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Intertextual London
Empire in the Occult Cosmopolis of Arthur Machen's *N*

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In Arthur Machen's novella *N* (1935), three elderly twentieth-century city-trotters – Perrott, Harliss, and Arnold – reminisce on a wintry night about the London of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their conversation weaves the material remainders of the city's old streets, shops, and gardens together with literary bric-a-brac from the past. They venture into London's past with the help of textual representations by Thomas De Quincey, Charles Dickens, and Edgar Allan Poe, among others. This is a strikingly intertextual, literary London formed from neoclassical, Romantic and Victorian literary snippets. The temporal differences among these texts are overcome in terms of their spatial unity, evoking the *longue durée* of literary London. While London remains the focal point of this intertextual maze, the itinerants blur its spatial outlines in their mind-walks: the streets at the outer edges of London resemble the colonial frontier and a nondescript park at Stoke Newington acquires the contours of an oriental garden. What is revealed in their walks is the symbolic spatial structure of the intertextual city that marks the colonies as the uncanny double of London. In Machen's text, the colonial spaces are not particularized. Rather, the references to Jamaica, China, or India coalesce into a spatial 'Other' of London, a symbolic outside residing within the city. The occult possibilities of London are symbolically tied to London's status as an imperial cosmopolis in many of his late works, especially the aesthetic manual, *Hieroglyphics* (1902); the autobiographical accounts *Far Off Things* (1922), *Things Near and Far* (1923) and *The London Adventure* (1924); the novels *The Secret Glory* (1922) and *The Green Round* (1933); and the articles in the London-based newspaper *The Evening News* in the 1910s. The focus on intertextuality as a constitutive element of Machen's London helps us map the imperial undertext of literary London in the waning era of the British Empire in his later writings. As the colonial space is configured by Machen to be the textual double of metropolitan London with the

hindsight of time, through allusions to past urban texts, *N* shows that the literary codes that historically gave shape to London have also been tangled with the literary codes of depicting the imperial frontier. If he 'emphasizes the *form* of secrecy' in his 'textual mazes', as Sophie Mantrant has persuasively argued, the occult nature of Machen's London does not reside so much in what it reveals, but in how it veils its secrets.[1] In this article, I explore how the spatial architecture of intertextual London veils its secrets in order to trace the ghostly presence of empire within his occult metropolis, a presence that has largely remained outside the purview of criticism on Machen.

Both spatiality and textuality have been explored as key components of decadence in recent scholarship. Alex Murray connects 'Decadent style' and 'Decadent politics' in terms of different ways of inhabiting 'specific places': Naples, London, Wales, New York and so on.[2] He notes the textual nature of Machen's landscape, strewn with allusions and 'textual traces' of the past.[3] Murray's analysis of spatial textuality is focalized on rural Wales, and draws our attention to the enigmatic quality of allusions in his writings, or his 'linguistic mysticism'.[4] My article, by contrast, focuses on London in order to annotate the literary codes embedded in his figuration of the occult, and locate their historical forms. Machen's London has received less attention than his Wales although, as Dennis Denisoff points out, the urban space is as important as the countryside in his writings, as 'a land of esoteric knowledge, dangerous mystery, solitary exploration, and self-discovery'.[5] Aaron Worth makes a crucial distinction between the early Machen of 'haunted Wales […] charged with deep time', and his late oeuvre, consisting 'of labyrinthine urban spaces, of uncanny repetition'.[6] Machen's London texts often uncannily repeat allusions to past writing on the city. And in these intertextual engagements one can decipher both an historical map of his esoteric views and his oblique commentary on literary London.

While Machen has been considered a maverick in the decadent tradition, the transcontinental scope and critical anachronism of his late writings make him vitally important to our understanding of literary decadence. Robert Stilling has noted that 'decadence' becomes an '*ur*-concept of postcolonial thought', an historical conjuncture that 'evokes imperial decline and

the emergence of postimperial plurality', as well as 'transnational poetics' that remain crucial to poets such as Derek Walcott or Agha Shahid Ali from the 'former colonies'.[7] Machen's London-based oeuvre reveals that the textual space of the metropole and its decadent poetics are woven with aesthetic codes drawn from across the continents. His deeply allusive late writings also augment the ambit of what Kristin Mahoney has called the 'post-Victorian' decadent, as he not only invokes and ironizes 'techniques and styles' of the late nineteenth century, but also engages with literary conventions of an even longer duration, moulding the literary codes that made London an imperial cosmopolis and an epicentre of global modernity.[8] Indeed, Machen's decadent textuality extends beyond the parochial geography of Western Europe and the narrow temporal strip between Victorianism and Modernism. Even though he is not directly attendant upon questions of imperial politics, he formally reorients the modernity of London by showing colonialism as its dark double.

