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Love, Loss and Madness in Patrick McGrath's *Dr. Haggard's Disease* and *Julius*

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Introduction

This work will focus on a novel and a short story by English writer Patrick McGrath – one of the leading representatives of the so-called “New Gothic”: *Dr. Haggard’s Disease* (1993) and *Julius*, the latter is part of a collection of short stories called *Ghost Town: Tales of Manhattan Then and Now* published in 2005.

I have chosen the title “Love, Loss and Madness in Patrick McGrath’s *Dr. Haggard’s Disease* and *Julius*” because they are the common themes in both works. “Love” because both Edward Haggard and Julius van Horn experience an intense, passionate and overwhelming love story that changes their lives forever. “Loss” because both protagonists go through important losses: apart from the end of their affairs, Haggard’s hip is damaged forever, while Julius loses his mother as a little boy. “Madness” because both love and the loss of it – as well as the pain caused by Spike in Haggard’s case and Julius’ trauma caused by his father who beat him during his childhood following the death of his mother – lead the protagonists into two different kinds of madness.

This work will begin with a general overview on Patrick McGrath: his life, his works, his medical and Gothic influences on his writing and his geography. Born in England, he has been living in the United States since the early 1980’s and this is the same path followed by the setting of his works.

The work will then feature an analysis of the main themes of the two works: the relationship between Haggard and Fanny, and the one between Haggard and James, as well as the medical discourse and addiction in *Dr. Haggard’s Disease*; Julius and

Annie's relationship and Julius' madness in the eponymous short story; the historical setting and its relation to the main characters and events of the two stories.

I will finally compare these works, highlighting their similarities and differences: the love affairs, insanity and the father-son relationships.

Patrick McGrath

Life and Works

The eldest of four children, Patrick McGrath was born on 7th February 1950 in London. His father was the medical superintendent of Broadmoor Hospital - the largest top-security mental hospital in the UK – for twenty five years. The McGrath family moved to Broadmoor when he was five, so he grew up in this place.

McGrath attended Stonyhurst College, a Jesuit public school in Lancashire; he then graduated from the City of Birmingham College of Commerce with an honours degree in English and American Literature, awarded externally by the University of London. Later he moved first to Canada, where he worked as an orderly in a lunatic asylum in Ontario; he worked also as a bar-room musician, as a kindergarten teacher and a graduate student at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia. After he moved to the United States: he has been living in New York since 1981. He is married to the actress Maria Aitken who starred in both adaptations of *Asylum* and *The Grotesque*.

His first work, a collection of short stories called *Blood and Water and Other Tales* was published in 1988,¹ followed in 1989 by his first novel *The Grotesque*. His other works are: *Spider* (1990), *Dr Haggard's Disease* (1993), *Asylum* (1996), *Martha Peake: A Novel of the Revolution* (2000), *Port Mungo* (2004), *Ghost Town: Tales of Manhattan Then and Now* (2005), *Trauma* (2008), *Constance* (2013). He has also edited a short story collection with Bradford Morrow called *The New Gothic: A Collection of*

¹ Sue Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, p. 13.

Contemporary Gothic Fiction (1991),² featuring short stories by important contemporary Gothic writers such as Anne Rice, Angela Carter, Joyce Carol Oates, Jeanette Winterson, Ruth Rendell, and Peter Straub.

Three of McGrath's novels were made into films: *The Grotesque* in 1995 (released in the United States as *Gentlemen Don't Eat Poets*), directed by John-Paul Davidson, starring Alan Bates, Sting and Theresa Russell, with the screenplay written by McGrath himself.³ McGrath wrote also the screenplay of *Spider*, released in 2002, directed by David Cronenberg and starring Ralph Fiennes, Miranda Richardson and Gabriel Byrne. *Asylum* was also made into a film in 2005, directed by David Mackenzie, starring Natasha Richardson, Marton Csokas, Ian McKellen and Hugh Bonneville; the screenplay was written by Patrick Marber and Chrysanthy Balis, even if an unfilmed one was written by Stephen King.⁴

In addition to being a writer, McGrath has also been a visiting professor at Hunter College in New York and at the University of Texas. He has run for years a graduate fiction workshop at the New School in New York. He is also a contributor to the *New York Times Book Review*. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in the UK, and a member of PEN America and the Writers Guild of America East.

² Ibid., p. 4.

³ Ibid., p. 45-46.

⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

When Medical Insight and Gothic Meet

Patrick McGrath is considered one of the greatest contemporary Gothic writers. According to Neil McRobert, “the term neuro-Gothic has been coined largely in response to McGrath’s melding of medical insight and Gothic atmosphere”.⁵

Being the son of the medical superintendent of Broadmoor Hospital for the criminal insane has deeply influenced McGrath’s writing. As McGrath himself declared, thanks to his father he could learn much about schizophrenia when he was a young boy,⁶ and something that happened at Broadmoor was the inspiration for *Asylum*:

I’d been casting around for an idea for a while, and I remembered an incident from my childhood, something unresolved, a story without a proper ending, and lacking in any real depth of detail, remarkable not for what had happened but for what had not. I remember I entered a room where adults were talking and at once they fell silent. Whatever was going on was not for my ears. But nothing will more reliably provoke a child’s curiosity than being told, in effect, that there’s a secret, and that he’s not to be let in on it. This occurred in the Medical Superintendent’s house, a large red-brick Victorian villa which stood a hundred yards from the Main Gate of Broadmoor. And as I say, my father was the superintendent. The secret was this. An illicit relationship had been discovered between a doctor’s wife and a patient. Broadmoor doctors were forensic psychiatrists, and the patients, many of them, criminal offenders who’d been found not guilty by reason of insanity. I believe the patient in question lost his parole privileges as a result of the incident, meaning he was confined within the walls of the hospital and could no longer work on the grounds. Later the doctor’s wife left the hospital with her husband and family, one of whom was a boy my own age and a particular friend of mine. This fragile and certainly flawed scrap of narrative was all I had, but it gave me the germ of *Asylum*. I would set it in 1959, when it happened. It was a time I remembered as clearly as I remember anything of my childhood. I had not yet been sent away to boarding school, and the long summers in the fields and forest around the hospital were the best of times in this small boy’s secure and untroubled life

⁵ Neil McRobert, “Patrick McGrath Interviewed by Neil McRobert. University of Stirling: The Gothic Imagination, 13 July 2011, <<http://www.gothic.stir.ac.uk/blog/patrick-mcgrath-interviewed-by-neil-mc robert/>> [accessed 5 July 2016].

⁶ Patrick McGrath, *Writing Madness*. Leggendo Metropolitano, 2015, <<http://www.leggendometropolitano.it/pdf/testi/mcgrath/writingmadness8.pdf>> [accessed 5 July 2016], p. 1.

so far. I knew the look of Broadmoor as it then was, the feel of the place and its people, and I was confident I could bring it to life on the page.⁷

McGrath also declared that his own personality as a kid was the inspiration for Charlie Raphael, the ten-year-old son of Stella and Max in *Asylum*:

Stella and Max have a child, Charlie, aged ten, and him I knew very well indeed, for he was me. His parents were not mine, but in his fascination with toads, and watery places, and football, and the parole patients who came out every day to look after the grounds of the estate, and whom he treated as benign uncles, this was me. A plump, toothy, precocious child, he was in love with his mother but eager for conversation with his father about all manner of things. I was soon plotting his downfall.⁸

After his graduation, McGrath's father found him a job in lunatic asylum in northern Ontario, Canada, where he worked as an orderly.

In McGrath's novels and short stories, many characters are doctors, psychiatrists and characters with unstable psychology. According to Zlosnik, "the three figures of the doctor, the artist and the mentally disturbed individual perform a complex textual dance, in which two of them are sometimes merged in one body and they are inflicted by historical circumstance"⁹ - while many novels are set in asylums. Speaking of the language of McGrath's works, Christine Ferguson wrote that:

A tainted mind, in other words, manifests itself through tainted diction and form. If 'proper' language is indeed the shibboleth of sanity, then the voices which McGrath creates for his protagonists, with the possible exception of Dennis Clegg, mark them as healthy and rational men. Their diseases histories are not told through stream of consciousness cant nor eclectic

⁷ McGrath, *Writing Madness*, 2015, p.13.

⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

⁹ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, p. 37.

vernacular, but through elegant phrases, precise grammar and casual plot progression.¹⁰

Speaking of settings, McGrath told Neil McRobert in 2011 that “The most claustrophobic of settings is of course one’s own mind” and that “minds are what I like to talk about”.¹¹

Patrick McGrath is considered one of the most important contemporary Gothic writers (Philip Hensher, in a review of *Martha Peake* for the *Observer*, claimed that “McGrath may be the best Gothic novelist ever”¹²). Despite this, McGrath told in an interview with Neil McRobert that:

Being called a Gothic writer gives me what Sue Zlosnik calls reception anxiety. That said, at least two of my novels are deliberately Gothic: *The Grotesque* and *Martha Peake*. The rest contain imagery and tropes that I suppose do belong under the large Gothic umbrella but don’t seem to me to be dedicated to what I regard as the central Gothic idea. But I’m probably not a good person to ask about this.¹³

McGrath’s early readings were largely Gothic and supernatural fictions, as well as ghostly tales; works of writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Sheridan Le Fanu, Ambrose Bierce, M.R. James and Algernon Blackwood. Among these writers, McGrath himself declared that Poe aroused in him “an enduring taste for Gothic literature”¹⁴. McGrath’s favourite writers are Oscar Wilde, Evelyn Waugh, Charles Brockden Brown and Robert Louis Stevenson; the latter is one of his greatest influences, along with other writers like

¹⁰ Christine Ferguson, *Dr McGrath’s disease: radical pathology in Patrick McGrath’s neo-Gothicism*, in *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography*, ed. by Glennis Byron and David Punter, New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 236.

¹¹ McRobert, *op. cit.*.

¹² Philip Hensher, ‘Don’t read this when you’re alone...’, *The Observer*, 20 August 2000, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/aug/20/fiction.reviews3>> [accessed 2 July 2016].

¹³ McRobert, *Op. Cit.*.

¹⁴ McGrath, *Writing Madness*, 2015, p. 2.

Herman Melville, Joseph Conrad (*Heart of Darkness* is one of the books that gave him greatest pleasure), Emily Brontë, Bram Stoker, John Hawkes (especially his short novel *Travesty*, that made him a writer), F. Scott Fitzgerald and Edgar Allan Poe.¹⁵ Speaking of the latter, McGrath defined him “a key figure in the development of Gothic”.¹⁶ Furthermore, he added that

I later came to the conclusion that with Poe a pivotal moment in the history of the Gothic occurred, when the genre that had been identified largely with supernatural phenomena turned toward psychological dysfunction, and discovered in the disintegrating mind a vein of black gold. For with Poe it became the special talent and function of Gothic fiction to expose the workings of the unconscious mind. A world of nightmares and phantoms, of sublimation, regression and displacement, of doppelgängers and other monsters of the Id was extensively mapped for more than a century before Freud organized the material in a theoretical format, and wrote madness from within a scientific paradigm. Psychoanalytic theory and the case studies underpinning it are the continuation by other means of the Gothic novel.¹⁷

Speaking of characters in his novels and short stories, he said that:

I’m interested in the various mental states through which we access reality, but in such a way that we get it wrong. Dreams, drink, passion, madness – all tend to obscure the real state of things. I generally like to take characters who, at the beginning of a story, are securely occupying their own reality, and who then by way of bad habits, bad circumstances, bad luck and so on, begin to lose touch and make erroneous judgments. They find themselves drifting away from the centre, off towards the periphery. While I was researching *Asylum*, I read that people who go into psychiatry do so out of a fear of going mad.¹⁸

¹⁵ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, pp. 3, 5, 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁷ Patrick McGrath, *Writing Madness*, Festival degli Scrittori - Premio Gregor von Rezzori, 12 June 2013, <<http://www.premiovonrezzori.org/patrick-mcgrath-writing-madness/>> [accessed 5 July 2016].

¹⁸ Patrick McGrath and Louise Welsh, ‘We all have dreaming minds, and we are all capable of being terrified’, *Tate Etc.*, 1 January 2006, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/we-all-have-dreaming-minds-and-we-are-all-capable-being-terrified>> [accessed 5 July 2016].

Between the old and the new World: Patrick McGrath's Geography

Born and raised in England, Patrick McGrath has been living overseas for many years. The setting of his works has followed the same route. He left England in 1971. Before moving to New York in 1981, he worked in a lunatic asylum in Ontario; he took a five-month hippy trip in a Volkswagen van from Ontario to San Francisco; he became a teacher in Vancouver and, after five years in this city, he moved for a while to an archipelago off the north-west coast of British Columbia called Queen Charlotte Islands. Then he moved to New York, where he still lives today.

As in real life, the setting of McGrath's works has followed the same route too, from England to the United States. His first four novels (*The Grotesque*, *Spider*, *Dr Haggard's Disease* and *Asylum*, all written when he was already living in New York) are all set in England during the middle decades of the twentieth century, from the 1930's to the late 1950's.¹⁹ For his impression of mid-century England, McGrath told Neil McRobert that some films inspired him:

The films of the 50's and 60's... black-and-white films in which an orderly British (or Viennese or American) society is disturbed by evil of one sort or another. I think of *The Third Man*, *Peeping Tom*, *The Blue Lamp*, *10 Rillington Place*, *The Servant*. Directors like Joseph Losey, Tony Richardson, Carol Reed, Powell and Pressburger, Hitchcock of course, actors like Dirk Bogarde, Alan Bates, Humphrey Bogart. The stories of Somerset Maugham: *Of Human Bondage*, *The Letter*, and Graham Greene, *The Fallen Idol*, *The Ministry of Fear*. Harold Pinter, *Accident*... Film noir, of course... Hard to say what's so attractive. Well-made stories, lack of sentimentality, excellent character actors, superb writing and direction, darkly sardonic tone, and most of them films that I first saw as a boy in England when I was most susceptible to their charms.²⁰

¹⁹ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, pp. 14, 16.

²⁰ McRobert, *op. cit.*

Starting from *Martha Peake*, his following novels and short stories are all set in the United States, mainly in New York - *Port Mungo* is set also in the eponymous fictional Central American town, inspired by Belize City²¹ - and during various periods (for example, *Trauma* is set in America during the 1980's, *Martha Peake* during the American Revolution and *Ground Zero* – one of the short stories included in *Ghost Town* – is set in 2001, shortly after the September 11 attacks).²² Asked by Ryan D. Matthews in a 2013 interview for *The Huffington Post* about having found valuable as a writer being an expatriate, McGrath underlined both advantages and disadvantages of this, as well as telling why he tends to set his stories in the past:

One of the disadvantages is you never actually really know what it's like to be a native. I can try and try, but I'll never know what it's like to grow up in America. So that is not available to me. I'll always be in some sense an *amateur* American. That's what I am, an amateur American.

But on the other hand it's liberating. I've found that I feel more free to tell stories about America—and Americans—because I'm somewhat marginalized by being from elsewhere. I think if I was, let's say, living in London, and writing stories about London, and from London—and I was born in London—I feel that I'd be inhibited in some way. It would all be a little bit too close at hand, too suffocating.

I think I tend to set my stories in the past for the same sorts of reasons. I don't want to be held accountable for some picture of life as we know it in the here and now, I like to get that bit of distance so I can work my canvas without somehow having to account for the realities of the world in the 21st-century.²³

²¹ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, p. 100.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 87, 117, 125.

²³ Ryan D. Matthews, 'Novelist Patrick McGrath on Writing, Setting and Psychology', *The Huffington Post*, 10 June 2013, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ryan-d-matthews/post_4942_b_3412948.html> [accessed 11 July 2016].

Dr. Haggard's Disease

An overview of the novel

Dr. Haggard's Disease is Patrick McGrath's third novel, after *The Grotesque* (1989) and *Spider* (1990). It was published in 1993 and it was translated into various languages, including Italian as *Il Morbo di Haggard* (1999). Surprisingly, it is the only work by McGrath – along with *Ghost Town* – that has not been translated into French. This novel explores the relationship between passion, delirium and madness,²⁴ and is set between 1937 and 1940 in London and in the fictional coastal town of Griffin Head. The present time of the novel is set in 1940 during the Battle of Britain on the south coast of England, but the story is narrated primarily through flashbacks. Speaking of the themes of the novel, Sue Zlosnik claims that: “Although at the level of plot it concerns the aftermath of a doomed love affair, its dominant theme is transgression at several levels: adultery; betrayal; violence; drug addiction.”²⁵ According to Adam Lively, *Dr. Haggard's Disease* “contains some of the principal elements of the Gothic imagination: bodily decay, drug addiction, obsessional but unstable sexuality and (as is suggested in the closing pages) mental illness.”²⁶ Zlosnik also writes that *Dr. Haggard's Disease*, along with *Spider* and *Asylum*, “represents the ‘New Gothic’, according to McGrath and Morrow’s own definition”;²⁷ this is what the two authors wrote in the introduction of their edited collection called ‘*The New Gothic*’:

That the gothicists of the past created an artistic vision intended to reveal bleaker facets of the human soul is a given; that such an impulse is very much alive in contemporary British and American fiction is the assumption

²⁴ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, p. 68.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁶ Adam Lively, ‘Blooming Symbols’, *London Review of Books*, 27 May 1993, p. 20.

²⁷ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, p. 51.

that underpins this anthology of stories and excerpts from novels. Though no longer shackled to the conventional props of the genre, the themes that fuel these pieces—horror, madness, monstrosity, death, disease, terror, evil, and weird sexuality—strongly manifest the gothic sensibility. Were Poe to come upon this collection he might perhaps be bewildered by the various accents and settings of the work, but he would certainly recognize and applaud the spirit animating them. This is the new gothic.²⁸

This novel, and the creation of convincing representations of shades of madness, has been inspired by the tales of McGrath's father, who was a pioneering Medical Superintendent at Broadmoor Hospital,²⁹ the largest top-security institution for mentally ill offenders in Britain – he worked there for more than 25 years, starting in 1957³⁰ – as well as by the author's "own experiences of mental health care in Canada".³¹ In the acknowledgement of this novel, McGrath writes that "For the immense help he's given me – medical, psychiatric, and literary – not only on this book but on *Spider* as well – I'd like to express my love and gratitude to my father, Dr. Patrick McGrath."³²

It seems that James – the young Spitfire pilot – was originally supposed to be the major character of Dr. Haggard's Disease; he would have been an "androgynous angel figure"³³ named Dorian Vaughan – this was supposed also to be the title of the novel – a reference to Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, one of the greatest literary icons of androgyny.

²⁸ *The New Gothic: A Collection of Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Bradford Morrow and Patrick McGrath, London: Picador, 1992, p. xiv.

²⁹ Jasper Rees, "A writer's life: Patrick McGrath", *The Telegraph*, 2 May 2004, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3617055/A-writers-life-Patrick-McGrath.html>> [accessed 11 July 2016].

³⁰ Barry Didcock, "Patrick McGrath revisits darkness, Broadmoor and the "less than wholesome" Jimmy Savile", *Herald Scotland*, 12 May 2013, <http://www.heraldscotland.com/arts_ents/13104313.Patrick_McGrath_revisits_darkness__Broadmoor_and_the__less_than_wholesome__Jimmy_Savile/> [accessed 17 November 2016].

³¹ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, 49.

³² Patrick McGrath, *Dr. Haggard's Disease*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, acknowledgement.

³³ Ineke Bockting, *The Ecstasy of the Abyss: The Void Beyond Dr. Haggard's Disease*, in *Patrick McGrath: Directions and Transgressions*, ed. by Jocelyn Dupont, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, p. 55.

Plot

Dr. Haggard's Disease is set in England in the late 1930's and in the early 1940's. The main character of the novel is Edward Haggard, who is also the narrator; he is a doctor and he addresses his story through flashbacks to James, a young Royal Air Force pilot who is the son of Fanny Vaughan, his former lover. Edward sees Fanny for the first time at a funeral, where he is struck by her. They meet at a dinner at the Cushings house, then he falls deeply in love with her. Vincent Cushing is Haggard's chief at St. Basil Hospital in London, where Haggard has just been employed as a surgeon and where Ratcliff Vaughan – Fanny's husband – works as a pathologist. After their first meeting at the Cushings' dinner, Edward and Fanny embark on an intense relationship. Haggard is deeply in love with her, and they meet in various places, including the St. Basil's. Haggard's love for Fanny affects also the doctor's work performance, because sometimes he is absent-minded during surgeries. He also feels guilty because, in order to keep his affair with Fanny going on, he tells his colleagues that his uncle Harry Bird, who lives in Griffin Head, is sick when he is not, but then happens so. After Fanny visits Haggard at St. Basil's during the nightshift, she is seen by Miggs, Ratcliff's assistant. He discovers the affair, and Ratcliff punishes Haggard by hitting him: he falls down the stairs of the hospital and breaks his hip. Following his hip surgery – made by Cushing, Haggard leaves London and St. Basil's and he moves to Elgin, a mansion on the cliffs in the coastal town of Griffin Head previously owned by his uncle. In Griffin Head he replaces Peter Martin, a retiring doctor; this is a downgrade for him, because from a promising surgeon he works now in general medicine in a town inhabited mainly by elderly people. After the hip surgery, Haggard keeps suffering from physical pain because of Spike – this is how he calls his hip injury

– which results in morphine addiction in order to alleviate his pain. Moreover, even if he left him, he is still in love with Fanny, and her rejection of him – despite Haggard tried to convince her to leave Ratcliff and to come back to him - contributes to his demise too: he is so obsessed by her that he haunts Elgin with her memory. In the meantime - just when Edward learns about Fanny’s death of a kidney disease – the Second World War breaks out; James Vaughan, Fanny and Ratcliff’s son who is a Royal Air Force aviator, visits Haggard at Elgin, and they become good friends. Haggard is struck by the fact that James resembles a lot his mother, and he starts fantasizing over him; sometimes he thinks that his mother’s spirit has entered James’ body. Moreover, the doctor diagnoses to James a genitalia dysfunction, and he wants to call it doctor Haggard’s disease; but the young aviator keeps telling the doctor that he is fine. The novel ends in 1940 during the Battle of Britain; James’ plane crashes and explodes in flames. Haggard gives him a deadly injection on his burnt body, because he cannot stand see him in those conditions: during those moments, Haggard feels Fanny’s spirit entering James’ body, so Haggard searches for James’ tongue in order to re-join spiritually with the love of his life.

Characters

Edward Haggard

Edward Haggard is the main character and the narrator of the novel. At the beginning he is a young and promising doctor who has just been employed as an aspiring surgeon by St. Basil’s, an hospital in London. Speaking of his profession, he

says that he was supposed to follow his father's footsteps, who was the rector of a small parish in Dorset, but he chose to go into medicine instead:

My father had been the rector of a small parish in Dorset, and I was expected to follow him into the church. I had all the makings of a certain sort of priest – intensely solitary, much preoccupied with metaphysics, and passionately fond of poetry – and would undoubtedly, had I so chosen, one day have ministered to a flock on my own. But it was in order to compensate for what I saw as the rather impractical tendencies in my character, and do some *real* good in the world, that I'd decided to go into medicine instead. After Oxford I'd taken the MBBS and then appointed to the staff of St. Basil's while I worked for my MD. (*HD*, 26-27)

He falls deeply in love with Fanny, the wife of Ratcliff Vaughan, the senior pathologist of St. Basil's. Haggard sees her for the first time at a funeral in 1937: he arrives late, she smiles at him and he is struck by her. They meet for the first time at a dinner at the Cushings' house, where he falls in love with her: Haggard says that on that night she "took my heart by storm – took it without a struggle" (*HD*, 31). After dinner, Haggard reflects on his feelings for Fanny:

When was it that I had become such a fool of love? It had been at that funeral, the seed had been sown that day, that's when it had started to grow, down in the dark soil of my heart, and me all unsuspecting until it burst forth, sturdy and vigorous in its maturity – oh *God!* (*HD*, 71)

Haggard and Fanny start a love affair; Haggard is so crazy for Fanny that this affects his job, and sometimes he is absent-minded because he is thinking about her. Once he is so distracted because of his love affair that during a surgery he sews the end of his rubber glove into the wound of a patient:

It's a delicate thing, opening a man's belly. You draw the knife across the skin, the flesh parts, you clamp the severed vessels, sponge the blood, suture and tie, cut through the yellow fat beneath, then the fascia, clamp, sponge, suture, tie, then the peritoneum, and so on. But I went in with such force I

cut right through the fascia with the first stroke of the knife, opening numerous blood vessels, and then, while tying them off, somehow sewed the end of my rubber glove into the wound. I was rather shaken by this, and botched the rest of the operation. The patient recovered, eventually, but he had a complicated convalescence and became enormously distended, with the result that the nursing staff referred to him as “Dr. Haggard’s pregnant man.” (*HD*, 108)

Vincent Cushing is irritated about his professional negligence, so he threatens to sack Haggard. Edward is not happy after what happened, but he is so in love with Fanny that in his heart he does not care about this:

I seemed on the point of throwing away a career in surgery for love of your mother. This must not happen, I told myself, though the truth was, in my heart I didn’t care. I didn’t care. All professional ambition had paled and withered in the shadow of this grand passion, and I’d have happily exchanged a lifetime of surgical work for twenty-four uninterrupted alone hours with her. (*HD*, 110)

When Ratcliff discovers the affair, he throws Haggard down the stairs of St. Basil’s to punish him, breaking his hip. Haggard names Spike the pin inserted to keep the hip together; it causes a lot of pain to him, leading Haggard into a morphine addiction in order to alleviate the pain.

