

All Aboard the HMS Olfactory

An Investigation in Scent Association, Fandom Projects, and Perfume History through AMC's *The Terror*



presented by Scylla (they/she)

Contact: s.hecateisaproton.me

Highlights, or "Top Notes"

- **In A Nutshell:** What started off as a simple thought (scent?) exercise of wondering **what modern colognes and perfumes would be worn by the Franklin Expedition's personnel as depicted in *The Terror***, morphed into the **fan community-informed** beginnings of a **research project on scents' relationship with memory**, its connection to **adaptation**, and the **history of fragrance**.
- **Go for Broke:** I was afraid to open up to a larger fandom community at first, but can confidently say now that this project would not be nearly as fun/thoughtful/investigative/rewarding without that step.
- **Go for More to Come:** The project is still ongoing, and previous content posted about it online will be expanded upon, with more research peppered in!

*Please note that *The Terror's* adaptations of the Franklin Expedition's personnel will be referred to as characters, throughout this poster.

Methods

at the individual level, at first, and eventually also at the fandom/community level

- Character analysis investigating defining traits, significant plot points, and other associations through a series of guiding questions
- Establishment of connections from generated analysis to scents, and potential fragrance components
- Second round of investigation, this time focused around 19th century fragrance practices, and other aspects of the history of perfumes/colognes/etc. that may be relevant
- Selection of fragrance(s) – through a combination of previous olfactory memory, fandom community member suggestions, and general research – best matching the generated components about the character in question
- Presentation of selection(s) through various formats on social media, including written explanations loosely mapping out the selection process, alongside contextual olfactory history-related information, if relevant

Abstract: "Heart Notes" of the HMS Olfactory Project

Olfactory sensations – smells, scents – have an ability to imprint upon one's memory, with previously encountered odors possibly activating feelings of nostalgia, and other callbacks to when they were first experienced. Similarly, scents have unique associations and emotional affects attached to them, which bear significance when studied on a larger scale...even when it comes to attaching scent profiles and perfumes to fictional characters. Such an exercise, when honoring both modern conceptions of smell, and historic perfume practices appropriate to the fictionalized-but-very-real people in *The Terror*, also offers an opportunity to educate about the development of the perfume and cologne industry (all while having fun in a fandom community setting!).

The HMS Olfactory project, while having been presented in a way that is less formal, is the start of a scholarly love letter to the fusion of *The Terror's* adaptation and characterization of historic figures; fandom communities and their ability to engage in thoughtful, but fun discourse; and the wonderful opportunity to combine thoughts around adored media and archival research in one smelly little package.

Background: "Base Notes" & Context

I don't want to dwell too much on myself for the sake of giving more place and space to the project; but, since my career is in the fields of archival studies/ library and information science, I also believe that providing context is crucial!

Scent has always been a powerful sensory experience for me. When I remember things, I can't picture people, scenes, or images in my head (I believe that this is referred to as *aphantasia*), which are sometimes called inner visualizations. In the process of learning more about myself and my own sensory weirdness – something something neurodivergence, something something sensory processing disorder and migraine – I discovered that sounds, text, and scent are the three things that I often draw back to when recalling something. Combine these things about me with a background in research/archival studies/library and information science, and a rewatching of *The Terror* before the start of my first PhD semester, and boom: a weird little project was born.

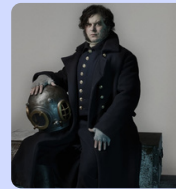


A final note about me is that I thrive in a pocket between academic/scholarly formality and a less formal, creatively communal space. To me, thought exercises, tinkering, and "play" are just as crucial as rigorously methodological research. They are ways of knowing and exploring topics that shouldn't be discounted! I hope that's reflected here in the tone and content of my work.

But, enough about me. Let's get to sniffing!

Example: Fragrance Profiling Henry Foster Collins

Second Master Collins was the first character that I decided to attach a fragrance profile to. He's a favorite of mine, and I felt more comfortable using a character that I had a stronger attachment to as my guinea pig, for this project.