In the urban narratives of late Machen, written in the age of high modernism, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century wanderers of London acquire uncanny afterlives. Figures such as the flâneur, the man of the town, the journalist, the opium-addict, the occultist, and the detective are invoked by the characters in *N*. Their walks (and mind-walks) across the city become entangled with imperial outposts and commodity networks across the empire, turning London streets into an occult maze. The rumour of a garden of Edenic beauty seems to offer them a respite from the streets – an access to a purely British past untainted by imperial transactions, a vestige of British countryside within the imperial cosmopolis. However, the elusive garden in *N* shows that transplantations from around the world construed British landscaping structures, and that those structures were often built by returnees from the colonies. Connecting British gardening traditions with imperial botany, the novella constructs a horticultural occult space magically cohabited by the native and the exotic flora. The street and the garden in *N* are the focal points for analysing the imbrications of the occult and the intertextual in Machen's oeuvre.

London Streets as the Imperial Labyrinth

A lingering sense of decay sets the narrative of *N* in motion. Three old friends, Perrott, Harliss, and Arnold assemble in Perrott's rooms to memorialize the city in an epoch of change, ruminating on 'old days and old ways and all the changes that have come on London in the last weary years'.[9] The past is summoned by reanimating literary anecdotes and weaving them together with the streets: the 'church, where Christina Rossetti bowed her head' or 'The shop of the Pale Puddings, where little David Copperfield might have bought his dinner' (pp. 302-3). The friends surround themselves with anachronistic décor to literally posit themselves into conversations of the bygone: 'The armchairs on which the three sat were of the sort that Mr. Pickwick sits on for ever in his frontispiece.' (p. 301) This invocation of Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) by the trio in *N* connects their nocturnal adventures in the city with textual sojourns into the past. Their belated incursion into the setting of the past confers upon them the insight of time that the original inhabitants of the past lacked: 'the eighteenth century couldn't draw a Gothic building when its towers and traceries were before its eyes' (p. 301).

Indeed, Machen's perception of the interweaving of the colonial and the modern in *N* is precisely related to the sense of an ending, when two traditional methods of depicting London in the long nineteenth century are brought together: the literary realism that contoured its everyday, as in *The Pickwick Papers*, and the Gothic tradition that undermined its stable outlines, often by melding the metropolis with oriental spaces of illumination and horror, as in De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821, revised 1856). Realism and the Gothic are concurrent and contrapuntal narrative threads in literary London. And the belated entrance of the *N* trio in the fictional London of *Pickwick* as well as *Confessions* inflects the properties of both realism and the Gothic in crucial ways.

Tanya Agathocleous argues that urban realism turned literary London into 'a microcosm of the globe' in the nineteenth century.[10] In her theorization of 'cosmopolitan realism', she traces the tension between London as the ground of 'Enlightenment cosmopolitanism', 'a world in

miniature', and 'the material realities of everyday life' in the city, its crowds, slums and filth.[11] In Machen, the tension is not so much between the moral vision of the city as a site of human connectedness and the experiential alienation of daily life. Rather, in his fiction, the elation as well as the threat of colonial dislocation is present within the very architecture of London, entangling it with the tradition of urban Gothic. Unlike the realist mode, the global is not contained within the description of the local in the Gothic. Tabish Khair notes that the narrative mode becomes a conduit of colonial 'Otherness' not only in the imperial outposts, but within the imperial home.[12] Indeed, the Gothic undercuts the cosmopolitan aspirations of the imperial city by revealing unassimilable foreignness within it.

In Dickens, Samuel Pickwick creates an endlessly fascinating fictional world through his privileged access to leisured observation in his street-facing 'apartments in Goswell Street' from which 'he had an equal opportunity of contemplating human nature in all the numerous phases it exhibits'.[13] Pickwick's is a diurnal world, symbolized by his numerous associations with the sun, which underscores his 'childlike imagination' and endless capacity for creating 'a world distinctly his own', Christopher Herbert suggests.[14] James Buzard notes the 'radical restlessness animating *Pickwick*', which not only configures the notion of 'English liberty', but also the very expansiveness of nineteenth-century London.[15] The visibility and elasticity of *Pickwick* as an urban fictional world, with a protagonist at once observing and shaping its contours, stands as a model of realist London against which the fictional world of *N* ought to be mapped.

