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# Textual Secrecy: Arthur Machen and 'The True Literature of Occultism'

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Arthur Machen (1863-1947) read *The Book of Nicholas Flamel* as a child and later in his life spent several years cataloguing books on occult matters for the antiquarian bookseller George Redway. The result of his work was an annotated catalogue, *The Literature of Occultism and Archaeology* (1885), that referenced works on alchemy, astrology, witchcraft, and animal magnetism (among others). The Welsh writer was more than well versed in the occult and esoteric philosophies that are often referred to and sometimes discussed in his works of fiction. In an article entitled 'The Cult of the Secret' (1926), Machen underlines that humanity has always been drawn to secret societies and mysterious rites, a powerful attraction he personally experienced.[1]

Machen became a member of The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1899 and while he was very much thrilled by the initiation rites, the emptiness underlying the ritual soon left him disappointed. In *Things Near and Far* (1923), he reflects that

> [t]he society as a society was pure foolishness concerned with impotent and imbecile abracadabras. It knew nothing whatever about anything and concealed the fact under an impressive ritual and sonorous phraseology.[2]

He also rejected 'the follies of modern theosophy and modern spiritualism' or 'back-parlour magic'.[3] In other words, all the new, fashionable forms of occultism. Instead, he always looked longingly back to the mystery cults of Antiquity, thus participating in the *fin-de-siècle* pagan revival.

In an 1899 article entitled 'The Literature of Occultism', Machen ventures that the true literature of the occult may not be that which consciously sets out to write of hidden things, but imaginative literature that thrills the heart 'with inexplicable, ineffable charm'.[4] Such literature is made of 'runes which call up unknown spirits from the mind'.[5] 'Runes', 'hieroglyphics', or 'symbols' are abundantly used by Machen in the definition of 'high literature' he outlines in *Hieroglyphics: A Note Upon Ecstasy in Literature* (written 1899; published 1902).[6] Indeed, the few

elements the author mentions in his description of the true literature of occultism are also to be found in his long treatise about what should be considered as fine literature. Machen's persona in *Hieroglyphics*, the Hermit, claims that the world is made up of hieroglyphics and that the literary text is created in its image. Both are veils that, like the veil of Maya, simultaneously reveal and conceal the truth about existence. High literature can only be written by one who has had a glimpse of the higher realities hidden behind the veil of appearances, an ecstatic experience that affords them the privilege of the initiated. The writer then translates this ecstasy into a symbolic language that may trigger the same extramundane experience in the neophyte reader. For example, Machen offers a list of possible synonyms for ecstasy: 'rapture, beauty, adoration, wonder, awe, mystery, sense of the unknown, desire for the unknown.'[7] Clothed in the language of symbolism, fine literature may be defined as occult as its meaning is not directly accessible.

As I will discuss in this article, Machen's focus is on the use of symbolic or hieroglyphic language rather than on what it supposedly reveals. In other words, he emphasizes the form of secrecy rather than its content. The same fascination with form appears in his praise of the elaborate ritual of the Catholic Church, which stages visible signs of the invisible and is thus 'a perfect image of the world'.[8] His own writing, he repeatedly stated, sought to convey the same sense of awe and mystery. Machen has been recently called a 'decadent apostle of wonder',[9] and it can be argued that his ultimate aim is not so much to take the reader into occult territories as to re-enchant the everyday world and mundane existence. His use of the decadent *topos* of unutterability has been discussed by several critics, such as Andrew McCann in his examination of occult-oriented popular literature in late-Victorian Britain. McCann places the *topos* within the larger framework of Machen's 'mystically inclined symbolism'. Indeed, unutterability is also a typical motif of mystical writing, in which 'the sign evokes the alterity that motivates it, but that is always beyond its scope'.[10] Often overlooked, however, is the use of this *topos* within a larger strategy of secrecy. Machen's writing may be called 'secretive' in that it insists that there is a secret but it withholds a revelation. Rather than unveiling, Machen weaves a complex textual

fabric, or multiplies the veils that supposedly hide higher truths.[11] As the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard underlined, seduction is at play not in the tearing of the veil, but in the play of veils.[12] Machen's texts tease the reader with the possibility of unveiling and this play of veils thus causes desire; more precisely a 'desire for the unknown' that Machen uses as a synonym for ecstasy.