After being operated, he leaves St. Basil’s and London and he moves to Griffin Head, a coastal town inhabited mainly by elderly people, including his uncle Harry Bird, who leaves him his house after his death. Here he replaces Peter Martin as general practice, after the latter’s retirement. Before moving to Griffin Head, Haggard thinks about his possibilities now that he has thrown away a career in surgery. He thinks about general practice, even if it is a downgrade from his previous job:

A career in surgery was no longer a possibility, so I had to think about general medicine. Positions in London were few, but I could easily enough

find work as an assistant in some country practice and make five hundred pounds a year. And given all that had happened, given my state of mind, the idea of getting out of London actually roused, for the first time in weeks, a small faint flicker of interest – until, that is, the reality of country practice came home to me. Was this really the best I could hope for? The promising young doctor who'd won a coveted place at one of the great London teaching hospitals – was I now to become an overworked, underpaid assistant to some country doctor? It rather looked as though I was. (*HD*, 139)

When he moves to Griffin Head, he lives in Elgin; this is an old Edwardian mansion that lies on a cliff by the sea and that he buys in the fall of 1938, when the Munich crisis is at its height and some months after the end of the affair:

I stood at the end of the drive I remember, the first time I saw it, and gazed in dawning wonder at its steeply gabled roofs, its tall chimneys, its many windows, each one high and narrow, with lancet arches and slender leaded frames. The stone was streaked with salt, and what paint there was everywhere flaking off to reveal weathered, cracking woodwork beneath. Out in front the grass was knee-high, the hedge untrimmed, and the flower beds overrun with weeds, such that an air of neglect, of decrepitude, almost, clung to the place, but none of that could for one moment detract from the effect it had on me: there was something monumental about the house, something massy, but at the same time it *soared* – the arches, the gables, the steep slate roof and slender chimneys – they drew the eye upward and in doing so aroused a *blaze* of ideas and feelings in me. Oh, it was a romantic house, a profoundly romantic house, it didn't suggest repose, this house, no, it suggested the restlessness of a wild and changeful heart; and its power was immeasurably enhanced by its siting. For Elgin stood close to the edge of a cliff that dropped a sheer hundred feet to black rocks and a churning sea. (*HD*, 17)

Haggard says that he has made of Elgin a “museum of the nostalgia” (*HD*, 17) for Fanny, and he says that “Her spirit often seemed more in possession of the house than I was, as though I had haunted it with her memory.” (*HD*, 17). During the second winter in Elgin, Haggard describes how the mansion is infested by the memory of Fanny:

Now I truly haunted Elgin with her memory, it served to keep her spirit alive. Late at night I would hear her voice in the top-floor corner room, and

despite the frigid chill that hung in the air, and turned my breath to smoke, I'd be aware, as I came hobbling along the passage, of vague ineffable wisps of her fragrance, and when I opened the door and went in I'd be certain she'd been there. These delicate impressions of her presence enabled me to sustain her, though it was only possible in the long watches of the night, when no other human presence interfered. (*HD*, 160)

And Elgin, on two occasions, plays tricks on Haggard's mind as if it was a living creature. Once it seems that drawings appear on the walls:

I remember once, it must have been midnight or later, and the wind was howling, turning from the window back into the room, that dimly lit room of books and thought, and my eye being caught by some small movement in the *wall*, so it seemed. Those old upstairs rooms hadn't been redecorated for eighty years, so the plasterwork was everywhere overspread with a vermiculate network of fine cracks that pleased me in some curious way and that I'd always taken as the random effect of natural aging. Until, that is, the night I caught that movement out of the corner of my eye and bending to inspect the wall discovered to my utter astonishment that the lines of the cracking formed distinct patterns, distinct *figures* – rich and various clusters of organic motifs, I mean, leaves and tendrils of the vine, in extended scrolls of spirals, and here and there bizarre figures, festoons of fruit, skulls, masks, snakes, and the longer I gazed into the wall, following the intertwining, convoluted lines of the pattern, and identifying newer and stranger grotesques half-hidden in its frenzied sweeps and swirls, the greater became my feeling of unease and excitement – the cracks in the plaster were no mere accidents of time, but *the product of conscious design*. This riot of elaborate organicism, these arches and lobes – they echoed, I realized, the detailing of Elgin's façade, they too expressed the wildness, the changefulness, the enduring vitality of the house-
Though in the morning, when I returned to the study, all I could see was random cracking. (*HD*, 35-36)

While, on another night, it seems to Haggard that Elgin has a beating heart. He later discovers that it is the generator who does not work properly:

Another night I was in the study late at night when I felt, from somewhere deep in Elgin's bowels, so it seemed, a massive, muffled *thump!* I was at my desk, writing. My head came up. Though it was muffled, there'd been enormous power in that thump – what was it? But before I could make any sense of it there came another one – and another – and another and another and another – and I sat there frozen at my desk, pen poised, in a state of total

alarm. With every thump! the whole house seemed to shudder, the lights flickered, and for half a minute, maybe longer, it persisted, in a steady, measured rhythm, and I was struck by this single thought, that I was listening to the beating of a heart. But a monster heart – a huge monster heart, pumping and thumping through the shuddering, flickering structure in which I sat. Then it stopped. As suddenly as it started, it stopped. A silence – and a sound, which I can only describe as a *sigh* – as though the house, or some principle of animation (and respiration) within it, was releasing breath. It was a long drawn-out sigh, and it seemed to have an almost sibilant accent to it, a sort of hiss, as it expired. But what a shock it gave me! I experienced terror, I admit it, there in that shadowy upstairs room, there was a rapid increase in heart rate, a dilation of blood vessels, I started to sweat and became aware of the contraction of my sphincter. I thought the house was falling down! I thought the entire cliff on which Elgin stood was crumbling, that the sea, which had been eating into it for so many years – so many centuries! – had, in hollowing it out, created such a tortuous, complicated burrow of caves and sea chambers and passages down there finally the very foundations had grown too weak to support the mass above, and the whole lot, Elgin included, was falling into the sea! But eventually all was still, and I wiped my clammy face and hands with a handkerchief and asked myself, what was it? A moment's thought, and I realized: the generator. Peter Martin had said something about the generator, but at the time I'd paid no attention, infatuated as I was with Elgin itself. (*HD*, 36-37)

This topic of the house that mirrors the personality of its owner reminds of Edgar Allan Poe – one of McGrath's biggest influences. According to McGrath himself, Poe was the one who made the Gothic shift away from “an emphasis on props and sets – dark forests and lugubrious caverns, skeletons and thunderstorms – and towards a particular sensibility characterized by transgressive tendencies and extreme distortions of perception and affect.”³⁴ This is present in Poe's short story *House of Usher*, where the writer “recognized how the furniture of the genre could be spliced together with the sensibility”;³⁵ this is what McGrath writes about this short story, that mirrors Haggard's situation in relation to Elgin:

³⁴ Patrick McGrath, “Afterword: The New Gothic”. *Conjunctions* 14, 1990. <<http://www.conjunctions.com/archives/c14-pm.htm>> [accessed 6 July 2016].

³⁵ *The New Gothic: A Collection of Contemporary Gothic Fiction*, cit. p. xi.

Roderick Usher's mind is as much a reflection of his house as his house is a reflection of his mind; when the one fissures, the other fissures also--"and the deep and dank tarn closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the House of Usher." In such a tale climate, landscape, architecture, genealogy and psychology seem to bleed into one another until it's impossible to distinguish a figure from its metaphors, and a sort of coalescence of elements results even as a movement of regression is occurring, a collapsing back into a state of primal unity--a death, in other words.³⁶

When he is living in Elgin, Fanny and Ratcliff's son James, a World War II Spitfire pilot comes to see him, and they become good friends. Haggard is struck by the strong resemblance of James to his mother. He fantasises about him and everything that reminds him of Fanny, and he even thinks that sometimes James' body is possessed by Fanny's spirit. After an argument over Fanny's death and after Haggard believes that James has a genitalia dysfunction, their friendship gets colder; in spite of this, Haggard keeps worrying about him, especially after the beginning of the Battle of Britain.

Haggard is a doctor who often shows compassion towards his patients. One of them is Eddie Bell, a young man who is dying of tuberculosis. This guy asks Haggard to promise him that after his death there will not be post-mortem, and Haggard promises it; but Cushing and Ratcliff want to look at his lungs, so this promise is not kept despite Haggard's attempt. Speaking of his case, he says: "I've seen a good deal of death, but there are always those who shatter your detachment and wring your heart and make you pray for a miracle" (*HD*, 47). He also adds: "it seemed the cruelest thing that he should be taken so young" (*HD*, 48), since "Eddie Bell was a clean, decent lad with a wife and a baby" (*HD*, 47-48). He often criticises Ratcliff Vaughan and Vincent Cushing because they are hard men. His attitude is praised by Fanny; once she tells him that he is "so

³⁶ Patrick McGrath, "Afterword: The New Gothic".

good with people” (*HD*, 81), while on another occasion she is marvelled by the fact that she hears “a doctor speak about medicine as a moral activity.” (*HD*, 51).

Haggard is the narrator of the novel, and he addresses the story to “you”: despite at first it seems that “you” refers to the reader, later it is understood that “you” is James, who lies dead in Haggard’s arms while he narrates the story. Haggard is considered an unreliable narrator that is, according to Sue Chaplin, “one who either does not know, or who chooses not to relate all of the facts pertaining to their circumstances”,³⁷ furthermore, she adds that “The use of the unreliable narrator in gothic fiction is frequently a device through which the emotional instability of the protagonist is conveyed, and such instability, often bordering on madness or paranoia) is frequently tied to the common Gothic motif of persecution and punishment”.³⁸ In an interview, McGrath comments about his predilection for the use of first-person narration:

I use first-person narration because I have always been fascinated by the question as to who is telling it, how they are altering, modifying, or twisting it, what they are leaving out of the story, what has been invented. In other words I am sceptical about the possibility of “truth” and wish to reflect in my work the idea that any account of reality is at root unreliable.³⁹

Magali Falco wrote that “McGrath justifies his narrative choice by arguing that we are all unreliable narrators inasmuch as we make shift and distortions in our reporting of events. His characters are just more extreme, more monstrous, and consequently their vision of life is more grotesque: it is the imagine of a distorted reality projecting the obsessions of disturbed minds. Imagination overlaps with reality and is

³⁷ Sue Chaplin, *Gothic Literature*, Harlow: Longman; London: York Press, 2011, p. 196.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

³⁹ ‘SPECIALE MCGRATH’ in *ARPnet*, <<http://www.arpnet.it/cs/speciali/mcgrath.pdf>> [accessed 26 October 2016].

turned in on itself.”⁴⁰ Indeed all McGrath’s narrators “speak in the first person as they document their attempts to establish an objective, ordered version of truth in the face of ever-increasing confusion”.⁴¹ According to McGrath himself, “In *Haggard*, *Spider* and *The Grotesque*, we are trapped within the mind of one narrator, beginning from one point where we accept the narrator and feel safe in his hands, and slowly we begin to see that the narrator is unreliable”.⁴² Haggard is an unreliable narrator because of his state of mind after the end of the affair with Fanny, that leaves him broken and still madly in love with her, and because of his addiction to morphine to alleviate the pain caused by Spike. One of the evidences of the fact that he is unreliable is when Haggard discovers a genital dysfunction to James, and James is convinced that he has nothing. Once Haggard reflects on this dysfunction, and he is not sure about what it is really:

Was it just a rare and curious medical phenomenon, what started happening to your body, entirely explicable in scientific terms? Or something much stranger, more glorious? Even now I waver. Even now I cannot be sure. What I believe in the morning I doubt at night. What I’m sure of at night is fantastic in the morning. (*HD*, 67)

As the Battle of Britain is approaching, Haggard is worried about James’ health, because the young aviator’s welfare is his own responsibility. James keeps telling Haggard that the doctor is lying and that he has nothing, and that he no longer does want to talk about this issue:

“Now please excuse me, I have an aeroplane to see to.”
“But James,” I cried, “you’re sick!”
You turned to me. “Not me, doctor,” you said shortly. “You.” (*HD*, 171)

⁴⁰ Magali Falco, “The New Gothic in Patrick McGrath: An Uncanny Encounter”, *The Western Journal of Graduate Research* 2001, Vol. 10 (1), p. 20.

⁴¹ Ferguson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 234.

⁴² Falco, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 19-20.

Haggard describes himself as “not a small man *spiritually*” (*HD*, 129). After breaking up with Fanny and after being hit by Radcliff, Haggard changes radically: “The gaunt gray man who limped out of St. Basil’s in the summer of 1938 was a very different creature from the passionate fellow who’d stood his ground that spring and told the senior pathologist what harm was he doing his wife” (*HD*, 135). He describes his suffering as “certainly permanent” (*HD*, 135), and the shock from Fanny’s rejection forces him “to go forward alone” (*HD*, 135), though he is still in love with her. He adds: “This tempered me. It matured me. I aged many years in those short weeks, learned much about the spirit and about that pear-shaped, fist sized, four-chambered bag we call the human heart.” (*HD*, 135). Losing Fanny “marked in a sense the end of my life” (*HD*, 74), and before moving to Elgin he adds that he has been “shattered” (*HD*, 20) and “broken in body and in spirit” (*HD*, 20). Edward’s situation after the hip surgery and the end of the affair with Fanny is linked to the meaning of his surname: according to the *Oxford Dictionary*, Haggard means “looking very tired because of illness, worry or lack of sleep”.⁴³

One of Haggard’s interests is poetry and he shares it with Fanny. On several occasions in the novel, McGrath cites lines from poems. Once, after making love with Fanny, he reflects on his love for her and if he would have done the same things if he knew how it would have ended. He cites some lines from Gerard Manley Hopkins’ *No Worst, There is None. Pitched Past Pitch of Grief*:

Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep. (*HD*, 61)

⁴³ A. S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*, 8th edn , Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, s.v. haggard.

He uses these lines to put them in contrast to what he was feeling at the time towards Fanny:

Well, no creeping for me! No comfort for me in the whirlwind! This was my feeling. Your mother and I had the same soul. We were drawn to one another by a force inexorable. It could not have happened other than I did. (HD, 61-62)

Haggard and Fanny share a passion for poetry. He cites two lines from *Ode to Melancholy* by John Keats:

Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine . . . (HD, 79)

About this poem, Haggard says that he introduced her to these lines. She loved him to read it to her and, even if it was unfashionable at the time, they both liked the Romantics.

After the end of the affair with Fanny and after his surgery, Haggard has changed a lot and is suffering because of this. He cites two lines from William Wordsworth's *The White Doe of Rylstone* to describe both his physical suffering and suffering for love:

Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity. (HD, 135)

As his suffering is permanent, and as he is "forced to go forward alone" (HD, 135) after Fanny rejected him, Haggard finds comfort in poetry "to know that what I

was experiencing had been experienced before” (*HD*, 135). To prove this, he cites some lines from Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Julian And Maddalo*:

Most wretched men
Are cradled into poetry by wrong;
They learn in suffering what they teach in song. (*HD*, 135)

Fanny Vaughan

Fanny Vaughan, whose real name is Frances, is Ratcliff Vaughan’s wife – Haggard says that they “had been married for seventeen years” (*HD*, 90) during Christmas of 1937 – and Edward Haggard’s lover. He sees her for the first time at a funeral and they meet for the first time at a dinner. Soon after, they start an intense affair that ends when Ratcliff discovers them; she then decides to leave Edward, even if he is still in love with her.

To Haggard, Fanny is “beauty itself” (*HD*, 61) and “perfection” (*HD*, 61). She has dark hair, a “pale, perfect skin” (*HD*, 31) and a “slight, slender figure” (*HD*, 31); she also has “the most exquisite profile, the clear brow, the small fine nose with its delicate, paper-thin nostril, the white flash of her throat” (*HD*, 50), as well as “a soft tender mouth” (*HD*, 106) and “little teeth” (*HD*, 106). To him she is the very embodiment of the ideal of grace:

Your mother came to represent for me an ideal. She came to seem the very embodiment of grace. Grace: it was manifest in everything about her, it was the ineffable breath of being in all she said, and did, and thought, and felt – her spirit, in a word, she possessed *grace of spirit* and was as incapable of vulgarity as I believe any human being can be. (*HD*, 34)

Haggard describes her as a “woman of many moods” (*HD*, 101), who “was at times subject to black moods, to brief attacks of melancholy” (*HD*, 103); she is also “easily bored” (*HD*, 32) and she likes “sudden shifts of mood” (*HD*, 32).

There is one topic on which Haggard and Fanny have a different opinion, that is Adolf Hitler. Once they argue about him and the threat of a war:

I remember once we argued about Hitler. “So alarmist,” she remarked, glancing at a man’s newspaper as we left the Two Eagles after a swift drink one evening, “all this talk of war with Germany. Hitler doesn’t want war.” “Not this year, certainly,” I said. We were standing on a pavement looking for a taxi.

“Not any year,” she said. “I think he’s created order and stability in the country. He won’t risk that.”

“But the man’s a monster!” I cried. “He’s a megalomaniac! A murderer!”

“He’s an authoritarian,” she said, “and that’s alien to this political culture, but they do things differently in Germany.” “They most certainly do.”

“Their history hasn’t given them the experience of democracy that ours has.”

“Darling, it’s not about history!”

“Can anything be said to be not about history?”

“Yes. Fascism.”

I suppose the same argument occurred over thousands of dinner tables every night, in the months before Munich, before Prague. (*HD*, 102)

Haggard and Fanny used to meet at Haggard’s flat in Jubilee Road and at a pub named Two Eagles. Once, while her husband is at the Royal Society of Medicine, Fanny visits Haggard at St. Basil’s during the nightshift, and they have sex at the hospital. This is one example of Fanny being a woman who often makes the first move; one another occasion, that is an evening dinner party, she approaches Haggard and asks him if he is in pursuit of flesh pleasures:

She had approached me and asked me with a small smile, with just a hint of *innuendo* in it, if I was off in pursuit of ‘flesh pleasures.’ “No,” I told her, “I’ve had quite enough pleasure for one evening.” (*HD*, 53)

She is the one who decides that Haggard no longer has to see her, because she can no longer handle a double life between her lover and Ratcliff. He tries twice to persuade her to continue their affair, but every time she refused to do so because she prefers to stay with Ratcliff and James, breaking Haggard's heart.

After the declaration of the war, Haggard learns about her death. McGuinness sent him a letter with the causes of her passing:

It was nephritis, McGuinness said. Kidney failure. She was ill for some weeks and then sank rapidly. She died in St. Basil's. Nothing anybody could do. (*HD*, 151)

Fanny's death is a "dreadful shock" (*HD*, 149) for Haggard. At the funeral, he sees for the first time James, Fanny's son. After the funeral, James visits Haggard for the first time at Elgin and they become good friends.

James Vaughan

James Vaughan is Fanny and Radcliff's son. He is an aviator for the Royal Air Force. He is very young: when he meets Haggard for the first time he is eighteen or nineteen year old, while when the doctor started the affair with Fanny, he was sixteen.

The reaction to James' choice to become an aviator initially comes as a shock to his mother, but then she accepts it, while his father is not so worried:

"Oh, I doubt we'll see much of him this summer. I've told him he can start flying lessons."

"You haven't! Oh Ratcliff."

This was a shock. To think of you flying airplanes – you were still (in her mind) a child. She said this to Ratcliff. "No he's not," he said. "he's not a child anymore. We have to accept this."

“But it’s so dangerous!”

“He has to try it. If he can fly with our blessing, he’ll fly without it.”

And then a curious thing happened. All her resistance to the idea, the surge of maternal anxiety it had provoked – it all just evaporated, leaving her strangely indifferent. Let him fly, then, she thought. If he wants to fly – if Ratcliff wants him to fly – so be it. She gave a small shrug of her shoulders. “Very well,” she murmured, reaching for the mint sauce. (*HD*, 111-112)

James is a “complicated boy, sensitive, poetic” (*HD*, 66), as well as “a small man, delicate of feature” (*HD*, 152) with dark hair; when he is fatally wounded and his body is severely burnt, Haggard tells him that “You had such lovely hands, you had your mother’s hands” (*HD*, 190) and that all his beauty was “destroyed” (*HD*, 190). He resembles a lot his mother; this has a great effect on Haggard. Sometimes Edward feels her spirit coming into James’ body, as when he dies; it seems that Haggard is almost in love with him as he was with her mother: at one point he remembers “how quickly our intimacy developed” (*HD*, 23); seeing him severely burnt brings tears to Haggard’s eyes: “I lift my face and look away; my face is streaming tears. Yes here they come, and what is it they’re shouting, fool? Fool, yes – fool of love -” (*HD*, 190). The resemblance between James and Fanny is also proved when James tells Haggard that he was never close to his father and that “my mother never hid from me the fact that she was unhappy” (*HD*, 25). Haggard believes that James’ arrival at Elgin saved his life, because he was in a terrible state, and that he brought him back to life:

You aroused feelings in me I thought I would never know again. The limping shadow I’d become, with broken hip, broken heart, broken hopes – I seemed now to step into the light of the day, to come properly to life once more. Blood coursed in my veins, my heart beat with fresh life, there was zest and vigor in all I did. Mrs. Gregor remarked on the change; she said she’d not seen me looking so well since I’d first come to Elgin. (*HD*, 162)

Despite being more similar to Fanny, James reminds Haggard of his father when he is angry. Once James visits Haggard at Elgin, and they have an argument on Fanny’s

death. After Haggard insinuated that Fanny's illness was not treated competently, James gets angry because Ratcliff told him that "everything was being done that could be done" (*HD*, 164) and, despite Haggard not being her attending physician, the latter is not convincing that Ratcliff is telling James the truth. Shortly after the argument started, Haggard says that James stared at him furiously, and this reminded him "of your father's expression when he attacked me in St. Basil's" (*HD*, 164). At the end of the argument, that makes Haggard and James' friendship colder, Haggard says:

This was going too far. Face ablaze you rose abruptly to your feet and left the room. Damn! Damn damn damn! I had misjudged you – misjudged how much in thrall you were to Ratcliff. A moment later the front door banged behind you. I sat there smoking until forced by his clamouring to attend to Spike. (*HD*, 165)

He dies at the end of the novel, after his plane crashes. Haggard witnesses the scene and he smothers the flames with his fur coat. After the crash, James is severely burnt and he lies into Haggard's arms. As the doctor does not want to see the young aviator suffer, he decides to give him a deadly injection that kills him. During those moments, Haggard feels the spirit of Fanny entering James' body once again.

Ratcliff Vaughan

Ratcliff Vaughan is Fanny's husband and James' father. He works as a senior pathologist at St. Basil's. He has a very different personality from both his wife and his son. Haggard tries to explain Ratcliff's personality, different also from his:

What was it, after all, that inspired a physician to devote his career to cadavers rather than living human beings? A deficiency in the emotional sphere, without doubt. I began then to see your father's behavior at home in a much clearer light. He was a senior pathologist, but he was also an

emotional primitive; and the idea that such a man should be married to an exquisite, delicate woman like your mother – I found it hard to contemplate, it made me so angry. It still does. For you see, I believe he didn't merely destroy her chance to be happy, I believe he destroyed yours too. (*HD*, 89)

Described by Adam Lively in a review of the novel for *The London Review of Books* as the better character of the novel, a “brilliantly repellent pathologist”,⁴⁴ Ratcliff is a “cruel, aggressive man” (*HD*, 145). He is fat and smells of formalin. Haggard says that Fanny told him it was typical “that his tenderness, so rarely aroused, should vanish with such abruptness if he sensed the slightest rebuff” (*HD*, 84), and “He came to her smelling of death, she said, cigars, whiskey and death.” (*HD*, 85). According to Sue Zlosnik, Ratcliff's name “suggests an allusion to Ann Radcliffe's fiction, in which the patriarchal house incarcerates the Gothic heroine”.⁴⁵ After Ratcliff discovers the affair, Haggard remembers what Fanny told him once:

Your mother once told me that in his way he was a passionate man, but that he placed no value on the expression of passion outside those situations in which he felt it appropriate. It was appropriate in the context of marital sexuality, he thought. It was appropriate on occasion when one fought the necessary battles that a responsible professional life demanded. It was not appropriate in politics, nor was it appropriate in the situation in which he now found himself. (*HD*, 121)

A few days later, when he meets Haggard at St. Basil's, he takes revenge by pushing him down the stairs and breaking his hip. After the death of his wife, he joins the Royal Army Medical Corps, a specialist medical corps in the British Army providing medical services, in war and in peace, to the Army personnel and their families.

⁴⁴ Lively, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Zlosnik, Sue, “McGrath's Women”, in *Patrick McGrath: Directions and Transgressions*, ed. by Jocelyn Dupont, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, p. 88.

Vincent Cushing

Vincent Cushing is Haggard's chief at St. Basil's. He is named after the American neurosurgeon Harvey Williams Cushing,⁴⁶ and states that "Surgery is the most exciting branch of medicine" (*HD*, 109). He is married to Daphne: Haggard and Fanny first met at a dinner at their house. According to Haggard, he is a "hard but not a heartless man" (*HD*, 109) and "a stocky, impatient man who whistled tunes from the great operas while he operated" (*HD*, 28), including Puccini while operating Haggard; his personality is more similar to Ratcliff than to Haggard, being "a tough, bloody-minded character" (*HD*, 27) without "sympathy for anyone less deft than himself" (*HD*, 27). Haggard says that he "became furious if he was kept waiting" (*HD*, 88); it is difficult to work for him, also because he treats "surgery like a branch of mechanics" (*HD*, 27). He is irritated by the fact that the rubber glove incident goes all over St. Basil's, since Haggard "was part of his team he was subjected indirectly to ridicule" (*HD*, 108): at first he threatens to sack Haggard, but then he lets Edward finish the residency with him" (*HD*, 109). It is Cushing who operates Haggard when Ratcliff pushes him down the stairs at St. Basil's and breaks his hips.

Haggard and Fanny

One of the main topics of the novel is the love affair between Edward Haggard and Fanny Vaughan, Ratcliff Vaughan's wife. It is important because his love for Fanny marks Haggard forever, as he falls in love for the first time when he meets her. This affair is also the cause of his downfall, both from a physical point of view – because

⁴⁶ Sue Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, p. 72.

Ratcliff punishes him by pushing him down the stairs at St. Basil's and breaking his hip that results in an addiction to morphine in order to alleviate the pain – and from a sentimental point of view, because after being rejected by Fanny he is still in love with her. Indeed he becomes more obsessed with her also after her death, when he haunts Elgin with her memory and later he projects his feelings for her on her son James.

Haggard sees Fanny for the first time at a funeral in London in October 1937. At that time he had been working at St. Basil's for six weeks; he arrives after the beginning of the service because he had been “up all night in Accident and Casualty” (*HD*, 13). As he arrives at the church in a hurry, some people turn their head to see him when he goes in. Among them there is Fanny, the wife of Ratcliff Vaughan, who smiles at him and catches his attention. Just her smile and a glance are enough to make Edward fall in love with her, and he says that “from that point forward I was done for. I was lost” (*HD*, 14).

