THE GREAT GOD PAN AND OTHER HORROR STORIES

ARTHUR MACHEN

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Perhaps no figure better embodies the transition from the Gothic tradition to modern horror than Arthur Machen. In the final decade of the nineteenth century, the Welsh writer produced a seminal body of tales of occult horror, spiritual and physical corruption, and malignant survivals from the primeval past which horrified and scandalized late Victorian readers. Machen's 'weird fiction' has influenced generations of storytellers from H. P. Lovecraft to Guillermo Del Toro, and it remains no less unsettling today.

This new collection, which includes the complete novel *The Three Impostors* as well as such celebrated tales as 'The Great God Pan' and 'The White People', constitutes the most comprehensive critical edition of Machen yet to appear. In addition to the core late-Victorian horror classics, a selection of lesser-known prose poems and later tales helps to present a fuller picture of the development of Machen's weird vision.

Arthur Machen was born in 1863 in Caerleon, Monmouthshire, the son of a Welsh clergyman. His birthplace, rich in history and legend, was to have a decisive impact on his later fiction. Machen attended Hereford Cathedral School, but his father's poverty precluded a university education. During the 1880s Machen worked in London as a tutor, translator, and cataloguer, while finding his way as a writer. Then, between 1890 and 1900, he produced a body of tales of horror, wonder, and the borderland between the two. The most popular, or notorious, of these in its day was 'The Great God Pan', associated, then and now, with the Decadent movement in literature. 'Pan' and other works written during that decade, including *The Three Impostors*, *The Hill of Dreams*, and 'The White People', are now recognized as classics of weird fiction. At the start of the First World War, Machen caused a stir with a short story about a supernatural rescue of an English company at Mons, 'The Bowmen', which many readers refused to accept as fiction. Despite Machen's very high reputation among other weird writers, his popular appeal, even to fans of horror and the supernatural, has ever waxed and waned. Machen died at St Joseph's Nursing Home in Beaconsfield in 1947.

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and other Horror Stories

Edited with an Introduction and Notes by
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INTRODUCTION

Readers who are unfamiliar with the stories may prefer to treat the Introduction as an Afterword.

In 1895 the editors of a new magazine, *The Unicorn*, sought to make a splash by engaging a pair of literary hot properties to contribute parallel series of tales. The two writers were Arthur Machen and H. G. Wells, both fresh from recent publishing triumphs (perhaps in Machen's case 'scandal' is closer to the mark), and their respective contributions were to offer readers distinct modes, or flavours, of what we should today call 'genre fiction'. The magazine, unfortunately, folded after a mere three issues, in which only one of Wells's stories, and none of Machen's, appeared. Machen related the episode, nearly three decades later, in characteristically self-deprecating fashion:

> 'The Great God Pan' had made a storm in a Tiny Tot's teacup. And about the same time, a young gentleman named H. G. Wells had made a very real, and a most deserved sensation with a book called 'The Time Machine'; a book indeed. And a new weekly paper was projected by Mr. Raven Hill [*sic*] and Mr. Girdlestone, a paper that was to be called 'The Unicorn'. And both Mr. Wells and myself were asked to contribute; I was to do a series of horror stories.[1]

This obscure episode in late Victorian publishing history is intriguing for a number of reasons. It would be interesting to know, for instance, just how Raven-Hill and Girdlestone phrased their offer; perhaps they requested 'more stuff in the "Pan" line'. Writing in the 1920s, Machen speaks of 'horror stories' and 'tales of horror', but it is unlikely that these were the expressions used at the time[2] (unlikely, too, that the editors asked the young Wells for more 'scientific romances', let alone the entirely anachronistic designation 'science fiction'). This was, after all, precisely the period during which the still-fluid conceptual boundaries of emergent genre categories like 'science fiction', 'fantasy', and 'horror' were themselves beginning to be negotiated, shaped, and defined. But a more tantalizing question is this: if *The Unicorn*, and its editors' scheme, had been a success, would the trajectory of Machen's reputation

[1] *Things Near and Far* (New York, 1923), 145.

[2] Though not impossible: an early reader of 'Pan' characterized it as a 'clever story of horror on the Edgar Poe or Sheridan Le Fanu pattern' (John Gawsworth, *The Life of Arthur Machen* (Carlton, OR, 2005), 119).

have more closely resembled that of Wells, who went on to score triumph after triumph, as well as worldwide celebrity, in the years to come? Machen's star, by contrast, sank slowly back towards the horizon line of relative obscurity, then followed an irregularly wave-like course throughout his later life (and afterlife), ascending and again declining at periodic intervals. For Wells, 1895 marked the beginning of fame; for Machen it meant something like the end of it, until the next century at any rate. But what if Machen had become, as it were, the 'H. G. Wells of horror'?

In one sense, the question is moot for the simple reason that, in the event, Machen found himself quite unable to write anything further in the 'Pan' line. The 32-year-old author of a small body of inventively appalling tales, when pressed to produce more of the same, extruded a quartet of mediocrities, which he was entirely relieved to be able to consign to oblivion. In the short term at least, his imagination led him down less egregiously 'horrific' paths, while the *fin-de-siècle* reading public supped on such fresh terrors as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*, to say nothing of Wells's own bloodsucking octopus-Martians and surgically transformed beast-men. But it is also moot because in the end Machen would indeed become something very like 'the H. G. Wells of horror'. Today he is widely accepted as a foundational figure—for some *the* foundational figure—in the development of modern horror fiction[3] (though it is worth noting that he would have strenuously, and with justice, resisted the idea that he was simply or solely a 'horror writer'). If, however, Machen is now so recognized, it is less by popular acclaim than by aristocratic consensus. Machen is, as Dante said of Aristotle, a 'maestro di color che sanno'—a master of those who know, a high priest retroactively canonized by later practitioners of his weird art. This process of canonization may be said to have begun with the influential essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature* by H. P. Lovecraft, who wrote:

> Of living creators of cosmic fear raised to its most artistic pitch, few if any can hope to equal the versatile Arthur Machen; author of some dozen tales long and short, in which the elements of hidden horror and brooding fright attain an almost incomparable substance and realistic acuteness. . . . his powerful horror-material of the 'nineties and earlier nineteen-hundreds stands alone in its class, and marks a distinct epoch in the history of this literary form.[4]

[3] He was, in Brian Stableford's estimation, 'the first British writer of authentically modern horror stories'. David Pringle (ed.), *St James Guide to Horror, Ghost, & Gothic Writers* (London, 1997), 384.

[4] *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (Mineola, NY, 1973), 88.

Whether Machen was in fact a purveyor of 'cosmic fear', as Lovecraft conceived it, is open to dispute; certainly he shared neither Lovecraft's atheism nor his fundamental belief in an amoral, indifferent universe. The point here is that Lovecraft was only the first of a long line of Machen admirers, including Stephen King, Ramsey Campbell, Clive Barker, and Guillermo del Toro, who have drawn upon Machen for inspiration in their own novels, stories, and films, which their own fans have been content to enjoy without necessarily feeling compelled to pursue Machen's distinctive note of weirdness back to the source, his own writing. There are signs, however, that this may be changing. With ever-increasing interest in Machen on the part of both readers and literary scholars—there has been a veritable explosion of critical work on him in recent years— the acolytes of the 'flower-tunicked priest of nightmare' are in some danger of losing their proprietary claims on him and his fiction. And since that fiction represents both a high point in the history of horror and the weird and a fascinating window into the *fin-de-siècle* cultural milieu within which most of it was produced, this is an entirely good thing.

