

WRITING PLACE: WRITING THE SENSES

Sight — specific but may be distant (the Petrarchan sonneteer - consider *Dubliners*)

Sound — invasive (consider *Dubliners*)

Smell — evocative (*Perfume*)

Taste — memory (*In Search of Lost Time*)

Touch — *Heart of Darkness*

The sense of the body in space (*Surfacing*)

EXAMPLES

- the significance of smell: Patrick Suskind, *Perfume*,
- drawing on the body: Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*
- the clothed and unclothed body: Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition Of Humphry Clinker*
- The sense of the body in space, the marker of the boundary between worlds: Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing*
- Excessive body Dylan Thomas

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SMELL:
PATRICK SUSKIND, *PERFUME*,

Here, then, on the most putrid spot in the whole kingdom, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille was born on July 17, 1738. It was one of the hottest days of the year. The heat lay leaden upon the graveyard, squeezing its putrefying vapor, a blend of rotting melon and the fetid odor of burnt animal horn, out into the nearby alleys. When the labor pains began, Grenouille's mother was standing at a fish stall in the rue aux Fers, scaling whiting that she had just gutted. The fish, ostensibly taken that very morning from the Seine, already stank so vilely that the smell masked the odor of corpses. Grenouille's mother, however, perceived the odor neither of the fish nor of the corpses, for her sense of smell had been utterly dulled, besides which her belly hurt, and the pain deadened all susceptibility to sensate impressions. She only wanted the pain to stop, she wanted to put this revolting birth behind her as quickly as possible. It was her fifth. She had effected all the others here at the fish booth, and all had been stillbirths or semi-stillbirths, for the bloody meat that emerged had not differed greatly from the fish guts that lay there already, nor had lived much longer, and by evening the whole mess had been shoveled away and carted off to the graveyard or down to the river. It would be much the same this day, and Grenouille's mother, who was still a young woman, barely in her mid-twenties, and who still was quite pretty and had almost all her teeth in her mouth and some hair on her head and-except for gout and syphilis and a touch of consumption-suffered from no serious disease, who still hoped to live a while yet, perhaps a good five or ten years, and perhaps even to marry one day and as the honorable wife of a widower with a trade or some such to bear real children . . . Grenouille's mother wished that it were already over. And when the final contractions began, she squatted down under the gutting table and there gave birth, as she had done four times before, and cut the newborn thing's umbilical cord with her butcher knife. But then, on account of the heat and the stench, which she did not perceive as such but only as an unbearable, numbing something-like a field of lilies or a small room filled with too many daffodils-she grew faint, toppled to one side, fell out from under the table into the street, and lay there, knife in hand.

DRAWING ON THE BODY:
MARCEL PROUST,
IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME

I haven't time to dilly-dally; it's nearly ten o'clock and my fire not lighted yet, and I've still got to scrape my asparagus."

"What, Françoise, more asparagus! It's a regular mania for asparagus you've got this year. You'll make our Parisians sick of it."

"No, no, Mme Octave, they like it well enough. They'll be coming back from church soon as hungry as hunters, and they won't turn their noses up at their asparagus, you'll see."

In the year in which we ate such quantities of asparagus, the kitchenmaid whose duty it was to prepare them was a poor sickly creature, some way "gone" in pregnancy when we arrived at Combray for Easter, and it was indeed surprising that Françoise allowed her to run so many errands and to do so much work, for she was beginning to find difficulty in bearing before her the mysterious basket, fuller and larger every day, whose splendid outline could be detected beneath the folds of her ample smock

what most enraptured me were the asparagus, tinged with ultramarine and pink which shaded off from their heads, finely stippled in mauve and azure, through a series of imperceptible gradations to their white feet—still stained a little by the soil of their garden-bed—with an iridescence that was not of this world. I felt that these celestial hues indicated the presence of exquisite creatures who had been pleased to assume vegetable form and who, through the disguise of their firm, comestible flesh, allowed me to discern in this radiance of earliest dawn, these hinted rainbows, these blue evening shades, that precious quality which I should recognise again when, all night long after a dinner at which I had partaken of them, they played (lyrical and coarse in their jesting like one of Shakespeare's fairies) at transforming my chamber pot into a vase of aromatic perfume.