Sometime later, Haggard and Fanny meet for the first time at a dinner at the Cushings' house. She recognises him, and they talk for the first time. Haggard says that that night Fanny “took my heart by storm – took it without a struggle” (*HD*, 31). For Haggard is “the first time in my adult life I knew I loved a woman” (*HD*, 58); he considers love as “an exalted or even *sacred* condition, a condition in which all the highest and best of human faculties are exercised” (*HD*, 75), not something “ephemeral, it is not a transient emotion, a passing state, a passage or flight into madness or ecstasy” (*HD*, 75). After that dinner, the two start an affair. They meet in various places, including the Two Eagles and Haggard's flat in Jubilee Road; the latter is where they make love for the first time:

For I had been a good lover to her. She had risen from the armchair and wordlessly taken my hand and led me into the bedroom, where without haste,

and keeping her eyes upon mine, she had begun to undress, and I of course had done the same. It was with some care that she laid her clothes and underwear on my chair. Then we climbed in together under the sheets. My heart rate was very high indeed. I took her in my arms and her skin was soft as silk against my own. I began kissing her face and her throat, and when I lifted my head from her breasts, she saw (she told me later) my eyes, and never, she said, did she imagine she would forget their expression at that moment, the utter glut of feeling, the *love* that was in them. Something in me cried out when I entered her, and in the few timeless moments that followed I knew a sense of fusion and completeness that I had never experienced before, and never will again until I die. It was the first time I had properly made love to a woman. (*HD*, 59-60)

According to Haggard, him and Fanny “had the same soul” (*HD*, 61-62), also because Fanny’s personality is way more similar to Haggard’s than to Ratcliff’s – Fanny praises Haggard’s attitude towards medicine and patients - and they “were drawn to one another by a force inexorable” (*HD*, 62). Ineke Bockting writes that “Dr. Haggard had temporarily been able to affirm his manhood”⁴⁷ through this love affair, because he states that it was the first time that he had been a good lover to her and that he had properly made love to a woman, while without Fanny he is a “shrimp, a crested shrimp” (*HD*, 69) of a man, and he is “trapped in this flawed and puny frame” (*HD*, 129).

After making love to her, Haggard daydreams about Fanny and reflects on his feelings for her:

I had made love to your mother. Now, without yet fully grasping the essential complexity of the situation, I began to indulge in richly textured daydreams about her. She was a figure of shimmering loveliness to me. She was beauty itself, she was perfection; I lived only to see her again, and though this didn’t happen for some days the waiting, at first, was less harrowing than you might imagine: my intoxication with the very *idea* that I loved her had not yet passed. So vast, so strong was this feeling, and so enamored was I of it, all else was mere detail, and beneath notice; I was in a state of bliss. (*HD*, 61)

⁴⁷ Bockting, *Op. Cit.*, p. 60.

Then Haggard recalls how he felt after she kissed him:

Our lips touched. She kissed me. It was the softest kiss imaginable. I was already deeply aroused. I felt a dampness in my underpants. She pulled gently free of me. My heart rate was high, my respiration shallow. I was very happy indeed in a very foolish way. All I wanted was to keep holding her, forever. That would be enough. (*HD*, 81-82)

During Christmas 1937 Haggard and Fanny are deeply in love, but they are “forced by circumstance to keep our love out of sight, and to meet always in quiet places, where we wouldn’t be known – love in the shadows” (*HD*, 90). During that period they stay away for a while, as Haggard goes to his uncle Henry Bird at Griffin Head. While he is still at St. Basil and he talks of the threat of an upcoming war with Cushing, he reflects that he if a war breaks out he is afraid of losing Fanny. Haggard says that “The days between Christmas and the New Year have always seemed to me a sort of black hole in the calendar. Days of desolation. But about halfway through Boxing Day I found myself thinking of your mother’s impending visit, and so near tingle and warmth, and my spirits began to rise” (*HD*, 95). They meet again at the Two Eagles after Christmas; she gives him a pebble-shaped glass with a fly inside in it that Haggard keeps in his pocket to bring him luck. As Fanny tells him that she bought it because when she saw it she thought of him, Haggard feels that “great tenderness was aroused at the idea of her thinking of me on seeing something in a shop window” (*HD*, 97) and he was affected by him being present in Fanny’s mind when they are not together as it happens to him towards her:

That I should be present in her mind when we were not together, as she was in mine – to be told this, actually to hear it from her lips rather than simply wondering if her response to me mirrored mine to her – it affected me more strongly than I’d imagined possible. We had said so pitifully little about our

feelings! Yet all the time, in the obscure depths of the heart, something had been growing: love. The growth of love. (*HD*, 97)

During their date at the Two Eagles, Haggard asks Fanny if things at her home are awkward, but she does not answer this question. The clandestine nature of their affair seems sometimes to play tricks on them, because first Fanny and then Haggard feel sure that they can hear Ratcliff in the next bar: Haggard goes there to see if the senior pathologist is in there, but there is instead “a group of commercial travelers telling each other jokes” (*HD*, 98). Moreover, before that Haggard tried to kiss Fanny’s lips, but she turned away resulting in him kissing her firstly her cheeks and then her neck because she said him that for her it was difficult; Haggard wonders what did she meant, what was difficult for her, if to sustain “our passion under clandestine conditions” (*HD*, 98) or maybe something else, like “not going back to Jubilee Road to make love” (*HD*, 98).

Haggard says that, even if it is not easy for both of them, they starts to meet at every occasion, but they never go together to Plantagenet Gardens. Haggard’s flat becomes the two’s private sanctuary, where their passion, their intimacy and their love find expression, and from a scholar’s room it changes, reflecting Fanny’s influence. It is a period of “almost unblemished bliss” (*HD*, 102), even if once they argue about Hitler because the two have different opinions on him. Haggard describes how it is his time now that he is so madly in love with Fanny:

My life now contained only two types of time, time with her and time without her; one paradise, the other hell. There were the small agonies: waiting for her, and becoming panicked if she was late. This was torment. I would try and explain her absence to myself until at last it became impossible not to assume that disaster had occurred and she was lost to me forever. Then she would appear, and find me affecting pathos, trying to hide

my joy at seeing her, and so wasting whole, precious minutes of the few fleeting hours we were to be allowed. There was my tendency, too, after each meeting, to dissect and analyse every word and gesture she'd made, examining each in trembling apprehension that it signified on her part impatience, or boredom, and therefore imminent rejection. There were even moments (the man with the mangled hand was one) when I *doubted* – when the whole fragile issue of feeling became somehow unreal and I could not hold on to it, though the doubt vanished the instant I saw her. (*HD*, 103)

One night Fanny goes to St. Basil's to see Haggard during the night shift. She has been alone because Ratcliff has gone to the Royal Society of Medicine for some function, so she decides to go for a walk and then to visit Haggard at St. Basil's. She wears her veil in order not to be recognised, and when they meet at the hospital lobby, they kiss first, and then they have sex in there:

After a first recoil of shock at the audacity of it, and the risk involved, it had occurred to her to wear her veil. Entering the hospital and waiting for me in the lobby had aroused anxiety, but now, she said, she felt calm. She leaned toward me, threw away her cigarette, and this time allowed me to kiss her. The pervasive hospital smell, bleach and antiseptic, mingled in my nostrils with her perfume. I took her gloved hands and in a low voice told her I wanted to spend all night with her. She seized my face and kissed me several times, small, rapid kisses, murmuring no, telling me that I must get back to work and she must go home. I lost control at that point, and so did she, and kissing, now, with passionate urgency, we fumbled at each other's clothing, pulling at buttons and clips, and we managed, somehow, to get my trousers open, and her skirt pushed up, and still in the big fur coat she climbed into my lap and there on the bench at the back of the lobby of one of the great London teaching hospitals we made hasty passionate love that left us dazed and panting and clinging to one another in disordered lethargy and I (as usual) began to cry, which aroused your mother to the realities of the situation, so stroking my head and making little tender clucking noises she gently pushed me away and readjusted her clothing and by the flame of her cigarette lighter attended to her face in the mirror of her powder compact. My own excitement subsided. I buttoned my trousers and retrieved my stethoscope from under the bench. I became aware of how peaceful the lobby was, the stillness and silence curiously restful, as though we were in a cathedral. I turned back to her. The flame of her lighter trembled as a small draft crept among the pillars, the obscure, flickering reflection of her face was for an instant eerily distorted in the tiny glass of the compact. Satisfied, finally, that no trace of the recent brief passion remained, she snapped it

shut. “Now back to work,” she whispered, and we rose to our feet. After a last embrace I made off through the shadows. (*HD*, 104-105)

After having sex, Fanny goes home. While leaving the St. Basil’s, she is seen by Miggs, Ratcliff’s assistant, who recognises her because she forgot to wear her veil. This moment marks the beginning of the end of their affair. *Dr. Haggard’s Disease* is not the only work by Patrick McGrath that features a threesome; among them there are also *Ground Zero* (2005) and *Asylum* (1996). In *Ground Zero*, set in New York in 2001, Kim Lee is a Chinese prostitute who has had an affair first with Jay Minkoff and then also with his father Paul, a prominent New York philanthropist and banker; the affair continues until Jay discovers Kim having sex with his father; Jay dies in the 9/11 attacks and later she becomes involved with Danny Silver, the patient of the psychiatrist who is the narrator of the story. In *Asylum*, Stella Raphael is the wife of Max, the superintendent of a maximum security psychiatric hospital, and they have a son, Charlie; she falls in love with Edgar Stark, a patient of the hospital who is an artist and who has killed his wife. Edgar escapes the hospital and goes to London, and Stella visits him sometimes – he lives in an abandoned industrial place with Nick, another artist. Stella is arrested and she is brought back to her family; she has sex also with the landlord of a rural house in Northern Wales where she moves with her husband and her son after Max has left the hospital. There are similarities between Stella and Fanny. They are both transgressive women for their time, since Haggard and Fanny have an affair in the late 1930’s and *Asylum* is set in 1959, before the 1960’s when there was “a radical departure from the legacy of Victorian sexual morality in Britain”.⁴⁸ Adultery was already a scandalous thing; Fanny is transgressive because she makes love with

⁴⁸ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, p. 79.

Haggard in the hospital lobby while everybody's watching; both women get drunk and smoke cigarettes.

After confronting with her husband, Fanny is not so sure to continue the affair with Haggard because she can no longer endure much more of what she is going through by living a double life. Haggard asks her to leave Ratcliff but she refuses because of James and because Haggard could not continue to work at St. Basil's. Fanny tells Haggard that it is better if they no longer see them again: Haggard promises her this because "at that moment, worried, exhausted, and depressed as I was, I saw no way out. So I promised. I only broke that promise once, but oh, with what disastrous consequences!" (*HD*, 119) As he cannot accept that he will no longer see her, Haggard decides to break his promise. One day he thinks that Ratcliff is still at St. Basil's, so he telephones at Plantagenet Gardens to talk to Fanny, but Ratcliff has already been home, and has gone to his studio before seeing his wife:

Then the phone had rung. He'd heard her pick it up upstairs. From an impulse that he did not attempt to resist he reached for the telephone on his desk and very gently took the receiver off the hook and brought it to his ear. He heard your mother saying it was impossible (what was impossible?) and a man's voice saying that he only wanted an hour, and he was so shocked that he replaced the receiver almost immediately. But he had heard two names. One was his own; the other was mine. (*HD*, 121)

That evening, while having supper with Fanny, Ratcliff does not say anything about what he has discovered earlier. He plans his revenge on Haggard for the affair with his wife; when he sees him at St. Basil's, in order to punish him he throws him down the stairs, breaking his hip. After this incident, Haggard is admitted at St. Basil's, where he is operated by Cushing. During that period when he is struggling in hospital with pain the only thing that gives him strength is thinking that Fanny is still waiting for

him when he will leave the St. Basil's. He stays there for six weeks and when he leaves the hospital he has changed a lot for the worse: he is a morphine addicted in order to cope with the pain for Spike, and he has aged a lot. What shocks the most Haggard is, however, Fanny's rejection. She writes him a letter where she said that they "were never to see each other again" (*HD*, 136), and that he had to keep that promise. When he reads it, for Haggard it is like "being struck full force in the face with a bucket of cold seawater" (*HD*, 136). Despite this, Haggard telephones her, but she hangs up the receiver after telling him that she cannot talk to him. According to Sue Zlosnik, "Fanny's abrupt dismissal of her lover is a betrayal of the language of Keatsian romanticism through which they had conducted their affair".⁴⁹ The following afternoon Haggard has a nightmare where Ratcliff tells him that she does not want him, leading Haggard not try to reach her again. He eventually leaves St. Basil's and moves to Griffin Head, but he is in a state of mourning, saying that "I knew I would never love again. I would never do anything again. All I could do was grieve" (*HD*, 138). After moving to Elgin, he tries to forget Fanny in order to suffer less, even if sometimes he thinks of her and once it seems that he has seen her in Griffin Head, but it is not true. Those times that he thinks of her he then tries to shut the memories down and think about something else:

For several days I held to my resolve. I did not permit myself to think about your mother. When I did, when I found myself caught up in some sweet passage, intoxicated with some memory, I abruptly shut it down, and turned my attention elsewhere. It was not easy, nor was it altogether successful, for if I banished her from my waking mind she merely waited till nightfall, and it was very much harder to keep her out of my dreams. But I tried. And eventually there came a period of several days when I did not suffer. I began to think it was working. I began to think that my refusal to indulge the reveries and memories and night-dreams that thronged about

⁴⁹ Sue Zlosnik, "McGrath's Women", in *Patrick McGrath: Directions and Transgressions*, ed. by Jocelyn Dupont, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, p. 88.

the doors and windows of consciousness, beseeching entry – my refusal to admit them, I thought, was gradually stilling the storm and allowing me to inch toward peace once more. Peace – peace of mind – where I could contemplate your mother and the few brief months we’d had without having to wage this constant terrible warfare with the armies of my own unconscious mind, whose sole objective so it seemed was to lay waste to my heart and leave me howling for the woman I loved like an orphaned child amid the rubble of a bombed city. (*HD*, 46-47)

After a while, Haggard goes to a dinner at Hug Fig’s house. Here he meets Jean, Hugh’s wife, as well as Harold Piker-Smith and his wife, Vera. In McGrath’s fiction there are several Piker-Smiths, and they are all boringly ordinary.⁵⁰ Harold is a doctor who has a practice in Wimbledon, and he used to work at St. Basil’s; Vera, his wife, asks him if he knows Fanny – whose personality, according to Zlosnik, is exotic in contrast to the Piker-Smiths personality,⁵¹ making Haggard sad and nostalgic for the rest of the evening. When Haggard comes home, he is relieved to have escaped “those dreadful people” (*HD*, 70); Vera Piker-Smith’s question about Fanny aroused in him “a terrible sense of loss and yearning” (*HD*, 70) which he softens by staring at the moonlit sea, meanwhile he reflects on him being a fool of love:

Oh God. When was it that I had become such a fool of love? It had been at that funeral, the seed had been sown that day, that’s when it had started to grow, down in the dark soil of my heart, and me all unsuspecting until it burst forth, sturdy and vigorous in its maturity – oh God! (*HD*, 70-71)

Later, Haggard goes town to the beach because he can no longer stay in Elgin because of the sadness caused by the memory of Fanny. There he reflects on what does his love for her mean to him, that “she and I were - are two parts of a single whole” (*HD*, 73), that he feels incomplete without her and that, for him, losing her marked in a

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

sense the end of his life. After this night, Haggard decides to no longer try to suppress the memory of Fanny:

That night marked an important change in my thinking about your mother. After that night I no longer attempted to suppress my memories, nor the feelings that were inevitably excited by her arousal. I understood that our love affair would influence me profoundly – define me probably – for the rest of my life, and this being so, I chose, freely, not to forget. I would not, I decided, allow the memory to atrophy, to wither and fade, I would keep it fresh, I would nurture it, make of it an object of worship and construct an altar in my heart where I could perform, nightly, my devotions. (*HD*, 74-75)

In spite of the fact that she has left him and caused him so much pain, contributing greatly to his downfall, Haggard does not want “to spoil her, to blacken her, to violate her image in my heart” (*HD*, 76) because he loved her and still he does, and this would have never changed. So he decides to make Elgin “a museum of nostalgia, a temple to the memory of your mother, where I worshiped her spirit” (*HD*, 144).

After a while, in the spring of 1939 when Hitler enters Prague, Haggard decides to go to Plantagenet Gardens to see Fanny again and to convince her to come back to him. He says that she did not expect him, and that he telephoned the St. Basil’s first to make himself sure that Ratcliff was at the hospital. When she sees him, Haggard finds it difficult to speak because is overwhelmed by emotions of being with her. He eventually is able to tell her what he is doing now and what he still feel about her. He asks her if she wants to go to live with him, but she refuses. Fanny is a *femme fatale* and a highly contradictory woman. First she makes Haggard falling in love for her with her smile, her grace and her looks and she fuels both their affair and Haggard’s love for her by provoking him – for example when they first meet and she asks him if surgeons make

good lovers - going to his place and to the St. Basil's to see him, making love together as well as telling him that she thinks about him and giving him the fly-in-glass as a present. Then, when it is difficult for her to handle her double life and her affair is discovered by Ratcliff, she asks Haggard to not see her again; despite praising him for his attitude – compared also to the one of her husband – knowing that he is deeply in love with her and confessing him how unhappy is with Ratcliff and how he treats her bad sometimes, she decides do leave Haggard and to stay with her husband, breaking Haggard's heart badly. She contradicts herself when Haggard first asks her to leave her husband but she does not want to; but when Haggard sees her for the last time and he asks her again to leave Ratcliff and to go to live with him she tells him that he should have insisted more some months before, leaving Haggard even more devastated.

A few months later, at the beginning of September after the declaration of war, Haggard learns that Fanny has died, and it is a dreadful shock to him. Her sudden and unexpected death at an early age is one of the factors that make her a *femme fatale*. Her death has been announced by a letter sent by McGuinness, where it is written that she has died from nephritis; she died at St. Basil's after being ill for some weeks, and there were “nothing anybody could do” (*HD*, 151).

After meeting James Vaughan and befriended him, Fanny's son brings Haggard back to life because “that long, terrible winter after she died was almost the end of me” (*HD*, 161) and is resembling Fanny. However, Haggard is still in love with her even if she has died. He says that during the winter of 1939, the second one that he is spending at Elgin, he haunts his mansion with her memory, to keep her spirit alive: he hears her

voice late at night in the top-floor corner room, he smells her fragrance and when he opens the door and goes in, he is certain that she is there.

After a while, Haggard is at Nancy Hale-Newton's home. Her daughter Marjorie shows him a box full of clothes that belong to her mother, and they take it to the church because Nancy will no longer wear them. Among them there is a black fur coat of the same colour as Fanny's, so Haggard decides to take it and bring it home with him. He starts to wear it because it helps him to identify himself with Fanny's living spirit and, according to Liza Pennywitt Taylor, "draping a man in a woman's decaying fur coat successfully depicts his descent into moral or mental decay".⁵² Once something unusual happens to Haggard; during one night he tries to reach to her in his mind, because "it had become a habit over time to feel for her presence in memory and feeling, if not in physical reality, when I was alone and melancholy late at night" (*HD*, 178-179) but he cannot find her. Haggard is dismayed, bewildered and frightened, because he has never failed to feel before; he goes to his study, where he finds the fly-in-glass that Fanny gave him and that he usually keeps in his pocket next to Spike, who is the keeper of Fanny's memory:

And then I had the most peculiar and vivid sensation: I felt her presence. Not as I'd felt it before, when by dint of sustained reverie I'd aroused a wisp of her perfume, the sound of her voice – at those times there seemed only the most delicate membrane separating the construct of aroused memory from her actual presence, only the thinnest of veils – no, it was not the willed evocation of her, which invariably brought in its wake tears of frustration as I railed against my inability to break through and make of the phantom a woman – it was not that, it was a tranquil, unstrained conviction that announced itself calmly and that filled me with the sure knowledge that she was, yes, viable still in the world, and inhabited the body of her son: she had come back to me. (*HD*, 179-180)

⁵² Liza Pennywitt Taylor, 'Highbrow Horror : DR. HAGGARD'S DISEASE, By Patrick McGrath (Poseidon Press: \$20; 182 pp.)', *Los Angeles Times*, 20 June 1993, <http://articles.latimes.com/1993-06-20/books/bk-4965_1_patrick-mcgrath> [accessed 5 July 2016].

And Haggard is convinced that the spirit of her former lover has entered his son's body also when James dies in a plane crash. Haggard is wearing his black fur also when this happens, and it uses it to extinguish the flames; as James' body is badly burnt, Haggard decides to give him an injection that kills him. During the last moment of James' life, he feels as if her spirit as entered again his son's body; Haggard feels that the passion is swelling and that Spike is howling so, in order to rejoin with the love of his life, he searches for James' tongue with his one.

Haggard and James

Another important topic of the novel is the relationship between Edward Haggard and James Vaughan, Ratcliff and Fanny's teenage son, who is also the one towards who Haggard addresses his narrative telling him about the affair with his mother. Following James' visit to Haggard at Elgin, the two become good friends, and Haggard becomes increasingly obsessed by the young pilot – his obsession is fuelled especially by the striking physical resemblance between James and Fanny, whom he is still in love with. He is broken-hearted for the end of their affair and her sudden, unexpected and untimely death.

Just like what happened in October 1937, when Haggard sees Fanny for the first time at a funeral, Haggard sees James for the first time at his mother's funeral; and just like at the previous service, Haggard has arrived late: this time not because he had been up all night working, but because he thinks that he is not welcome there. He goes at the back and, as well as seeing many familiar faces, he says that "almost all of the men

were in uniform and quite a few of the women” (*HD*, 151). Among the people wearing a uniform there is James; even though Haggard does not know him yet, he knows that he must be Fanny’s son:

I saw you. Or I saw, rather, among the coffin-bearers, a young man in the uniform of a RAF pilot-officer, recently commissioned and wearing his wings. A small man, delicate of feature, his dark head lowered in grief – I knew this must be her son, and I found myself staring at you with a fierce intentness, in fact, that you sensed it, and lifted your head, and stared, for an instant, straight into my eyes – straight into my soul! – before dropping your head once more. You don’t remember the look we exchanged that day; I have never forgotten it. (*HD*, 152)

Haggard says that James’ expression of feeling in his face during the service is equal to his own; he feels between them “a current of communication” (*HD*, 152), and he says that when he leaves the funeral he carries away with him “the memory of meeting your gaze and finding replicated in my own passionate experience of grief and loss” (*HD*, 152). This and the fact that Haggard has seen James for the first time at a funeral just like it happened with Fanny are a sort of a prelude of what Haggard will experience after meeting James and befriending him, that in some ways it is like a *déjà vu* of what he has felt for Fanny.

That afternoon, James visits Haggard at Elgin’s surgery; when he introduces himself, he says to Haggard that he believes that the doctor knew his mother, and Haggard, who is still in love with Fanny and deeply shocked by her death, is impressed by this: “had you *any* idea the effect those words would have on me? I don’t believe you did” (*HD*, 12). The doctor is so struck by the uncanny resemblance between the young Spitfire pilot and his mother – he sounds like her, he crosses his legs in the exact way as Fanny did and he has the same posture as his mother - that it is like as if he feels

Fanny's presence again in there: his hands are shaking and he says that "I could hear nothing but the throbbing of blood in my head and the cry of a gull from the cliffs" (*HD*, 12). Haggard's excitement can be perceived by the use of italic to highlight some of his thoughts when he sees him for the first time, for example in a sentence like "That you should be *here*, her *son*, in *Elgin-!*" (*HD*, 13).

James asks Haggard if he was Fanny's lover. For Haggard it is difficult to answer James' question and to tell him immediately everything about his affair with Fanny, so he tells him only that he has loved her mother and that she was the most fascinating woman he has ever seen. When James leaves and asks him if he can go and see him again, Haggard is happy and relieved, because he looks forward to tell him about his affair with Fanny. For Haggard, after the pain for losing Fanny, meeting James is like that "my heart was a musty chamber, long closed, but good clean fresh air was starting to blow through" (*HD*, 23). They start to meet various times, and Haggard tells him about his affair with Fanny one step at a time, while James reveals him some details of the atmosphere at Plantagenet Gardens, of how Ratcliff used to treat Fanny – James worries that this could have been one a cause of Fanny's illness.

James then invites Haggard at a party. Haggard is flattered and is "curious to see how you were with the rest of the squadron" (*HD*, 55), because he had met "a couple of other pilots and they seemed a good deal more hearty than you, they lacked, that moody complexity that so intrigued me about you" (*HD*, 55) When he goes to the party, he is initially concerned about James' relations with the other pilots, about "how a complicated, sensitive boy like yourself was treated by those rough hearty men" (*HD*, 78). James gets on well with his fellow aviators, even if they are different from him.

The pilots' stronger masculinity opposed to James' more feminine personality – something that mirrors Haggard's situation when he worked at St. Basil's – is highlighted by the fact that Haggard says that “It was clear to me that you were different from the other men; that evening I saw they sensed it too, and that it provoked in them a certain defence toward you, a certain gallantry, as though they understood that this slim youth was special” (*HD*, 78). After having attended this party and having witnessed how the other pilots are, Haggard wonders if it was his father who led James to become an aviator:

Was it pressure from Ratcliff I wondered that led you to join the RAF and become a fighter pilot? He was so utterly and aggressively male, with his leather aprons and his booming voice and his big cigars, it was not difficult to imagine him imposing his own particular twisted ideal of masculinity on his son. At times you seemed so young, practically a school-boy, and I was impressed – I was *awed*, rather – to think of the work you did in the sky each day. I'd look at that fresh boyish face, the clear eyes with their thin dark brows converging to a delicate arrow point at the top of that small straight nose, and around your red lips no sign yet of the weary irony that inevitably comes to stamp the English face – you should have had no more to think about than Latin prep and cricket bats and the spirit of the Upper Sixth! No, not hard to imagine Ratcliff wanting to make a “proper” man of you, and you succumbing, giving yourself over to it with gusto, in fact, afraid of admitting to him and perhaps even to yourself just how deeply unsuited you were by nature for the work of a Spitfire pilot. Though I never doubted your love of flight – that was always clear to me, the way your eyes lit up when you talked about it. (*HD*, 89-90)

Due to his situation of a desperate and broken man made even worse by Fanny's death, Haggard reflects on how James' arrival brought him back to life and made him feel better, as he is becoming increasingly obsessed by him due to his striking resemblance with Fanny:

The story was not over, after all; there was another chapter yet to be written, a final flourish, and why? You, that's why; because you had come. You aroused feelings in me I thought I would never know again. This limping

shadow I'd become, with broken hip, broken heart, broken hopes – I seemed to step into the light of the day, to come properly to life once more. Blood coursed in my veins, my heart beat with fresh life, there was zest and vigor in all I did. Mrs. Gregor remarked on the change; she said she'd not seen me looking so well since I'd first come to Elgin. I could tell she approved. She disliked my melancholy, and the irregular habits it encouraged. All that spring you visited me in Elgin, and I awoke happy in the morning, and not even the stretch of bad weather we had in June could dampen my mood. There was rain and fog, clouds and thunderstorms, all of which served to incite Spike to particularly vicious flare-ups, all of which I dealt with as I always have, but even Spike I could now tolerate with benign resignation, with grace. (*HD*, 161-162)

Despite this, Haggard and James's friendship starts to become colder because once James goes to Elgin to ask Haggard about Fanny's illness:

“You think she was diagnosed wrongly?”
“No no no. No, I'm sure everything was done that could be done. I'd have liked to examine her myself, that's all.” (*HD*, 128)

James is troubled by his conversation with Haggard. The next time that he visits him, James is angry because Ratcliff told him that everything that could have been done was being done, after Haggard previously hinted that Fanny might have been treated incompetently, and that Haggard was not her attending physician. At the end, James is so angry that he resembles Ratcliff.