These were more general thoughts when I was actively searching for a perfume or cologne for Collins, but now that I'm further along in this project, I can look back and see a few guiding questions or prompts that informed a selection:

- What characteristics stand out to me (and to others in the fandom community surrounding ***The Terror***) when considering Second Master Collins? Do these characteristics have links to any smells?
- Are there any plot elements, props, or other show-related aspects that could contribute to his fragrance profile?

Investigating these questions generated the following...

Layering Past and Present – or, a Fragrance Crash Course

Key "Notes" in 18th & 19th Century Fragrance

- Perfume and scent at this time served not only an olfactory purpose, but was closely associated with hygiene (and often used to cover up body odor). Perfumes were also a means of displaying wealth, and indicating social status.
- In 1709, Johann Maria Farina is credited for the invention of *Eau de Cologne*. Farina attempted to, according to correspondence, create a fragrance, "that [reminded him] of an Italian spring morning, of mountain daffodils and orange blossoms after rain." The fragrance quickly grew popular among royal courts, and versions of it are still available for purchase today.
- Napoleon Bonaparte was known for having a deep love of fragrance. This is often cited as a reason for an uptick in the industry. Notes that he preferred, that also were becoming popular at the time, included vetiver, neroli, and other combinations of herbs and citruses.
- Major political and cultural shifts due to the French Revolution, coupled with the eventual technological and scientific developments in the Industrial Revolution would majorly impact the fragrance world and its trends. Though, when relating back to Collins, the character at hand, he would not have seen or known about the majority of these changes, with much of this progress occurring in the latter half of the 1800s.

Characteristics

The following list is a combination of my own notes, and the input of other fan community members (more on that later):

- Confidence, assertiveness, strength, at the start of the series
- Compassion for those around him; nearly self-sacrificing, and quick to act
- Trauma-bearing, deeply affected by his own as well as the trauma endured by those around him
- Seeking an escape through work, and substances, until meeting his end
- Compelling combination of gruffness and vulnerability

Plot, and Other Show-Related Aspects

Next, some key show element related to Second Master Collins...

- The loss of Billy Orren and Collins's near-insistence to jump in after him, in "*Go for Broke*," coupled with the diving helm and his descent below the surface in the same episode
- Henry's attempts at seeking help and connection with Surgeon Stephen S. Stanley in "*A Mercy*"
- A subsequent confession and monologue to Assistant Surgeon Harry Goodsir in "*Horrible from Supper*"
- And, of course, his indulgence in wine of coca and demise in "*Terror Camp Clear*"

Guiding Questions, Part 2: Electric Boogaloo

As I started to realize the potential to incorporate historical elements with this project, more guiding questions came along:

- What scent notes were popular in men's colognes and perfumes at the time of the Franklin Expedition?
- With the answer to that question in mind, and answers to the previous questions, is there a scent that blends all of these concepts together?



But, before the big reveal... Similar to the process of weaving in historical questions and details to Collins's fragrance selection, I wanted to sneak in a (very) brief overview of some key points about fragrance in the 18th and 19th centuries, and describe the layers of a particular fragrance are typically broken down.

Defining the "Perfume Pyramid" Levels

- **Top Notes:** Also known as head notes, these are the smells experienced immediately following a perfume's application. They are often described as being fresh, light, bright, and sharp, and evaporate quickly in comparison to the other notes in a perfume's full profile. Some characterize the top notes of a perfume or a cologne as a first impression.
- **Middle Notes:** Middle, or heart notes, can be detected more clearly after the evaporation of the top notes. Typically making up the majority of the fragrance's "whole," middle notes are longer-lasting than top notes, and have been referred to by various professionals and perfume houses as a scent's main character.
- **Base Notes:** Last, but certainly not least, base notes are what remain after both the top and middle notes have evaporated. They are also called soul notes, and lean on the richer, heavier side in comparison to their middle and top companions. Base notes are designed to linger, making them a fragrance's final, lasting impression upon the skin, chemically, and the nose, scent-wise.