In contrast to the daytime adventures of Pickwick, the trio in *N* mind-walks London during the night. They drink and drift into conversation in what is an inn by day – housed in an alley that becomes blind in the night – indulging in a form of leisure that reverses the paradigm of *Pickwick*. Their freedom lies in the shared act of remembrance, shutting out the visible rather than embracing it. The contrasting modes of inhabiting the urban world in *Pickwick* and in *N* are best captured in the contrasting figurations of the street in the two texts: as a panorama in the former, and as a labyrinth in the latter.

The endless possibilities of nineteenth-century London are captured in Pickwick's reflection on the interminable reach of Goswell street: 'Goswell Street was at his feet, Goswell Street was on his right hand – *as far as the eye could reach*, Goswell Street extended on his left; and the opposite side of Goswell Street was over the way'.[16] In his adventure the secrets of the world are unfolded in the optic plenitude of an ever-receding horizon. The infinitude of horizon has been a key feature of the panorama that encapsulated cosmopolitan aspirations of London, as Agathocleous notes: 'in their emphasis on the infinite and all-encompassing extension of the horizon, they situated their landscapes within a global whole'.[17] In contrast, the figural shape of the streets in *N* is that of a labyrinth which is oriented towards access to the past rather than unexplored spaces:

> Perrott began it, by tracing a curious passage he had once made northward, dodging by the Globe and Olympic theatres into the dark labyrinth of Clare Market, under arches and by alleys, till he came into Great Queen Street, near the Freemason's Tavern and Inigo Jones's red pilasters. (p. 304)

The labyrinthine streets are conduits of the past, where time becomes porous. This is not the past that one could experience in a museum. Indeed, Perrott indicts the museums for effacing the sense of wonder from London's streets: 'If there is anything curious, anything beautiful in a street, they take it away and stick it in a museum' (p. 303). In Machen, the streets are the loci of the occult because they archive and reanimate the past. In *The Great God Pan*, Villiers, 'a practiced explorer' of 'obscure mazes and byways of London life' utters the secret of the city to the initiate: 'London has been called the city of encounters; it is more than that, it is the city of Resurrections'.[18] The shape of the labyrinthine streets in London is also structurally connected to the occult idea of the maze as 'the symbol of ecstasy' in *The London Adventure*.[19]

The streets are a living repository of London's past, and, therefore, a standing rebuke to the teleology of progress posited through the museum. Tony Bennett notes how during the nineteenth century both the museum of art and the museum of natural history became instruments of narrating modernity as onward progression, 'helping to shape its organization of the relations

between past and present and, moreover, functioning within these to initiate and regulate *a "progressive" movement* between past and present'.[20] The maze of London streets subverts any progressivist temporal order. Indeed, in *The Secret Glory*, the 'grandiose and gloomy' British Museum is to be avoided if one wishes to truly experience the 'immense scale' of London.[21]

While the museum hierarchized races according to an evolutionary scale – with Europeans at the apex of civilization and modernity – the permeable temporality of London streets connects the metropole with the colonies in Machen. Agathocleous recognizes the problem of temporal hierarchization among social groups in nineteenth-century realist writings on London, even as she notes the utopian impulse of universal progress that accompanied it.[22] She marks the fin de siècle as the moment when cosmopolitan utopianism shrinks into a compartmentalized vision of racial essentialism.[23] While there is much truth to her argument, the end of the nineteenth century was also marked by the rise of alternate cosmopolitan impulses through spiritualism, vegetarianism, the animal rights movement, and so on that forged interracial filiations and anti-imperial networks, as Leela Gandhi shows in *Affective Communities* (2006).

In *N*, this impulse is staged through spatial affiliations between the outer edges of London and the imperial frontier. For the trio in *N*, the streets beyond King's Cross Road 'touch on the conjectured' and entice the possibilities of wonder and terror (p. 306). In *The London Adventure* distance becomes the figure of alterity, marking the edge of London with the insignia of colonial outposts:

> And then there are places and regions farther afield, places on the verge of London, as unknown to the vast majority of Londoners as Harrar in Abyssinia. To attain these, the general recipe is to take something that goes out of London by the Seven Sisters Road, something that touches on Finsbury Park, which I take it, is the extremest mark of the *Londinium cognitum Londiniensibus*; the caravansarai from which the caravans set out across the wilderness […].[24]

The desire for the *incognitus* (unknown) in London inevitably takes its itinerants into colonial spaces. The trope of discovering unknown territories within London alludes to the walks of De Quincey's