Life and Work

Machen was pre-eminently a writer of place—of, first of all, his native Monmouthshire (later he would discover London, completing the binary landscape of his imagination). It is significant that in his autobiography Machen privileges geography over genealogy, filling many lyrical pages with evocations of his birthplace before thinking to bring any of his relations onto the stage of memory. He is ever reminding the reader, too, of the decisive impact of the history of Wales—natural as well as human—upon his own. In an often-quoted passage near the beginning of the first of his memoirs, *Far Off Things*, he declares,

> I shall always esteem it as the greatest piece of fortune that has fallen to me, that I was born in that noble, fallen Caerleon-on-Usk, in the heart of Gwent. . . . For the older I grow the more firmly am I convinced that anything which I may have accomplished in literature is due to the fact that when my eyes were first opened in earliest childhood they had before them the vision of an enchanted land.[5]

That land was a palimpsest, steeped in both history and legend from Celtic, Roman, and medieval times (for as we will see, if Machen was

[5] *Far Off Things* (New York, 1922), 8.

a writer of place, those places were deeply imbued with a sense of temporality):

> I am a citizen of what was once no mean city . . . once the splendid Isca Silurum, the headquarters of the Second Augustan Legion. And, then again, a golden mist of legend grew about it; it became the capital of King Arthur's court of faerie and enchantment, the chief city of a cycle of romance that has charmed all the world. . . . wonderful was it to stand in the evening on the green circle of the Roman amphitheatre, and see the sun flame above Twyn Barlwn, the mystic tumulus on the mountain wall of the west. So the old town dreamed the long years away, not forgetful of the Legions and the Eagles, murmuring scraps of broken Latin in its ancient sleep.[6]

Here in 1863 Machen was born, and baptized Arthur Llewellyn Jones. (The 'Machen' came later, from his mother's family, and is a Scottish name, despite there being a village of 'Machen' near his birthplace.) His father was a Welsh clergyman, from a line of Welsh clergymen, and the rectory library furnished the second formative influence on the future writer's life: there the young Machen devoured a heterogeneous collection of books and periodicals, supplemented by such treasured acquisitions as *Don Quixote*, De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, and *The Arabian Nights*. There was money—for a while—for grammar school in Hereford, but this had entirely evaporated by the time he was to have followed in his father's footsteps—to university and, in all likelihood, the Church.[7] Plan B was a medical career. But a constitutional innumeracy, helped not at all by a preference for sub-Swinburnian versifying over cramming, ensured Machen's failure of the examinations for the Royal College of Surgeons in London. He returned to Wales, where a long, self-published poem on the Eleusinian mysteries suggested to his family—oddly enough—that he might be a journalist; accordingly, he was sent back to London in June 1881, at the age of 18, to become one.

And Machen did, in fact, become a newspaperman, but not for twenty-nine years; in the meantime, he became something else, a 'literary man'. To this end he spent most of the 1880s in severe poverty, serving an idiosyncratic apprenticeship: he translated Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron* for a much-needed £20, wrote a pseudo-scholarly

[6] Introduction to *Notes and Queries*, quoted in Mark Valentine, *Arthur Machen* (Bridgend, 1995), 10.

[7] Flirtations with occultism aside (see the next paragraphs), Machen was a believing, if somewhat idiosyncratic, Anglican with High Church tendencies throughout life. (In 'The White People' he has the mystic Catholic Ambrose say, 'I am a member of the persecuted Anglican church', p. 264.)

treatise on tobacco and a collection of pseudo-Renaissance tales in archaic English, and read his way through a garret crammed with esoteric literature to prepare a bookseller's catalogue (entitled *The Literature of Occultism and Archaeology*). This last commission was to provide rich matter for Machen's creative work, exposing him to 'as odd a library as any man could desire to see'. As he would later write:

> Occultism in one sense or another was the subject of [most] of the books. There were the principal and the most obscure treatises on Alchemy or Astrology, on Magic. . . . books about Witchcraft, Diabolical Possession, 'Fascination', or the Evil Eye; here comments on the Kabbala. Ghosts and Apparitions were a large family, Secret Societies of all sorts hung on the skirts of the Rosicrucians and Freemasons. . . . the semi-religious, semi-occult, semi-philosophical sects and schools were represented: we dealt in Gnostics and Mithraists, we harboured the Neoplatonists, we conversed with the Quietists and the Swedenborgians. These were the ancients; and beside them were the modern throng of Diviners and Stargazers and Psychometrists and Animal Magnetists and Mesmerists and Spiritualists and Psychic Researchers. In a word, the collection . . . represented thoroughly enough that inclination of the human mind which may be a survival from the rites of the black swamp and the cave or—an anticipation of a wisdom and knowledge that are to come, transcending all the science of our day.[8]

Most of these subjects would crop up somewhere or other in Machen's later writing (though the 'Ghosts and Apparitions' that were the meat and drink of his contemporary M. R. James appear hardly at all).[9] In particular, the idea of an occult science 'transcending all the science of our day' lay behind the pair of tales which John Lane of The Bodley Head published together in 1894 as part of his 'Keynote Series'. There are superficial resemblances between both 'The Great God Pan' and 'The Inmost Light' and science fiction; in each, a mad scientist figure engages in a forbidden experiment: in the first story, a surgical procedure performed on a woman's brain to make her 'see the god Pan'; in the second, the removal of a woman's soul to a gemstone prison. Yet where science fiction depends upon the presence of what Darko Suvin

[8] *Things Near and Far*, 20–1.

[9] Later Machen would become personally involved in the *fin-de-siècle* world of the occult as well, joining the Order of the Golden Dawn after the death of his first wife (his friend the occult scholar Arthur Waite was a leading figure in the Order, which also counted Yeats and Aleister Crowley among its members). He would write disparagingly of the experience and the Order (thinly disguised as the 'Order of the Twilight Star'): 'I supposed that the Order, dimly heard of, might give me some light and guidance . . . [but] the Twilight Star shed no ray of any kind on my path' (*Things Near and Far*, 218).

has called a 'novum' or 'new thing',[10] consistent with current scientific knowledge (What if time travel were possible? What if robots became smarter than humans?), these tales are premised on what might better be termed an 'antiquum', a recovered piece of older, occult knowledge. Without question Machen's interest in, and treatment of, the brain in both of these stories draws upon contemporary developments in neuroscience; at the same time, however, he suggests that such modern disciplines are only catching up with the 'sciences' of a bygone age. And when the demonic Helen Vaughan in 'Pan' kills herself, her body undergoes a grotesque recapitulation of forms, but it is one which calls to mind less the evolutionary ideas of Darwin or Haeckel than the theories of the seventeenth-century alchemist Thomas Vaughan.[11]

Oscar Wilde called the novella 'un succès fou', but Machen treasured far more, as he would throughout his career, the abuse of critics. 'Pan' was 'gruesome, ghastly, and dull', 'acutely and intentionally disagreeable', 'ludicrous', 'an incoherent nightmare of sex', even—'unmanly'.[12] Some condemned Machen for revealing not too much but too little: Richard le Gallienne wrote in a reader's report that 'The nature of the horror . . . is persistently shirked . . . mainly a dumb-show of ghastly interjections. Terrified asterisks, horrified notes of exclamations are not enough.'[13] Many others echoed this criticism, a fact which points to Machen's pioneering use of a trope which would become a commonplace of twentieth-century horror—that of the 'unspeakable' or 'unnamable' thing which utterly resists representation.[14] This quality of obliqueness extends to other aspects of the novella as well, particularly its narrative structure—the reader pieces together the story from a sequence of seemingly disconnected episodes. H. P. Lovecraft saw the construction of 'Pan' as perhaps its greatest strength: 'But the charm of the tale is in the telling. No one could begin to describe the

[10] *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (New Haven, 1979), 63.

[11] Who is also her namesake; as far as I know, Machen biographers Aidan Reynolds and William Charlton were the first to make this connection in *Arthur Machen: A Short Account of His Life and Work* (London, 1963).

[12] Introduction, *The Great God Pan and the Hill of Dreams* (Mineola, NY, 2006), 8; D. P. M. Michael, *Arthur Machen* (Cardiff, 1971), 11.

[13] Quoted in Gawsworth, *Life*, 199.

[14] The 1925 story 'The Unnamable' is at least half a parody of this conceit, by one of its greatest purveyors, H. P. Lovecraft; the tale ends with a gloriously futile attempt to articulate the nature of the horror: '*No—it wasn't that way at all*. It was everywhere—a gelatin—a slime—yet it had shapes, a thousand shapes of horror beyond all memory. There were eyes—and a blemish. It was the pit—the maelstrom—the ultimate abomination. Carter, *it was the unnamable*!' *The New Annotated H. P. Lovecraft*, ed. Leslie S. Klinger (New York, 2014), 122.

cumulative suspense and ultimate horror with which every paragraph abounds without following fully the precise order in which Mr. Machen unfolds his gradual hints and revelations.'[15] But this is a minority view; modern readers have tended to be more disturbed by the story's defects of plotting and characterization[16] than by the improprieties which shocked its original audience. Whatever its weaknesses, 'Pan' has exerted an enormous influence on the course of horror fiction in the century and a quarter since its publication.