Second Master Collins's Fragrance. Revealed

The answer that I found to my guiding questions, when considering Henry Foster Collins, was in ***Heretic Parfum's Black Salt*** (this is Not A Sponsored Poster).

Heretic's ethos, as a fragrance house, emphasizes natural elements, and "the dirty side of clean." This, when combined with some of the Gothic elements in their perfumes (you may remember them for their ***Nosferatu***-inspired fragrance) made their fragrances a natural avenue to explore, to me, when considering a pick for Collins, and other characters seen in *The Terror*. I was fortunate enough to be gifted a few samples from *Heretic*, which allowed me to literally try and sniff out the best option.

A thorough mapping of Black Salt's layers, and the connections made across details of Henry Collins's character, are up next...



Second Master Collins's Fragrance, Explained

Head: Black Pepper, Lime, Tangerine, Eucalyptus



In the early 19th century, clean and citrusy head notes were very trendy for masculine scents. I think the top notes of tangerine and eucalyptus speak to that. There is also an added sweetness to the top note of tangerine, which could be a nod to the compassion seen in Collins's nature towards his fellow crew members, his mentioning of and interest in his own and others' family, and his capacity for showing vulnerability.

Heart: Jasmine Sambac, Water Lily, Turkish Rose, Smoked Sea Salt



Building off of the sweetness first experienced in the tangerine top note, the combination of jasmine and rose further emphasize Henry's capacity for warmth. Smoked sea salt, when combined with black pepper, nods to the Second Master's witnessing of the burning of others at Carnival, and can speak to his hardening and overall descent, as far as his character's arc and declining mental state. It also, in tandem with Water Lily, introduces an aquatic element that I felt was necessary to represent whenever possible with *The Terror* characters' fragrance profiles.

Soul: Seaweed, Labdanum, Petrichor



The soul notes of seaweed and petrichor further scaffold the water-related profile established by the presence of sea salt and water lily in the fragrance's heart notes. These also speak to, crucially, Collins's journey below the ocean's surface (where seaweed grows). Petrichor also potentially symbolizes the mark such a journey leaves behind, and how it haunts, or impacts Henry. Though this connection may not be as tidy — with petrichor being more closely associated with rain, and the smell that comes after it touches dry soil — there is certainly a link to be made between the way that Collins is forever changed by what he sees below the surface, and how rainfall alters the scent of the dirt that it comes into contact with, and is absorbed by it.

Interested in some of the other HMS Olfactory fragrance selections and analyses? Click [here](#)...

A 'Heart Note' to Fandom Community. or. Sniffin' By With A Little Help from My Friends

After putting out a write-up or two about figures/characters from *The Terror* that I felt close connections to, also feeling confident about the scent profiles that I was starting to build, I started to run into a wall. Though I had background knowledge on fragrances to fall back on, as well as the rich content of the show, picking out scents without having a strong emotional affect attached not only felt like a disservice to the characters and to the fan community that may interact, but it genuinely felt dishonest. If I was able to put an authentic combination of passion, research, and care into some characters and their respective scent profiles, shouldn't that same level of care be granted to the others?

That principle, on top of my growing wish to connect with others in the fandom (as my experience had been fairly disengaged or limited in social interaction, so far), I decided to reach out to others. This happened across multiple social media platforms and forums, through public-facing discussions as well as direct messaging, and it was incredibly generative. (And I hope that's not shocking to anyone that knows the community attached to the Franklin Expedition, and *The Terror*.)

Thanks to peers, I was able to not only develop a better understanding of characters' traits and distinctions that lent themselves to picking fragrances and fleshing out scent profiles, but I found myself appreciating characters that I hadn't given as much attention to, prior to the project. And, to boot, I found myself meaningfully connecting with others that had shared interests!

I can say with certainty that All Aboard the HMS Olfactory would not be what it is, and is becoming, without its transition from a solo endeavor to a community-informed project. The involvement of others has inspired revisions, future directions, and introduced elements that I would not have included on my own. Though scent, to me, has always been a deeply personal thing, that has only been bolstered by the inclusion of others, while being given a new dimension of meaning.