**Enigmatic Signs**

Machen's texts abound in enigmatic signs, codes, cryptograms or ciphers that foreground the theme of secrecy. In 'Riddles and Symbols', an essay included in the collection *Bridles and Spurs*, he wonders about man's irresistible attraction to riddles and symbols.[13] The tentative answer is that we love enigmas because we live in an enigma. Here, as in many other places, Machen expresses his view of the world as a tremendous mystery. It is made of symbols or hieroglyphics that hint at higher realities like a sacramental veil. The mysterious graphic signs or codes that pepper his fictional world are thus an analogue of the *liber mundi*; they are enigmatic signs embedded in an enigmatic world-text.

'The Red Hand' (1895) provides several examples of such mystery languages and the whole story revolves around the activity of deciphering. The amateur detectives, Dyson and Phillipps, soon (mistakenly) identify the red hand of the title as the *mano in fica*, also called the fig sign, a gesture used to avert the evil eye. They have much more difficulty decoding the message found in the dead man's pocket, however. Not only does it remain meaningless without the secret key, but the handwriting itself seems odd: 'the letters were curiously contorted, with an affectation of dashes and backward curves which really reminded me of an oriental manuscript.'[14] The handwriting gives an impression of strangeness and remoteness. In other words, a sense of the unknown. Once decoded, the message leads the amateur sleuths to a black tablet engraved with mysterious whorls and spirals, which are even more precisely described than the handwriting of the message. When faced with such marks, the first step in the semiological

investigation consists in identifying the signs. After briefly wondering if the 'labyrinths of line' are natural markings, Dyson becomes convinced that they are the work of man and need deciphering.[15] Unsurprisingly, the mystery of all those secret languages is not solved by the man of science, the ethnologist Phillipps, but by the man of imagination and would-be writer, Dyson. Because he refuses to limit the field of possibilities, Dyson eventually uncovers the supernatural explanation of the enigma. The short story as a whole, however, gives much more importance to the puzzling signs and ciphers than to what they reveal: the supernatural explanation is sketched in less than a page at the end of the tale. Indeed, the solution opens the door to a larger, ontological mystery to which there is no real closure.

The mysterious signs are also a form of *mise en abyme* – the symbolic language used by the writer is essentially the 'runes' of the true literature of occultism. In Machen's view, high literature is created in the world's image. The world is made up of hieroglyphics and, as it is written in symbolic language, so is the literary text:

> For literature, as I see it, is the art of describing the indescribable; the art of exhibiting symbols which may hint at the ineffable mysteries behind them; the art of the veil, which reveals what it conceals.[16]

In *Hieroglyphics*, the Hermit uses the image of the cryptogram to further explain what he means by 'high literature'. Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), he states, is like a cryptogram that enthrals, amazes, and perplexes the reader, but once the secret is divulged the spell is broken and one is unlikely to read the novel again.[17] While admitting that a luminous intuition lurks behind the plot, that is, the mystery of human nature, the Hermit places *Jekyll and Hyde* on the lower shelves of high literature, mainly because the plot eventually discloses the secret of the physical transformation being produced by a drug. Thus, it sweeps aside the truly mysterious by resorting to the ingenious incident of the powder. Machen's persona indirectly states that high literature is not a literature of revelation.

Myths, too, are veils, since they also use the language of symbolism. They are an indirect means of expression that simultaneously reveals and conceals. Thus, Machen's persona in

*Hieroglyphics* claims that 'all the profound verities which have been revealed to man have come to him under the guise of myths and symbols – such as the myth of Dionysus'.[18] This conception of myth is also propounded in one of Machen's most famous texts, *The Great God Pan* (1894). The encounter with Pan is described within the novella as 'an exquisite symbol beneath which men long ago veiled their knowledge of the most awful, most secret forces which lie at the heart of things'.[19] The novella itself is a diegetic transposition of the Pan hypotext,[20] moving the story to a different time and a different place. One of the characters explicitly identifies this transposition: 'Yes; it is horrible enough; but, after all, it is an old story, an old mystery played in our day, and in dim London streets instead of amidst the vineyards and the olive gardens.'[21] The meta-textual comments obliquely designate the novella as a symbolic text that needs deciphering. Indeed, the text contains its own instructions for use as it underlines that, being written in symbolic language, it should not be read literally. The process of deciphering undertaken by Machen's amateur detectives thus mirrors the reading of the hieroglyphic world, as well as the reading of the hieroglyphic text.