Three days after, James has injured “just below the waist but well to the right of the spine” (*HD*, 166). Haggard examines the wound, it seems that a small piece of shrapnel has embedded itself in the muscle of James' upper buttock, but without immediate danger of infection, so he gives him an injection, stitches the wound – shortly after the injection, while the anesthetic takes effect, grief arises in Haggard and he has to “turn away, hold myself rigid as the wave passed through me” (*HD*, 166) –

and tells James that he does not have to fly for a while. When James is dressing, Haggard glimpses something strange to his body:

You reached for the dressing gown hanging on a hook on the door, and for just a second, as you pulled it on, I caught a glimpse, in my mirror, of the front of your body. Frowning, I turned round, picked up a towel and dried my hands. I was puzzled at what I'd seen. There appeared to be something peculiar about your penis. (*HD*, 167)

During that night Haggard thinks again about what he has seen, and he is worried: "As a doctor, I was concerned, As a man, however, as a *friend* – I was wounded by the coldness and hostility you'd displayed" (*HD*, 167). What consoles him is the fact that they have to see once more to have his stitches removed, and he hopes that, if it suits him, James could make "the first approach to reconciliation" (*HD*, 167).

When they meet again, Haggard observes more closely James' body:

You emerged from behind the screen, and I watched you closely as you moved across the surgery. I had you stand in the middle of the room. What I saw, as I rose from my desk, was a small, pale, perfectly made young man with black hair, narrow shoulders, slim hips, and an almost complete absence of body hair. There was a tendency to infantilism of the sexual organs; there was also a slight convergence of the lower limbs toward the knees, and imperceptible, perhaps, to any but the trained medical eye, mild gynecomastia with slight enlargement of the nipple. It instantly suggested nascent glandular disturbance, which was worrying. I approached, frowning, pulled over a chair and examined you more closely. Your skin, I again noted, was oddly smooth to my fingers. I paid particular attention to the penis, plump and soft like a child's, and the testes, cupping them in my hand, weighing them. Froehlich's syndrome, perhaps? They were rather small. You grew suddenly impatient. "That's enough of that," you said. I rose to my feet, and you stepped swiftly over to the examination table and lay down flat on your stomach. At the time I had no real knowledge of the pathology, though I was aware of the shock, or violent emotional upset, could produce disorders of the endocrine system. "Had any bad shocks lately?" I murmured as I started taking out your stitches. Muffled snort from you. "Plenty of shocks in this war." "Ah." (*HD*, 168)

Haggard thinks that James should see a specialist, but the young aviator has no time because of the war. The doctor is worried about what he thinks that is happening to James' body, because he does not know exactly what he has. Haggard does not see James for several days and when he sees him again, the young aviator ignores him: this is a self-defence attitude towards Haggard's ever increasing morbid obsession with him. Haggard talks to him about what is happening to his body, but James feels like he is not sick and tells Haggard that he is the sick one. Haggard does no longer want to put pressure on James, but he says that for him is illness is progressing:

But I did notice that it was progressing, I could tell by your skin, your voice, your general demeanor. Impossible of course to know what was happening elsewhere to the body, I'd need to examine you for that, and there seemed little likelihood, the frame of mind you were in, of your permitting that. But I could imagine how alarming it was, seeing your body behave so oddly, and in all probability having to deal with urges and desires that issued from what must have felt like an alien creature within you. (*HD*, 171)

Haggard thinks that what he saw on James' body is something new and unknown, because the conditions necessary to provoke the effect of the endocrine system of acute, sustained emotional pressure has never existed before. He says that a likely name for this disease could be *Haggard's disease*, but he could do a proper case study and write about it only if James would let him examine, take a history and attempt treatment. According to Ineke Bockting, the title of the novel finds here its meaning because "through the hallucinatory projection of his own affliction upon the young man, the sexual anxieties that Dr. Haggard himself suffers from are replaced by the supposed disease of the young man";⁵³ moreover, "by thus castrating Fanny's son, Haggard fantasizes the young pilot to merge more fully with his mother, while at the same time

⁵³ Bockting, *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

making him carry to the fullest extent the doctor's own insecurities concerning his manhood and sexual preferences".⁵⁴

Haggard is increasingly worried about James, not just because of the war, but also because of what he thinks that he has. Moreover, the young aviator no longer visits Haggard at Elgin avoiding him as if he were a stranger; Haggard thinks he behaves this way because "I *knew*. You had suddenly shied away, withdrawn from me, because you couldn't admit this physical embarrassment that must every day be growing more pronounced, more inescapable" (*HD*, 175). This is painful for Haggard, who misses also his friendship:

I was no stranger to loss and loneliness, God knows I drank deep enough of both in the wake of your mother's rejection. To lose you, however, so soon after finding you – I was quite desperately disheartened by this. (*HD*, 176)

After stating that he knows James' condition, Haggard realises that he has to do something to relieve the Spitfire pilot's pain. One night, Haggard is unable to feel Fanny's presence, and he is worried because this has never happened to him before. As he finds the fly-in-glass that Fanny gave him as a present when they were still together, he puts it near Spike – this is where it usually lies, but not that time - and, after this, he feels her presence again. But this time is different, because he feels that her spirit has entered James' body. According to Lucie Armitt, "The intimacy the two men share enables Haggard to see Fanny emerging from the form of her son",⁵⁵ while for Sue Zlosnik "Believing in James' progressive feminization, he transfers his romantic desire

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62-63.

⁵⁵ Lucie Armitt, *Twentieth-Century Gothic*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011, p. 138.

to the son”.⁵⁶ When Haggard awakes, all of this seems “the most preposterous nonsense” (*HD*, 180), the result of “a fevered imagination, erotic obsession exacerbated by morphia” (*HD*, 180), but during the night he is still convinced that Fanny has “cried out to her lover through the body of her son” (*HD*, 180). When he falls asleep, he dreams that the back of Elgin has been destroyed during a bombing, and while he is sitting on a chair in the ruins of his house, he looks up and sees James as an angel, “hairless, translucent, with tiny breasts and a boy’s genitalia, evanescent in the daytime sky and soaring upward like a diver returning to the surface, and *radiant* – your whole figure *suffused* with light” (*HD*, 183). According to Lucie Armitt, “the connection with the angel is based upon flight, in part on James’ physical symptoms (androgyny being the typical state of angels) and in the part it is the ‘sniff’ of death, for the last pages detail Haggard cradling in his arms the dying boy”.⁵⁷

A few days after, Haggard sees James again. He talks again to the doctor about the hormone treatments that he can prescribe, but James must let Haggard examine him one more time. James replies firmly: “I don’t know what it is you imagine I have, but I can assure you there is *nothing wrong with me*” (*HD*, 187). However, according to Haggard, he is still denying and pretending it is not happening because it is clear to him that his disease is progressing. Haggard says that he is “fascinated at the sight of you in that uniform, knowing what I did about the body within” (*HD*, 187), and suddenly something strange happens to him: Haggard feels “a distinct movement of sexual feeling toward you, a movement of *passion*” (*HD*, 187), and he feels confused at that moment, also because it is something that has never happened before; moreover, there is some hilarity close behind him: “a pilot mincing across the floor with one hand on his

⁵⁶ Zlosnik, *McGrath’s Women*, p. 89.

⁵⁷ Armitt, *Op. cit.*, p. 139.

hip, then pausing, glancing over his shoulder, and saying coyly, to the delight of the whole mess – “Care to examine me, doctor?”” (*HD*, 188). According to Sue Zlosnik, Haggard’s homosexual yearnings are recognized by the other pilots, who mock him “in tune with the homophobia of the time”.⁵⁸ Just like it already happened in the past, Haggard’s feminine personality and ambiguous sexuality feels out of place next to the other aviators with their strong masculinity and heterosexuality.

This is the last time that Haggard sees James whole. Some days after, James’ plane crashes, and the young Spitfire pilot’s body is so burnt that Haggard decides to kill him with an injection in order to no longer see him suffer. As James’ body lies in Haggard’s arms when he is ready to give him the fatal injection, the doctor is crying: he says that his tears are streaming from his face, and it is as if they shout at him that he is a fool of love. Meanwhile, during the final moments of James’ life, Haggard feels once again Fanny’s spirit entering her son’s body:

Then with a shock of violent exaltation I feel the sudden nearness of her spirit. Again she has entered your body, she has entered this ruined dying body and as passion swells, and Spike howls, I fumble in the black bag with my free hand for the needle. Your black lips parted, a gasp, a sigh, a word. My face down close, what is it you’re saying to me? I press my mouth gently to yours and probe for your tongue with my own, probe with tiny darting flickers till I taste in your terrible burnt head the fresh sweet wetness of the living tongue within- (*HD*, 191)

According to Lucie Armitt, this final passage of the novel narrates a “rapacious homoerotic assault”,⁵⁹ with “Haggard’s penetration of James’ lips in a scene that ravel[s] up in its convolutions labial penetration of the ghost of (a) Fanny and necrophilia”.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, p. 74.

⁵⁹ Armitt, *Twentieth-Century Gothic*, p. 139.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Ineke Bockting argues that “The end of the narration completes the unravelling of the narrator”;⁶¹ Haggard continues to “*vampirize*”⁶² James, instead of looking at him or listening to his dying words, and he finally merges “fully – and wetly – not with the dying man but with his own most secret and terrible desires”.⁶³ While Sue Zlosnik points out that: “The final unfinished sentence of the novel signals the ultimate coalescence of death as, it implies, the plane explodes, engulfing both of them in flames. The climax of the novel is thus both an act of extreme abjection and an act of transcendence, as Haggard believes at the moment before death that he has been reunited with Fanny”.⁶⁴ The ending of the novel is open and it leaves to the imagination of the reader what might have been of Haggard and James; Haggard thinking that Fanny’s spirit has possessed James’ body, as well as his progressive feminization, is a result of the effects of morphine addiction, the highly striking resemblance of the boy with his mother and the love for Fanny that has never ended even after her death.

Medicine and Addiction

Medicine and addiction are two of the main topics in *Dr. Haggard’s Disease*. The novel chronicles Edward Haggard’s professional downfall from being a promising young surgeon at the St. Basil’s to a general practitioner in Griffin Head, a coastal town mainly inhabited by elderly people. The novel gives accounts of many of Haggard’s patients’ health problems, explaining in a detailed way what doctors do. The novel also

⁶¹ Bockting, *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶⁴ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, p. 75.

narrates Haggard's pain for Spike and his addiction to morphine, and this is one of the factors that contribute to his demise.

The subject of medicine has been incorporated in Gothic literature since the nineteenth century, with as the subject of attention "the singular body that might stand for any human being subjected to pain".⁶⁵ Medicine is heavily featured in Patrick McGrath's works – with doctors being often the main figures present in his works – due also to his background as a son of the former superintendent of Broadmoor and to the fact that he once worked in an asylum in Canada for a while.

At the beginning of the novel, Edward Haggard is a promising young doctor who has been employed for six weeks at St. Basil's Hospital in London, and his chief is Vincent Cushing. Haggard says that he was supposed to follow his father's footsteps – he was the rector of a small parish in Dorset – into the church; he chose instead to go into medicine to do "some real good in the world" (*HD*, 27) and to "compensate for what I saw as the rather impractical tendencies in my character" (*HD*, 27); he studied at Oxford, took the MBBS and he has been appointed to the staff of St. Basil while working for his MD. He describes St. Basil's theatres, as well as his work at St. Basil's:

Theaters was up on the third floor at the end of a white-titled corridor behind a set of swing doors, with a wash room where we scrubbed for surgery, which required three minutes with a hard brush on the backs of the hands, the palms, between the fingers and halfway up the forearms to the elbows, and this always left me chapped and sore. I never had a problem during the simple operations, when I was one of the two or three doctors performing and could stand over the incision with a clear view of all that went on, in fact I quite enjoyed taking out gallbladders, that level of surgery. It was the complicated procedures I disliked, where five or six doctors were involved and I'd have the tricky job of holding the retractors that pulled back the body wall so the surgeon could get in. (*HD*, 27)

⁶⁵ William Hughes, "Medicine and the Gothic", in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, ed. William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith, 2 vols., Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, II, p. 439.

In the novel, McGrath gives a detailed account of several operations made by Haggard. The first one described is one made by Cushing, with Haggard as an assistant:

One morning I was desperately tired, having been up all night in Accident and Casualty, and I was assisting while Cushing operated. Though I was only an arm's length from the wound I was excluded from a clear sight of it by a wall of white-gowned backs all stooped over the patient on the table beneath a pair of large, powerful, circular lights. The procedure was a long one, the theater was hot, the atmosphere tense, and after an hour or so everything turned milky – I suppose I must have drifted off. Suddenly there came a loud rap. "More retraction!" barked Cushing, and I was abruptly jerked into here and now. I gave more retraction. "Too much!" he shouted. "Who is that? Haggard? Wake up, man." The patient was under spinal anesthesia and Cushing was trying to find a bleeder deep in the belly. "Pull the bloody retractor," he cried, "I can't see what I'm doing. No no no no no, you're pulling too hard again, you'll rupture his spleen. Dear God what kind of idiots are they sending me now?" My face, behind my mask, burned with humiliation; impassive eyes gazed at me from other white-masked faces. I let my knees go slack, took a few rapid breaths, and stamped my right foot on my left to stimulate enough vascular tone to stay vertical and awake; fortunately there were no further mishaps. (*HD*, 27-28)

After this, Cushing is not happy with Haggard – this is the first time in that novel that it happens, also because of their different personalities:

"What's the trouble, doctor," he said, "not getting enough sleep?"
"Frankly no, sir," I said. I was buttoning my white coat, about to go back down to the wards.
"Better get used to it. Medicine takes physical stamina, that surprise you?"
"I was aware of that," I said. Damn it, I had been up all night!
"You better be aware of it, doctor," snapped Cushing. "You won't last otherwise."
"If I could see what was going on," I retorted, "I could do my job."
"Don't bandy words with me, Dr. Haggard! You're going to have to learn to go days without sleep and perform competently, that clear?"
"Yes sir."
"Good. Because if you can't do that you won't survive. And get your hair cut, doctor!" And with that he flung down his towel and off he went. (*HD*, 28-29)

According to Haggard, “The nights were the worst though” (*HD*, 29). He describes what he used to do during the nightshift at St. Basil’s:

Exhausted, I’d write up a history of every patient who appeared, do a physical examination, a white-cell count, a red-cell count, and a haemoglobin, all in the musty closet of a laboratory at the end of the ward that stank of urine and chemicals. Hunched over a stained and battered workbench I’d light a Bunsen burner attached to an ancient gas cock by rotten rubber tubing, then boil the urine gently over the flame until a cloud of protein appeared. Test tubes cracked in the heat, urine spilled, and then, weeping tears of anger and frustration, I’d have to pour more into another tube and start all over again. My back ached from hours spent bending over a bed, a stretcher, an operating table, a lab bench. When I finally got off duty I’d trudge home to Jubilee Road, fall into bed and immediately be asleep, though at times I’d be too exhausted even for sleep, and instead I’d lie there in the darkness and ask myself, why? Why all this pain, all this sickness, what is the point? At these times medicine seemed as futile as life itself. For if all one’s efforts proved negligible in the face of a steadily increasing volume of human suffering then it was hard to resist the implication of a random godless universe and us, its tenants, mere registers of sensation, specifically pain. (*HD*, 29)

Once, during the nightshift, Haggard admits “a man whose hand had been horribly crushed under heavy machinery during night work in a factory” (*HD*, 99); as the damage is extensive, Haggard calls McGuinness in and, in the meantime, he applies Vaseline dressings to the wound:

Then McGuinness appeared; examined the damage; turned to me and shook his head. We took the man up to theaters. The procedure is straightforward: you have to leave a flap of skin so there’s something to sew back over the stump, then with a heavy amputating knife you saw off the mess below the level of the flap, toss it all into a pail (whose contents later go down to the incinerator room in the basement) and stitch up what’s left. It was the first time I’d cut a man’s hand off, and it made me shiver. We were clever though. We saved his apposition. He would still be able to hold things with his thumb and forefinger, the only digits he had left on that hand. (*HD*, 99)

McGrath narrates not only Haggard's surgeries, but also what other doctors do. Once he describes Ratcliff Vaughan, the senior pathologist, explaining the dead body and some of its peculiarities:

"This is hypostasis, gentlemen," he was saying. "Note the discoloration of the skin." He was a fat, confident man who smoked cigars to mask the smells of the cadavers with which he worked. "Begins to happen about thirty minutes after death, and takes six to eight hours till it's done. Caused by the blood gravitating downward and suffusing the lower capillaries, leaving the upper surfaces of the body pallid. Starts off pink, then rapidly darkens. Ends up purple." He gestured at the gaping cadaver before him with brisk, choppy hand movements, like a man conducting an orchestra. "Another peculiarity of the body in death, gentlemen, is the appearance of a network of bluish veins, dendritic in structure, just below the surface of the skin. Generally occurs when putrefaction is rapid." He paused and spent a moment, frowning, relighting the cigar. "Note too the shedding of the skin and the formation of adipocere. This happens when fatty tissue changes to fatty acids. You'll also see bloating as a result of methane generated by decomposition, you'll see liquefied eyeballs, you'll see blistering of the skin, you'll see dazzling changes of color, maggots, you'll even see corpses bursting open. You can never really rely on the dead to do what you expect; it all depends on temperature, moisture, insects, bacteria, oh, a host of factors." (*HD*, 64-65)

During the first half of the novel, Haggard is involved in a love affair with Fanny, and he is constantly thinking about her. Once he struggles to perform a spinal tap on an elderly prostitute named Belle Sylvester who has meningitis, while during another surgery on an unnamed patient who has appendectomy, Haggard sews a piece of his rubber glove into the wound because he is distracted:

It's a delicate thing, opening a man's belly. You draw the knife across the skin, the flesh parts, you clamp the severed vessels, sponge the blood, suture, tie, then the peritoneum, and so on. But I went in with such force I cut right through the fascia with the first stroke of the knife, opening numerous blood vessels, and then, while trying them off, somehow sewed the end of my rubber glove into the wound. I was rather shaken by this, and botched the rest of the operation. The patient recovered, eventually, but he had a complicated convalescence and became enormously distended, with

the result that the nursing staff referred to him as “Dr. Haggard’s pregnant man.” (*HD*, 108)

This is one of the episodes that marks the beginning of Haggard’s professional downfall. This story spreads throughout St. Basil’s, making Vincent Cushing angry because Haggard “was part of his team he was subjected indirectly to ridicule” (*HD*, 108). Cushing calls Haggard into his office and threatens to sack him; Haggard tells him that he would like to finish his residency with him. Cushing tells Haggard that it seems to him that he has lost his taste for the work, and Haggard replies him by telling him a lie, that is because he is worried about his uncle who is ill. According to Cushing, Haggard may make a surgeon, even if now he is unhappy with his performance and wants to watch his work closely in the future. After, Haggard reflects on what has happened: he is not happy and he thinks that he does not have to throw away a career in surgery for the love of Fanny; but in reality he says that he does not care, because his grand passion made all his professional ambition pale and whiter, and he would have happily preferred twenty-four hours interrupted alone with Fanny to a lifetime of surgical work. The next days he tries to do best and not think about her, but it is impossible for him not to.

Some time later, Ratcliff discovers the affair between Fanny and Haggard. He takes revenge on Haggard by throwing him down the stairs at St. Basil’s and breaking his hip. He is admitted to St. Basil’s, and he stays there for six weeks. When he leaves the hospital after the surgery he no longer works there; this is a downgrading for Haggard because a career in surgery is no longer possible for him, so he starts to think even more about going into general medicine in the countryside, also because in London there are few positions to apply. But Haggard wonders if this is really the best

he can hope for – being an “overworked, underpaid assistant to some country doctor” (*HD*, 139), given the fact that he was “a promising young doctor who’d won a coveted place at one of the great London teaching hospitals” (*HD*, 139).

As he inherits Elgin, his uncle’s mansion in Griffin Head, he moves there to replace Peter Martin, the retiring doctor. This town is inhabited mainly by elderly people, and he now is involved in general medicine – he says that Peter Martin told him that general practice involves “a little surgery, a little medicine, and much reassurance and advice” (*HD*, 43). He describes what Peter Martin teaches him about his new job, as well as explaining that the retiring doctor used to prescribe a placebo – “Mist Explo” – to his patients, and later Haggard will take the same approach with his parents despite his initial scepticism:⁶⁶

I knew hospital medicine, and I knew some surgery, but before I found Elgin I had never practiced general medicine. Peter Martin came to advise me. He told me that the backbone of the work was a group of private patients, elderly retired mostly, who paid a guinea a visit, though there was a sizable panel list too, for each of whom I’d get nine shillings a year from the county. He said that the main thing was to give people something to take home with them. He used a Brighton pharmacologist for his preparations, but he didn’t have much faith in medicines as such. “Palliative at best,” he said, puffing away at his cigarette, then shuffled across the surgery to the glass-fronted cabinet and took out a flask of yellow liquid. “Mist Explo,” he said, “very popular.” It was a concentrate made up from crystals derived from picric acid which I could dilute, two ounces to eight of water, and dispense to patients with a wide variety of ailments. “Half a crown the surgery visit,” he said, “two shillings the medicine, tuppence the bottle.” “Mist Explo,” he said, “very popular.” It was a concentrate made up from crystals derived from picric acid which I could dilute, two ounces to eight of water, and dispense to patients with a wide variety of ailments. “Half a crown the surgery visit,” he said, “two shillings the medicine, tuppence the bottle.” “Mist Explo?” I murmured, thinking: mumbo jumbo, the man’s a witch doctor.” “Vast majority of people who’ll come to you,” he said, “vast majority, doctor, have ailments that fall well within the scope of the body’s healing

⁶⁶ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, p. 71.

powers. Immense capacity to heal itself, the body, but it's got to be persuaded."

Still I was sceptical. "You'll see," he said, turning away, nodding, ash dripping down the front of his cardigan. He dispensed digitalis for heart conditions but had little faith in that either. "May prolong life a little," he said, and told me a story about an old lady with congestive heart failure and swelling of the legs so gross she could barely move. "Took her digitalis three times a day with a quarter bottle of champagne."

"And?"

"Died. Nothing I could do."

He showed me the three bottles of aspirin he kept in the surgery, in one of which the pills were green, in another pink, in the third yellow. "Make a great business of selecting the most efficacious," he told me, "but they're all the same. We're priests," he said, "that's our function. Give them faith in their own healing powers. Let nature do the work."