English opium-eater under the spell of the drug. In *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, city walks in spatial extremities mirror imperial nautical adventures:

> And sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye in the pole-star […] I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, such enigmatical entries, and such sphynx's riddles of streets […]. I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these *terrae incognitae* […].[25]

While the notion of *terra incognita* (unknown land) has been historically deployed in the purpose of conquest and colonialism, its invocation in Machen's London alters the ways in which the city and the pedestrian-self were co-constituted in De Quincey. Emily B. Stanback reads the birth of *flâneurie* in *Confessions*, which depicts the 'city's enduring, haunting influence on the mind', and she charts its persistent aesthetic afterlife in Baudelaire, Poe, and Benjamin, among others.[26] The motif of opium addiction in De Quincey's rambles is reiterated through a secret drink that facilitates the occult exploration of London in *N*. The ingredients of the drink have imperial provenance: 'rum from the Jamaica Coffee House in the City, spices in blue china boxes, one or two old bottles containing secret essences' (p. 303). However, unlike 'The Pains of Opium' in De Quincey, the ingestion of these putatively foreign substances does not conjure horror in Machen.

Even more importantly, the trio of *N*, unlike the opium-eater, overcomes the fear of the past associated with colonial spaces and populace. Indeed, in *Confessions*, the opium-induced nightmares initially manifest through 'the vast expansion of time', where the narrator 'seemed to have lived for 70 or 100 years in one night; nay, sometimes had feelings representative of a millennium passed in that time'.[27] The 'imaginable horror' of his later dreams, strewn with 'oriental imagery, and mythological tortures' projects his fear of the depth of time into spaces such as China, India, and Egypt.[28] The fear of the past and the fear evoked by the Oriental or the African in De Quincey are inter-constitutive of each other because both evoke the Gothic horror of slipping away from the modernity of London and getting stuck 'amongst reeds and Nilotic mud'.[29]

In Machen temporal and spatial interactions between the metropolitan and the colonial do not evoke this fear. Rather, through the rumour of a garden of astounding beauty in Stoke

Newington called Canon's Park, the latter part of the novella charts spatial affiliations between London and the British Empire in the East on multiple grounds.

The London Garden and the Botanic Occult of the Empire

The tale of a suburban park of unusual beauty trickles into the novella when Perrott shares the textual adventure of his acquaintance Hare, an Edgar Allan Poe enthusiast. He went in search of the setting of the Poe short story 'William Wilson', 'the dreamy village' at the outskirts of London in Poe's schooldays, but could not be certain whether such a place existed in the northern suburbs of London or not. The tale momentarily invokes the relationship between a supposedly unchanging 'knowable community' of rural Britons and the 'country house' tradition of British realism that Raymond Williams explores.[30] The range of accounts of the garden from multiple characters, however, puts it beyond the nostalgic bounds of a pristine British past.

Perrot's cousin, an agriculturalist, had chanced upon a beautiful garden called Canon's Park in the same neighbourhood. Harliss, who grew up in the area, refuses to believe in these stories: 'There is a part in Stoke Newington or near it called Canon's Park. But it isn't a park at all; nothing like a park. That's only a builder's name' (p. 306). Whatever be the veracity of the accounts, the spectacle of the garden, posited in an unremarkable suburban quarter, condenses the landscaping codes of imperial cosmopolitanism. It is at once a botanic marvel of transplantation and an idyll untouched by labour:

> Such trees, that must have been brought from the end of the world: there were none like them in England, though one or two reminded him of trees in Kew Gardens; deep hollows with streams running from the rocks; lawns all purple and gold with flowers, and golden lilies too […]. And here and there, there are little summer-houses and temples, shining white in the sun, like a view in China […] (p. 309).

It is at once the very form of a garden of the world and a garden built through imperial networks, with exotic trees brought from different parts of the world. More than a view of a garden in China that has erupted in London, the golden patterns of flowers with the stylized motifs of summer houses and temples remind one of patterns on porcelain earthenware. Elizabeth Chang points out

that the Chinese garden in the accounts of British travellers and architects, such as William Chambers, presented a 'despotic' and immobile landscape, suited to the British views about the stupor of Chinese society.[31] Botanic patterns on china, however, exemplified 'the paradox of the familiar exotic', where imperial consumerism of nineteenth-century Britain aspires to subsume 'visual difference' within the comforts of 'cultural capital'.[32] And yet, the value of china as a token of refinement resides in the lingering exoticism.