As Nicholas Freeman argues in *Conceiving the City* (2007), symbolist texts such as Machen's often use the form of the detective story to hint at spiritual quests and at mysteries in the older sense of the term.[22] The genre of detective fiction can be considered as a veil or a hieroglyphic language hiding a symbolist text. Machen actually anticipates this analysis in *Hieroglyphics* when his persona ventures the hypothesis that Edgar Allan Poe's Monsieur Dupin is a symbol of the mystagogue, the initiated who leads others into secret rituals and teachings. Seen in this light, the mystery genre is directly related to the Greek word *mustêria,* referring to initiation cults. Machen's detectives are faced with the figurative labyrinth of the enigma, but also with a literal one as they walk through maze-like London in quest of a solution.

The labyrinth is a common motif in detective fiction, but it takes on another dimension in the work of the mystically-inclined author because of its initiatory function. Many of Machen's *flâneur*-detectives know the city well.[23] In 'The Inmost Light' (1894), for example, Dyson's main

field of study is 'the physiology of London'.[24] His research work includes the darkest parts of the city; its slums, dangerous alleys, and disreputable neighbourhoods. Because of their knowledge of the city, Machen's detectives can see networks and patterns that escape the common gaze. Their investigations take the reader into an initiatory labyrinth that may lead to a secret centre.

**Textual Mazes**

Machen discusses the motif of the labyrinth in several places in his non-fiction writing, for example in the autobiographical *London Adventure*:

> The maze was not only the instrument, but the symbol of ecstasy: it was pictured 'inebriation', the sign of an age-old 'process' that gave the secret bliss to men, that was also symbolised by dancing […].[25]

Describing the maze as 'pictured "inebriation"' is not only a way of referring to the disorientation it causes. Inebriation, which is placed between inverted commas, should be understood as the mystical experience that gives access to another reality.[26] Similarly, the inverted commas around 'process' emphasize the mystery shrouding the signified. As a symbolic sign, the labyrinth is a signifier without a signified. It is, in Gilbert Durand's words, 'the epiphany of a mystery',[27] but the mystery remains.

Machen replicates the complex architecture of the labyrinth in his writing. His longer texts are maze-like narratives in which the reader wanders in search of meaning. In his 2013 article on *The Hill of Dreams* (1907), Kostas Boyiopoulos highlights the centrality of the image of the labyrinth/maze in Machen's fiction and studies how the disorientated protagonist of the novel, Lucian Taylor, negotiates 'the boundary between the London maze and the maze of his own consciousness'.[28] The reader, too, experiences disorientation in Machen's textual mazes, which may be seen as instruments of readerly ecstasy. Their complexity turns the reader into a detective, who endeavours to piece the puzzle together but never obtains a clear, full picture. For example, *The Three Impostors; or The Transmutations* (1895) is an episodic novel whose narrative structure was deeply influenced by Stevenson's *The Dynamiter* (1885). The two novels are made

up of embedded stories connected together by a frame narrative. Like the three young men created by Stevenson, Machen's amateur detectives listen to stories, which in turn often move to a third, hypo-hypodiegetic level. The tales, it turns out, have been fabricated by the three impostors of the title with the aim of locating and capturing a man named Joseph Walters. The mastermind behind the plan is the mysterious Lipsius, the head of a secret society about which very little information is provided. The self-contained embedded stories are loosely connected together so as to the frame story by tenuous links and subtle echoes. The reader's attention is thus constantly solicited as they tread Machen's maze, which, in the end, takes them back to the beginning. The circular text returns to the deserted house Dyson and Phillipps discover in the prologue, the epilogue taking place only a short while later. The reader thus emerges from the disorientating maze, but a full revelation is denied and their questions are left unanswered. Some pieces can be fitted together, some threads can be woven so that unclear shapes appear, but the pattern in the carpet, to borrow an image from Henry James, remains shadowy and indistinct.[29]

