

PATRICK MCGRATH THE SMELL 1991

( taken from THE NEW GOTHIC eds. Patrick mcgrath & bradford morrow )

If one removes or ignores the "trappings" of historical Gothic, namely huge old mansions with family portraits and 'things' that go 'noisy' at night when one is trying to sleep, what do we have left for the reader ?

I approach this story from the ultra modern world where the trappings are quaint and would give charlotte bronte a thrill, but not necessarily a modern reader educated by computers, cyber space and technological advancements.

The question I ask is how much of 'gothicism' is pure psychology and psychological disturbance with characters losing their minds and reverting to psychopathy ?

This story strikes me as being pure personal dictatorship exerted by the "hero" Over his family displaying pure manic psychopathy and murderous rage to control everything in his environment.

The only thing he cannot control or punish sadistically is his own brain and emotions. The brain manufactures a real stink to go along with the psychological stink of his personality.

Only he can smell it coming from his "special" room and it begins to worsen the more he punishes and runs sadism against his own family.

He later explores the chimney in his special room and gets caught in the piping which we assume is going to "kill" him slowly and turn him from metaphorical "stink" to real rotting flesh "stink".

He was the "stink" both metaphorically and realistically. He states at the end "...while i slowly suffocated, stuffed up my chimney like a dirty cork in a bottle of rancid milk".

The story uses a metaphor to completely depict a real psychological state.