Despite Machen's later disavowals, 'Pan' was, and remains today, closely associated with the Decadent movement, and benefited, if that is the right way to put it, from the association. The British version of the Decadence was influenced by an earlier French movement, as well as by the Aesthetic school associated with Walter Pater. Machen's personal connection with the central figures of this movement was tangential: he had, for example, a slight and ambivalent relationship with Wilde (the Irishman praised the Welshman's early story 'A Double Return' as well as 'Pan'; for his part Machen considered Wilde a brilliant but superficial conversationalist). Another key figure, Aubrey Beardsley, designed the cover and title page for *The Great God Pan and The Inmost Light*, while the book's publisher, John Lane, was also responsible for the periodical which gave its name to the 'yellow nineties'. Despite these connections, Machen himself, writing in 1916, would have his readers believe that his work owed no debt at all to 'yellow bookery' (as he called it):

> 'The Great God Pan' was first published in December, 1894. So the book is of full age, and I am glad to take the opportunity of a new edition to recall those early 'nineties when the tale was written and published—those 'nineties of which I was not even a small part, but no part at all. For those were the days of 'The Yellow Book', of 'Keynotes', and the 'Keynotes Series', of Aubrey Beardsley and 'The Woman Who Did', of many portentous things in writing and drawing and publishing. 'The Great God Pan' had the good fortune to issue from The Bodley Head, which was the centre of the whole movement, and no doubt the book profitted by the noise that the movement was making. But this was in a sense an illegitimate profit; since the story was conceived and written in solitude, and came from far off lonely days spent in a land remote from London, and from literary societies and sodalities. So far as it stands for anything, it stands, not for the ferment of the 'nineties, but for the visions that a little boy saw in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies.[17]

[15] *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, 90.

[16] As many have noted, Machen looses upon the reader a veritable pack of all but indistinguishable young gentlemen.

[17] Introduction, *The Great God Pan and The Hill of Dreams*, 1.

Machen's attempts to distance himself from that world are understandable, given its unsavoury reputation in the public mind, well into the twentieth century. This does not mean, however, that we are obliged to accept uncritically his self-portrait of the artist as autocosm. But opinion has divided over the question of just how 'Decadent' his fictions of this period are, how influenced by the cultural milieu in which Wilde, Beardsley, and others flourished. On one view (not very different from Machen's own), the answer would seem to be, 'very little indeed':

> for our purpose these dazzling and picturesque figures [of the English Decadent movement], however tragic, however intriguing, are irrelevant. They are irrelevant because they scarcely affected Machen at all. Although the atmosphere of the age and the opportunity to experiment had something to do with the themes he chose for his own stories, he followed no fashion and clung to no coterie.[18]

Even here, however, there is that tantalizing 'something to do with'. Other critics, seeking to specify the nature and extent of this 'something', have faced first of all the challenge of satisfactorily *defining* 'Decadence', of agreeing on its characteristic qualities. Perhaps the best way to think about Decadence is in the spirit of what Ludwig Wittgenstein called 'family resemblances'—as a concept associated with a shifting but overlapping set of themes, tropes, and techniques. And indeed, Machen critics have painted various portraits of the Decadence—none exactly alike, but all bearing a strong likeness to the fiction he produced in the 1890s. Mark Valentine, for instance, has written:

> While there has been no succinct and accurate encapsulation of what the Decadence meant, it may very broadly be considered as implying a devotion to exquisitely crafted style in literature, and in life to the quest for new sensations, involving variously the exploration of the occult, the exotic, the sexually unorthodox, the bohemian way of life, and a taste for strange drugs or drink.[19]

For Wesley Sweetser (thinking along similar but not identical lines), the 'larger elements of Decadence' are 'intent to shock, emphasis on sensation, and fascination with evil'.[20] John Simons, warning against the temptation 'to dismiss Machen as just another of the throng of literati of the 1890s who have narrowly failed to achieve canonical status', highlights other qualities:

> Certainly, we find throughout Machen's work all of those things which became the clichés of the 1890s. His work is lushly embroidered with the aureate

[18] Reynolds and Charlton, *Arthur Machen*, 42.
[19] Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 22.
[20] *Arthur Machen* (New York, 1964), 75.

diction of The Yellow Book, it breathes the atmosphere of the study in which a collection of rare erotica is displayed to only the closest friends, it is bathed in the pallid gleam of the Celtic Twilight.[21]

Then there is the *fin-de-siècle* fascination with paganism, and with the figure of Pan (and his various caprine avatars) in particular: '*The Great God Pan* should be seen . . . as a novel of the Decadence, of a piece with . . . [Florence Farr's] *The Dancing Faun*, with Kenneth Grahame's *Pagan Papers* (John Lane, 1893), with Beardsley's sly fauns and lascivious ladies.'[22] One might go on.[23] But these multifarious affinities with the spirit of the movement, and the age, are enough to demonstrate that such works as 'Pan', *The Three Impostors*, and *The Hill of Dreams* deserve to be considered important, perhaps indispensable, works of the English Decadence.

But if the Decadent brand was an asset, albeit an ambivalent one, in 1894, it would prove a liability in 1895—or so Machen believed, blaming the comparative failure of *The Three Impostors* (also published by John Lane) in part on public revulsion at Wilde's trial and conviction on charges of 'gross indecency': 'there had been some ugly scandals . . . which had made people impatient with reading matter that was not obviously and obtrusively "healthy"; and so, for one reason or another, "The Three Impostors" failed to set the Fleet Ditch on fire'.[24] To be sure, there have always been readers who have recognized its Gothic potency—it scared Conan Doyle to death, and John Betjeman—and today its status as a foundational work of horror fiction is generally acknowledged, among critics at any rate. In the 1980s Jorge Luis Borges included the novel in his 'Personal Library' of a hundred volumes, calling it one of literature's 'short and almost secret masterpieces'. But the text has remained an 'almost secret masterpiece' even to many who have read a fair bit of Machen, for the simple reason that it has so often, and for so long, been chopped up and sold, as it were, for parts. *The Three Impostors*, while to some extent written piecemeal, comprises

[21] 'Horror in the 1890s: The Case of Arthur Machen', in Clive Bloom (ed.), *Creepers* (London, 1993), 35.

[22] Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 33.

[23] Machen's preoccupation with (physical and spiritual) corruption, for instance, resonates with other Decadent works, as does his depiction of Helen Vaughan in 'Pan' as a man-destroying femme fatale. For Adrian Eckersley, the unifying theme of Machen's 1890s stories is degeneracy, a condition associated with the Aesthetic and Decadent movements (among others), most famously by Max Nordau in his book *Degeneration* (1892, translated into English in 1895) (see 'A Theme in the Early Work of Arthur Machen: "Degeneration"', *ELT* 35/3 (January 1992), 277–87).

[24] *Things Near and Far*, 162.

a gratifyingly perplexing whole. A larger frame narrative—concerning a terrified 'young man with spectacles' fleeing from the occult society he has betrayed—contains a series of interpolated episodes told by unreliable narrators (this is one of those novels which demands a second reading at least).[25] Two of these episodes, however—'The Novel of the Black Seal' and 'The Novel of the White Powder'—have long been treated by anthologists as stand-alone tales.

And they are great tales. But there are losses as well as gains involved when one plucks them from the frame of the novel, which Machen would later describe as

> a book which testifies to the vast respect I entertained for the fantastic, 'New Arabian Nights' manner of R. L. Stevenson, to those curious researches in the byways of London which I have described already, and also, I hope, to a certain originality of experiment in the tale of terror, as exemplified in the stories of the Professor who was taken by the fairies, and of the young student of law who swallowed the White Powder.[26]

Interestingly, this passage anticipates—seems even, perhaps, to sanction—the practice of harvesting individual 'stories' from the novel, even as it directs our attention to two fascinating aspects of the text which are almost entirely lost when this is done. The first of these aspects is precisely the narrative complexity noted earlier, for which Machen owes an explicit debt to Stevenson (especially to *The Dynamiter*, the 1885 sequel to his 1882 *New Arabian Nights*), and an implicit one to such works as the original *Arabian Nights* and (very likely) the *Heptameron* which, as we have seen, he had translated during the previous decade—all works using the device of an interlinked series of tales.[27] The second feature is the novel's depiction of London as a potent locus of wonder and terror; the text is in large part the product of a young writer's fascinated urban wanderings—his 'curious researches', as he puts it, 'in the byways of London'. As noted earlier, if Wales stood at one pole of Machen's axial imagination, the great 'City of Resurrections' (as it is called in 'The Great God Pan') was firmly fixed at the other, and

[25] The 'three impostors' of the book's title are liars, spinning fictions within a fiction—but mystery and ambiguity do not necessarily vanish altogether once one realizes this: for example, as Mark Valentine points out, in the case of 'The Novel of the Black Seal' there really *is* a Professor Gregg, and he really *has* vanished, as Phillipps's knowledge independently confirms (Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 43).

[26] *Things Near and Far*, 144.