[the kitchen maid] charged by Françoise with the task of preparing them for the table, would have them lying beside her in a basket, while she sat there with a mournful air as though all the sorrows of the world were heaped upon her; and the light crowns of azure which capped the asparagus shoots above their pink jackets were delicately outlined, star by star, as, in Giotto's fresco, are the flowers encircling the brow or patterning the basket of his Virtue at Padua.

Françoise had adopted, to minister to her unfaltering resolution to render the house uninhabitable to any other servant, a series of stratagems so cunning and so pitiless that, many years later, we discovered that if we had been fed on asparagus day after day throughout that summer, it was because their smell gave the poor kitchen-maid who had to prepare them such violent attacks of asthma that she was finally obliged to leave my aunt's service.

THE CLOTHED AND UNCLOTHED BODY:
TOBIAS SMOLLETT, *THE EXPEDITION OF*
HUMPHRY CLINKER

We had scarce entered the room at Marlborough, where we stayed to dine, when she exhibited a formal complaint against the poor fellow who had superseded the postilion. She said he was such a beggarly rascal that he had ne'er a shirt to his back, and had the impudence to shock her sight by shewing his bare posteriors, for which act of indelicacy he deserved to be set in the stocks. Mrs Winifred Jenkins confirmed the assertion, with respect to his nakedness, observing, at the same time, that he had a skin as fair as alabaster.

‘This is a heinous offence, indeed (cried my uncle) let us hear what the fellow has to say in his own vindication.’ He was accordingly summoned, and made his appearance, which was equally queer and pathetic. He seemed to be about twenty years of age, of a middling size, with bandy legs, stooping shoulders, high forehead, sandy locks, pinkish eyes, flat nose, and long chin—but his complexion was of a sickly yellow; his looks denoted famine, and the rags that he wore could hardly conceal what decency requires to be covered—My uncle, having surveyed him attentively, said, with an ironical expression in his countenance,

‘An’t you ashamed, fellow, to ride postilion without a shirt to cover your backside from the view of the ladies in the coach?’ ‘Yes, I am, an please your noble honour (answered the man) but necessity has no law, as the saying is—And more than that, it was an accident. My breeches cracked behind, after I had got into the saddle’ ‘You’re an impudent varlet (cried Mrs Tabby) for presuming to ride before persons of fashion without a shirt’—‘I am so, an please your worthy ladyship (said he) but I am a poor Wiltshire lad—I ha’n’t a shirt in the world, that I can call my own, nor a rag of clothes, and please your ladyship, but what you see—I have no friend nor relation upon earth to help me out—I have had the fever and ague these six months, and spent all I had in the world upon doctors, and to keep soul and body together; and, saving your ladyship’s good presence, I han’t broke bread these four and twenty hours.’

Mrs Bramble, turning from him, said, she had never seen such a filthy tatterdemalion, and bid him begone; observing, that he would fill the room full of vermin—Her brother darted a significant glance at her, as she retired with Liddy into another apartment, and then asked the man if he was known to any person in Marlborough?—When he answered, that the landlord of the inn had known him from his infancy; mine host was immediately called, and being interrogated on the subject, declared that the young fellow’s name was Humphry Clinker. That he had been a love begotten babe, brought up in the work-house, and put out

apprentice by the parish to a country black-smith, who died before the boy's time was out: that he had for some time worked under his ostler, as a helper and extra postilion, till he was taken ill of the ague, which disabled him from getting his bread: that, having sold or pawned every thing he had in the world for his cure and subsistence, he became so miserable and shabby, that he disgraced the stable, and was dismissed; but that he never heard any thing to the prejudice of his character in other respects. 'So that the fellow being sick and destitute (said my uncle) you turned him out to die in the streets.' 'I pay the poor's rate (replied the other) and I have no right to maintain idle vagrants, either in sickness or health; besides, such a miserable object would have brought a discredit upon my house.'