Nature. As if nature were exempt from botches. (*HD*, 38-39)

While in Elgin, Haggard narrates the cases of some of his patients. These include: Nancy Hale-Newton, a patient sick with cancer, whose daughter Marjorie is a teacher and it is like a nurse to her; she is a tough woman who, despite all the pain from the cancer – she takes morphine in order to alleviate it - is strongly determined to not surrender to it "until she chose to do so" (*HD*, 176); Haggard goes to see her many times and he tells her what is going on in his life. James Vaughan, the aviator who is the son of Fanny and Ratcliff. Jean Fig, the wife of Hugh Fig – the solicitor of Griffin Head; she starts to see Haggard because she has a problem:

Her skin still had a distinctly yellowish-green tinge, and the bags under her eyes were quite as deep and dark as my own. Jaundice perhaps? After a few polite interchanges I asked her what appeared to be the problem. "I do hate to bother you, doctor," she said, "it's probably nothing at all." [...] "I'm always tired but I can't sleep," she said. "And I get these attacks of diarrhea, but I never know when they're coming." Probably, like most women of her class, she suffered in a hell of quiet desperation. "I threw up after dinner and I had to go to the bathroom five times during the night. I just don't know what's wrong with me." (*HD*, 155)

He thinks that she has gastritis, so he gives her Mist Explor. After asking her about her childhood and her relationship with her husband – they have no children and they no longer have sex – Haggard is convinced that her symptoms are hysterical; as a result, she is admitted to a private asylum, where she dies some time later. As Haggard has misdiagnosed Jean's problem, it is revealed that she refused to see a doctor for some time before her death because she had lost "all confidence in the medical profession".⁶⁷

Another important feature of McGrath's writing is the writer's ability in the description of places. In this novel, he gives a description of some places, like the post-mortem room where Ratcliff Vaughan works:

I sat down in Pathology to hear what they'd found in Eddie Bell's lungs. Your father was in the post-mortem room, standing at the dissecting table in a black rubber apron, his sleeves rolled up, large hands ungloved, talking to half a dozen medical students. On the dissecting table (steel, with a central channel and a hole where body fluids were hosed down) lay the pale cadaver of Eddie himself, with his thorax split open. Also in the room was a glass-fronted cupboard containing instruments (knives, saws, bone forceps), a row of metal hooks with rubber aprons hanging from them, and a table with steel bowls for specimens, at which your father's assistant, a balding, weasel-faced fellow called Miggs, was busy with a slice of Eddie's lung. It was a small, cramped, low-ceilinged basement room with a narrow barred window at the top of one wall through which a little light was admitted, and a view of feet crossing the courtyard outside. It was cold, and stank of formalin. "Pathology makes physiology possible," your father was saying, "in the sense, gentlemen, that organic functions are revealed only when they fail." (*HD*, 65)

McGrath describes also Elgin's surgery where Haggard works:

The surgery was the first room off the dark-paneled hallway at the front of the house; a passage led into the back parts, and a carved staircase ascended to the upper floors. I was reminded of the doctor's surgery my father took me to when I was sick as a boy – the examination couch, the glass-doored cabinets full of dressings and medicines, the screens behind which patients

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

undressed – dear boy you’ve undressed behind those screens yourself! And like the doctor’s surgery of my boyhood there were two doors, one giving onto the hallway and the private parts of the house, the other into the waiting room. (*HD*, 18)

Another important topic of *Dr. Haggard’s Disease* is Edward Haggard’s addiction to morphine, developed following his hip surgery and while he is still at St. Basil’s. The themes of drugs, alcohol and addiction are present in Gothic literature since the 1790’s, “given the Gothic’s fascination with altered states of consciousness, transcendence of established bodily limitations, and figuration as a type of escapist opiate”.⁶⁸ Opium, “the Victorian drug of choice”,⁶⁹ was featured in many Gothic novels of that time. Haggard is addicted to it until the end of the novel:

You feed your obsession with the woman with morphia until you’re unable to think of anything else, you can’t sleep, you can’t even stay in the house. (*HD*, 72)

After leaving St. Basil’s and before moving to Griffin Head – when he realises that his career is going to be downgraded from being a promising surgeon to being in general medicine, and when he is still suffering for Spike and for Fanny’s rejection - Haggard feels worthless and has “fresh despair, lassitude, self-reproach” (*HD*, 139). He starts to loathe himself, and during those days he feels “a profound dissatisfaction with myself which, when it became particularly acute, set off Spike, which then had me reaching for my medical kit” (*HD*, 139). He still thinks about Fanny, and he says about himself that he is “an open wound, and without sleep I could not heal” (*HD*, 140). Despite the pain caused by Spike – Haggard says that “he hurt worst as I fell off to

⁶⁸ Carol Margaret Davison, “Drugs and Alcohol”, in *The Encyclopedia of Gothic*, ed. by William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith, 2 vols., Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, I, p. 205.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

sleep, when my muscles relaxed and the damaged bone ground like a drill against its seating in the pelvis” – and the fact that morphine relieves his pain, as well as bringing in “its train waves of peace and serenity” (*HD*, 140), he decides to try to stop taking it; McGrath describes clearly an addict’s struggle as he tries to fight his demons and he succumbs again to his addiction because Spike causes too much pain to quit using morphine. The day that he stops, for the first twelve hours after the last injection he feels well, but then he starts to feel as if he need to take it again:

It was around noon – twelve hours after the last injection – that I began to grow uneasy. I became aware that a feeling of weakness had gradually kept over me. I began to yawn, then noticed that I couldn’t stop shivering. I pulled a blanket round my shoulders. I seemed to be weeping, though not out of misery, it wasn’t true weeping, it was, rather, a hot, watery discharge that had begun pouring from my eyes and nose in a copious stream. (*HD*, 140)

He then decides to go to bed, and he describes one of the side effects of not taking morphine while Spike hurts; he has grotesque dreams, involving some of his former colleagues at St. Basil’s:

I saw Ratcliff bearing down on me in his black rubber apron, his face a rictus of rage and in his hand an amputation knife. I found myself on the steel table in the post-mortem room with Ratcliff and Miggs and Cushing sniggering down at me. My thorax was open, my insides were piled neatly on my chest, and my penis was rolling around on the floor. I got up on one elbow, concerned to recover my penis, and my insides slithered off and fell on the floor and they all laughed. (*HD*, 141)

Haggard awakes eighteen hours since the last time that he took morphine, at six in the evening. But the next hours and the following day are even worst for him, and McGrath describes what happens to him in a graphic way to highlight Haggard’s suffering:

I couldn't stop yawning – I yawned so violently I feared I would dislocate my jaw. Armies of ants crawled about under my skin. Huddled in my blanket with the tears pouring from my eyes, and a watery mucus from my nose, I managed with difficulty to smoke a cigarette. I was shivering uncontrollably. At one point I struggled to the fireplace and peered at myself in the mirror. My pupils were dilated and the skin of my face was pimped like gooseflesh. Suddenly I felt violently sick. There was no time to reach the bathroom down the hall, I had to make do with my chamber pot. The vomiting was explosive. Its contents were streaked with blood. Kneeling there over my bloody flux I opened my shirt and saw the skin of my belly knotted and corrugated as though a nest of vipers were writhing beneath it. Diarrhea soon followed. But I did not crack.

The hours crawled by. I called your mother's name, it gave me strength. I was doing it for her, this was the only way I could go on with it. By the next morning I was in truly pitiful condition. In a desperate attempt to relieve the chills racking me I had gone back to bed and covered myself with every blanket I could lay my hands on. My whole body shook and twitched beneath this mountain of bedclothes, though the pain not only in my hip but in all my muscles prevented me from getting sleep or even rest. I clambered out of bed and for a while I limped back and forth across the room, attempting to get warm. I opened a book and tried to read; hopeless of course. With tears of frustration and misery I climbed back into bed: the sheets and blankets were soaked through to the mattress. (*HD*, 141-142)

As soon as he goes to bed, Desmond Kelly knocks at the door; Haggard is in poor conditions, he is befouled with vomit, unshaved and filthy, and his voice resembles that of an old man because it is weak, but he manages not to let Desmond Kelly in his flat. He sees him half an hour later, when he decides to take the morphine again, and he feels better:

Time passes with excruciating slowness, and no relief came. I could neither eat nor drink, and in the course of that second day I became weaker and weaker as my bodily reserves were consumed and vitality slipped away. I thought then that unless I found relief I would surely die; and that seemed a heavy price to pay for dispensing with a crutch. Shortly after noon I broke. I cracked. I barely had the energy to drag myself out of my armchair and with trembling fingers make up a needle. But thirty minutes later (so rapid was my recovery) I was downstairs, shaved, clean, and joking weakly with Desmond Kelly about the terrible noises he'd heard from my room in the night. Eight hours after that I felt again the unease that had ushered in the

nightmare, and I decided to prolong my holiday from hell. As I have ever since. (*HD*, 142)

After this, he no longer tries to stop taking morphine. This addiction increases even more during the latter part of the novel, and it is one of the factors that make Haggard's narration unreliable. In the novel, Haggard describes how he keeps this drug and how he injects it, narrated in a professional and graphic way:

I'd have at hand a steel bowl, kidney-shaped, in which lay my big hypodermic needle; and an ampoule of morphia. I'd tap it smartly then snap off the top. Draw up the fluid into a syringe – a squirt or two to expel the air – and from the lifted needle droplets fountain in the twilight. With my jacket draped over my shoulders I perch there on the edge of my desk and roll up my sleeve, and tie the rubber tourniquet till the veins of my inner arm bulge against the skin. A quick swab, fist clenched tight, then the needle slides in and the plunger is carefully depressed. After a moment or two the syringe clatters back into its bowl and the tourniquet is tossed onto the desk. (*HD*, 68)

During the winter, Spike hurts a lot and Haggard is forced to raise his dosage of morphine. When an inspector from the Home Office goes unannounced to his office, Haggard keeps it there, and he tells the inspector that he keeps this drug because he prescribes it to many patients of him – including Nancy Hale-Newton:

I kept a supply of the drug in the surgery, in a cupboard under lock and key. An inspector from the Home Office did drop by, unannounced, one morning, but the books were quite in order. In fact – as I was quick to point out to him – I prescribed a good deal of morphia to my patients, the practice including many elderly persons among whom cancer was common. The tolerance for morphia of patients like these – Nan Hale-Newton was a case in point – increased (I told him) over time, and often quite rapidly: it was not rare that a quarter-grain dosage would have to be raised to three grains within a matter of weeks. For this reason I always had to have a large supply on hand, and the man from the Home Office was satisfied that no illicit prescription was occurring. (*HD*, 154)

Haggard's morphine habit is a consequence of the pain caused by Spike. He is introduced in the first pages of the novel – McGrath does not say what it is – and when Haggard talks about it, Haggard refers to it as if it was a living creature, a sort of a friend – this is something typical of someone who is really sick - for example when he describes what Spike is by using a medical language:

A broken hip is pretty straightforward. You open it up, dissect away the muscle, and bang in a steel pin. It's called a Smith-Petersen, and it holds the broken end together. During cold weather, or when I'm tired, or if I've been on my feet too long, it'll produce inflammation in the femuro-pelvic joint, where the neck of the thighbone fits into the pelvis. Then it hurts like the devil, and that's when I need a shot of morphia to keep me cheerful – you know how I am when Spike's not behaving. And if it hadn't been for your father knocking me down the stairs that day I'd ever known the pleasure of Spike's company. (*HD*, 131)

He uses other expressions to give the impression of a personification of Spike; for example, after a morning in the practice, Haggard is exhausted, and Spike is “throbbing painfully” (*HD*, 41); another time, after Haggard visited James in a bar, Spike “shrieked” (*HD*, 188); Haggard adds that the weather is also responsible of Spike causing pain: “rain and fog, clouds and storms, all of which served to incite Spike to particularly vicious flare-ups” (*HD*, 162). Haggard always keeps a fly-in-glass paperweight given to him by Fanny in the pocket of his trousers, near Spike. And Spike is a reminder of the pain caused by the love for Fanny:

The old pain, pain the familiar. The ache, the bite of the pain – it was Spike remembering, not I, it was Spike who held her memory and all the associated emotion – Spike it was who held the slim phantom close, held her clinging to the pin in my hip like a plasmid substance, translucent, faintly shining, trembling to life now in the darkness, and I sank into my chair and reached for my black bag, relieved that the crisis was past. The idea came to me then the memory was less a faculty of the mind than of the body, for with the easing of Spike's pain so did the memory of your mother cease to harrow me with hopeless longing. (*HD*, 179)

Historical Setting

Dr. Haggard's Disease is set in England during the late 1930's and the early 1940's. To be more precise it is set from 1937, when Edward sees Fanny for the first time, until 1940, when James dies during the Battle of Britain. The novel presents many references to the Second World War: among them, various circumstances that led to the outbreak of the war and the first battles of the Second World War, especially the Battle of Britain. Sue Zlosnik, in *Patrick McGrath*, maintains that in the novel "External events, such as the invasion of Europe and the Battle of Britain, are analogous with this more personal battle",⁷⁰ because the circumstances that lead to the war, as well as the various battles that are mentioned chronicle Haggard's situation throughout the novel. Moreover, this is what Magali Falco wrote about the fact that some of McGrath's novels are set during the Second World War:

McGrath presents the ghosts of the mind, diseases and decay of society, madness ruling the world. Quite significantly, some of McGrath's novels (*The Grottesque*, *Spider*, *Dr. Haggard's Disease*) take place around the Second World War period, directly making a connection with the idea of ruins. The Second World War period stands as a metaphor for the contamination of madness from one individual to the other, while the villain figure has been transposed into the figure of the fascist state.⁷¹

In the same essay, McGrath explains why in his opinion what happened during the Second World War is related to the so called New Gothic:

Our view of humanity has become much darker by seeing what Hitler was able to do, what a civilized European nation was ready to permit him to do. I think we haven't yet properly assimilated it. We are still thinking about it, we are still trying to make a sense of it. Hitler continues to feature in our

⁷⁰ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, p. 73.

⁷¹ Falco, *Op. Cit.*, p. 22.

culture. We still don't quite understand how human beings were capable of generating so much evil. It may be a reason why it's possible to have such a thing as the New Gothic: the extremes of human disorder are no longer fantastic, it happened. It's real, the villains of the nineteenth century Gothic novels are just tiny innocence compared to the real monsters that came to life in the middle of the twentieth century.⁷²

At the beginning of the novel, when Haggard falls in love with Fanny and they start an affair, there is the threat of the outbreak of the war, especially in Continental Europe; during the first part of the novel the war and the threat of an outbreak are in the background. Haggard worries about what could happen if a war between Britain and Germany broke out:

I was not optimistic. With our overextended empire, our faltering industrial output – what chance had we of winning a war with Germany? Thriving, martial, boldly led Germany? (*HD*, 32)

Haggard and Fanny share different opinions on Hitler. Haggard is scared of Hitler. Fanny, on the other hand, has a more positive opinion of him; she thinks that he does not want war because he has created order and stability in Germany, and that he is authoritarian because the German political culture is different from the British. However, their different opinions on Hitler do not interfere with their affair.

The threat of a war becomes a topic of conversation between the doctors at St. Basil's. During Christmas of 1937, the festive atmosphere contrasts with the talk about Germany. Haggard is worried that, if the war breaks out, he might lose Fanny: he says that now he "feared the upheaval and destruction that war would bring – now I had something to lose" (*HD*, 91), and he wonders: "If war came – as it probably would –

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

and we lost it – as we probably would – what place would there be in that new world for love?” (*HD*, 92). Meanwhile, Cushing reflects on the political situation of Britain: he compares it to the one in Germany, and to the difference between the British monarchy and the German Nazis:

“It all goes to demonstrate,” he said. When we’d gone through to theaters, and were about to begin a complicated visceral sympathectomy, “that the British, politically speaking, are split down the middle.” We stood with our forearms bent upward, hands pointed to the ceiling, as the scrub nurse gowned us, tying the bows behind our backs. “Rationally,” said Cushing, “we adhere to democratic principles. Emotionally, imaginatively” - hemostats clicked, sutures were snipped, the wound was a forest of loop-handled steel instruments – “we indulge a rich appetite for costume and ritual. Hence our adoration of the monarchy. It’s a damn sight more benign” – here he cut the first of the small preganglionic fibers emanating from the thoracic and lumbar cords - “than what the Germans do. Where we have royalty” – now he frowned, barked out a few terse orders, called for a more retraction – “they have the Nazi party.” (*HD*, 91-92)

When the German troops occupy Vienna in March 1938, Haggard tells James that during those days “for your mother and me the first augurs of disaster made themselves known” (*HD*, 108), because his love for Fanny affects his job: he is absent-minded during surgery and once he sews a piece of his rubber glove into the wound of a patient. Shortly after this incident, Ratcliff discovers the love affair between Haggard and his wife, and this marks the start of Edward’s downfall.

After Ratcliff discovers the affair, Haggard telephones Fanny. She tells him that she is not afraid that she could talk to him, and hangs up the telephone. While in the hospital, Ratcliff tells him that “she doesn’t want you” (*HD*, 137). Haggard uses a military metaphor to describe the fact that he has to accept that he has to let her go despite being still in love with her:

I couldn't forget the tone of her voice when she'd said, "I'm afraid I can't talk to you." They echoed in my head, those dead flat tones, during the pain-racked days and nights I spent in St. Basil's, they devastated me, and it was a week before I finally began to attempt the fact that I had to let her go. I have to let her go, I have to let her go: up and down the ward I'd hobble on my crutches, the words like the chant of a mob in my head, you have to let her go, you have to let her go. "But I *cannot* let her go!" – I awoke one night with this scream in my lips, and I woke the ward (what's worse I woke Spike too), but it did no good, those marching armies just kept on and on: you have to let her go, you have to let her go. (*HD*, 137)

Haggard says that he bought Elgin, the mansion in the coastal town of Griffin Head, in the autumn of 1938, when "the Munich crisis was at its height" (*HD*, 17). Hitler wanted Czechoslovakia to concede the Sudetes region to Germany, as this region was inhabited by many Germans. This led to a crisis. In order to resolve it, Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini reunited in Munich at the end of September 1938. As Hitler threatened to start the war, France and Britain agreed to concede the Sudetes to Germany. Haggard moved to Elgin after his hip surgery that caused him so much pain that he becomes addicted to morphine; moreover, he has left St. Basil's Hospital and is broken-hearted following the end of his affair with Fanny. When he moves to Elgin he is going through a personal crisis:

I was in a very bad way then, as low as I've ever been, stagnant, depressed, in severe physical pain, and it felt to me as though the world were a distorting mirror in which I discovered only my reflection: the inexorable drift into war – an echo, merely, of my own imminent disintegration. Elgin changed all that. It enabled me to act. (*HD*, 17)

Haggard sees Fanny for the last time "the day Hitler entered Prague" (*HD*, 145), in March 1939. A few months later, just after the declaration of war, he learns of her death, that comes to him as a "dreadful shock" (*HD*, 149). Two days after the invasion of Poland and the death of Fanny, on the 3rd of September, the United Kingdom and

France declare war on Germany. Haggard says that he learnt of the Declaration of war in the newspaper on the 4th of September. He recalls how the old people of Griffin Head felt on that day, also because they remember the First World War and its horrors:

They remembered too well the horrors of '14-'18. The intimation of personal mortality made the prospect of mass death abhorrent – this I could understand: the scale shifts, the private end becomes insignificant in the epidemic. It seemed to the old men and women who came into my surgery that morning that a sickness was upon us, and what galled them most was the warmth of its welcome; but they had neither the will nor the strength to resist. (*HD*, 159)

During the second winter that Haggard spends at Elgin it is difficult for him to deal with Fanny's death, and he haunts his mansion with her memory to keep her spirit alive. Even if no bombs fall that winter, there is the fear of the war, also because they know what happened to Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War:

That winter no bombs fell, though we had certainly been expecting them. We knew what had happened to Barcelona, buildings flattened, streets filled with dead and dying, the sky black with enemy aeroplanes – but no, no bombs fell, and the only war casualties I had to deal with were caused by the blackout. (*HD*, 161)

At this point war becomes more present in the novel because of the continuous threat of invasion and because James, the young Spitfire pilot who is the son of Fanny and Ratcliff, comes into Edward's life. According to Adam Lively, McGrath narrates the war with such clarity and vividness by using some familiar images of it that “we are given not the war itself, but a B-movie of the war”.⁷³

⁷³ Lively, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

Haggard sees James for the first time at Fanny's funeral. Shortly after, the young aviator visits Haggard in Elgin, and the two become good friends. Haggard tells that James told him what he was doing when the war broke out:

Practicing battle climbs to thirty thousand feet, where oxygen hissed into your face mask from a black steel cylinder behind the armored bulkhead. Firing your guns into the sea and raising a jagged plume of foam on the water. Cloud flying and night flying, air drills and battle practice, and getting to know Spitfires – and how you loved Spitfires! You were never able properly to explain to me the joy of flying a Spitfire, but I think perhaps I understand. You told me how you once climbed through twenty-seven thousand feet of cloud, passed out, divided for four miles, and recovered consciousness just in time to pull out of it and climb again – in any other aircraft you'd have bought it, you said. Curtains. (*HD*, 160)

Since Edward and James meet for the first time after Fanny's death and the outbreak of the war, Haggard fears for the invasion of England because of what just happened in Europe: "In the past weeks Hitler's armies had swept across Europe smashing everything in their path. Holland and Belgium had crumbled. France fell in a matter of days. Fears of an invasion on the south coast of England began to be voiced with increasing frequency" (*HD*, 162). After the Fall of France, Haggard recounts how he felt after freeing himself from grief following James' arrival into his life:

But what for me was most remarkable, at that time, was the sense I had of being liberated at last from grief. My spirits were rising, and not mine alone; there was a new feeling abroad, I had detected it in Mrs. Gregor, for there had come, with the fall of France, and the knowledge that we now stood alone, a sense of exhilaration combined, curiously, with a desire, albeit oblique and perverse, for things to get worse, to get as bad as possible, until we were, as a people, staring directly into the abyss, so that *then* we might fight back – we seemed to need to have it confirmed that the situation was hopeless before the impulse of resistance could be properly aroused. Oh, they were extraordinary days, and I was no less affected by the mood of them than anyone else, though my exhilaration was not provoked just by the threat of invasion, no, I was exhilarated for different reasons, for reasons of my own. For this was the period when you were visiting me regularly in Elgin. (*HD*, 163)

According to Ineke Bockting, “the general feeling of excitement of the English people – “staring directly into the abyss” – at the time of the “Fall of France”, which effectively brings England into the War”⁷⁴ is a clear turning-point in Haggard’s personal story, because it makes him lose James.

Indeed, Edward and James start arguing, and their once idyllic friendship gets colder. Despite this, Haggard is still worried that James could be injured. Three days after they argued, James is injured in a crash but manages to survive. Haggard cries when he hears the news, and he imagines the scene of the crash:

I was in the surgery seeing to Spike when I heard the news that I suppose unconsciously I’d been dreading all spring: you’d been injured. I was in the surgery seeing to Spike when the call came through. It was the adjutant from the station. “B Flight?” I cried – That was your flight – “Who?”
It was you.
Five minutes later I was in the car and turning out onto the coast road. The alarm I’d felt on hearing that it was you – the vehemence of it surprised me. In my imagination I saw your Spitfire cartwheeling across the airfield, smashing itself to pieces and you lying in the wreckage broken and dying. Then the adjutant told me there’d been heavy flak over Dover and you’d caught some of it chasing a Dornier down. “Badly hit?” I said.
“He got out of his kite by himself,” he said, “but he’s not happy.” (*HD*, 165)

During those days, Haggard is worried about James’ health, after he supposedly discovered a genital dysfunction on the aviator’s body, but the young Spitfire pilot is more worried about the war. Speaking with James after the crash, Edward realises that war is reaching Britain:

The Battle of Britain. It was the first time I’d heard the phrase. Now that the Battle of France was over, the Battle of Britain would begin. It would be fought in the air, for in order to invade England Hitler must get his army

⁷⁴ Bockting, *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

across the Channel unmolested by the RAF; he must wipe out the RAF first. (HD, 169)

Despite Haggard saying that James' illness is progressing, he no longer wants to put pressure on the young Spitfire pilot, because Royal Air Force pilots have a great responsibility on stopping a German landing in Britain:

The Luftwaffe was attacking the RAF by day and by night, in the air and on the ground. Only when the RAF was knocked out could a landing in England be undertaken. Churchill said that the future of civilization depended on you. If you failed, he said – that is, if the RAF failed to repel the German air assault, which would open the way to a landing on the south coast – the world would sink into the abyss of a new dark age made sinister by the light of perverted science. (HD, 171)

On the 10th July 1940 the German air force, known as *Luftwaffe*, bombs the South of England.⁷⁵ The operation of a German invasion of Britain is known as “Operation Sea Lion”. This is the start of the Battle of England, that lasts until September 1940, when Hitler is unable to launch an invasion of Britain because the Royal Air Force is too strong for the *Luftwaffe*.⁷⁶ Although the weather was “clear, still and warm, a lovely English summer” (HD, 172), for Haggard “these were the worst conditions for an overworked, undermanned air force whose pilots were close to exhaustion” (HD, 172). He describes how is the sky during those days, when the enemy attack Griffin Head:

The sky over Griffin Head was crisscrossed with contrails that unraveled like rolled bandages as Spitfires fought Messerschmitts escorting bombers whose targets were the airfields of southern England. Casualties were heavy. The station was attacked again and I was there. It was one of those warm, cloudless days, utterly tranquil – until, that is, the message came over the loudspeaker: “Large enemy bombing formation approaching Griffin

⁷⁵ David Thomson and Geoffrey Warner, *England in the The Twentieth Century <1914-79>*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981, p. 192.

⁷⁶ Henry Pelling, *Britain and the Second World War*, Glasgow: Collins, 1970, p. 96.

Head. All personnel not engaged in active duty take cover immediately.” I looked up but I couldn’t see or hear a thing in that clear blue summer sky. All round the field men were running for shelter. A Spitfire came past me with a roar to take off downwind and it was then that I saw them, a dozen black shapes shining in the sun and coming straight on. I stood transfixed, fascinated, mesmerized – this was the enemy. (*HD*, 173)

Even if James and Edward are no longer close friends as they were before, the doctor still worries about the young pilot. During that day, he witnesses the crash of a Spitfire in which another aviator, Johnny Hart is killed; Haggard describes the scene of the crash, as he is worried that James could have been in that plane:

Through my fingers I watched the Spitfire take off, and it occurred me that you might be flying it. It was about twenty feet off the ground when suddenly it catapulted upward as though on a piece of elastic, came down on its back and plowed along the runway upside down. The next moment a load of dirt hit me and then I heard someone shouting, “Run, for Christ’s sake!” I peered around, spitting dirt out of my mouth, and saw the adjutant standing in the door of a shelter and waving wildly at me. Somehow I got myself over there. My first thought was of a black bag, somewhere out on the field; my second was of you, and whether you were in the crashed Spitfire. I started to ask where you were, but the scream and the crump of falling bombs made it impossible to be heard. The air was thick with dust and the shelter heaved with each explosion, and for several minutes I believed that you were dead, and that I would shortly be dead also. (*HD*, 173)

During that period, Haggard misses James’ friendship and he comes to realise that he is deliberately avoiding him. One night Haggard dreams of bombings over Griffin Head and one of the buildings damaged by the German bombings is Elgin, his mansion:

There was a Heinkel in trouble in the sky over Griffin Head. It was one of a group that had crossed the Channel with an escort of Messerschmitts. The squadron scrambled and attacked from the rear, from above, out of the sun; the German fighters took evasive action, going into half-rolls and vertical dives with the Spitfires in hot pursuit. I heard the crackle of machine-gun fire and stopped the car (I was up on the downs for some reason) to get out

and gaze at the sky inland to the north, but all I could see were trails of vapor. The Heinkels, separated from their escort, turned for home and in close formation made the coast at twelve thousand feet. Somebody on his way back to the airfield – was it you? – spotted them from above and divided straight down in a quarter head-on attack. You got the slowest of them in your sights and let go with all eight guns in several short bursts. Smoke poured from the port engine and the bomber began to lose altitude. At about eight thousand feet it jettisoned its bombs. To no avail; it crashed into the sea and went down in seconds. None of the crew got out. A stick of bombs fell on the outskirts of the town, and several houses sustained extensive damage. One of them was Elgin. (*HD*, 181)

Haggard realises that this dream is a reflection of how his body is suffering for the loss of James, his worry for the young aviator's illness, the pain caused by Spike and the nostalgia for Fanny:

There is a way the body has of postponing pain, of going into shock in the immediate aftermath of the trauma. The mind will function in a similar fashion when it must protect itself from too fierce an assault of feeling. This, in the dream, seems to be what happened now. (*HD*, 181)

When he sees in the dream that Elgin has been bombed, his “initial reaction was one of bemusement” (*HD*, 181), as he did not perceived at first “how severe the damage was” (*HD*, 181). He says that, even if the roof has been badly hit and the windows blown out, the façade of the house “seemed almost intact” (*HD*, 181). He realises that the house has been destroyed at the back. He then describes the destruction of his own house:

And this is where the bomb had hit. It was as though a huge bite had been taken out of the back of the house. The back porch, the back kitchen, the scullery, the kitchen itself – the rooms above – utterly destroyed. The blast had knocked the walls out sideways. Small fires burned here and there. Strange thing, the way the unconscious mind works, for I perceived not wreckage but fragments of order. Splintered stretches of flooring sagged drunkenly against stumps of walls but here there was a table, rubble all around it, and a coup and a saucer intact on top. Here was a bundle of

newspapers neatly tied with string. Here was the kitchen stove on it a pot with a wooden spoon, though the pot was full of broken slate. The floors above had fallen in and I came upon part of the wall of my study, and hanging in the middle a painting, undamaged, of a wanderer above a sea of mist. I gingerly picked my way through, my black bag in my hand, still incredulous, as though I were on my way, as usual, to the front of the house for afternoon surgery. (*HD*, 182)

According to Liza Pennywitt Taylor, this nightmare of “a German bomb annihilating the rear of his house while the front remains whole, a façade of normalcy”⁷⁷ proves that “Dr. Haggard is not completely rational, and has been pushed over the edge of ordinary life into what he calls his “grief-torqued imagination”.⁷⁸ Mrs. Gregor – the governess of Elgin - is also present in the dream, which ends with the squadron passing overhead and with Haggard having a vision of an angel in the shape of James. Haggard wonders what this vision means, and he is worried about what is happening to him: “An angel – what did *this* mean? What was happening to me – was I going out of my mind? Was I being driven mad by loss and starting to confuse reality with the products of my own grief-torqued imagination?” (*HD*, 183) After this dream, Haggard describes how Griffin Head is preparing for a German invasion:

Around Griffin Head all the signposts had been taken down, all the streets name removed, so as to confuse the Germans when they came. And we needed no reminding that when they did come it was on the south coast that they'd be arriving: Griffin was the front line. The town was a cat's cradle of mines and barbed wire; huge cement cylinders had been put in the roads to block the progress of armed enemy convoys, and sentries were posted everywhere, manning pillboxes; they had two machine guns between the lot of them. The barricades thrown up to block a German advance were pitiful – clumsy jumbles of barrels and tree trunks and old iron bedsteads, and at the crossroads where the coast road met the main road the police had dumped a hundred tons of broken glass, as if for a medieval siege. (*HD*, 188)

⁷⁷ Pennywitt Taylor, *Op. cit.*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*.