[27] Beyond this structural similarity, David Trotter has identified a number of further connections between *The Dynamiter* and *The Three Impostors*, in his introduction to the latter (London, 1995).

was as central to his literary vision as it was to those of Samuel Johnson and Charles Dickens (both favourite authors). Machen's London appears variously as a fantastic 'Baghdad on the Thames', site of impossible coincidences;[28] a source of sudden, transfiguring epiphanies and ecstasies; a network redolent with occult menace; and a disorienting labyrinth. Machen saw himself—how facetiously it is difficult to know for certain—as a solitary practitioner of what he called 'my London science' and 'the Great Art of London': 'I will listen to no objections or criticisms as to the Ars Magna of London, of which I claim to be the inventor, the professor and the whole school. Here I am artist and judge at once, and possess the whole matter of the art within myself.'[29] But of course he was far from the only one 'researching' the city—its seedier side in particular—in the later nineteenth century. Kelly Hurley aligns Machen's treatment of the city in *The Three Impostors* with the work of a host of 'late-Victorian "social explorers" . . . middle-class reformers—sociologists, urban missionaries, government agents, journalists—[who] founded their discussions of urban poverty upon a central conceit: that the slum neighborhoods of London were as little known, mysterious, and fearsome as the more obscure reaches of the colonies'.[30] This wider cultural context should be borne in mind when the reader follows the wanderings of Dyson (a peripatetic stand-in for Machen himself) into 'region[s] as remote as Libya and Pamphylia and the parts about Mesopotamia' (p. 180). However, most readers of Machen's fiction will probably agree that his vision of the metropolis is, ultimately, very much his own.

The second half of the decade was at least as productive for Machen as the first, yet this fact can only be appreciated in retrospect: in 1897 he wrote a novel, *The Hill of Dreams*, and a set of ten prose poems or short fantasies; 1899 saw the completion of 'The White People'—long reckoned, as much as 'Pan' or *The Three Impostors*, a key work of modern horror—and a book of literary criticism, *Hieroglyphics*, at which point the death of Machen's wife interrupted his work on the novella

[28] As fantasy writer Lin Carter seemed to recognize, Machen's imaginative Orientalization of London was closely related to his construction of a narrative world shot through with improbability: 'To me it reads rather as if Machen were trying to look at London as Scheherezade [*sic*] looked at Baghdad—through eyes that saw everyday life as a tangle of incredible coincidences, chance meetings, overheard anecdotes, and marvelous encounters'. 'Baghdad on the Thames', Introduction to *The Three Impostors* (New York, 1972), pp. xi–xii.

[29] *Things Near and Far*, 85–6.

[30] *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the* Fin de Siècle (Cambridge, 1996), 161.

A Fragment of Life, and indeed his writing life altogether. But none of these works—among them some of Machen's finest—saw print until 1904 at the earliest; the prose poems would not appear complete until 1924, as *Ornaments in Jade*.

These latter pieces, each of which 'recounts a single incident in which there is an encounter with the celestial or satanic',[31] represent yet another part of Machen's oeuvre which deserves to be better known. While it is easy to dismiss them as derivative or secondary fragments—chips struck from *The Hill of Dreams* during its making, or tentative steps in the direction of 'The White People'—these compressed, ambiguous fictions are powerful in their own right. Reading them, one is particularly struck by their insistence on the ineluctability of rite and ritual, ceremony and mystery, as sources of meaning in an age of religious decline.[32] They explore, too, the abiding appeal of sympathetic magic and other 'primitive' practices. One 'young lady' in these pieces imitates the 'antique immemorial rite' she had seen another girl perform at the flower-decked stone in the wood; another uses a 'loathsome', obscene image to ensnare a gentleman's affection. At midnight the 'quiet modest girls of [an] English village' form a 'writhing' sylvan procession; in a London suburb, a City clerk makes and adores a dubious idol (pp. 254, 250, 260). Kindred scenarios are explored in the fragmentary sketches from this period which did not make it out of Machen's notebooks: there is the 'Story of a man who made for himself a god' of clay, that of the 'ordinary family living in the suburbs [who] shut themselves for certain days in the year to perform some horrible "cave" rites', the 'Girl who danced in the Maze [and] was afterwards beset by the influence she had in that manner invoked', and so on.[33] While Machen's obsession with ritual was hardly new,[34] in his earlier tales such practices had been largely associated with either the unambiguously diabolical or the primitive, subhuman 'other', or both, rather

[31] Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 57. The selections included here have been chosen in part for their greater proximity to the 'satanic', though in Machen it can be difficult to keep these categories separate.

[32] Stephen King's 2008 story 'N' is a self-described 'riff on Arthur Machen's "The Great God Pan" ', with a title borrowed from Machen as well, but its most profound connection to Machen may lie in its theme of obsessive-compulsive disorder (a man performs obsessive rituals to keep a monstrous being in its own dimension). It is a striking figure for the irrepressible return of ritual in a secular age.

[33] *The London Adventure* (New York, 1924), 97–100.

[34] As Machen said, he 'chose the mysteries first', and he 'chose them last' (quoted in Gawsworth, *Life*, 31); the Alpha and Omega of his writing career are the poem *Eleusinia* and the story 'Ritual'.

than with ordinary, modern Englishmen and women. It is no accident that these stories, and stories *manqués*, were conceived within a culture still under the spell of James George Frazer's magisterial work of comparative mythology *The Golden Bough* (1890), a book whose core message was deeply troubling to many Victorians: 'when all is said and done our resemblances to the savage are still far more numerous than our differences from him'.[35]

As the Victorian era came to an end, Machen had almost half a century of life ahead of him. It is fair to say that most of his best, and all of his most influential, tales of horror and the weird had been written, if not published, by this time. This is not to say, however, that he produced nothing of interest or value in the twentieth century. During the Great War he performed the remarkable feat of single-handedly, if unintentionally, splicing a myth into the collective imagination of a nation.[36] On 29 September 1914, the *Evening News* carried an account of an embattled English company on the Western Front which is miraculously rescued from annihilation by the spectral bowmen of Agincourt. To say that Machen's tale of providential delivery from the Hun found favour with the British public would be an understatement. Fantasy was taken for reality; Machen's insistence that his tale had no basis in fact provoked angry and elaborate rebuttals in print. It was an object lesson in the kind of deeply rooted human connection to myth and the supernatural he explored in his fiction. The success of 'The Bowmen', published in book form with a few other war stories, led to several commissioned works, including *The Great Return*, one of a number of Machen's writings, fictional and non-fictional, centring upon the Grail legend. Another tale of the War—the mystery-horror novel *The Terror* (1917), which describes a revolt of the animal kingdom against mankind—helped bring about a revival of interest in Machen, which his friend and biographer John Gawsworth called 'the boom'. Collected editions of his work appeared on both sides of the Atlantic (with the American edition, by Knopf, bound in yellow covers: yellow books belatedly invoking the decade of 'yellow bookery'). In the 1920s he wrote a trio of autobiographical books, as well as numerous essays.

[35] *The Golden Bough*, ed. Robert Fraser (Oxford, 2009), 218. Frazer's words might have served as epigraph to Machen's paradigmatically titled story 'Ritual' (1937), in which a group of English boys re-enact, or reinvent, a rite identical to that practised by an African tribe, with the same fatal result.

[36] 'This legend' of the Bowmen, wrote Borges, 'has now become part of popular mythology, and can be heard from the mouths of humble folk who have never heard of Machen'. Introduction, *Los Tres Impostores* (Madrid, 1985).

Finally, in 1936, Machen did what he could not do in 1895—write a sheaf of fresh 'tales of horror' to order. But it is to Machen's distinctive *fin-de-siècle* conception of the Gothic horror tale that we now turn.

Deep Gothic

The first literary form specifically associated with the generation of extreme sensations of horror and terror—the Gothic romance of the eighteenth century—was inextricably, constitutively bound up with a fascination for the past. The same impulse consciously to revive archaic forms prompted Horace Walpole both to build an imitation medieval castle as his home and to pen the foundational Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764); his literary successors, from Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe to Edgar Allan Poe, wrote about ancestral curses, restless spirits, ancient houses, ruined abbeys. In large measure this fascination was a historically specific one, part of the same broader interest in antiquity that helped give rise to such modern fields of historical inquiry as archaeology; as Clive Bloom notes, the original Gothic sensibility 'grew from an antiquarian interest in the peoples of the long distant past'.[37] Yet—precisely because of the nascent or non-existent state of such disciplines—the antiquarian imagination was necessarily hampered by what now appears to us as a crude and confused—and, above all, cramped—sense of history, to say nothing of prehistory. Many awoke in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to a new sense of wonder at the evidences of past ages to be found throughout Britain—Neolithic barrows, henge monuments, Roman ruins, Saxon artefacts—but lacked a framework for conceptualizing, or differentiating among, these historical periods with anything like the kind of precision which we take for granted today. Sir Thomas Browne's 1658 prose masterpiece, *Urne-Buriall*, was inspired by his discovery of Anglo-Saxon pottery urns which he took to be Roman, and things had not changed much by the time the future author of *The Castle of Otranto* joined the Society of Antiquaries of London in the next century.