The association of Kew Gardens, and its trees brought from foreign soil, lingers with the botanic chinoiserie in this vision of the agriculturist and interlaces cosmopolitan exoticism with the form of plantation economy. Jill H. Casid acknowledges the role of Kew Gardens in creating an imperial network of gardens in the eighteenth century, 'used as nurseries for the cultivation of plants economically useful to the expansion of colonial agriculture'.[33] However, the cosmopolitan aspects of the garden carry within them the threat of the un-British, not merely construed with foreign elements that have been thoroughly domesticated, but completely unfamiliar. Casid's discussion of the landscaping techniques of celebrated gardeners such as Capability Brown in the eighteenth century shows that the project of naturalizing alien botanic species in British soil carried twin impulses: a cosmopolitan desire for 'seamlessly integrating the foreign', and an imperial anxiety that the space of 'colonial plantation would embed itself in the emblematic heart of old England'.[34]

The next iteration of the garden comes from 'the remote north of the story' (p. 308) through another textual cue: Reverend Thomas Hampole's *A London Walk: Meditations in the Streets of the Metropolis* – a fictional text that also appears in Machen's 1929 novel *The Green Round*. Hampole is a worldly-wise priest who 'stalked the London streets with a moral and monitory glance in his eye' (p. 308). He is a textual relic of eighteenth-century city literature: 'the age of Addison and Pope and Johnson', when landscape gardening gains traction as a mode of organizing nature, and London becomes an epicentre of global trade (p. 310). His characterization of the neighbourhood

draws upon the techniques of the panorama, historically tied to the cosmopolitan spatial aspirations of London, as well as the phantasmagoria and its psychic overtones.

Hampole's beatific description of the city creates a visual panorama reminiscent of Wordsworth's sonnet 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802': 'Has it ever been your fortune […] to rise in the earliest dawning of a summer day, ere yet the radiant beams of the sun have done more than touch with light the domes and spires of the great city?' (p. 308) Denisoff comments upon the influence of Wordsworth 'in the model of imagination' espoused by Machen's hermit in *Hieroglyphics*.[35] Agathocleous notes 'the impression of totality', knotting 'the highly differentiated spectacle of the city' into the form of a panorama, which appeared prominently in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, despite its avowed retreat from the city.[36] A panorama presents the vision of a variegated but interconnected city, under the rational order of the Christian God. However, the neighbourhood becomes reminiscent of Coleridge and the tradition of Romantic orientalism soon enough: 'They have become magical habitations, supernal dwellings, more desirable to the eye than the fabled pleasure dome of the Eastern Potentate, or the bejeweled hall built by the Genie for Aladdin in the Arabian tale.' (p. 310)

Hampole becomes acquainted with Glanville: an Oriental scholar with 'a dark complexion', as well as a person influenced by the German Theosophist 'Behmen' (Jakob Böhme) and his English disciple William Law (p. 310). Aaron Worth notes that the name Glanville is 'a nod to the seventeenth-century English philosopher Joseph Glanvill, who produced a mighty counterblast to unbelief in the supernatural, and witchcraft in particular, in his *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1681)'.[37] Hampole, an 'amateur of landscape and the picturesque', enthusiastic about the visual codes of British organic life, experiences the other end of the spectrum – the phantasmagoria, closely allied to the Gothic – psychic, primal, and demonic, when Glanville touches him 'with his finger-tips on the shoulder' (p. 311). Hampole experiences the spatial alchemy of occult where one place moulds into another. For him, the vision of the garden initially unfolds as a visual panorama, only to

uncannily end in 'great perturbation and confusion of mind' (p. 312). Note the merging of psychic and mineral imagery exploding the panoramic orderliness of the landscaped garden:

> Before me, in place of the familiar structures, there was disclosed a panorama of unearthly, of astounding beauty. In deep dells, bowered by overhanging trees, there bloomed flowers such as only dreams can show; such deep purples that yet seemed to glow like precious stones with a hidden but ever-present radiance, roses whose hues outshone any that are to be seen in our gardens, tall lilies alive with light, and blossoms that were beaten gold. (p. 314)

The texture of the flora shifts, from the visual delicacy of patterns on china in the agriculturist's vision, to the tactile fragility of hammered gold in that of the priest. The lilies and roses beam with the radiance of minerals, revealing the deep temporality of the 'primal Paradise' upon the space of the garden (p. 309). Hampole's final description of the garden highlights the floral associations of European folklore:

> I saw well-shaded walks that went down to green hollows bordered with thyme; and here and there the grassy eminence above, and the bubbling well below, were crowned with architecture of fantastic and unaccustomed beauty, which seemed to speak of fairyland itself. (p. 312)

The occult garden in *N* is a hyper-aestheticized place where the distant Orient becomes improbably knitted with the local. There is no singular aesthetic form that crystallizes the occult. Rather the ever-mutating form of the occult in Machen can only be deciphered in terms of the shifts in aesthetic form: from the panoramic to the phantasmagoric, from the visual to the tactile – through an intertextual reading. Indeed, intertextuality is a constitutive element of the occult in his writings, as the next section makes apparent.