Edward is worried about all those pilots' deaths and he says that "The life expectancy of fighter pilots in the Battle of Britain was not long". (*HD*, 174) This statement is confirmed at the end of the novel, when James' plane crashes. Haggard does not witness how the crash happened so he imagines it:

Evening was already coming when I saw you scramble for the seventh or eighth time that day, saw you climbing into the west, into the sun. What place I wondered for us in the Third Reich? I, a cripple, and you – you, a brave sick gallant boy giving your life for a hopeless cause-
This is what I imagine happened. In the line astern you ran into them in a steep climbing turn and in those seconds they lost the advantage. Your wingman let go a burst of fire at the first one, who sheared off toward you and you knew he was yours. Fierce unwavering concentration, sweat on your brow and knuckles white as you kicked the rudder over to get him at right angles then let go a four-second burst with full deflection, and grim relief as you saw him come through your sights and the tracer hammered home! For a second he seemed to hang motionless, then a jet of red flame shot upward and he spun down into the sea. Then a blur of twisting machines, tracer bullets beading and crackling, the sudden glint on metal of the setting sun. Another went down in a sheet of flame on your right as a Spitfire went by in a half-roll. You were weaving and turning and trying to gain height when you saw another one below you climbing away from the sun so you closed in to three hundred yards and gave him a two-second burst and saw fabric rip off the wing and black smoke pour from the engine but he didn't go down. Angry now you put in another burst and at last saw red flames shoot upward as he spiralled out of sight. And then – a moment's inattention. Why? Sun in your eyes? A flicker of terror? Jab of pain from your shrapnel? Whatever: it was *then* that you felt a terrific explosion, so strong it knocked the stick out of your hand and the whole aircraft shuddered violently. But it didn't start burning so you headed for home. With that excruciatingly tender care did you nurse that Spitfire back to Griffin Head! What did you think about? Could you think about anything but the job in hand? Did you think about me? The cockpit only burst into flames as you touched down. I was there waiting for you. I was the one who saw you standing on the wing engulfed in flame, then falling, and I the one who reached you first and smothered the flames with my fur. (*HD*, 189-190)

As James' body is severely burnt, Haggard tries to extinguish the flames; when he realises that James' body is "too badly burn to live" (*HD*, 190), he decides to give him a deadly injection in order to save him from suffering.

Julius

An overview of the story

Julius is a short story by Patrick McGrath. It is one of the three novellas of *Ghost Town: Tales of Manhattan Then and Now*, a collection of short stories published in 2005. *Ghost Town* is part of Bloomsbury's series "Writers and the City", and it features three short stories set in Manhattan during three different historical periods, three "turning points in American history":⁷⁹ *The Year of the Gibbet*, set in the Eighteenth Century during the American Revolution; *Julius*, set during the Nineteenth Century; *Ground Zero*, set in 2001, shortly after the September 11th attacks. It was translated into Italian as *La Città Fantasma: Manhattan Ieri e Oggi*, and it is the only work by McGrath – along with *Dr. Haggard's Disease* – that has not been translated into French. The collection is "a portrait and a tribute to New York, a collection of three novellas set at different times in New York's history – linked by violence".⁸⁰ In a 2004 interview for *The Daily Telegraph* after the publication of his novel *Port Mungo*, McGrath anticipated Jasper Rees that he was working on *Ghost Town*, and that one of the three short stories would have focused on 9/11:

"I want to write a novel that's set right now, and try to do something with how it is to live today, particularly in New York in the wake of 9/11. Maybe it's just because it's very hard to be an escapist at the moment. I've scratched that itch enough."⁸¹

⁷⁹ Claude Maisonnat, "Love, Trauma and Creation in "Julius"", in *Patrick McGrath: Directions and Transgressions*, ed. by Jocelyn Dupont, 127-142. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, p. 127.

⁸⁰ Susie Mackenzie. "In pursuit of sublime terror", *The Guardian*, 3 September 2005, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/sep/03/fiction.features>> [accessed 6 July 2016].

⁸¹ Jasper Rees. "A writer's life: Patrick McGrath", *The Telegraph*, 2 May 2004, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3617055/A-writers-life-Patrick-McGrath.html>> [accessed 11 July 2016].

McGrath has been living in New York since the early 1980's, but on the 11th September 2001 he was not there because he was spending the summer holiday with his wife in Kennington, south London.⁸² In an interview with *The Guardian*, he said that Lower Manhattan "has been fought over for centuries. It is one of the most violently contested pieces of real estate in history. And 9/11 is a part of that history."⁸³ In a review for the same newspaper, Todd McEwen described the relation between the content of the stories and the title of the collection:

The reader will discover that these are, literally, ghost stories, and once or twice the "gothic" gets a little lurid - but the element is a valid one. More important than the revenants of vanished people are those of the previous cities, lingering into the new. As the second World Trade Center tower falls, it leaves "a ghostly image of itself in the empty air". The steel structures still standing are twisted arches from a gothic cathedral.⁸⁴

Julius is the second short story of the collection – the longest one - and it is set in New York during the Nineteenth Century, mainly from the 1830's – Julius van Horn was born in 1935 – until the 1880's. This is how Sue Zlosnik describes this novella:

Uncovered in a leisurely manner as the unfolding of a mystery, it is a tale of patriarchal oppression and dynastic self-interest in a period when the commercial class was consolidating its wealth and the city was growing at a rapid pace [...] The familiar McGrath themes of love, madness and art – with their underlying intimations of transgression and decay – are interwoven in this tale of familiar violence and its repercussions. The violence of the larger stage (the Civil War takes place during the period it covers) is incidental to its plot, but connected at a deeper level.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid..

⁸³ Mackenzie, *Op. cit.*.

⁸⁴ Todd McEwen. "The City that Ate the World", *The Guardian*, 24 September 2005, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/sep/24/featuresreviews.guardianreview18>> [accessed 12 July 2016].

⁸⁵ Zlosnik, *Patrick McGrath*, p. 113.

The story is narrated in third person by Alice, the grand-niece of Jerome Brook Franklin and Sarah, one of Julius' sisters, who tells it living in 1950's, when the van Horn family's fortunes have collapsed. She narrates what happened through the description of photographs – she says that through them “I am able to bring to life at least in my own mind what it might have been like, the day Julius came home” (*GT*, 145) - her mother's memories, her grandparents' memories and Julius too (the latter through her mother's memories – she is no longer alive); when she visits he grandfather, he says that “a large part of the pleasure I took from being there came of listening to my grandfather talk about the family” (*GT*, 170).

In an interview with Leonetta Bentivoglio for the Italian literary magazine *Almanacco dei libri*, Patrick McGrath revealed that when he writes he usually reads works by writers who can lead him through a certain historical period; he said that the setting of *The Year of the Gibbet* was inspired by William Dean Howells, while *Julius* was inspired by Henry James;⁸⁶ it is very likely that *Julius* has been inspired by *Washington Square*: they are both set in mid-Nineteenth Century New York City and narrated from a third person-point of view, both Julius' and Catherine Sloper's mothers have died shortly after having given birth to them; Catherine's father is cruel towards her because he thinks that Morris Townsend want to marry her just for her wealth, but he is right: he tells Catherine that if she marries him she will not inherit anything; she is so in love with Morris that she agrees, but Morris then leaves, breaking her heart.

⁸⁶ Leonetta Bentivoglio, “Patrick McGrath”, *Almanacco dei Libri*, 11 June 2005. <<http://ilmiolibro.kataweb.it/recensione/catalogo/7531/patrick-mcgrath/>> [accessed 24 December 2016].

Plot

Julius narrates the story of Julius, the son of Noah van Horn, a wealthy merchant from New York City. Noah and his wife, Ann Griswold, have three daughters – Charlotte, Sarah and Hester – and when Julius, his only son, was born in 1835, he is happy initially because he thinks that his son would inherit his empire in the future. As Ann dies shortly after giving birth to Julius, Noah is devastated and starts to beat Julius “for the smallest infractions of the rules of the household” (*GT*, 66); he is disappointed because he realises that Julius is not the right person to lead the House of van Horn in the future, so he searches for someone who is fit for the role: the chosen one is Max Rinder, who later will marry Charlotte. In the meantime the latter, along with her other sisters, asks Noah to stop beating Julius, and he agrees. Also Charlotte is the one who thinks that her brother has a talent for art and she looks for an art teacher. She finds Jerome Brook Franklin, so Julius starts to attend his lessons; here he meets Annie Kelly, a young Irish model, and he falls in love with her. They spend time together, and he tells his sister about his feeling for Annie: they are all happy for him, but at the same time they warn him not to tell anything to Noah.

So Julius is crazy for Annie and he feels guilty to lie to his father, during a walk he reveals to Noah that he is in love, so his father wants to know who is she and he invites her to dinner. Noah van Horn dislikes Irish immigrants and he does not accept that his son is in a relationship with an Irish girl. After the dinner, Julius goes to lesson as usual, but Annie is not there; he asks Jerome Brook Franklin, but the painter has no idea about it, so he goes to her home, but neither her mother knows where she has gone.

When he goes back home, Julius is still shocked by Annie's disappearance; moreover, it seems also that he is no longer able to know where he is and to recognise the other members of his family: for this reason, some members of his family call the doctor, who thinks that Julius is suffering from acute nervous exhaustion caused by the shock for the loss of Annie and sedates Julius with an opiated preparation. When the doctor goes away, Julius is in his bedroom with his sisters. They see him turning into a monstrous and unrecognisable creature who is not him and that chants obscenity and blasphemy at them, before going back sleeping in his bed. Scared by what just happened, Julius' sisters call the doctor again, but he thinks that the young boy has fever and it is difficult for him to believe to what Julius' sisters tells him that they have seen. When the doctor leaves the house, Julius transforms again into that creature, and he takes out Jerome Brook Franklin's eye with a knife because, shortly after Annie's sudden disappearance, he discovered that the painter used to have private sessions with the Irish model.

After this, in the summer of 1859, Julius is admitted in a private asylum under the care of an alienist. During the twenty years he spends here, his sisters visit him several times, while Noah visits him only once: on that occasion, his father reveals Julius that he ordered Rinder to make Annie disappear from New York, but his son-in-law killed her instead. When Julius leaves the asylum during the summer of 1879, many things have changed. Some time later, during a dinner, Rinder reveals him that he has not killed Annie, and that she left New York after he gave him a sum of money to do so. The following day, Julius searches for Annie, but he cannot find her, also because during those twenty years some areas of Manhattan – including Nassau Street, where Annie and her family used to live - have changed.

Alice, the narrator, says that some decades after the House of van Horn has lost all its wealth, and that when she asked her grandfather once – Jerome Brook Franklin – about what happened to his eye, he revealed to her that Julius attacked her because he ruined Julius' life, and he ruined his, since he said that Annie belonged to him because it was too much for Julius.

Characters

Julius van Horn

Julius van Horn is the protagonist of the eponymous story. He was born in 1835, he is the youngest son of Noah van Horn and Ann Griswold, and he has three older sisters, Charlotte, Sarah and Hester; moreover, he is the great-uncle of Alice, the narrator of the story.

Despite being born into a wealthy family, he had a hard childhood, because his mother died shortly after having given birth to him, and his father has beaten him for several time; in spite of what his father used to do to him, “Julius never seemed to grow bitter at this treatment, for as soon as his tears were dry, he would come back as cheerful as before and ask his dear papa if there was anything he might do to be of service to him” (*GT*, 67). After his sisters ask Noah to stop beating him, Julius works for him in his father's counting house; since he has “difficulty with any task involving numbers, indeed with any application of reason to an abstract problem” (*GT*, 73), he is happy that he will soon stop working there – Noah chose Max Rinder as his successor - because “he was delighted at his imminent release from what had become an irksome

captivity at a narrow, inky desk and a most tedious set of duties involving the keeping of accounts of bills of lading and cargo manifests and the like.” (*GT*, 73) McGrath then describes Julius:

By all accounts he was a cheerful, friendly boy but he was profoundly disorganized. He was late for his appointments, often lost his money, his house-key, on one occasion his *shoes*, even, and his memory for names was that of an old person suffering from dementia. As to his appearance he was a long-limbed, lanky youth with a chaotic tumble of yellow curls. He grinned wildly when he was pleased or embarrassed and was forever having trouble with his clothing, buttons coming undone, short-tails escaping their confinement within his trousers, studs and pins going astray and with them the cuffs and cravats and such which they were intended to secure. His eyesight was poor, and he wore spectacles. (*GT*, 73-74)

Despite being depicted as “unfit for the world that awaits him”⁸⁷, Charlotte, his oldest sister, sees in him an artistic personality:

It was Charlotte who saw in him something more than an unkempt buffoon. She watched closely as he amused himself in the sisters’ parlor, running off pencil sketches of the girls and their friends and then springing to the piano, where he would invent a tune with a lyric to accompany what he had sketched. Charlotte saw these spontaneous effusions as the froth or spume atop a rising wave of artistic genius, and was determined that her brother not waste it. She was convinced he had the makings of an artist, and it was certainly undeniable that with his wild hair and disheveled aspect he presented the appearance of an artistic type, and to artistic types the sisters were particularly sensitive. (*GT*, 74)

This leads Charlotte to search for an art teacher, and she finds Jerome Brook Franklin. When Julius starts to attend his lessons and has gone far as a “sentient being, a creature emerging from the misty innocence of childhood and into mature self-awareness” (*GT*, 86) - he meets Annie Kelly, a young Irish model, and he falls in love with her. His sisters – especially Charlotte - are all very happy for him, but warn Julius

⁸⁷ Maisonnat. *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

not to tell anything to Noah; after her wedding, Charlotte leaves Waverley Place and moves to a house in the West Twenties: Waverley Place is now more silent, and “Julius, obsessed as he was with Annie Kelly, contributed significantly to the subdued atmosphere, and without Charlotte he wandered about, a lovesick youth, absorbed in the eruption of a volcanic passion but nobody to talk about it” (*GT*, 93); moreover, “without Charlotte to confide in, Julius became secretive” (*GT*, 94). While his relationship with Annie Kelly continues, once his father asks him what is happening with him and Julius feels a little guilty because he is not used to tell lies to his father. This leads Julius to confess him that he is in love; Noah wants to know Annie, so he invites her for dinner. After the dinner, Annie disappears, and this shocks deeply Julius. When he comes home, he stays in his bedroom, where for two times he transforms himself into a monstrous creature – once he takes out Jerome Brook Franklin’s eye. For this reason, he is admitted to a private asylum in the Catskill Mountains.

When he leaves the asylum in the summer of 1879, many things have changed. One of them is that now it seems that he is no longer talented as Charlotte thought that he was. Beside this, Alice has a photograph of him, so she describes how it might have been like the day that Julius goes home, by describing how he was dressed in the photograph and how he has changed:

He was a little stooped, still tall and thin, his hair now flecked with silver but as unruly as ever. He wore a double-breasted jacket with broad lapels, a wide cravat with a pin in it and a narrow collar at least ten years out of date. Across his vest hung a silver fob. He wore wool trousers with a narrow pinstripe and laced boots. All this is in the photograph. He carried a bamboo cane, and someone had put a flower in his buttonhole.

Also apparent in the photograph is a faint reminder of what he had lost. The long, mild face with the watery pale-blue eyes and delicate claw of nose – a fine narrow ridge of bone under skin as taut as parchment, I have that nose myself! – carries the unmistakable mark of his vanished youth. (*GT*, 145)

Alice has known Julius personally. He has told her about that time that he saw the Brooklyn Bridge for the first time and, because she knew what he had seen, he was “astonished at my cleverness” (*GT*, 164); she says also that she “liked Uncle Julius, and I remember as I child I was eager to learn from my mother what it was he had done, to be sent to an insane asylum” (*GT*, 164). She is so curious that her mother, after being initially reluctant to do so, tells a bit what happened to him before being vague. For Alice, “I heard enough by then to elevate Uncle Julius to heroic status – to think of it, my own uncle being driven insane for *love!*” (*GT*, 167).

Annie Kelly

Annie Kelly is a young model of Irish origin, who works for Jerome Brook Franklin and has a relationship with Julius, whose forced end leads him to madness.

Julius sees her for the first time when she is at Jerome Brook Franklin’s studio, and she is dressed “only in a bed-sheet, which she clutched to the bed” (*GT*, 85); she has a flawless skin and a slim, straight figure. She is not a modest girl, as many other girls like her:

Annie Kelly was not modest, how could she be, given her line of work? The lack of modesty of artists’ models was well known in those days, and gave rise to the popular belief that the morals of such females left much to be desired. Not to put too fine a point on it, they were considered little better than whores, and not a few of them were in fact whores. (*GT*, 85-86)

She is described as “tall and fair, and on the platform, divested of her bed-sheet, she displayed to the astonished youths a pale body perfect in all its proportions” (*GT*, 86). Her mother, who is an actress, has a boarding-house in Nassau Street:

She was a plump, jovial woman with skin as clear and youthful as her daughter's. She had lived all her life on the east side of lower Manhattan, having been an actress once and played in all local theaters. She later married a ship's carpenter, raised several children and saw enough riotous times not to be shocked by anything now. (*GT*, 122-123)

When Julius sees her for the first time at Jerome Brook Franklin's studio, he immediately falls in love with her. They start to meet, and Julius is crazy for her. When Julius confesses to his father that he is in love with her and his father decides to invite her at their home. After her sudden disappearance, Julius discovers that she used to have private sessions with Jerome Brook Franklin and, when he visits her mother, she tells him that "Three days before, a Sunday, Annie had left the house early in the morning, saying she would not be home until dinner-time. She had not saying where she was going. She had not seen since." (*GT*, 123)

Julius thinks that Annie has died, and this is one of the reasons why he has gone mad and has been locked in an asylum; in reality she has been paid to disappear, and it is unknown what has happened to her since.

Noah van Horn

Noah van Horn is Julius' father. Alice describes a portrait of him:

Noah van Horn was a ruddy, raw-boned man with a will of iron, and nobody ever got the better of him in argument except perhaps his daughter Charlotte. To judge from his portrait, which first hung over the mantel in his town-house on Barclay Street, he must have been a quite alarming character in the flesh. Bullish, loud, domineering, impatient – possessed of an ungovernable temper – it is all there in the face, and I say this because the picture is now in my possession and I spend far too much time in front of it. For with his grizzled whiskers and wild black eyes he looks more like an Old Testament prophet than a merchant who spent his days on the South Street wharves – he seems literally about to burst from the canvas and lay about the viewer with a stick! (*GT*, 63)

Alice she also describes him in his seventies:

Noah was over seventy now – his whiskers were clipped and gray, a salt-and-pepper beard which by means of its concealment of his cheeks and jaw drew one's gaze to the wise black eyes and the broad forehead on which a few last strands of silver were brushed straight back. (*GT*, 99-100)

Noah van Horn is presented as a “powerful patriarch obsessed with keeping a strict control over his family”,⁸⁸ his position in the family is “god-like”⁸⁹ and figure is associated with violence, cruelty and animality, because “The towering figure of Noah is obviously meant to dominate the whole story as it occupies a privileged position in the narrative. Noah is the first character to be introduced and he invades the whole textual space whereas Julius enters the scene only pages later”.⁹⁰ Alice mentions also another terrifying feature of Noah's personality, that is his silence:

I have heard about the terrifying power of Noah's silence, when he chose to exercise it – so terrifying that its reputation came down through the family as though it were a legend, or an anecdote, at least, of some historic import. (*GT*, 99)

Noah is a wealthy merchant who has built his own fortune since the early 1800s – when he was in his twenties – in the Atlantic cotton trade, and then “he ploughed his profits into shipbuilding, real estate, construction and the like” (*GT*, 64). He is described by Alice as not “one of the old money elite”, someone who before his wedding used to drink brandy in the hotels of lower Manhattan with his fellows and has “a powerful commitment to aggressive enterprise and the getting of money” (*GT*, 64). In 1832 he marries Ann Griswold, the Yankee merchant's daughter with whom he did business; he

⁸⁸ Maisonnat, *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

is twenty years older than her and they have three daughters and one son. Noah and his family used to live in Barclay Street, but they moved in the winter of 1935 in a mansion in Waverley Place and their old home was destroyed one week later in the Great Fire of New York.

Shortly after Julius' birth, Ann dies, shocking Noah. He is shocked, so he starts to beat Julius. Meanwhile, he hoped once that his son was the one who was going to take over the House of van Horn; he realises that Julius is not fit for this job, so he searches for someone who can do this in the future; he finds Max Rinder, a man of Bavarian origin who later marries Charlotte.

Noah does not like Irish people, since he employed some of them. This is the reason why he does not approve Julius' relationship with Annie Kelly. Alice says that, after his wedding with Ann, Noah has developed "an interest in the history of ancient civilizations, accumulating a library of some two thousand volumes" (*GT*, 64); before Julius being admitted to an asylum, Noah makes plans for his future, including to visit Europe with his son:

Noah was at last growing tired. For more than forty years he had run the House of van Horn and overseen its steady expansion. He was now among the wealthiest men in New York. He believed that in a few more years he would retire. To travel, perhaps, and to read. He had for years wished that he had more time to spend in his library. He wanted to study the ancient civilizations, for he was curious to draw comparisons between those civilizations and his own. He believed that the American people would in time be as great as any in human history, and he wanted to spend a year in Europe to visit the old sites, the ruins. He would take Julius with him, perhaps, set him up with a teacher in Paris, or in one of the German studios. Alone each evening in his library, Noah thought often of this happy prospect, and Rinder, he was confident, would make it possible by assuming the responsibilities he was finding increasingly irksome. So Noah permitted himself a sigh of relief. Five more years, he thought, possibly four. Julius would then be twenty-two. He would take the boy to

Europe and they would see together what the Old World had to offer the New. (*GT*, 119-120)

But his plans do not become reality. Noah dies during this time, and one year before his death he visits Julius – this is the only time that he does so. Alice describes him now as “a broken old man, his face haggard, his heart shattered by what had befallen his son” (*GT*, 142).

After his death, the van Horn family has lost its wealth; moreover, she owns Noah’s portrait that she describes at the beginning, that is present in the story also during the dinner with Rinder and Charlotte, and Alice says that on this occasion the room was dominated by a phantom, as it “truly belong to the man in the painting” (*GT*, 155).

Charlotte van Horn

Charlotte van Horn is the oldest daughter of Noah and Ann. After the death of her mother, she acts like a mother to Julius, being the one who asks Noah to no longer beat him. She is the one also who thinks that Julius has a talent for art so, after her research for an art teacher, she enrolls Julius at Jerome Brook Franklin’s art lessons.

When she is in her twenties, Charlotte has an extravagant talk, smokes cigarettes, has dangerous ideas, as well as believing in free love and being an abolitionist; later in life, after Julius left the asylum, Alice describes her as a “stout, colourful woman and very much a character in New York society” (*GT*, 151), whose opinions are still radical because she has embraced socialism:

She compounded her eccentricity with ostentatious jewelry and cosmetics, often appearing in public in flowing capes and scarves, a cigarette holder

permanently in her gaily beringed fingers, loud and fearless as only the very wealthy can be. (*GT*, 151)

When she is twenty-four, Charlotte is still unmarried, and her father is concerned for her; she is described as “not an unattractive girl” (*GT*, 89) but she is difficult:

She had frightened off at least two men who were showing an interest because she was not sufficiently feminine. She was too intense, too loud. Too many opinions. Her father lost sleep over her, for in his gruff way he had a great tenderness for his firstborn child and wanted to see her safely settled in the world. (*GT*, 89)

Max Rinder starts to court her and they eventually marry:

The couple was married in the early spring of 1857. Noah escorted his daughter into the First Presbyterian Church on Fifth Avenue, Charlotte in a white satin dress with a long train and a tulle veil which fell like a mist from a headpiece of daisies and lilies. She was transformed from the Charlotte they all knew, the restless, excitable young woman so quick to argument, so intemperate in her enthusiasms. Instead she seemed demure, at peace – in love, even. [...] Charlotte’s sisters were her bridesmaids. (*GT*, 92)

They go on a short honeymoon in Florida and then they move into a house in the West Twenties; without her, life at Waverley Place changes forever, especially for Julius:

Without Charlotte the house lacked a certain feverishness. Charlotte had made the sisters’ parlor a place where gossip and laughter and lively conversation about subjects artistic and political were encouraged, but in her absence the house became almost somber. The girls read more, chattered less, and plied their needles as they never had before. (*GT*, 93)

She witnesses Julius’ descent into madness along with Sarah and Hester. When he is locked in the asylum they visit him regularly. When he goes home, Charlotte is

“relieved to find him apparently sane” (*GT*, 151) and she thinks that he has fully recovered, because sometimes she was afraid that “he would never be well enough to come home” (*GT*, 152). Moreover, during those twenty years she realises by looking at some of his paintings that Julius has no talent for art and that she was wrong about it some decades earlier. Alice does not say anything about what happened to her later, but she says that her mother disliked her.

