million copies worldwide by 1991. Wary of his newfound celebrity, Süskind declined a five-thousand dollar prize for best first novel from *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1986, vowing to never again accept awards for writing. That same year, Süskind resumed his collaboration with Dietl by co-writing the script for another popular television series, *Kir Royal*, which revolved around the adventures of a titular Munich gossip columnist. In 1987 Süskind published the novella *Die Taube (The Pigeon)* which, though critically well received, failed to attain the popular success of *Perfume*. Süskind and Dietl reteamed again in 1996 to write the screenplay for the film *Rossini: oder die mörderische Frage, wer mit wem schlief*, which follows the careers of a variety of characters in the German film industry as their lives intersect in a Munich restaurant.

**Patrick Suskind’s career**

The principal focus of Süskind's works has been the motivations and behavior of the typical outsider. *The Double Bass* is a serio-comic monologue that explores a double-bass player's relationship to his instrument, illuminating the instrument's—and the player's—supporting role in the orchestra and in life. The double-bass is alternately characterized as feminine, reliable, discriminated against, and simultaneously protesting and threatening revolution. However, in the
end, both the instrument and its player allow themselves to conform and play their allotted secondary part. Set in urban Paris and the French countryside of the 1700s, *Perfume* is a study of the dynamics of scents and the sense of smell. The bizarre and ironic tale focuses on an alienated antihero, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, a despised outcast orphan who lacks any bodily odor. He roams through eighteenth-century France murdering beautiful young women in order to distill their bodily scents into a perfume that will make him the most desirable and powerful man on Earth—not to mention nominally human. In addition, *Perfume* also weaves a detailed discourse on historical perfume-making techniques into its narrative, complete with sensuous descriptions of both pleasant and repellent odors as a recurrent motif.

The novella *The Pigeon* focuses on a single day in the life of Jonathan Noel, a Parisian bank guard, who has finally attained a measure of happiness after years of personal strife. Totally satisfied with his job and the isolation he secures in his small apartment, Noel finds his serenity abruptly interrupted when a pigeon lands on his doorstep and remains there for the rest of the day. The event is so unnerving for Noel that he goes to sleep vowing to kill himself in the morning. In *Die Geschichte vom Herrn Sommer* (1991; *The Story of Mr. Sommer*), the narrator recalls his post-war childhood, framing his growing knowledge of the adult world in terms of his frequent encounters with the eccentric Herr Sommer, who spends his days frantically traversing the local environs by foot, barely saying a word to anyone but always carrying his extraordinarily long walking stick. The novella concludes with the death of the wandering misfit, which teaches the boy valuable
life lessons about responsibility, suffering, and distress that contrast with his comfortable, contented existence as a child. In the first story comprising Three Stories and a Reflection (1996), a young artist retreats from the world and eventually kills herself because critics labeled her art as superficial. The second story involves a game of chess in Luxembourg Gardens between a dashing young stranger and a perennial elderly champion. As the game progresses, the confidence and foolhardiness of the youthful novice unexpectedly yields a victory over the expertise of the seasoned veteran, stunning the audience and ultimately persuading the old man to abandon playing chess. The longest piece of the collection, “Das Vermächtnis des Maitre Mussard,” consists of the first-person deathbed writings of Mussard, a historical figure mentioned in Jean-Jacque Rousseau's Confessions (1782-89), who is suffering from the delusion that petrifaction is overtaking the world. In an addendum, an anonymous narrator tells us that Massard died of a strange form of paralysis and had to be buried in a right-angled hole. The final item of the collection, “Amnesie in litteris,” is a reflection on books, with Süskind proclaiming that he has long since forgotten every book that had once deeply stirred him.

SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

Grenouille is born to a fishwife mother in Paris in the early eighteenth century. He is delivered behind his mother's fish stall and is immediately abandoned to die. The baby, who strangely has no scent, cries out and is saved by onlookers. His mother is executed for this attempt and for her previously
successful infanticides, leaving Grenouille, a bastard, alone in the world. He is brought up in a sort of home orphanage, tended together with several other orphans by an emotionally damaged woman named Madame Gaillard. At the age of eight he is given in apprenticeship to a tanner, Grimal, where he is almost worked to death. After having survived anthrax, and thus becoming more useful in a tannery, he is treated marginally better and is given some slight freedom. Grenouille roams the city of Paris, searching for new scents, because he has the most gifted nose in the world.

On one of his olfactory jaunts around the city, Grenouille finds the most delicious scent he has ever encountered, that of a adolescent girl. He finds her scent from a long distance, and he follows it until he is very near her in the dark. She senses him, and as she turns around to see him he strangles her. He then takes the opportunity to smell her scent to his heart's content. It is the happiest he has ever been. He leaves the body and feels no remorse.

One night he delivers some goatskins to Baldini the perfumer. He begs the old man to let him work for him, after showing the master that he has a wonderful nose and a great memory for mixing perfumes. Baldini is so impressed with the scent that Grenouille creates that he buys his apprenticeship from Grimal. While working for Baldini, Grenouille makes the best scents Paris has ever smelled, and Baldini becomes very rich. Grenouille falls ill again, but he survives once Baldini tells him there are other ways to distill and preserve scents to be learned in the south of France. This news revives Grenouille, and he lives. Eventually he leaves Baldini to go learn distillation methods in Grasse.
On the way to Grasse, Grenouille makes a detour for seven years to a mountain cave, where he ponders the scents he has known in his life thus far. Descending from the mountain looking like a wild man, he is rehabilitated by a slightly mad pseudo-scientist nobleman who believes that he is a prime example of a victim of fluidum letale. After a farce of a scientific "proof" is enacted, Grenouille slips away and goes to Grasse.

There he works in a small perfumery, learning different methods of distillation, but especially cold enfleurage. He now begins to distill scents other than flowers, such as inanimate objects. He moves onto animals, finally realizing that he must kill them in order to get their scent properly. Now he has a goal; he has found a scent to match the girl he killed in Paris, another red-head here in Grasse named Laure Richis. He devises a plan to create a scent of her essence, but he needs other scents to buoy up and extend her scent, to make it truly wonderful.

Grenouille thus proceeds to kill twenty-four teenage girls in the region of Grasse, and he distills their scent by cold enfleurage. Finally he murders and obtains the scent of his prize, the best-smelling girl, Laure. He is caught for his crimes but, by using the master scent he has created, he is believed innocent by all and released. Feeling depressed and suicidal because there are no greater scents to be discovered or distilled, Grenouille goes to Paris to die. He douses himself with the master scent and is then devoured by a mob.