Things *had* changed, however, and radically, by the time Machen came to make his own distinctive contributions to the Gothic tradition, and not only in the development of historiography. Above all, the nineteenth century witnessed a revolution—one which would spread very quickly from the confines of scientific circles to the larger culture—in the conceptualization of temporality itself, a revolution whose dramatic—for

[37] Clive Bloom, *Gothic Histories* (London, 2010), 2.

some, traumatic—impact is difficult to overstate. The broad contours of this time revolution, while well known, are worth rehearsing briefly. Until comparatively recently the world was believed, on the best authority, to be no more than 'Some fifty or sixty centuries' old, a scripturally sanctioned span which was felt to be quite old enough 'for the unfolding of the whole of known human history and therefore for the natural world, the stage on which it had been played out'.[38] Famously, in the middle of the seventeenth century the historian and archbishop James Ussher, no ignoramus or, in our sense, religious fanatic, fixed a precise date of 4004 BCE for the Creation. And while subsequent theories of societal development, as well as discoveries by natural historians, might have chafed at times against this compressed chronology, it was not until the nineteenth-century emergence of geology as a science that it was seriously challenged—and, in rather short order, demolished. The world was suddenly—overnight, as it were—millions of years old.[39]

The revelation of earth's deep past engendered, variously, feelings of exhilaration, consternation, and anxiety, but seldom indifference. Religious faith, especially when rooted in biblical literalism, was often a casualty; John Ruskin famously lamented: 'If only the Geologists would let me alone, I could do very well, but those dreadful Hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of the Bible verses.' On the other hand, the prospect of an all-but-bottomless well of time made for exciting possibilities in other sciences. Pioneering works in evolutionary biology and paleoarchaeology followed in geology's wake, consolidating the conceptual revolution begun several decades earlier. Deep time was an indispensable ingredient in Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection, as well as a spur to new disciplines exploring human 'prehistory', a word which now appeared for the first time. Archaeologists proposed the existence of Stone, Bronze, and Iron ages, while John Lubbock's *Pre-Historic Times as Illustrated by Ancient Remains* (1865) introduced a further distinction between 'Palaeolithic' and 'Neolithic' humanity. Meanwhile historians, for their part, largely shrank back from the challenge of allowing so *longue* a *durée* to cast its dauntingly attenuated shadow over their discipline, 'fashioning instead a view of history that begins with the rise of civilization', and accepting 'prehistory' as a kind of conceptual 'buffer zone'.[40]

[38] Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History* (Chicago, 2014), 10.

[39] Actually billions, as we know now.

[40] Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2008), 1–2.

But what has all this to do with Machen, or the literary form that originated with *The Castle of Otranto*? One way to characterize Machen's core contribution to modern horror is to say that he engaged in a thoroughgoing reconceptualization—a 'reboot', as we might say today—of the Gothic mode in the aftermath of the Victorian time revolution. Arguably no earlier writer had attempted to inscribe the newly revealed abysses of deep temporality, with its disconcerting potentialities, within a recognizably Gothic framework—certainly none so extensively, or so influentially. Machen's haunted Wales is charged with deep time—it is not a landscape dotted with ruins of vaguely antique provenance, but a coded, stratified space preserving traces of the historic, prehistoric, and prehuman pasts alike (even if these traces have a disconcerting habit of appearing where they are not supposed to be). And the historical sciences of geology, archaeology, and ethnology, as well as such kindred fields as philology and comparative mythology, are on prominent display in Machen's fiction, where they are not mere window dressing but rather central to the articulation of his Gothic vision.

These disciplines are particularly conspicuous in the stories of the 1890s featuring Machen's recurring character Dyson (a Sherlock Holmes figure whose mind, unlike that of Conan Doyle's iconic detective, is ever musing on the mysteries of the deep past). In 'The Shining Pyramid', for instance, Dyson, seeking to account for the anomalous presence in Gwent of a number of prehistoric flints, asks casually, 'By the way . . . what is your geological formation down there?' His friend, while surprised, replies with promptitude and accuracy: 'Old red sandstone and limestone, I believe. . . . We are just beyond the coal measures, you know' (p. 227).[41] As for the flints, their appearance prompts Dyson to deduce the agency of the sinister race which represents one of Machen's favourite conceits—his reimagining of the fairies of Celtic lore as a survival from the prehistoric past. In this and other tales, Machen clearly draws upon contemporary works of archaeology and anthropology in associating the material culture of the 'Little People' with the Neolithic period. They possess 'flint arrow-head[s] of vast antiquity', 'primitive stone axe[s]', a 'primitive stone knife' resembling an 'adze'—all artefacts which might have come straight from Lubbock's *Pre-Historic Times* (Dyson's ethnologist companion declares

[41] Wales, it may be worth noting, had played a prominent role in the development of geology, with three geological periods of the Palaeozoic Era—the Cambrian, Silurian, and Ordovician—being named after Welsh tribes because of the important rock strata found there.

the adze-knife, with authority, to have been 'made about ten thousand years ago. One exactly like this was found near Abury [Avebury], in Wiltshire', p. 200).

Other writers of the time, to be sure, engaged imaginatively with deep time, sometimes to create horrors; H. G. Wells once again comes to mind. Machen once described a sensation of 'travelling in time—backwards, not forwards, as in Mr. Wells's enchantment',[42] and subsequent commentators have imagined his and Wells's countenances as the two faces of Janus—one looking to the past, the other to the future—seeing this as the essential difference between them.[43] This is not quite right—Wells wrote, for instance, a set of 'Stories of the Stone Age' in the 1890s, dramatizing the transition from Palaeolithic to Neolithic culture—but there are indeed fundamental differences between Machen's creative exploitation of deep time and its uses in science fiction. This can be seen quite clearly by simply comparing two subhuman, subterranean races, superficially not dissimilar, which appeared in works of British popular fiction in the same year, 1895: Wells's Morlocks (in *The Time Machine*) and Machen's Little People (in 'The Shining Pyramid', 'The Red Hand', and *The Three Impostors*). While the former are the product of Darwinian evolution, descended from men over the span of hundreds of thousands of years, the latter are, as another of Machen's ethnologists puts it, 'unchanged and unchangeable', perennially 'repeating the evil of Gothic legend' (p. 137)—perpetuating the same rites, propagating the same symbols—throughout the ages. True, Professor Gregg, in a sop to the Darwinian idiom, suggests that they have 'fallen out of the grand march of evolution' (p. 136), but the enduring impression Machen leaves is of an utterly changeless evil, coeval with the geologic timescale itself; the 'chronotope' of these stories, as Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin would have put it, suggests the presence of a *deep* but not *evolutionary* time (in 'The Red Hand' Dyson, contemplating the inscriptions on one of the Little People's tablets, is struck by 'an impression of vast and far-off ages, and of a living being that had touched the stone with enigmas before the hills were formed, when the hard rocks still boiled with fervent heat' (p. 208); in 'The Novel of the Black Seal' Miss Lally reflects upon 'awful things done long ago, and forgotten before the hills were moulded into form' (p. 129)). Machen

[42] *Far Off Things*, 150.