Jerome Brook Franklin

Jerome Brook Franklin is a painter, as well as Alice’s grandfather. He is the one who becomes Julius’ art teacher.

When he meets Charlotte, he is described as “burly and full-bearded, with fierce blue eyes” (*GT*, 77-78) who feels dangerous, and this means to her that “he must be a proper artist” (*GT*, 78). He is a painter – not established among the most popular yet, so he gives instructions to young men to fund his expeditions into the American wilderness - whose canvases “displayed sweeping vistas of such scenes of natural beauty as the lakes of northwestern New York in the fall” (*GT*, 76). This is a reference to the Hudson River School; it was America’s first true artistic fraternity:

Its name was coined to identify a group of New York City-based landscape painters that emerged about 1850 under the influence of the English émigré Thomas Cole (1801–1848) and flourished until about the time of the Centennial [...] Cole’s style was marked by dramatic forms and vigorous technique, reflecting the British aesthetic theory of the Sublime, or fearsome, in nature. In the representation of American landscape, really in its infancy in the early nineteenth century, the application of the Sublime was virtually unprecedented, and moreover accorded with a growing

appreciation of the wildness of native scenery that had not been seriously addressed by Cole's predecessors.⁹¹

Cole painted the Catskill Mountains – the place where lies the asylum in which Julius is locked – and in the story there is a description of a large painting by Jerome Brook Franklin called *In the Catskills at Sunset*:

Charlotte saw a vista of dark peaks receding to the horizon, and beyond them a sky of an intense, pale orangey-blue touched with flames of a scarlet radiant against the darker sky over the mountains in the foreground, where in a valley, in utter stillness, lay a lake of what looked like burnished copper and beside it a tiny human figure in a state of rapt contemplation. (*GT*, 79)

After Julius takes him off an eye during his descent into madness because he had discovered that the painter used to have private sessions with Annie, Sarah, his youngest sister, nurses him. They fall in love and they marry in July 1860; the wedding is attended by both of his painter friends and “the families of men from Noah’s world of business and politics” (*GT*, 143), then Jerome Brook Franklin and Sarah move to a large house on West Twenty-Third Street. With the loss of his eye, he is no longer able to paint landscapes, so he focuses on portraits:

Jerome Brook Franklin applied himself conscientiously to the work of portraiture, and in time he prospered, earning an income greater by far than what he could have expected from landscape painting. But he had lost the work which had once answered every deep yearning of his painter’s soul, I mean the depiction of the great natural vistas of the American wilderness. In his later years a bitter, impotent rage began to eat away at his spirit. He drank to console himself, and eventually the drink got the better of him. By the end he had lost everything. (*GT*, 144)

⁹¹ Kevin J. Avery, “The Hudson River School.” In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/hurs/hd_hurs.htm> (October 2004) [accessed 28 December 2016].

Alice writes about her memories of her grandfather. She inherited an artistic personality from him and she attempts to be a writer.⁹² She says that he was a “gruff man, and he often exaggerated that trait in order to amuse me” (*GT*, 169); when she visited him in his studio, he was aware of her presence even if she did not make sound at all, and she says that when she visited him “a large part of the pleasure I took from being there came of listening to my grandfather talk about the family, which he did in tones of *faux* horror, saying we were all mad. It was a good joke” (*GT*, 170). One day Alice is curious about what happened to Brook Franklin’s eye, so he tells her that his uncle Julius did it, and he attacked because they ruined each other’s lives; she says that despite her mother telling her what she had, she kept her secret for herself for many years.

Max Rinder

Max Rinder is Charlotte’s husband, the man who takes over the House of van Horn after Noah’s death, as well as the one who orders Annie to disappear. Rinder’s family has Bavarian origin, and they have been living in Long Island for two generations; they are described as a “contented and industrious” (*GT*, 72) family:

Max, however, had ambition. It may be that he was already a clerk in the van Horn warehouse on Old Slip when he first came to Noah’s attention, probably through a display of the kind of qualities Noah would approve – initiative, enterprise, punctuality, defence, or maybe not defence, maybe rather an independence of thought and a readiness to speak up boldly even at the risk of arousing the awful displeasure of the master. He was a sallow young man, above medium height although somewhat stooped, for he had a bony deformity at the top of his spine which is apparent in all the photographs. He had a large sloping brow with a Napoleonic lick of jet-black hair at peak and temple and pale, deep-set eyes – hypnotic eyes, like a snake-charmer or a preacher, which he would fasten unblinking upon

⁹² Maisonnat, *Op. Cit.*, p. 135.

whomever he was talking to, the effect unsettling. He was quick in all his movements and even quicker in his thinking, a characteristic particularly esteemed by Noah van Horn, who yielded to no man in his estimate of his own brains when it came to matters of business. (*GT*, 72)

Rinder is also described as heartless, passionless, cold man with a ruthlessness just like Noah, “a swift and devious intelligence and an ability to get what he wanted regardless of what to any other mortal might seem insurmountable obstacles” (*GT*, 88).

After being chosen by Noah as his successor, he starts to court Charlotte:

He had seen from the very outset that a man of property like Noah van Horn, with his three unmarried daughters, could provide the means of fulfilment of all his ambitions. He recognized Charlotte’s predicament, and he also recognized the depths of her father’s feelings for her even if no one else did, including Charlotte herself. (*GT*, 89)

They eventually marry, and Charlotte is the one who discovers that he is a complicated and vulnerable young man:

An intense sensitivity to pain which he concealed from everybody except her. For he had suffered much in his dramatic rise in the world of trade and commerce, and he was not thick-skinned. Every insult, every slight drew blood and caused deep hurt, and he was unable to forget such wounds. He schemed and brooded, and did not see that this was a sickness. (*GT*, 91)

Alice says that Charlotte “was moved by Rinder’s pride and his private suffering, and she pitied him. She offered him sympathy, and tried to deflect him from his fantasies of revenge” (*GT*, 91)

Rinder wants to take control of everything that Noah possesses and he is a social climber. This is why he offers to pay Annie a sum to disappear. When Julius sees him after many years, Rinder has changed a lot:

In the wheelchair lolled a shrunken man who had clearly only a few months to live. It was difficult to recognize in this broken creature the coiled and potent figure which once had been Rinder. (*GT*, 154)

Julius and Annie

One of the main themes of the story is the relationship between Julius van Horn and Annie Kelly. Julius sees Annie for the first time at Jerome Brook Franklin's studio when he is seventeen; she has been working as a model and he has been working there for two months:

Julius was now ripe for that experience without which no sentimental education is complete, and with the appearance of a girl called Annie Kelly it begins. She was the spark, the match tossed idly into the tinder of Julius' destiny, for with her arrival the fervor so recently aroused in Julius found its outlet. It happened in the studio. There was the usual din of noisy chatter, those boisterous boys waiting to be told what they were to do that day, for no pieces of plaster statuary had been set up for them to work from. They all assumed the room at the back was empty, when suddenly, in the doorway, appeared – a girl. There was an immediate silence. She was clad only in a bed-sheet, which she clutched to her breast. (*GT*, 85)

After seeing her, he immediately falls in love with her, and this is something new, unknown and unexpected for him:

He had come far, I do not mean as an artist – as an artist he had barely begun – I mean as a sentient being, a creature emerging from the misty innocence of childhood and into mature self-awareness; but for this he was not prepared. Around him his fellows scratched away with their pencils, and after a while he did manage to lift his own, but for a few moments only. Then he set it down again, and looked about him helplessly, suddenly unsure what was happening to him.

I believe that after he left the studio Julius spent the rest of the day on the streets of New York indulging the emotion which had sprung to life in him as he sat gazing at that naked body. At what point he returned home to Waverley Place I do not know, but it seems he had had time enough to decide that what he was experiencing was, in fact, love. When he told Charlotte the extraordinary news, rather than talk carefully to her brother, perhaps advise him to go slow, and be prudent, instead she apparently

clapped her hands together, gave out a small scream, cried “Oh, *Julius!*” then flung her arms around him and told him how proud she was.

Then she insisted he tell her everything. In this way Julius’ folly was given validity by one who should have know better, for Charlotte was not a child, indeed Charlotte was herself engaged in some related negotiation, though in a spirit altogether different from that of her brother. (*GT*, 87)

According to Claude Maisonnat, Julius’ love for Annie is “a more naïve experience of love that came to him as a blinding revelation so that Annie became his one and only obsession, even though he had no guarantee that she loved him”.⁹³ To him “Annie is desirable as she comes to symbolize femininity and sexual desire, although nothing is said in the text about the sexual nature of their brief intercourse”.⁹⁴ Alice describes how Julius and Annie once spend some time together after the class, also narrating how Julius is feeling while he is so in love:

When the class was over and the other students had dispersed he waited for her outside the building. [...] She was a tall, jaunty, handsome girl and Julius fell in beside her as she strode east on Tenth street. She affected to ignore him but he was so persistent that she at last relented and told him her name.

She then climbed aboard a horse-car going south on Broadway. But having seated herself she saw that he was hanging on the platform at the back of the carriage and she rolled her eyes to heaven, for she was no stranger to importunate youths like this. Then he was pushing through the standing passengers with copious apologies until he stood in front of her, clinging to the pole and grinning at her. She knew he was a rich boy and she was wary of him, but all the same he did amuse her a little. With every lurch of the carriage he was flung this way and that, but still he hung over her, and she consented to talk to him.

I see them descend from the horse-car somewhere in the vicinity of City Hall, where she sat with him on a bench in the park. She told him a little about herself, that her mother had a boarding-house on Nassau Street, and then they spoke about Jerome Brook Franklin. After a few minutes the bells of St. Paul’s reminded the girl that she had duties at home, and away she went. She paused at the gate of the park. Julius stood by the bench with his hand outstretched and a blissful smile on his foolish face.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 132.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 132.

Then see the love-struck youth make his slow way back up Broadway! He had, yes, properly fallen in love. He had not however fallen in love wisely, but why should he? Who falls in love wisely? He could not guess that the thing would end in tragedy. I almost think his feet were a few inches above the sidewalk, and as the crowds swept by him he barely heard the tumult of voices, the wagons and carriages, the fruit-sellers and cigar-sellers and the newsboys with their penny papers crying out the latest murder – none of it touched Julius. He walked home in a kind of sanctified silence. (*GT*, 94-95-96)

His sisters warned him not to talk about her relationship with Noah:

-What is it you are not telling me, son?

-Nothing, papa!

Another few seconds of that frightful gaze upon him, and poor Julius wished only to be lifted bodily by a team of angels and spirited off to some remote place. Then Noah pushed back his chair, rose to his feet and, plucking the starched white napkin from his throat, flung it onto the table. Still regarding Julius, with an expression now of hurt, as though the boy had insulted him, he left the room.

No sooner had the door closed than Julius burst into tears and laid his head on his arms on the table. His sisters rushed to him and with their arms about his heaving shoulders begged him not to cry, it was all right, everything was all right-

-It's not all right! cried Julius, lifting his head and turning to them, and as he did so the last of the evening sunlight fell full upon him, and his cheeks shone with tears, his hair gleamed like gold.

-It's not all right, he said more quietly, but with a desperate throb of sorrow in his voice. I have told papa a lie!

-Not a lie, said Hester, stroking his head.

-I must tell him about her, he whispered, his damp eyes fierce now.

-Not yet, I beg you, dear brother.

I think this may have been the first time Julius properly understood the necessity of behaving in the world with less than utter transparency. Never before had he had to conceal his feelings, though I remind myself of what he must surely have concealed as a small boy, when his papa had beaten him until he bled. (*GT*, 100-101)

In order to break down the barrier of silence which had arisen between him and Julius, Noah decides to have a stroll with his son around Washington Square, like he used to do with his wife. Julius is nervous, because "For almost two weeks he had been trying to conceal from his father the fact that he was in love, and the strain was acute"

(*GT*, 103); during the stroll he becomes increasingly nervous that he needs to confess his father that he is in love:

-Father, is it ever wrong to love?

Familiar though he was with the naivety of his son, Noah could not restrain a bark of laughter.

-Is it wrong? How could it be wrong to love? he said.

Then all at once Noah understood that he had given away the first point in the game by admitting the absolute value of love. Poor Julius, he did not even know he was playing a game, nor that he had seized the advantage effortlessly by failing to employ a stratagem. He agreed with some alacrity that no, of course it could not be wrong to love, how could it be? And more in this vein. When his outburst was over his father allowed a few seconds of silence and then spoke again.

-And who is it you love, son? You love your sisters, I know. I may hope you love your father.

Now this was a stratagem. Julius at once plunged into the trap.

-Of course I do, papa, but this is not the same.

-What is not the same?

There. They were at the crux of the thing already.

-Why, it is different!

-That is surely what we mean by "not the same", said Noah, dryly.

Julius made an inarticulate sound. He was encouraged. He could hold it back no longer.

-I love a girl, papa!

-Ah. That is different.

-It is different, papa!

-To love a girl is certainly different from loving your sisters.

-It is not the same at all, papa!

-I think we have established it. Who is she?

This was the moment, the boy knew, about which his sisters had warned him.

-You will be angry with me.

-But why?

-Her name is Annie Kelly.

Here was the first realization on Noah van Horn's part that Julius had not chosen a girl of his own class. He knew no Kellys. He did not doubt, however, that the human cargo of the Atlantic packets, discharged daily at the southern tip of the island, contained many a Kelly.

-And what do her people do, son?

-Her mother keeps a boarding-house on Nassau Street. (*GT*, 104-105-106)

During the Nineteenth Century many Irish immigrants arrived to New York. Between 1840 and 1860, over four million people entered the United States, and the

majority of them were from Ireland and Germany – many Irish came to the United States after 1845 following the Great Famine. In 1860, New York City had 814,000 residents, and over 384,000 of them were immigrants,⁹⁵ while “by 1855 about 86% of the city laborers and 74 percent of its domestic servants were Irish born”.⁹⁶ Many Irish women worked as nurses and laundresses, while more than half the city’s weavers, masons, stonecutters, polishers, blacksmith and bricklayers were Irish-born men; moreover, both Irish men and women were employed in the expanding clothing industry in New York City. As they settled almost everywhere in New York, many of them lived in cheap and crowded tenements of the fourth and sixth wards; some were able to move to better quarters, while many others succumbed “to the ill effects of long-term poverty, such as crime, insanity, domestic violence, prostitution, and alcoholism, reducing the areas in which they lived to some of the city’s worst slums”.⁹⁷ Regarding Irish immigration in the United States, this is what Eric Foner wrote about the effect on natives:

The Irish influx of the 1840s and 1850s thoroughly alarmed many native-born Americans. Those who feared the impact of immigration on American political and social life were called "nativists". They blamed immigrants for urban crime, political corruption, and a fondness for intoxicating liquor, and they accused them of undercutting native-born skilled laborers by working for starvation wages. [...] Nativists contended that the Irish, supposedly unfamiliar with American conceptions of liberty and subservient to the Catholic Church, posed a threat to democratic institutions, social reform, and public education. Stereotypes similar to those directed at blacks flourished regarding the Irish as well – childlike, lazy, and slaves of their passions.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Eric Foner. *Give Me Liberty! An American History*. 2nd ed. New York: W.W.Norton & C., 2007, p. 330.

⁹⁶ Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press; New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1995, p. 599.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 599.

⁹⁸ Foner, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 332-333.

Noah is likely of Dutch origin, probably his ancestors came to America when New York was still under the Dutch rule – its name then was New Amsterdam. He is among those who are alarmed by Irish immigrants. It is said that “After the birth of Charlotte, Noah decided to move his young family to a more salubrious location, the business quarter of Manhattan having become increasingly susceptible to the diseases which according to him came in through the port with the Irish and found fertile breeding grounds in the narrow filthy streets and fetid courtyards where they lived” (*GT*, 65):

Noah employed Irishmen on his wharves, his ships, his building sites and in his warehouses, and while he knew many who were sober and industrious men, nonetheless he believed them at root to be a shiftless, dishonest people. He would employ them, but allow one of their women to draw close to his children, to befriend his daughters and walk out with his son – it must be stopped, and the sooner the better. (*GT*, 115-116)

This is the reason why Noah does not approve the relationship between his son and Annie, as well as her belonging to a lower class; moreover, he already has a son-in-law who is an immigrant and this is enough for him. According to Claude Maisonnat, Annie:

For Noah she is merely the prototype of the ambitious woman trying to use her charms to make her way in the world, so that he cannot help but consider her as an obstacle to his plans for Julius.⁹⁹

In order to know Annie better, Noah decides to invite her for dinner at the van Horn’s house. Before the dinner, Annie spends some time with Julius’ sisters, and they

⁹⁹ Maisonnat, *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

get on well; Noah, on the other hand, has a different attitude towards her when he sees her:

Noah was grave. Not for a moment did he betray his feelings. He already disapproved of her, in a sense he feared her. It was impossible for him to think of a girl called Kelly without the taint of her race upon her, and in the New York of those days the taint bespoke lives of squalor and drunkenness in the crowded tenements of the Points and the Hook. This was the burden of prejudice with which Noah regarded his son's friend from the staircase of his home that evening, and her slim, straight figure and flawless skin served only to sharpen his suspicion, for now he understood that the threat she posed was greater than he had first imagined. (*GT*, 113-114)

Despite Noah's prejudice towards Annie, he "showed nothing of his feelings. He was surprised to discover that the girl was not frightened of him, and found himself after a while feeling almost affectionate toward her" (*GT*, 114); the dinner goes well, but Noah decides that, even if "it was with some distaste that he recognized how unpleasant it was going to be to break the thing up" (*GT*, 115), that the relationship between Julius and Annie must not continue. For this reason, he asks Mix Rinder – who was present at the dinner too - to take care of it:

Noah was nothing if not decisive, but for once in his life he found himself reluctant to do what he knew he must. He spoke of the matter to his son-in-law that very night. He told Rinder what was on his mind.

-She won't do, he said.

Rinder himself came of immigrant stock. He had clawed his way into society, had become a partner in the House of van Horn, had married into the family – all good reasons why others must be prevented from doing the same. He must thwart this upstart girl, despite the fact that she aroused him – or *because* she did, perhaps – or the family would begin to look like a way-station for every aspiring nobody in New York. He was astonished that his father-in-law could have allowed the thing to progress this far, but he understood the reason.

-Why not leave it to me? he said.

It went no further that night. [...]

-Leave it to you? He regarded his partner with some suspicion. [...]

But why should Rinder take care of the Annie Kelly problem?

-I know girls like that, he said.

He had identified precisely what troubled Julius' father: "girls like that" were girls who preyed on gullible young men. Rinder was closer than Noah to the street, where such girls flourished. Noah saw the point. He assumed there would be a payment made.

-Not overly generous, he said.

-Of course not.

-And Julius must know nothing.

He held the other man's eye. A profound importance attached to Julius remaining ignorant of the scheme.

-He must think she has tired of him.

-He will know nothing of it.

-You relieve me of a tiresome burden.

Rinder bowed slightly. [...] Rinder's ambition, his sole ambition, was to assume control of all that Noah van Horn possessed. It had been in recent years to take on whatever Noah found distasteful, and the problem of Annie Kelly was distasteful in the extreme.

Rinder left the room and Noah settled at his desk with a sense of relief which was not altogether comfortable. He was still troubled. (*GT*, 116-117-118-119)

Two weeks after the dinner, Julius goes to Jerome Brook Franklin's studio, but Annie is not there:

-Where is she, sir? he said.

The painter was attempting to open a window that was stuck. The day was a hot one, and he was warmly perspiring.

-How should I know? he said, between grunts. She was meant to come to me yesterday. I waited an hour. Damn!

The window continued to refuse to move.

-She was meant to come to you? said Julius.

Brook Franklin turned to him with considerable ill humor.

-I waited an hour! Waste of time! She's gone to hell for all I care.

This was the first Julius knew of Annie's private modelling sessions with Brook Franklin. (*GT*, 121-122)

Julius then goes to Annie's house in Nassau Street, but also her mother does not know where she has gone; he goes back to Jerome Brook Franklin's studio, also to ask him why she had private sessions with him:

-She had not been home to her mother, sir!

-Who has not? Oh. Then I expect she has gone off on some business of her own.

-Without telling her mother?

Brook Franklin knew the ways of artists' models. He laid a meaty hand on Julius' trembling shoulder.

-I shall be twenty minutes more here, he said, and told Julius he could wait for him, if he wished to.

Julius wasted no time, when twenty minutes later he had the painter's undivided attention.

-Did she say nothing to you, sir?

-Of what?

-Of any scheme, or plan?

They were sitting in the empty studio. The dust danced in the autumn sunshine streaming down through the skylights overhead. The stuck window was now open. Brook Franklin was filling a pipe with tobacco. Shreds of black shag hung from the edge of the bowl. He shook his head, his eyes on the bowl.

-I fear the worst, said Julius darkly.

The painter gave out a short choke of laughter as he set a taper to the tobacco. Julius turned on him.

-You think it's funny? he cried.

-My dear man, said Brook Franklin, girls are like young horses, did nobody tell you that? Skittish. She has gone off on a whim. Perhaps she has a friend. He stopped here. He was bored now, and careless. He understood that Julius was her friend. He did not want to inflame the boy further. He wanted to get rid of him. But Julius had become suspicious.

-Why didn't she tell me about her private sessions with you?

At this Brook Franklin colored beneath his beard. Again he busied himself with his pipe, which had at once gone out.

-How on earth should I know?

-What happened?

-What are you getting at, sir? I am a painter. I *painted* her. I cannot help you further. I am sorry she hasn't told you where she's gone but I can shed no light on the matter.

-She didn't tell her mother either.

Brook Franklin threw his hands in the air.

-I know nothing of the mother!

At this Julius leaned close to him and lifting his hand, stabbed a finger at him.

-But you do. You were there. She told me.

-Weeks ago, when I wished to employ the girl. What do you accuse me of?

He was on his feet now, and growing angry. He was a stout man who reddened easily, and he stood now with his arms braced at his sides and his fists clenched. His true relationship to Annie Kelly he was not going to disclose to Julius, and he was certainly not going to sit in his own studio and be accused of some vague malfeasance toward her-!

Julius also rose to his feet and stared at the man for several seconds, his eyes hot with tears. Then all at once he fled from the studio, banging the door behind him.

-Damn! cried the painter, and flung his pipe on the floor, where it clattered against the wall, throwing off sparks like a locomotive in the night. (*GT*, 126-127-128)

When he goes back home, Julius is shocked by what has happened and he goes to his bedroom; here, he transforms twice into a monstrous creature in front of his sisters' eyes, and he takes off an eye to Brook Franklin; meanwhile, the sisters call the doctor twice to see what is wrong with Julius, and the doctor says first that he is suffering from nervous exhaustion, and then that he has fever – he does not believe to what Julius' sisters said about him being transformed into a creature. When Noah visits him, he reveals something:

Julius appeared not to hear him. He stared out at the mountains murmuring to himself as his father quietly explained his decision to pay Annie Kelly to go away, never to see Julius again, and his entrusting the job to Rinder. He then said, slowly and gravely, that Rinder had instead had the girl murdered. He paused, while Julius continued to stare at the mountains, his lips moving but otherwise showing no reaction to what his father had said. Noah began speaking once more. For what Rinder had done, he said, he felt the most abject remorse. It could make no difference now, he said, but he wished to tell Julius the truth. Perhaps, he said, he was merely trying to ease his own conscience – Julius was entitled to think it – but he wanted him to know that there would be no easing of his conscience, not ever. Guilt and remorse had leached all joy from his life, ever since the day he discovered what Rinder had done. (*GT*, 141)

Some time after Julius left the asylum in the summer of 1879, Rinder reveals him the truth about Annie Kelly's disappearance:

Rinder's uplifted hand began to tremble and he laid it flat on the tablecloth, and stared at it. The room was now utterly silent in expectation of what he would say.

-A misconception exists which I have fostered.

More glances flitting about the table like little birds in a conservatory, all atwitter with questions.

-It concerns Annie Kelly.

An intake of breath now, and all eyes upon Julius. He sat frozen, blackly glaring at Rinder. Rinder wheezed. It was not easy for him to talk, and he was accustomed to signalling his needs with gestures. [...]

-She was not murdered.

-What? cried Charlotte.

Julius continued to glare at the man as Rinder's hand once more came up and Charlotte fell silent.

-I gave your father to understand that she was. But she was not.

Jerome Brook Franklin absently turned his unlit cigar between his lips, his frowning concentration fierce upon the shrivelled Rinder.

-No? said Julius.

Rinder held Julius' eye and shook his head.

-Noah could say nothing. He felt responsible. [...]

Annie Kelly was not murdered, but Rinder told Noah she was. Noah withdrew from active oversight of the House of van Horn soon after, and Rinder's reign began. Jerome Brook Franklin was nodding now. He put a flame to his cigar and produced a cloud of smoke.

Then Julius was on his feet. He had one question only.

-Where is she?

A shrug from the bony shoulders of the dying man.

-But did she not die.

-No.

Julius set down again. He stared at Hester with his mouth open. Hester asked him if he was all right. Did he wish to live now? For some seconds Julius said nothing, then he closed his mouth and shook his head, as though awakening from sleep.

-Alive then, he murmured.

Rinder nodded.

-She did not suffer?

-No.

At which a sort of radiance seemed to well up from somewhere deep inside Julius, his soul most likely, and it irradiated his face until in the candlelight was seen the golden glow his sisters remembered from his youth. The years fell away, and so did the last of the madness.

-Alive, he said again. (*GT*, 157-158-159)

After this, Julius tries to discover what has become of Annie; Rinder told him that "she had been paid a handsome sum, first to leave New York and then to allow some weeks to pass before writing to her mother" (*GT*, 160-161); Julius goes searching

for her at her old house in Nassau Street, but there are neither Annie and her mother nor their house:

He was oddly undismayed by this. He must have realized that mother and daughter had most likely established themselves in another town far distant from New York. But it was also possible they had returned to the city after some years, perhaps having failed to find a life that gave them what they had known in Manhattan. For that reason he continued to hope that he would meet her in the streets of the city, and so he continued to search for her. (*GT*, 161)

As Julius keeps wandering looking for Annie Kelly, Alice, who has known personally Julius and admires him, reflects on his uncle's story in front of a portrait of Noah, because the van Horn family decayed in the following decades:

The portrait of Noah van Horn came down to me, and as I say, I spend too much time in front of it. It all began with him, of course; it was Noah who denied Julius his chance of love and why? Because a prejudice acquired as a function of fear. Love must never be denied, never! – as I have cause to know, and better than most. For the story of Julius, so painstakingly assembled by means of the fading memories of those who knew him, and the ghosts now clustered on my walls and sideboards – do they not all clamor the same sad warning? That love denied will make us mad? I think so. (*GT*, 173)

Julius' Madness

Another important topic of the story, and of Patrick McGrath's works in general, is Julius van Horn's madness. Ushered by the shock for Annie's sudden disappearance, it changes the lives of both Julius and the other members of the van Horn family, affecting like a curse the later generations of the van Horn family.