Formal Alchemy Across Continents

The occult is constitutively intertextual in Machen because the materiality of the occult must resist direct figuration: 'figurative language' works to contain the materiality of 'Heavenly Chaos', a 'soft and ductile substance', as Glanville describes it (p. 310). Even the 'Holy Writ' could not contain the fluidity of the universe and it became a dead mass of materiality (p. 310). The antidote to the constraining materiality of the world lies in the power of imagination that restlessly roams across

cultures and continents, recuperating the formal fluidity of Paradise. In this movement of the occult, the textuality of the East and the West are entangled.

The example Machen chooses to illustrate the *forming* potency of imagination is an emblematic text from the putatively magical Orient: *One Thousand and One Nights*. Magic as the prowess of imagination is the 'first nature of man', rather than a supernatural phenomenon:

> the wild inventions (as we consider them) of the Arabian Tales give us some notion of the power of *homo protoplastus*. The prosperous city becomes a lake, the carpet transports us in an instant of time, or rather without time, from one end of the earth to another […]. [T]his magic of the East is but a confused and fragmentary recollection of operations which were of the first nature of man […] (p. 310).

The archetypal human imagination has been fragmented for as long as language has tried to grasp the ever-morphing materiality of the world into fixed forms. Therefore, the wonder and terror of the occult world cannot be captured in a single text. It must be intuited in the very flux of its mutating shapes – glimpsed through the cracks of intertexts.

I am not sure Machen's interest in the formal mutations of matter, as well as materiality of form can be readily summed up as a 'Platonic worldview', as Mantrant suggests.[38] Rather, he explores in his writings the constellation of matter and form, registered in the numerous references to Dionysus, notable for his shifting shapes, and succinctly captured in the image of Helen Vaughan's dead body in *The Great God Pan*: 'the hideous form upon the bed, changing and melting before your eyes from woman to man, from man to beast, and from beast to worse than beast'.[39] Murray notes that in Machen's *The Hill of Dreams*, the notion of time as well as space is marked by an eternal flux, 'a constant process of decomposition and recomposition'.[40] The mutating shapes of space and time can only be accessed in relation to the textuality of past, and in the formal weave of history.

In Machen's work, London becomes an especially suitable space for exploring the occult not only because one could decipher the imprint of diverse temporal moments in the varied styles of its streets, buildings, or gardens, but also because those pasts are all alive in the city, threatening to trap its explorer in their mutating shapes. Mantrant has identified the 'labyrinth' as an emblem

of the mystery Machen pursues in his texts; she has called it 'a signifier without a signified',[41] and I agree that his mysteries remain ultimately elusive, without a positive determination. However, since Machen often builds his labyrinths with remnants of past texts, his textual assortment and their occult inscription could be more fruitfully understood according to Jacques Derrida's notion of the 'trace'. Derrida defines the trace as the form of 'spacing' that grafts 'the dead time' of previous texts upon 'the living present'.[42] London remains a mutating archive, constantly being written and rewritten through the textual itinerary of its explorers. Coming at the end of a long tradition of texts, *N* (itself a literal sign of infinity) plays with the past textual knots of the street and the garden that co-created the empire and the imperial city. One might seek a direct cipher to the occult symbolism of the title letter N and connect it to the figurations of Horus or the Christian Trinity. However, it is London that textualizes infinity in Machen's novella, by weaving traces of other texts across space and time. Arnold decides to venture into this living archive of London in his next adventure in Stoke Newington. He becomes the preeminent wanderer of the trio precisely because he is at once an idler, a scholar, a journalist, an alchemist, and an occultist – the perfect textual conduit for Machen to graft the evolving intertexts of London into the tale.