[43] 'If Wells looked forward, Machen looked backward,' wrote William Francis Gekle (*Arthur Machen, Weaver of Fantasy* (Millbrook, NY, 1949), 55)—a phrase echoed later by Machen scholar Wesley Sweetser.

takes care, too, to draw an absolute, unbridgeable boundary line between the speech of these beings ('a jargon but little removed from the inarticulate noises of brute beasts') and that of humans, echoing the anti-Darwinian position of philologist Max Müller, who famously wrote, 'language is our Rubicon, and no brute will dare to cross it'.[44]

And yet. *They write*. These ostensible 'troglodytes' possess systems of symbolic inscription exactly akin to those associated with the first human civilizations (Machen makes pointed reference to Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Hittite cultures), at just the moment in intellectual history when writing was being conceptualized as *the* defining marker of civilized man.[45] They engrave their 'hieroglyphics' on seals of black stone, and scrawl them with bits of red earth on limestone rocks in Monmouthshire (aeons later, yet 'without alteration of any kind'; they are radically static culturally as well as racially). In one story Machen describes 'a kind of cuneiform character, a good deal altered'; in another, an elaborate system of 'fantastic figures, spirals and whorls' (pp. 139, 208). And this calculated blending of Neolithic and Postlithic cultural forms, and their backwards projection into the fathomless deeps of geologic time, is a good example of the kind of unsettling effect Machen sought to produce in these deep Gothic tales. The chief horror of Darwinism lies in its reminder that we come from beasts, its intimation that 'underneath it all' the respectable vicar or barrister is a savage. But Machen travesties the very categories that were emerging within Victorian intellectual culture, historiography in particular, to distinguish 'civilized' from 'savage', 'history' from 'prehistory' (and both of these from what came before). He articulates, in other words, the 'deep history' which the later Victorian era was keen to repress.[46]

'To the Nth and to Infinity'

In the *fin-de-siècle* fictions which earned Machen a measure of evanescent notoriety, he may, again, have sometimes gestured at horrors too awful to be named, but he can hardly be accused of denying his readers horrors of a more explicit, and graphic, nature as well. His 'transmutations'

[44] *Lectures on the Science of Language* (London, 1885), i. 403.

[45] There is much more that might be said about Machen's fascinatingly, instructively overdetermined (and, in the context of modern horror and fantasy fiction, extremely influential) Little People. For a brief discussion of their relationship to contemporaneous ideas about race, see explanatory note to p. 240.

[46] See Aaron Worth, 'Arthur Machen and the Horrors of Deep History', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 40/1 (2012), 215–27.

(the subtitle of *The Three Impostors*) of the human form—his depictions of corporeal corruption and deliquescence, of extreme torture, and other figured 'ruinations of the human subject' (in Kelly Hurley's phrase)[47]—evoke shock, disgust, and visceral fear, pointing the way unflinchingly to our contemporary genre of 'body horror'. Yet even in his earlier writings—'The Lost Club' is one example—one can detect another, subtler modality of unease, one which would help to lend a shared, distinctive tone to a number of his later stories in particular, and which often appears in Machen's descriptions of London. The keynote here is one of dislocation, defamiliarization, and dread, rather than acute terror and revulsion. This is the Machen of labyrinthine urban spaces, of uncanny repetition, of bounded infinities; the Machen, perhaps most of all, of the alternate, the parallel, the counterfactual, the lost.

It is a note that has, for us, a distinctly modern, or postmodern, sound, as in an early article he wrote for the *Evening News* and later summarized in *Things Near and Far*:

> I said the chief horror of the modern street was not to be sought in the poverty of the design . . . but in the fact that in the street of to-day each house is a replica of the other, so that the effect to the eye is, if the street be long enough, the prolongation of one house to infinity, in an endless series of repetitions. And I pointed out that even if you admired some particular picture or statue immensely, it would be rather awful to traverse a long gallery in which the picture or the statue were repeated again and again as far as the eye could see.[48]

If such passages as this seem to anticipate the imaginative world of Jorge Luis Borges, it is no accident; the Argentine writer whom David Foster Wallace called 'the great bridge between modernism and postmodernism' counted Machen among his influences.[49] Indeed, Machen's impact on postmodern literature, if only through his impact on Borges, has yet to be fully explored. For both writers, the figure of the labyrinth

[47] *Gothic Body*, 3. [48] *Things Near and Far*, 134–5.

[49] Machen's idea of the 'awfulness' of infinite repetition calls to mind, for instance, Borges's conception of Otto Dietrich zur Linde, the Nazi commandant in 'Deutsches Requiem': 'I had realized many years before I met David Jerusalem that everything in the world can be the seed of a possible Hell; a face, a word, a compass, an advertisement for cigarettes—anything can drive a person insane if that person cannot manage to put it out of his mind. Wouldn't a man be mad if he constantly had before his mind's eye the map of Hungary?' *Collected Fictions* (New York, 1998), 232. In his recent discussion of Machen's treatment of the city in *The Hill of Dreams*, Kostas Boyiopoulos invokes the idea of a 'Borgesian *regressus in infinitum*'. ' "The Serried Maze": Terrain, Consciousness and Textuality in Machen's *The Hill of Dreams*', *Victoriographies* 3/1 (2013), 56.

served as a master-trope; both, too, were fascinated with the theme of 'forking paths', in Borges's phrase.[50] In his (itself digressive, reflexive, furcating) book *The London Adventure* Machen would imaginatively populate an entire district of the metropolis, a kind of parallel neighbourhood, with those whose lives had taken a 'wrong' turn:

> Here live, I know, the people who are a little aside from all our tracks, and, perhaps some of them have a wisdom of their own or a folly of their own which differs from all our common systems of sapience or stultification. . . . I always look upon this strange, unknown region as the country of the people who have lost their way. . . . I am sure that they are all secret people who live there, to the east of the Gray's Inn Road; secret and severed people. . .[51]

Forking paths and parallel worlds become especially prominent themes in the stories from Machen's last creative period. In 'Out of the Picture', for instance, we encounter a painter whose response to what he sees as the fatuities of modernism is to return, creatively, to the eighteenth century—to one of the branching points in the history of Western art—and from there to take an alternate path forward. Elsewhere Machen explores the prospect of discrete, multiple worlds, and the disconcerting possibility of their intrusion into our own—a theme which has since become a commonplace in science fiction and fantasy, as well as more 'literary' fictions. 'N' is about a parallel reality that can be glimpsed, under certain circumstances, from within the London suburb (as it then was) of Stoke Newington, through a process which Machen, borrowing a term from Christian theology, calls 'a perichoresis, an interpenetration'. This particular world appears as a paradise; but Machen hints that there are others, less pleasant. The story ends as one character, comfortably seated in 'the very heart of London', is struck with a disagreeable thought:

> '. . . It is possible, indeed, that we three are now sitting among desolate rocks, by bitter streams.
>
> . . . And with what companions?' (p. 320)

Written shortly after 'N', the poignant 'The Tree of Life' displays Machen's penchant for articulating counterfactual variants of the reality we know. The story begins prosaically enough, with the young invalid Teilo Morgan talking with his agent about potential improvements to his estate. Only gradually does the reader become aware that his proposed

[50] His celebrated story 'El jardin de senderos que se bifurcan', written in 1941, would first appear in English eight months after Machen's death.

[51] *London Adventure*, pp. 158, 160–1.

innovations are insane (there is to be cultivation of eggplants (aubergines) and arbor vitae, with 'zebras for haulage'); the estate, which had indeed once belonged to his family, is now a madhouse. Yet it is far from clear that Teilo's fantasies are to be understood as lunacy *tout court* (and not only because Machen had himself once advocated the British cultivation of eggplants[52]); he has, like the denizens of Machen's secret London, 'a wisdom of [his] own or a folly of [his] own'. As a young boy Teilo had been stricken with a brain illness, which changed him utterly. A tutor is hired to humour him:

> And . . . young Teilo nearly drove the poor man off his head. He was far sharper in a way than he'd ever been. . . . But then the twist in the brain would come out. Mathematics brilliant; and at the end of the lesson he'd frighten that tutor of his with a new theory of figures, some notion of the figures that we don't know of, the numbers that are between the others, something rather more than one and less than two, and so forth. It was the same with everything: there was the Secret Conquest of England a hundred years ago, that nobody was allowed to mention, and the squares that were always changing their shape in geometry, and the great continent that was hidden because Africa was on top of it, so that you couldn't see it. Then, when it came to the classics, there were fresh cases for the nouns and new moods for the verbs: and all the rest of it. (p. 334)

The phrase 'Tree of Life' refers, among other things, to a Kabbalistic figure, an arrangement of 'Sephiroth [which] tell in a kind of magic shorthand the whole history and mystery of man and all the worlds'.[53] In which of these worlds, we may ask, was Teilo vouchsafed his knowledge of an alternate mathematics, historiography, geography, and grammar?

Machen's fascination with parallel worlds or dimensions shows the convergence of many sources, Christianity and Platonism among them (even such tales as 'Pan' are premised upon the existence of a spiritual world 'beyond the veil'). There are possible antecedents to be found, too, in his favourite reading: the tale of Buluqiya in his beloved *Arabian Nights* has been invoked as an early example of a parallel-worlds fantasy, and Isaac D'Israeli and Richard Whately were among the first to explore the theme of counterfactual historiography.[54] Esoteric literature certainly makes a conceptual contribution to 'The Tree of Life' at least. Machen was also intrigued—despite his avowed mathematical

[52] Reynolds and Charlton, *Arthur Machen*, 156.