Many Gothic novels and stories have a domestic setting; generally, when it comes to characters, "weaker inhabitants of the domestic space are frequently

contested”.¹⁰⁰ According to Elaine Hartnell-Mottram in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, domestic Gothic is when:

Everyday matters relating to the home relating to the home become magnified to nightmare proportions, framed by the recognizably Gothic tropes and presented in the language of excess. Domestic Gothic narratives magnify the family problems of the non-Gothic domestic novel into horrifically abusive intergenerational relationships.¹⁰¹

The origins of Julius’ madness are traced back to his childhood in his family. As his mother Ann died shortly after giving birth to him, Noah is devastated by this loss, so “in his grief he imposed impossibly high standards on his son” (*GT*, 66); for this reason he beats him “for the smallest infraction of the rules of the household” (*GT*, 66) and he is even more brutal towards Julius when he realises that he is not fit to take over the House of the van Horn one day. Despite this, “Julius never seemed to grow bitter at this treatment, for as soon as his tears were dry he would come back as cheerful as before and ask his dear papa if there was anything he might do to be of service to him” (*GT*, 67). Julius’ sisters suffer to see their brother being beaten: Charlotte – who has raised his brother and is like a sort of mother-figure to him - speaks to Noah in order to convince him to stop beating Julius, and he agrees.

After this, Noah finds in Max Rinder the one who will take over the House of van Horn in the future, while Julius grows up and starts to attend art lessons; here, he meets Annie Kelly, a model of Irish origin, and he falls in love with her. His father opposes Julius’ relationship with Annie because she is Irish and of a lower class and eventually makes her disappear with the help of Max Rinder. As during those years

¹⁰⁰ Elaine Hartnell-Mottram, “Domestic Gothic”, in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, ed. by William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith, 2 vols., Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, I, p. 185.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

Julius never showed anger or resentment towards his father after what he did to him when he was a little boy, the shock for Annie's disappearance awakes in him what he apparently had removed; according to Alice, Quentin the butler believes that "Annie's disappearance had inadvertently awoken a deep sorrow of his early childhood grief and he had confused it with the death of his mother" (*GT*, 130). Julius goes searching for Annie, but he is unable to find her, so he goes back home in a state of shock:

The next day Julius came down to breakfast in his nightshirt, wild-eyed and incoherent. He seemed to have no idea where he was, nor who his father and sisters were. He stood in the dining room beneath his father's portrait shouting that the two boats must be taken off the back of the wagon and put in the water. It made no sense to any of them, and the doctor was called. Quentin took him back up to his room, the butler being the only member of the household now to whom Julius would listen. As regards the two boats, I think that in Julius' disordered mind they represented coffins. He believed that Annie Kelly was dead, and that she would therefore require a "boat" for her last voyage. Not hard to see why he should have dreamed of boats, given his presence on South Street the previous afternoon. As for the second boat, I can only assume that he meant it for himself. (*GT*, 130-131)

When the doctor visits Julius, he tells Noah that his son is suffering "from acute nervous exhaustion, the inciting agent being a sudden intense shock related to the disappearance of a young woman of whom he had become fond" (*GT*, 131). In order to sedate him, the doctor prepares Julius an opiated preparation. When he goes away, Julius lays in his bedroom "in a state of stupor induced by the drug he has been given" (*GT*, 132), he is asleep and he turns "from side to side, muttering, and every few seconds cried out incoherently, and no sense could be made of any of it" (*GT*, 132). Her sisters are in his room with him while he is sleeping, but suddenly something strange and scary happens to Julius:

All at once Hester uttered a scream and her hands flew to her face. Charlotte stood up and moved rapidly backwards, knocking over the chair. Sarah

clutched Hester's arm and all three stared at the bed. Julius had sat up, but as far as the sisters were concerned – and they remained unshakeable on this till the end of their days – it *was not him*. They could never speak rationally about what it was they saw in Julius' bed that day – there was a *creature*, they said, and there was a smell, too, a strong smell, which they associated with raw meat and stables, and something else which they could not identify, something quite horrid – and they shrank back against the bedroom door where they clung together, open-mouthed. Apparently their brother, or whatever it was he had turned into, then began *chanting* at them, blasphemy and obscenity!

-Julius! screamed Charlotte.

The sound of his own name seems to have penetrated the boy's inflamed brain, for the fit – if that is what it was – passed off as suddenly as it came. He fell back on his pillows in a dead faint, and when Charlotte cautiously approached the bed he was fast asleep. (*GT*, 133)

Annie's loss is a trauma for Julius, that is “an occurrence in his life characterized by its intensity and to which he is unable to react adequately”,¹⁰² as it is described in that scene, that is the climax of the story. Then, Julius continues to sleep; his sisters are frightened after what they have just witness, so they call the doctor again; he examines Julius and then announces that the boy has fever, but he does not believe to Julius' sisters telling him about their brother having turned into a strange creature. Meanwhile, Noah arrives home; Jerome Brook Franklin goes to the van Horn's house too and when he is there Julius transforms again into that nightmare creature and seeks revenge on the painter:

All at once something was flying down upon them and neither man had time properly to understand what was happening. Then my grandfather was tumbling down the stairs, and Noah was shouting, and Quentin ran up from the basement as Hester and Sarah spilled out of their parlor and screamed to see their brother, or the thing that he had become, rather – the thing in the bed – stabbing at a portly man in a loud suit as they struggled violently on the hall floor. Quentin managed to pull him off and hold him back as Jerome Brook Franklin crawled away on his hands and knees with blood and jelly streaming from his face. Held tight in the embrace of the butler, Julius, his face distorted, unrecognizable – bestial! – sobbed and panted, and then

¹⁰² Maisonnat, *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

began to chant, clutching aloft the instrument of his enemy's enucleation; I believe it was a palette knife. With it he had taken out my grandfather's eye. (*GT*, 136-137)

This is another climactic scene; Julius attacks Jerome because he is convinced that the painter "had built a secret room beneath the floorboards of his studio where Annie Kelly was being held against her will, forced to live on flour cakes and water in which he cleaned his paintbrushes and copiously urinated" (*GT*, 139-140), and here Brook Franklin after the lesson would have "ravished her body for hours" (*GT*, 140). After witnessing this scene, Noah is unable to act for the first time in his life and, according to Alice, "He aged ten years that night at least, in fact I believe Noah van Horn that night began to die" (*GT*, 137). They call again the doctor and Rinder to take control of the situation. Noah's son-in-law decides to send Julius to a private asylum in the Hudson Valley; here Julius is "put under the care of an alienist named McNiven" (*GT*, 138), and Julius stays locked there for twenty years.

In those years, sending someone to a private asylum was common for wealthy New York families, in order to keep out of the press when insanity erupted and scandalous behaviour ensued. Asylums for the insane – as well as orphanages for children without families, poorhouses for the destitute and jails for criminals – were instituted in the United States during the 1830s and 1840s; in colonial America the families used to take care of mentally ill members, and these institutions believed in the idea that it was possible to eliminate those social ills that were once considered

incurable.¹⁰³ Julius is admitted to the asylum in the Catskill Mountains during the summer of 1859 – he is in his mid-twenties – and he stays there for twenty years:

It was the era of what was called the moral treatment of insanity, this being an approach which stressed the exercise of constant kindness in a carefully selected location where not only the character of the carers but also the buildings themselves tended to regulate and make tranquil the lunatic mind, and lead it gently back to reason. Routine and occupation were considered essential, and activities such as basket-weaving and hymn-writing were encouraged, though in Julius' case landscape painting in oils was the chosen therapeutic occupation. (*GT*, 139)

The figure of the mad artist is recurrent in McGrath's narrative. Some of them include: Jack Fin, the main character of the short story *Lush Triumphant* who is an alcoholic artist; Edgar Stark, the artist who previously killed his wife and embarks in an affair with Stella Raphael, the wife of Max, the new deputy superintendent at a secure psychiatric hospital in *Asylum*; Jack Rathbone, the painter who is the protagonist of *Port Mungo* and he is married to a fellow artist named Vera, who is an alcoholic.

After Julius left the asylum in the summer of 1879, he is happy to know that his house has not changed during those twenty years; Charlotte considers him to have made a full recovery, despite “with his slow gait and unworldly air he seemed to have drifted into old age having known nothing of a period of manhood, those years being lost in the obscurity of the Catskills asylum” (*GT*, 162). After Jerome Brook Franklin's revelation to Alice and after all that happened to the van Horn family during the last decades – the downfall of their wealth and Alice's father being an alcoholic - Alice states that “in time I understood that mine was not the only family in which violence and insanity had erupted in generations past, and plagued the lives of those to come” (*GT*, 172).

¹⁰³ Foner, *Op. cit.*, p. 436.

Historical Setting

Just like all the other works by Patrick McGrath, *Julius* is set in the past, more precisely in Nineteenth Century Manhattan. The story mentions many historical events that are involved in the lives of the van Horn family; it gives also a detailed description of several places in New York City, as well as narrating the city's evolution through several decades, from the early Nineteenth Century up until the Twentieth Century, when the city experienced a dramatic population growth – due also to mass immigration from Europe, especially from Germany and Ireland – and became a metropolis.

One of the first historical events cited in the novel is the Great Fire of New York. It happened on the 16th and 17th of December 1935; it caused more damage to property than any other event in the history of the city – McGrath wrote that it was “one of the worst disaster ever to befall the city” (*GT*, 65) - destroying “more than twenty square block of mostly wooden buildings bounded by Wall and Broad streets, Coenties Slip, and the East River”.¹⁰⁴ The destruction caused by the fire is partially described in the story because it happens shortly after the van Horn family moved to Waverley Place:

A fire in a Pearl street warehouse spread through the downtown business area and in two days destroyed nearly seven hundred buildings, along with tens of millions of dollars-worth of merchandise. Among the private houses burnt to the ground was the recently vacated van Horn residence on Barclay Street. Noah gave thanks. He considered himself blessed. (*GT*, 65-55)

Another historical reference present in *Julius* is to the American Civil War. Despite not being directly narrated in the story because during those years Julius was

¹⁰⁴ Jackson, ed., *Op. Cit.*, p. 502.

locked in the asylum – “It was a war which Julius would miss in its entirety” (*GT*, 138)

– it has a massive impact on Noah Van Horn:

He built the foundations of his fortune in the Atlantic trade, running raw cotton out of Savannah, Georgia, carrying it to London then working his way down the eastern seaboard, turning a profit in every port – this would be the early 1800s and him barely twenty years old. In the decades that followed his wealth rapidly accumulated as he ploughed his profits into shipbuilding, real estate, construction and the like. (*GT*, 63-64)

In the following decades, Noah van Horn continues to prosper at the same pace as New York City. Meanwhile, before the outbreak of the Civil War, Noah is worried for what is happening in the South:

The long-simmering dispute over slavery went to the very heart of Noah’s cotton interests, for he held bonds from southern planters worth tens of thousands of dollars; like many New York merchants he was apprehensive as to what would happen next. (*GT*, 97-98)

Following the Civil War, the death of Noah van Horn and the management of the House of van Horn by Max Rinder, the wealth of the van Horn family decreases dramatically, causing a sense of nostalgia in Alice’s mother:

I believe now that the past, vale of tears though it was, so bleak and full of suffering, was still preferable to a present in which a cold, indifferent husband came home to her night after night and reminded her of just how low we had sunk. The house on Twenty-Third Street in which we had a small apartment on the third floor, hard to heat in the winter, stifling hot in the summer, and the ice-box down the hall – once we had owned the whole building! (*GT*, 168)

In the story there is a reference to the New York City draft riots, “when for days New York was under the control of a howling mob and all the family trembled for their lives” (*GT*, 145): they happened from the 13th to the 16th of July 1863, when “armed

mobs interrupted enforcement of the first federal conscription and struggled with authorities for sway over the nation's manufacturing and commercial capital"¹⁰⁵; they were also race riots, as many Irish and black citizen were involved – the riots caused more than 100 fatalities. There is also a reference to Abraham Lincoln:

On February 25, 1860, a few months after Julius was sent away, an obscure, ill-dressed politician from Springfield, Illinois stepped off a ferry at Cortlandt Street. Two days later he gave a speech at the Copper Union which helped to propel him into the White House, and the United States into civil war. (*GT*, 138)

In addition to the van Horn family, *Julius* narrates the evolution of New York City during several decades of the Nineteenth Century. New York changes rapidly during the years:

In those days – this would be the summer of 1859 – all over New York buildings were going up, others coming down, some no more than ten years old, but in this impatient town where nothing ever has a chance to decay, ten years was practically an eternity. Up beyond Harlem Heights surveyed lots which were no more than granite outcrops with perhaps a few trees, some stagnant swampland, here and there a squatter's shack and a dirt road running through it would soon be levelled, the swamps drained, the site turned into prime building land in a city whose expansion was limited only by its riverbanks. (*GT*, 96)

The fact that New York is changing fast is highlighted even more after the summer of 1879, when Julius leaves the asylum and finds that the city has changed. For example, when he goes back to Nassau Street, Annie and her family's boarding-house is no longer there, replaced by newspaper offices – the *New York Times* has its seat there since the mid-Nineteenth Century. Alice describes that time that she went to a poor block with Julius:

¹⁰⁵ Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 3.

The further he went, he said, the worse became the character of the streets, and he was beginning to feel distinctly afraid. The block he was on was a poor one, the tenements badly run down, windows broken and patched with newspaper, and between the buildings criss-crossed washing lines with scraps of clothing hanging from them. The people he saw, shabby, watchful men idling in doorways, grimy children and sallow, harried women, all regarded him with suspicion and hostility. (*GT*, 162-163)

Then, he sees for the first time the Brooklyn Bridge. It was inaugurated in May 1883,¹⁰⁶ it is described as “a monumental block of stone towering high over the rooftops, and within it two soaring arches” (*GT*, 163) and they are “filling the sky, and rising from somewhere by the East River near the tip of the island” (*GT*, 163). Julius’ reaction when he sees it for the first time is one of astonishment because of its majesty, and initially he is not able to recognise what it is.

¹⁰⁶ Gorton Carruth and Associates, eds, *The Encyclopedia of American Facts and Dates*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1956, p. 330.

Dr. Haggard's Disease and Julius: A Comparison

Both *Dr. Haggard's Disease* and *Julius* have common themes. Just like any other work by Patrick McGrath they are both set in a given historical period: *Dr. Haggard's Disease* in England during the late 1930's and early 1940's and it is directly narrated in first person by Edward Haggard; *Julius*, on the other hand, is set in Manhattan during the Nineteenth Century and it is narrated indirectly by Alice in the 1950's through photographs, personal memories and narrations by other members of her family. Both works are set during two wars. In *Dr. Haggard's Disease* the first stages of the Second World War are related directly by Haggard, due also to his friendship with a Spitfire pilot named James (whose father joins the RAMC later in the novel); *Julius*, on the other hand, does not witness directly the American Civil War because is locked in an asylum, but the van Horn family loses most of its wealth following this war.

In this chapter I will compare three of the most important topics of the two works, to show its similarities and its differences: the love affair between Edward Haggard and Fanny Vaughan and the one between Julius van Horn and Annie Kelly; how madness is narrated in the two works and how it involves their protagonists in different ways; the father-son relationship between James and Ratcliff – and also between James and Haggard, since the latter becomes a sort of a father-figure to the young aviator. Finally, I will investigate the relationship between Julius and Noah.

One thing shared by Edward Haggard and Julius van Horn is that they are both involved in a relationship – with Fanny Vaughan and Annie Kelly – that changes their lives forever with tragic consequences for both of them.

For both Edward Haggard and Julius van Horn it is their first real love, and for both of them it is love at first sight. Edward Haggard is a young and promising surgeon who falls in love with Fanny Vaughan, the wife of the senior pathologist at St. Basil's, who is older than him and has a teenage son. Julius, on the other hand, is a teen ager who just started to attend Jerome Brook Franklin's studio when he sees for the first time and falls in love with Annie Kelly, a young model of Irish origin. Both of them are crazy for those women; Fanny's attitude towards Edward is mixed: initially she encourages their affair (for example, she visits Haggard at his home and at St. Basil's), and it seems that she is really in love with him, because her husband treats her badly – and once thinking about Haggard after this makes her vanish her anxiety - because she tells Haggard that sometimes she thinks of him and because once she gives him a fly-in-glass as a present. Following Ratcliff's discovery of their affair, Fanny changes her attitude towards Haggard; she becomes more distant from him because she no longer handles living a double life; she also contradicts herself, because once Haggard asks her if she wants to leave Ratcliff and continue their relationship but she refuses to do so, while some time later Haggard asks her again to leave Ratcliff to come back to him but she refuses again because she says that he should have tried harder to convince her before. In *Julius*, on the other hand, it is never specified if Annie Kelly reciprocates Julius' love for her.

Due also to their different ages, the love between Haggard and Fanny and between Julius and Annie is narrated in two different ways. Haggard and Fanny's love is narrated through their mutual love for poetry; When Haggard talks about her he is extremely romantic; but their love is highly transgressive too, for example when they get drunk together and when they make love in the St. Basil's lobby in front of many

people; it is narrated in an explicit way by describing in details Haggard and Fanny's sex scenes. Julius and Annie's relationship, on the other hand, is the typical first teenage love described in an innocent, romantic naïve and virginal way. They do not have sex, and they have walks hand in hand just like two young sweethearts.

After the end of their affair, Haggard tries to convince Fanny to come back to him but she refuses, breaking his heart and contributing greatly to his personal downfall; he later receives another blow when she dies in a sudden, early and unexpected way. Annie's destiny, on the other hand, is unknown; Julius believes that she has been murdered; when Rinder confesses him that she has not killed her, he goes searching for Annie through New York City, but he is unable to find her, because just after her disappearance she left the city, but it is unknown if she comes back to Manhattan since she no longer lives in Nassau Street.

Edward Haggard and Julius van Horn's Madness

As in all the other works by Patrick McGrath, madness is an important theme also in both *Dr. Haggard's Disease* and *Julius* and it involves the two protagonists, but in different ways.

In both *Dr. Haggard's Disease* and *Julius* madness originates from the traumatic end of an important relationship. In the first novel both Fanny and Haggard commit a naivety; after visiting him at the St. Basil's during the nightshift and making love to him in the hospital lobby, Fanny forgets to lower the veil that covers her face, so Miggs – Ratcliff Vaughan's assistant – recognises her. Haggard's naivety happens when he telephones Fanny at Plantagenet Gardens thinking that Ratcliff is still at St. Basil's;

unfortunately for him, the senior pathologist has gone home earlier, so he intercepts the telephone call and discovers that his wife has cheated on him. In *Julius'* case there is another naivety committed only by the protagonist, as he reveals his love for Annie to his father; Julius does not know that Noah has a negative opinion on Irish people, and it is a shock for him when Noah and Rinder pay her in order to disappear.

In both *Dr. Haggard's Disease* and *Julius* physical violence shapes and changes forever the lives of Edward Haggard and Jerome Brook Franklin. In the first novel, Edward Haggard is thrown down the stairs by Ratcliff, who takes revenge on him after discovering the affair with his wife; the fall causes the break of Haggard's hip, dubbed affectionately Spike, that affects him in a negative way, leading him into a morphine addiction. In *Julius'* case it is the protagonist who, during one of the two moments in which he turns into a monstrous creature, takes an eye off Jerome Brook Franklin, because he previously told him that Annie used to meet with him in his studio; following this incident, Brook Franklin is forced to no longer paint the landscapes of the American Sublime that are his real passion; he paints portraits: he makes a lot of money from them, but he becomes an alcoholic.

Another element that is featured in different ways in the two works are drugs. Following the break of his hip, in order to alleviate his pain, Edward Haggard starts to take morphine, developing an addiction to it. He once tries to stop unsuccessfully to take it, and he increases its use afterwards in order to cope with the physical pain caused by Spike and his broken heart caused by Fanny's rejection; the drug use compromises also his narration, making him an unreliable narrator. In *Julius* opium – the drug associated with the Nineteenth Century culture and literature – makes a short appearance when the doctor sedates Julius with an opiate preparation after he has come

home in a state of shock; shortly after, Julius turns into a monstrous creature, but that is the only time that a drug appears in the story.

The two protagonists' madness is different. Haggard's madness is fuelled when he moves to Elgin, an isolated mansion that reflects his broken personality; here he is overcome by a feeling of nostalgia for Fanny (that increases after her sudden death) and with his morphine addiction. In *Julius*, the protagonist has two moments in which madness erupts and he transforms into a monstrous creature; this is provoked by the shock caused by the sudden loss of Annie, that made the trauma caused by his father beating him during his childhood emerge; following this, Julius is locked for twenty years in an asylum under the care of an alienist and, when he returns home, his sister thinks that he is better.

Father-Son Relationship

Another important topic of both *Dr. Haggard's Disease* and *Julius* is the father-son relationship between James and Radcliff and between Julius and Noah. Edward Haggard mentions his father only once when, at the beginning of the novel, he says that he was supposed to follow his father's footsteps into the Church, but he went to study medicine instead; later Haggard becomes a sort of father figure to James.

Both James and Julius have a difficult relationship with their fathers. Radcliff and Noah are two dominant male figures who represent patriarchy, and their personalities are opposed to James and Julius' sweetness. James tells Haggard about his relationship with his father, and how he used to treat both him and Fanny bad. Despite all the wealth of the van Horn family, Julius' childhood is difficult because of his

mother's death shortly after his birth; Noah, devastated by this loss, often punishes his son by beating him for every small infraction because he expects him to take over his empire in the future.

Haggard in some ways is similar to Julius. *Dr. Haggard's Disease* features more important male figures than females; here, Edward Haggard and James Vaughan's personalities contrast with the aggressiveness masculinity of the St. Basil's doctors and of James' fellow aviators. While working at St. Basil's, Haggard sometimes clashes with some of his fellow doctors like Cushing because of his caring attitude towards some of his patients. James is in many ways similar to Haggard and Fanny: his personality is different from his father's – even if once when he is angry Haggard says that he resembles Ratcliff – and from his fellow aviators too. They once mock Haggard for his alleged homosexuality when he is with James and he feels passionate about the Spitfire pilot. When James goes to Elgin, he and Haggard become friends; the young pilot asks Haggard to tell him about his love affair with his mother and, after a while, Haggard becomes like a sort of a father figure to James. Noah's cruelty and omnipotence makes Julius' sweetness and vulnerability stand out. Moreover, in *Julius* there are many important female figures like her sisters, Annie and Alice, while in *Dr. Haggard's Disease* there are more important male figures. An example that underlines Noah's cruelty towards Julius is the fact that he makes Annie disappear because he cannot stand that his son marries an Irish girl of a lower class and he thinks that he is a social climber; although he does not like immigrants in general and he does not like him, he does nothing to stop his daughter Charlotte's wedding to Max Rinder, a man of Bavarian origin who is going to lead the House of van Horn in the future. Charlotte is a

stronger character than her brother and Rinder, as proved in the novel, is a cruel man just like Noah and is a real social climber.

Conclusion

Patrick McGrath is one of the most important contemporary Gothic writers. His writing has been influenced by his father's experience as a superintendent of Broadmoor Hospital and by his passion for supernatural and Gothic readings – of writers as Poe - whom he has admired since he was a child; this is why his style is called Neuro-Gothic, because it blends medicine and psychiatry with elements of Gothic literature. Moreover, his earlier works like *The Grotesque*, *Spider*, *Dr. Haggard's Disease* and *Asylum* are set in England, while his newest works like *Martha Peake*, *Ghost Town*, *Trauma* and *Constance* have been set in the United States: this is the same path followed by McGrath, who is English but has been living in New York for more than thirty years.

Dr. Haggard's Disease is a novel which was published in 1993. Edward Haggard, its protagonist, at the beginning of the story is a young and promising surgeon. His life is subverted by his overwhelming love for Fanny Vaughan: this love is so strong for him that when she breaks up with him, he is completely devastated; when he meets his son, the resemblance between him and his mother is so striking that Haggard, who is a broken man and is addicted to morphine, thinks that sometimes Fanny has entered his son's body, including at the end when he is dying. This novel has a writing style that is quite flowing. It is narrated in first person through several flashbacks that reveal the story like a puzzle, with the pieces that complete the story one step at a time. The novel uses often a medical language, not only to describe in a detailed way what concerns medicine, but to talk about Haggard's love for Fanny too. Something that strike the readers are the narration of Haggard's deep love for Fanny, as well as his suffering; one part of the novel in which suffering is described in a utterly striking, sad and graphic way is when Haggard tries to stop taking morphine unsuccessfully: here it

is highlighted how hard is for him to try to survive without taking drugs. One thing that may leave the reader disconcerted is the final, that is open to the imagination – this is why it ends with suspension points; however, this open and ambiguous epilogue can be considered a strong point by some readers and critics. While Adam Lively considers it “an explosive conclusion”,¹⁰⁷ Liza Pennywitt Taylor wrote that:

When Dr. Haggard's lonely adoration leads to a final, horrible tableaux grimmer than any previous scene, there's an impulse in the reader to go back to the first page and start over again, to try and unravel the doctor's terrible downfall, and to see how Patrick McGrath created such a perfect little book.¹⁰⁸

A short story that is part of the collection *Ghost Town: Tales of Manhattan Then and Now* (2005), *Julius* narrates the story of Julius van Horn, a young boy from New York City who falls in love with Annie Kelly, a young model of Irish origin. His father does not approve of this relationship, and he decides to make Annie disappear. This causes a shock to Julius: an hidden trauma surfaces – his father used beat him when he was a child – which leads the young boy to madness, and he will be locked in an asylum for two decades. Unlike *Dr. Haggard's Disease*, *Julius* is narrated in third person through memories and photographs, and its writing is more fluent than the other novel's. The stories are set in two different places and periods and they both present an accurate recreation of the location, as well as other elements like furniture and clothing; this shows that McGrath may have studied well the historical context. The story gives the reader freedom of interpretation regarding the fate of its main characters: for example, Annie's destiny following her disappearance is unknown and Julius and his sisters' final years and their deaths are not narrated either.

¹⁰⁷ Lively, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁸ Pennywitt Taylor, *Op. cit.*.

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