Architectural Debris and the Spatial Memory of the Polis

Arnold encounters a marvellous image of architectural debris that captures the history of London in rubble: 'late Georgian or early Victorian design' – 'ambitious pilasters and stucco' work coexisting with the 'assault' of 'modernism' – 'maisonettes' and 'blocks of flats in wicked red brick' (p. 313). Hypnotism, telepathy, and hallucination are all rejected as possible explanations for the elusive vision of the garden, as it is experienced by multiple people in different times as a concrete landscape where Perrott's cousin 'actually walked' (p. 314). Machen is more interested in the 'puzzling signs and ciphers' than in any singular 'supernatural explanation', as Mantrant notes.[43]

Machen is interested in the architecture of the occult cipher, which in the case of his late oeuvre is London. The city is the very embodiment of temporal flux, marked in the constant

process of dislocation, as Arnold realizes: 'London has always been a place of restless, migratory tribes, and shifting populations' (p. 314). And yet, there is 'an old fixed element, which can go back in memory sometimes for a hundred, even a hundred and fifty years' that attributes a concrete sense of the *longue durée* upon the place – a vantage point from which to perceive the insignia of lost times. Arnold hears an historical account of the elusive garden from Mr. Reynolds, the oldest member of a group of local elders, in a 'venerable tavern' on the brink of being transformed into a pub (p. 314). London emerges as 'a concrete image of the eternal things of space and time and thought', as Machen depicts the city in the third installment of his 1914 column in *The Evening News*, 'The Joys of London', through this dialectic of fixity and change.[44] London becomes a space of endless occult discoveries through the symbolic and material incorporation of its colonial frontier, and the spatial architecture of the city remains thoroughly enmeshed in this history, as the last part of *N* demonstrates.

What now appears to a be nondescript, even 'intolerably unpleasant' suburban park, was originally the property of a nabob, 'an old farmhouse by a rich gentleman from India'. The house became decrepit and was sold along with the premises to a doctor, who turned it into a 'madhouse' named 'Himalaya House'. It has since been turned into another building called 'Empress Mansions' (p. 317). Glanville's house, where the priest Hampole had his vision of the garden, became a lodging kept by one Mrs. Wilson, from which Mr. Vallance, an escapee from the mental asylum, had a similar vision of 'golden and silver and purple flowers, and the bubbling well, and the walk that went under the trees right into the wood, and the fairy house on the hill' (p. 318). Mrs. Wilson did not buy into this 'outrageous nonsense' and handed him over to the doctors of Himalaya House (p. 318). However, Arnold 'wonders whether Mrs. Wilson's lodger was a madman at all; any madder than Mr. Hampole, or the farmer from Somerset or Charles Dickens', all of whom glimpsed a mystery in the temporal folds of London (p. 319). The city is a palimpsest of lost times, where its wanderers cross paths across temporal nodes, as Arnold ends up meeting Mr. Vallance in his obsessive second venture into the 'singular Park': 'And then and there I came upon the

young man who had lost his way, and had lost – as he said – the one who lived in the white house on the hill […]. I am sure that the young man was lost also – and for ever.' (p. 320)

The city as a concrete repository of time where one remains lost forever, reminds one of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin's characterization of Baudelaire's Paris as duration and memory in the *Arcades Project*, written in the same period: 'This city is a *durée*, an inveterate life-form, a memory'.[45] The term Benjamin uses for memory is *eingedenken*, which, Peter Osborne notes, has a 'substantial, quasi-spatial' quality.[46] In the concrete memory of the city, the vanishing pasts persist as tropes, as tissues of texts, intertwined in alleys or implanted in gardens. It must therefore be distinguished from subjective nostalgia, as both the tropes of the street and the garden are thoroughly intersubjective. These tropes preserve the dead times of the city in textual fragments, which can be assembled by the initiate, as Arnold does in the novella, but which are not confined to the limited memory of any individual initiate. Therefore, the diegetic architecture of Machen's occult London remains bound to the historical architecture of the city, and its role as the imperial cosmopolis.

Gayatri Spivak makes a fruitful distinction between 'pure trace' and 'instituted trace', which helps us understand why the seemingly idiosyncratic textuality of Machen's London remains embedded in a concrete form of history: 'Being human we *think* the pure trace, an impossible history, a "pastness" without reference. But we can *access* the trace only as instituted trace, some mark of the origin of a particular institution'.[47] The pure trace, which can only be conceived, might signify the form-making capacity of imagination Machen conceived in the esoteric theology of Glanville or the mutating body of Helen Vaughan in *The Great God Pan*. However, a glimpse of that imagination can only be structured through a concrete path, through instituted trace, laden with other texts, and in the case of this article, the textuality of London itself. The explanation offered in the text is 'perichoresis', or 'interpenetration', a theological notion where God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are revealed in relation to each other, and not as separate entities (p. 320). Without the textuality of history, the occult would not be captured in narration, as in the highly

suggestive ending of the novella, where the characters find themselves without the spatial architecture of London: 'sitting among desolate rocks, by bitter streams' (p. 320). The story ends by disintegrating the very building block of the story, the companionship of the trio, and perhaps by becoming a moment of pure trace, wonderful and terrible at once: '…And with what companions?' (p. 320).