On Limitations and Future Directions

The personal nature of scents and attaching them to fictional characters (or, to be more accurate, fictionalized versions of real figures), and traits or emotions that are associated with them, may make this project seem fraught with subjectivity. That very subjectivity has made me feel a sort of "imposter syndrome" while fleshing out this project (and making this very poster!); however, I challenge this with the fact that olfactory studies and scent have an entire scholarly community attached to them, as do media and adaptation studies.

It's also important to acknowledge that there is plenty of room for "bias" or the personal to be at play, due to a simple fact: it's not feasible for me to smell, or even be aware of, every possible fragrance that could be appropriately attached to a character. What I have selected at times has been agreed upon by those that have engaged with the project, and others have been more divisive. From my perspective, I see neither one of these as fatal flaws to this project. If anything, they serve as inspiration for further scent exploration, continued fandom community discourse, and these things empower me to maintain the attention to detail put into the project thus far. (I've already committed to this bit for so long that there's no use stopping here, yeah?)

As far as next steps go, I plan on revisiting the posts and write-ups I've created of *The Terror* character scent selections to add more information on both the history of fragrances, and the analysis of why a smell is attached to a particular person. To hold more space for fandom community thoughts and input, I also intend to select multiple fragrance options per character. This will allow for the possibility of different fragrance types being represented (perfume vs. cologne, masc-branded vs. femme-branded vs. unisex-branded fragrances, etc.). Future work related to the project may also introduce more formal engagement with the fandom community. Much of the project's first leg, when it came to introducing fandom input, was facilitated through more casual messaging (which I will always value!). I'm curious to see how more formal involvement — surveys, a side-blog accepting submissions, etc. — would also inform future work.

References

"A Look at 19th Century Perfumes | Beehive."

<https://www.masshist.org/beehiveblog/2021/05/a-look-at-19th-century-perfumes/>.

Aromatics, Alpha. A Perfumer's Simplified Guide To The Fragrance Pyramid. February 7, 2023. <https://www.alphaaromatics.com/blog/fragrance-pyramid/>.

Be Layered. "Deciphering the Fragrance Pyramid: Top, Middle, and Base Notes Explained." Accessed November 20, 2025. <https://www.belayered.com/blogs/blog/deciphering-the-fragrance-pyramid-top-middle-and-base-notes-explained>.

Benson, Laurie. "How to Smell Like a Regency Era Gentleman." Laurie Benson's Cozy Drawing Room, July 3, 2016. <https://thecozydrawingroom.com/2016/07/03/how-to-smell-like-a-regency-era-gentleman/>.

Charles-Philippe. History Of Perfume & Fragrances: Men's Colognes In The 20th Century. November 19, 2019. <https://bespokeunit.com/fragrance/history/>.

équipe, La Carrément Belle. "History of Perfume: The 19th Century." Carrément Belle, December 3, 2019. <https://carrementbelle.com/blog/en/2019/12/04/history-perfume-19th-century/>.

Walsh, Colleen. "How Scent, Emotion, and Memory Are Intertwined — and Exploited." Harvard Gazette, February 27, 2020. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/02/how-scent-emotion-and-memory-are-intertwined-and-exploited/>.

Many Heart(note)felt Thanks to...

- The community of scent-crazy folks that have contributed to, expanded upon, and sharpened this project's process and output! For the sake of digital privacy and boundaries, I'm not mentioning these people (sailors) by name, but may that not detract from my gratitude and appreciation!
- My partner, for playing along any time that I asked them to sniff something and tell me what emotion/thought/character it brought to mind. (Sorry for the sneezing, too...)
- My darling friend Ian, for being an amazing cheerleader and proofreader throughout the poster-making process
- The amazing creators, cast, and crew of ***The Terror***, for providing so much food for thought re: adaptation, even if it's something as seemingly simple as smells
- You, for reading & engaging with this poster and project!