[53] *Things Near and Far*, 30.

[54] D'Israeli's 'Of a History of Events Which Have Not Happened' appeared in *Curiosities of Literature*, 2nd series (1824), which the young Machen certainly read; Whately, whose *Elements of Logic* had a strong influence on Machen, had written the playful 'Historic Doubts relative to Napoleon Buonaparte' in 1819.

'incompetence'—by the multidimensional speculations of those initiated into the mysteries of what he called 'the high geometry'. He knew (and mentions in *The Terror*) Edwin A. Abbott's pioneering novel of parallel worlds *Flatland* (1884); in *The London Adventure* he writes: 'For we, it is true, live in an illusory world, but there are other spheres of deception, beyond ours, and of a different order . . . the geometers tell us that there is a fourth dimension beyond our three, and so on, as I understand, to the *nth* and to infinity'—perhaps the significance of the cryptic title 'N' lies in that '*nth*'?[55]

Yet it is difficult not to assign some part to Machen's personal ambivalence about his literary achievements as well, one which led him to ruminate about paths not taken, or paths, as he seemed to believe, he was not capable of taking. He was haunted by the gap between vision and execution, the ideal and the real—by a sense of the writer he might have been. Indeed, if Machen had been permitted a glimpse of a world in which he had been transmuted into a 'classic', with his 'shilling shocker' 'Pan' included in a series alongside the masters he revered, he would surely have thought it the most improbable future imaginable. Modern readers of weird fiction, for their part, can be thankful for the particular sequence of forkings in Machen's path which led him to London, unqualified for any vocation but the one he made for himself, in poverty and solitude. If, for instance, the Revd John Edward Jones had been able to send his son to Oxford, some smallish congregation in Monmouthshire might well have been edified by decades of lyrical, allusive sermons, known locally for their unusually vivid depictions of sin, death, and the punishments of hell. But the paths traced by the literature of fear and the uncanny, throughout the twentieth century and beyond, would have been profoundly different—and infinitely less interesting.

[55] *London Adventure*, 126.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

The main priority in assembling this collection has been to include as much of Machen's seminal horror fiction from the 1890s as possible, as it originally appeared (hence the inclusion of *The Three Impostors* complete, rather than harvested for individual stories as is usually done), and complemented by seldom-published pieces from this period which throw additional light on these better-known works. But Machen's later fiction is also represented—by two Great War fantasies and a quartet of tales from the 1930s—so that readers can see how he both revisited favourite themes and engaged creatively with the cultural and historical currents of the new century. The texts of all stories have been taken from their first appearance in book form (with earlier periodical appearance, where applicable, discussed in the Explanatory Notes), except in two cases ('The Lost Club' and 'The Shining Pyramid'), where a later but superior edition has been preferred.

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A CHRONOLOGY OF ARTHUR MACHEN

1863 (3 Mar.) Arthur Llewellyn Jones born in Caerleon, in Monmouthshire, Wales, the child of the Revd John Edward Jones and Janet Robina Jones (née Machen).

1874–80 The young Machen boards at Hereford Cathedral School, where he receives a sound classical education. Here he also learns French, laying the groundwork for his later work translating French classics into English.

1880 First visits London, to prepare for examination for the Royal College of Surgeons, which he fails; returns to Wales.

1881 Machen's first work to appear in print, the self-published poem *Eleusinia*. A 'horrible production', as he later called it. Returns to London to prepare for a journalistic career, for which purpose he attempts to learn shorthand. For several years he lives in poverty, wandering the metropolis as he had done the Welsh countryside, and earning a precarious living as a tutor, cataloguer, and translator.

1884 Machen's first book, *The Anatomy of Tobacco*, published by George Redway.

1885 Reads through a substantial library of occult works to prepare a catalogue; death of his mother.

1886 The first of Machen's translations appears: *The Heptameron* of Marguerite de Navarre, which he had begun in 1884.

1887 Marries Amy Hogg; death of his father.

1888 Publishes *The Chronicle of Clemendy*.

1889 Translates *Le Moyen de parvenir*, a seventeenth-century work by François Béroalde de Verville, and has difficulty finding a publisher.

1890 Publishes short stories including 'The Lost Club' and 'A Double Return'; begins acquaintance with Oscar Wilde, who praised the latter tale as having 'fluttered the dovecotes'. Two other pieces from this year would later be incorporated into 'The Great God Pan' and *A Fragment of Life* respectively.

1891 Moves with his wife to Northend, in Buckinghamshire. Here he would complete 'The Great God Pan', and also write 'The Inmost Light', which was commissioned for an annual by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, who 'refused it with lightning speed'.

1894 John Lane of The Bodley Head publishes *The Great God Pan and the Inmost Light* as part of its Keynotes Series (volume v). 'Pan' attracts

a great deal of interest, and a great deal of criticism. Machen's translation of *The Memoirs of Casanova* also appears.

1895 Publication of *The Three Impostors*, also as part of the Keynotes Series (volume xix).

1897 Machen writes the prose poems that would eventually (1924) be published in book form as *Ornaments in Jade*. He also completes the novel that would become *The Hill of Dreams*; his ambition is to produce 'a *Robinson Crusoe* of the soul'.

1899 Writes 'The White People', and part of *A Fragment of Life*. His writing life is interrupted by the death of his first wife, Amelia Machen.

1900 Joins the Rosicrucian Order of the Golden Dawn, a secret society whose members included W. B. Yeats and Alastair Crowley; upon initiation he takes the name 'Frater Avallaunius'.

1901 At the age of 38, Machen becomes an actor, joining the Benson Shakespeare Repertory Company.

1902 Machen's work of literary criticism, *Hieroglyphics*, is published by Grant Richards.

1903 (23 June) Marries Dorothie Purefoy Hudleston.

1906 Publication by Grant Richards of *The House of Souls*, a major collection of Machen's work including *A Fragment of Life*, 'The White People', 'The Great God Pan', 'The Inmost Light', a slightly abridged and revised version of *The Three Impostors*, and 'The Red Hand', with cover and frontispiece designed by Sidney H. Sime.

1907 Begins to write *The Secret Glory*; publishes related articles on the Sangraal.

1910 Begins new career as a journalist for the *Evening News*.

1914 First appearance, in the pages of the *Evening News*, of the stories 'The Bowmen' and 'The Soldiers' Rest'; together with 'The Monstrance' and 'The Dazzling Light' these would be published in book form in 1915 as *The Angels of Mons and Other Legends of the War*.

1915 Publishes *The Great Return*.

1916 Serialization of 'The Great Terror' in the *Evening News* (16–31 October); the novel would be published in book form in 1917, as *The Terror*, by Duckworth & Co.; a severe abridgment ('The Coming of the Terror') would also appear in 1917.

1918 Vincent Starrett writes *Arthur Machen: Novelist of Ecstasy and Sin*, a work which helps to fuel a wave of American enthusiasm for Machen's work.

1922 Beginning of what Machen's friend and biographer John Gawsworth would call 'the boom' in interest in Machen and his work. Publication of *The Secret Glory* by Martin Secker in London, and the first of his autobiographies, *Far Off Things*, by both Secker and Alfred A. Knopf in New York; the two publishers would issue parallel series of Machen's collected works on both sides of the Atlantic.

1923 Publication of *Things Near and Far* (the sequel to *Far Off Things*), as well as the first of two collections (this one by Covici-McGee, in Chicago), very different in content, entitled *The Shining Pyramid*.

1924 The third volume of Machen's autobiographical trilogy, *The London Adventure*, appears; also a collection of negative reviews of his work (*Precious Balms*) and a slender volume of prose poems written in 1897, *Ornaments in Jade*.

1925 Martin Secker publishes the second Machen collection to bear the title *The Shining Pyramid*; a quarrel arises over publication rights to story and title.

1926 Publication of *Dreads and Drolls*, a collection of articles which had originally appeared in the *London Graphic* during the previous year. Also *Notes and Queries*, a book of articles from *T.P.'s Weekly*, first published between 1908 and 1910.

1933 Machen publishes his last novel, *The Green Round*.

1936 Two new collections of Machen's short fiction appear: the first, *The Cosy Room*, is made up of previously published material, with the exception of the newly composed 'N'; all six stories in *The Children of The Pool* are new.

1946 Penguin Books issues a new selection of Machen's work, entitled *Holy Terrors*.

1947 (15 Dec.) Machen dies in St Joseph's Nursing Home, Beaconsfield.

1948 Publication of *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural*, with an introduction by Philip Van Doren Stern.