At the very brink of dissolution, the trio must find themselves in the historical architecture of London and traverse the textual infinitude of *N* again and again. The pure trace neither leaves any token of remembrance for the characters, nor any hermeneutic cipher for the critic. Machen's concept of 'interpenetration', however, offers the possibility of reading the histories of the metropole and the colony as endlessly intersecting forms. It is a hermeneutic gesture towards the relational: a possibility of time being illuminated in space, and history in that of the trope. The interwoven relationality, that constitutes cosmopolitan London and its imperial constituents, urges us to reveal the colony in the metropole in the twilight years of the decadent Empire. Arthur Machen's centrality in decadence lies in manifesting this act of remembrance – in capturing the murmur of history through resurrected tropes of the past.

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[1] Sophie Mantrant, 'Textual Secrecy: Arthur Machen and "The True Literature of Occultism"', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 1.2 (2018), 81-96 (p. 82). My emphasis.
[2] Alex Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 6.
[3] Ibid., p. 150.
[4] Ibid., p. 139.
[5] Dennis Denisoff, 'Introduction', *Decadent and Occult Works by Arthur Machen*, ed. by Dennis Denisoff (Cambridge: MHRA, 2018), p. 20.
[6] Aaron Worth, 'Introduction', *The Great God Pan and Other Horror Stories*, ed. by Aaron Worth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. xxiv-xxvii.
[7] Robert Stilling, *Beginning at the End: Decadence, Modernism, and Postcolonial Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), pp. 288-89.
[8] Kristin Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 23.
[9] Arthur Machen, *N*, in *The Great God Pan and Other Horror Stories*, pp. 301-20 (p. 301). All further references will be given parenthetically in the text.
[10] Tanya Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 11.
[11] Ibid., pp. 14-15.
[12] Tabish Khair, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness: Ghosts from Elsewhere* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 9.
[13] Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (London: Penguin Classics, 1999), pp. 158-59.

[14] Christopher Herbert, 'Converging Worlds in Pickwick Papers', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 27.1 (June 1972), 1-20 (p. 3).
[15] James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth Century British Novels* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 124-25.
[16] Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, p. 20. My emphasis.
[17] Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 97.
[18] Machen, *The Great God Pan*, in *The Great God Pan and Other Horror Stories*, pp. 9-54 (p. 21).
[19] Arthur Machen, *The London Adventure: Or The Art of Wandering* (London: Martin Secker, 1924), p. 89.
[20] Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 187. My emphasis.
[21] Arthur Machen, *The Secret Glory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), p. 207.
[22] Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 11.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Machen, *The London Adventure*, pp. 134-35.
[25] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Related Writings*, ed. by Joel Faflak (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Editions, 2009), p. 98. Emphasis in original.
[26] Emily B. Stanback, 'Peripatetic in the City: De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and the Birth of the Flâneur', *Literature Compass*, 10.2 (2013), 146-61 (p. 147).
[27] De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 119.
[28] Ibid., p. 125.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 165-81 (p. 176).
[31] Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 26.
[32] Ibid., p. 73.
[33] Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 51-52.
[34] Ibid., p. 53.
[35] Denisoff, 'Introduction', *Decadent and Occult Works by Arthur Machen*, p. 18.
[36] Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 96-97.
[37] Aaron Worth, notes to *N*, in *The Great God Pan and Other Horror Stories*, p. 384.
[38] Mantrant, 'Textual Secrecy', p. 93.
[39] Machen, *The Great God Pan*, p. 54.
[40] Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence*, p. 146.
[41] Mantrant, 'Textual Secrecy', p. 86.
[42] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), p. 74.
[43] Mantrant, 'Textual Secrecy', p. 84.
[44] Arthur Machen, 'The Joys of London III', *The Evening News* (London), 15 April 1914, p. 8. https://newspaperarchive.com/london-evening-news-apr-15-1914-p-8/ [accessed 15 June 2021].
[45] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 252.
[46] Peter Osborne, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 218.
[47] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Afterword', *Of Grammatology*, p. 357. Emphasis in original.