

PATRICK MCGRATH SPIDER 1990

Spider is gaunt, threadbare, unnerved by everything from his landlady to the smell of gas. He tells us his story in a storm of beautiful language that slowly reveals itself as a fiendishly layered construction of truth and illusion.

With echoes of Beckett, Poe, and Paul Bowles, *Spider* is a tale of horror and madness, storytelling and skepticism, a novel whose dizzying style lays bare the deepest layers of subconscious terror.

The main issue or underlying contention throughout the entire novel is "Who murdered Spiders' mother?" or "Was she murdered at all?" Is it all mental derangement? or is it madness from holding the truth?

I cut into my potato, and dead in the middle of the halved potato there was a . . . thick, slow discharge I recognized as blood.

A wry, mesmerizing tale of madness in a London suffused with the smells of jellied eels, leaking gas, outdoor lavatories and furry feet.

Dennis Clegg has moved into a boarding house run by the stern Mrs. Wilkinson. He writes his journal there in an attempt to piece together his fragmented memories of the past. He misses his dead mother and loathes the father that killed her. Why did his father kill his mother? What happened to the body? Why did Dennis spend twenty years in Canada and when did Spider move to the back of Dennis' mind? The story unfolds through flashbacks while Dennis takes us on a journey through the damaged mind of a child then the damaged mind of an adult.

Spider obsesses about wetness and fire and sexuality, about "this business of the thought patterns" and "the dead eyes" of his father and a woman named Hilda

. Somewhere inside Spider's internal web of illusions lurks the truth about his mother's death.

McGrath here pares away the campy, macabre elements of his previous works (*Blood and Water and Other Tales* ; *The Grotesque*) in favor of a closely observed study of madness, memory and storytelling .

Dennis Clegg, affectionately nicknamed Spider by his mother, returns to his London neighborhood after 20 years in a mental hospital and begins a journal to "create some order in the jumble of memories"--that is, to unravel the murky circumstances surrounding his mother's murder

. This crime, he contends, was committed by his father, but has been pinned on Spider.

Through lucid, poetically charged reconstructions, we are introduced to an unhappy family triad: alcoholic father, passive mother and an only child who becomes increasingly delusional.

In Spider's telling, the truth of things is elusive, but the stormy wonder of the prose--Spider describes himself as a "baggy, threadbare sort of a customer, really--my clothes have always seemed to flap about me like sailcloth, like sheets and shrouds . . . and they always look vacant, untenanted . . . as though I were nothing and the clothes were clinging merely to an idea of a man"-

-perfectly conveys the roiling vertigo of mental illness along with the clarity it often incites

. Spider's unreliability as narrator deepens McGrath's portrait of an unfathomable reality

and preserves the refinements of his philosophical skepticism.

An admixture of Poe and the comic vulnerabilities of Beckett, this tale lingers long and disturbingly in the mind.

Our narrator is a little twisted. he struggles with his early childhood experiences and does so by telling us in graphic detail what happened, what is real or imaginary is up to the reader to decide. he also has a problem with his noisy neighbors and dont get him started on his landlady. and inexplicably he also smells gas all the time.

The atmosphere of this novel is just grim. it's like constantly being in London during twilight. Night never truly falls and day never rises. Very little happens in terms of plot. Essentially forward progress occurs in about 25% of the novel. The rest is Spider ruminating

. Vivid descriptions and lush imagery grow as wonderfully as the garden Spider maintains, and this is the heart of the novel. The text is rich with descriptions and similes and metaphors

and truly makes this novel for me. Towards the end, Pat cuts loose and uses the REALLY good descriptions, and at this point, it's making me feel crazy.

Spider takes you to zones of insanity, horror and depravity, as we enter the mind of deranged ex mental patient Dennis Clegg as he tells us the disturbingly shocking story of his past . As usual McGrath draws you into his dark bleak fifties setting this time to the depressed East End of London as you trip on a roller coaster nightmare of demonic horror through the darkest of minds as fact is hard to decide from reality.

Spider is a story which reads more like sinister poetry and worth reading to get your mind lost in the world of a disturbed shizo's mind

.A mind where imps live in the attic, worms and spiders live within him.