THE GREAT GOD PAN AND OTHER HORROR STORIES

THE LOST CLUB

One hot afternoon in August a gorgeous young gentleman, one would say the last of his race in London, set out from the Circus end, and proceeded to stroll along the lonely expanse of Piccadilly Deserta.* True to the traditions of his race, faithful even in the wilderness, he had not bated one jot or tittle of the regulation equipage; a glorious red-and-yellow blossom in his woolly and exquisitely-cut frock coat proclaimed him a true son of the carnation;* hat and boots and chin were all polished to the highest pitch; though there had not been rain for many weeks his trouser-ends were duly turned up, and the poise of the gold-headed cane was in itself a liberal education. But ah! the heavy changes since June, when the leaves glanced green in the sunlit air, and the club windows were filled, and the hansoms flashed in long processions through the streets, and girls smiled from every carriage. The young man sighed; he thought of the quiet little evenings at the Phœnix, of encounters of the Row, of the drive to Hurlingham,* and many pleasant dinners in joyous company. Then he glanced up and saw a bus,* half-empty, slowly lumbering along the middle of the street, and in front of the 'White Horse Cellars'* a four-wheeler had stopped still (the driver was asleep on his seat), and in the 'Badminton'* the blinds were down. He half expected to see the Briar Rose trailing gracefully over the Hotel Cosmopole; certainly the Beauty, if such a thing were left in Piccadilly, was fast asleep.*

Absorbed in these mournful reflections, the hapless Johnny* strolled on without observing that an exact duplicate of himself was advancing on the same pavement from the opposite direction; save that the inevitable carnation was salmon colour, and the cane a silver-headed one, instruments of great magnifying power would have been required to discriminate between them. The two met; each raised his eyes simultaneously at the strange sight of a well-dressed man, and each adjured the same old-world deity.

'By Jove! old man, what the deuce are you doing here?'

The gentleman who had advanced from the direction of Hyde Park Corner was the first to answer.

'Well, to tell the truth, Austin, I am detained in town on—ah—legal business. But how is it you are not in Scotland?'

'Well, it's curious; but the fact is, I have legal business in town also.'

'You don't say so? Great nuisance, ain't it? But these things must be seen to, or a fellow finds himself in no end of a mess, don't you know.'

'He does, by Jove! That's what I thought.'

Mr Austin relapsed into silence for a few moments.

'And where are you off to, Phillipps?'

The conversation had passed with the utmost gravity on both sides. At the joint mention of legal business, it was true a slight twinkle had passed across their eyes, but the ordinary observer would have said that the weight of ages rested on those unruffled brows.

'I really couldn't say. I thought of having a quiet dinner at Azario's.* The Badminton is closed, you know, for repairs or somethin', and I can't stand the Junior Wilton.* Come along with me, and let's dine together.'

'By Jove! I think I will. I thought of calling on my solicitor, but I dare say he can wait.'

'Ah! I should think he could. We'll have some of that Italian wine—stuff in salad oil flasks—you know what I mean.'

The pair solemnly wheeled round, and solemnly paced towards the Circus, meditating, doubtless, on many things. The dinner in the little restaurant pleased them with a grave pleasure, as did the Chianti, of which they drank a good deal too much; 'Quite a light wine, you know,' said Phillipps, and Austin agreed with him, so they emptied a quart flask between them, and finished up with a couple of glasses apiece of Green Chartreuse.* As they came out into the quiet street smoking vast cigars, the two slaves to duty and 'legal business' felt a dreamy delight in all things, the street glimmered full of fantasy in the dim light of the lamps, and a single star shining in the clear sky above seemed to Austin of exactly the same colour as Green Chartreuse. Phillipps agreed with him. 'You know, old fellow,' he said, 'there are times when a fellow feels all sorts of strange things—you know, the sort of things they put in magazines, don't you know, and novels. By Jove, Austin, old man, I feel as if I could write a novel myself.'

They wandered aimlessly on, not quite knowing where they were going, turning from one street to another, and discoursing in a maudlin strain. A great cloud had been slowly moving up from the south, darkening the sky, and suddenly it began to rain, at first slowly with great heavy drops, and then faster and faster in a pitiless, hissing shower; the gutters flooded over, and the furious drops danced up from the stones. The two walked on as fast as they could, whistling and calling 'Hansom!'* in vain; they were really getting very wet.

'Where the dickens are we?' said Phillipps. 'Confound it all, I don't know. We ought to be in Oxford Street.'

They walked on a little farther, when suddenly, to their great joy, they found a dry archway, leading into a dark passage or courtyard. They took shelter silently, too thankful and too wet to say anything. Austin looked at his hat; it was a wreck; and Phillipps shook himself feebly, like a tired terrier.

'What a beastly nuisance this is!' he muttered; 'I only wish I could see a hansom.'

Austin looked into the street; the rain was still falling in torrents; he looked up the passage, and noticed for the first time that it led to a great house, which towered grimly against the sky. It seemed all dark and gloomy, except that from some chink in a shutter a light shone out. He pointed it out to Phillipps, who stared vacantly about him, then exclaimed:

'Hang it! I know where we are now. At least, I don't exactly know, you know, but I once came by here with Wylliams, and he told me there was some club or somethin' down this passage; I don't recollect exactly what he said. Hullo! why, there goes Wylliams. I say, Wylliams, tell us where we are!'

A gentleman had brushed past them in the darkness and was walking fast down the passage. He heard his name and turned round, looking rather annoyed.

'Well, Phillipps, what do you want? Good evening, Austin; you seem rather wet, both of you.'

'I should think we were wet; got caught in the rain. Didn't you tell me once there was some club down here? I wish you'd take us in, if you're a member.'

Mr Wylliams looked steadfastly at the two forlorn young men for a moment, hesitated, and said:

'Well, gentlemen, you may come with me if you like. But I must impose a condition; that you both give me your word of honour never to mention the club, or anything that you see while you are in it, to any individual whatsoever.'

'Certainly not,' replied Austin; 'of course we shouldn't dream of doing so, should we, Phillipps?'

'No, no; go ahead, Wylliams, we'll keep it dark enough.'

The party moved slowly down the passage till they came to the house. It was very large and very old; it looked as though it might have been an embassy of the last century. Wylliams whistled, knocked twice at the door, and whistled again, and it was opened by a man in black.

'Friends of yours, Mr Wylliams?'

Wylliams nodded and they passed on.

'Now mind,' he whispered, as they paused at a door, 'you are not to recognize anybody, and nobody will recognize you.'

The two friends nodded, and the door was opened, and they entered a vast room, brilliantly lighted with electric lamps. Men were standing in knots, walking up and down, and smoking at little tables; it was just like any club smoking-room. Conversation was going on, but in a low murmur, and every now and then someone would stop talking, and look anxiously at a door at the other end of the room, and then turn round again. It was evident that they were waiting for someone or somebody. Austin and Phillipps were sitting on a sofa, lost in amazement; nearly every face was familiar to them. The flower of the Row was in that strange club-room; several young noblemen, a young fellow who had just come into an enormous fortune, three or four fashionable artists and literary men, an eminent actor, and a well-known canon. What could it mean? They were all supposed to be scattered far and wide over the habitable globe, and yet here they were. Suddenly there came a loud knock at the door; and every man started, and those who were sitting got up. A servant appeared.

'The President is awaiting you, gentlemen,' he said, and vanished.

One by one the members filed out, and Wylliams and the two guests brought up the rear. They found themselves in a room still larger than the first, but almost quite dark. The President sat at a long table and before him burned two candles, which barely lighted up his face. It was the famous Duke of Dartington, the largest landowner in England. As soon as the members had entered he said in a cold, hard voice, 'Gentlemen, you know our rules; the book is prepared. Whoever opens it at the black page is at the disposal of the committee and myself. We had better begin.' Someone began to read out the names in a low distinct voice, pausing after each name, and the member called came up to the table and opened at random the pages of a big folio volume that lay between the two candles. The gloomy light made it difficult to distinguish features, but Phillipps heard a groan beside him, and recognized an old friend. His face was working fearfully, the man was evidently in an agony of terror.

One by one the members opened the book; as each man did so he passed out by another door. At last there was only one left; it was Phillipps's friend. There was foam upon his lips as he passed up to the table, and his hand shook as he opened the leaves. Wylliams had passed out after whispering to the President, and had returned to his friends' side. He could hardly hold them back as the unfortunate man groaned in agony and leant against the table: he had opened the book at the black page.

'Kindly come with me, Mr D'Aubigny,' said the President, and they passed out together.