[Clinker's] natural awkwardness and the flutter of his spirits were productive of repeated blunders in the course of his attendance—At length, he spilt part of a custard upon her right shoulder; and, starting back, trod upon Chowder, who set up a dismal howl—Poor Humphry was so disconcerted at this double mistake, that he dropt the china dish, which broke into a thousand pieces; then, falling down upon his knees, remained in that posture gaping, with a most ludicrous aspect of distress. Mrs Bramble flew to the dog, and, snatching him in her arms, presented him to her brother saying, 'This is all a concerted scheme against this unfortunate animal, whose only crime is its regard for me—Here it is, kill it at once, and then you'll be satisfied.'

THE BODY IN SPACE; THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN WORLDS MARGARET ATWOOD, *SURFACING*

The trouble is all in the knob at the top of our bodies. I'm not against the body or the head either: only the neck, which creates the illusion that they are separate. The language is wrong, it shouldn't have different words for them. If the head extended directly into the shoulders like a worm's or a frog's without that constriction, that lie, they wouldn't be able to look down at their bodies and move them around as if they were robots or puppets; they would have to realize that if the head is detached from the body both of them will die.

Second-hand American was spreading over him in patches, like mange or lichen. He was infested, garbled, and I couldn't help him: it would take such time to heal, unearth him, scrape down to where he was true.

THE EXCESSIVE BODY
DYLAN THOMAS, 'A STORY'

EXCESS – CRAMMED WITH VERBS, SURREAL LISTS, STRANGE JUXTAPOSITIONS

But there he was, always, a steaming hulk of an uncle, his braces straining like hawsers, crammed behind the counter of a tiny shop at the front of the house, and breathing like a brass band; or guzzling and blustery in the kitchen over his gutsy supper, too big for everything except the great black boats of his boots. As he ate, the house grew smaller; He billowed out over the furniture, the loud checked meadow of his waistcoat littered, as though after a picnic, with cigarettes, apple peelings , cabbage stalks, birds' bones, gravy; and the forest fire of his hair crackled among the hooked hams from the ceiling.

...The shop was full of my uncle, and when Mr Benjamin Franklin, Mr Weazley, Noah Bowen, and Will Sentry came in , I thought it would burst. It was like all being together in a drawer that smelt of cheese and turps, and twist tobacco and sweet biscuits and snuff and waistcoat.

[...]

He was about sick and tired, he said, of being followed by Will Sentry.

All day long, wherever I go, he said he's after me like a collie with one eye. I got a shadow of my own, *and* a dog. I don't need no Tom, Dick or Harry pursuing me with his dirty muffler on.

Will Sentry blushed, and said : it's only oily. I got a bicycle

A man has no privacy at all , Mr Franklin went on. I tell you he sticks so close I'm afraid to go out the back in case I sit on his lap . It's a wonder to me, he said, he don't follow me into bed at night.

Wife won't let Will Sentry said.

THE UNTHINKING ACTIONS OF THE GROUP

... behind locked doors, they hymned and rumpused all the beautiful afternoon. And when a policeman entered the Druids Tap by the back door and found them all choral with beer, [...]

Where do you come from? He said in his buttoned, blue voice.

They told him.

I got an auntie there, the policeman said. And very soon he was singing Asleep in the Deep.

Off we drove again at last, the charabanc, bouncing with tenors and flagons, and came to a river that rushed along among willows.

Water! They shouted.

Porthcawl ! Sang my uncle.

Where's the donkeys? Said Mr Weazley.

And out they lurched, to paddle and whoop in the cold, white, wading water. Mr Franklin, trying to polka on the slippery stones fell in twice. Nothing is simple , he said with dignity as he oozed up the bank.

It's cold! They cried.

It's lovely!

Its smooth as a moth's nose!

It's *better* than Porthcawl !

And dusk came down warm and gentle on 30 wild, wet, pickled, splashing men without a care in the world at the end of the world in the West of Wales. And, who goes there? called Will Sentry to a wild duck flying. ... so they carried out the remaining cases, and the Primus stove, and old O. Jones himself, and took them in a field, and sat down in a circle in the field and drank and sang while old O. Jones cooked sausage and mash and the moon flew above us. And there I drifted to sleep against my uncle's mountainous waistcoat, and, as I slept, Who goes there ? called out Will Sentry to the flying moon .