Other texts are similar to concentric labyrinths as they take the reader through a series of layered embeddings that suggest penetration into a hidden centre or secret room. They sweep the reader into a sort of gyrating dance. In Chapter 2 of *The Great God Pan*, Clarke takes up a manuscript in which he wrote down the story he was told by a man named Phillips, who was not a participant but was reporting a story he had heard. His narrative contains yet another embedded story, that of a girl named Rachel who tells her mother about what happened to her in the woods. But the reader does not get to hear Rachel's story since Clarke suddenly closes the book. The last words that can be read are 'she said–',[30] and the door leading to the hidden centre bangs shut. The device of denying revelation by interrupting the act of reading is also used in Chapter 7, though in a slightly different manner. Austen picks up the manuscript written by one of the victims of the *femme fatale*, the daughter of Pan, which describes the dark rituals she performs. He reads a short passage, that is not revealed to the reader, and, struck with horror, snaps the book shut. The reader does not learn anything about the short fragment and is thus

relegated to a position of inferior knowledge. Robert Mighall very appropriately describes *The Great God Pan* as a whole as 'a "Chinese puzzle" without a centre'.[31] The comparison to Chinese boxes is used within the text by one of the amateur sleuths: 'A case like this is like a nest of Chinese boxes', Herbert states.[32] Yet, the secret nested in the centre is never reached, as is evidenced by ellipsis that "closes" the novella. Machen's texts draw attention to the way they withhold information, constantly reminding the reader that there is much he does not know.

Chapter 13 of Machen's later novel *The Terror* (1916), which includes a manuscript written by a man who is locked up in a house surrounded by murderous animals, may also be likened to a concentric labyrinth without a centre.[33] As he is dying of thirst and falling prey to hallucinations, he hears a voice delivering a long speech reminiscent of a sermon. He writes the speech down, which adds an embedded layer. Yet the promise of a centre is not fulfilled, as the manuscript ends with scrawled lines across the page and, finally, 'scrapes and scratches of ink'.[34] Thus, the end of the text consists of undecipherable signs and the centre of the concentric labyrinth remains out of reach. One might say that a veil lifts to reveal another veil, which in turn reveals another veil, but the supreme revelation is denied. A parallel may be drawn between Chapter 13 of *The Terror* and the ending of *The Hill of Dreams*. In this *Künstlerroman*, Lucian Taylor, the decadent artist, is set on writing the 'golden book', one that would cause delicious sensations in the reader by using the art of suggestion. When he dies from a drug overdose, his landlady and her husband find his manuscript on his desk. The page they pick up is an unreadable text, the sheet being covered with 'illegible hopeless scribblings; only here and there it was possible to recognize a word', and the end of the novel foregrounds the theme of indecipherability.[35] After going through a phase of existential solipsism, the fictional writer has reached the most extreme stylistic solecism. As Linda Dowling writes, he has created a language 'so perfected in its private symbolism that it will no longer yield its meaning even to the select few, but only to the unique reader, Lucian himself'.[36] More generally, the recurrent theme of indecipherability in Machen's

work can be interpreted in relation to a wider metafictional discourse on the allusiveness of symbolism.

*The White People* (written 1897; published 1904) is probably the most stunning and fascinating textual maze devised by Machen. Just as the protagonist is initiated into dancing in the labyrinth by her nurse, the reader journeys through a disorientating manuscript, a hermetic text where they lose their way more than once. *The Green Book* is an embedded text in which an adolescent girl relates her wandering in the woods and her initiation into black magic by her nurse.[37] In the epilogue, the reader learns that the girl eventually committed suicide, for some unknown reason. S. T. Joshi's description of the text as 'a masterpiece of indirection, a Lovecraft plot told by James Joyce'[38] gives a rather clear idea of the novella, and the ceremonies of black magic performed by the otherworldly creatures the girl meets in the dark woods indeed give the story a Lovecraftian flavour. She also relates these strange encounters in a sinuous narrative that heralds the modernist stream of consciousness and the text mimics the labyrinthine wanderings of the character walking in the woods. In *The Green Book*, chronology is repeatedly disrupted, embedded stories lead away from the main narrative path, and words in an unknown language are obstacles in the reader's way. Many such words are used in the very first paragraph of the girl's manuscript, so that the reader loses their bearings from the beginning, and attention is drawn to the deliberate withholding of information and meaning: 'And I must not say who the Nymphs are, or the Dôls, or Jeelo, or what voolas means.'[39] The mysterious words call for deciphering, but, though the reader can dimly guess what the referents may be, they remain semantically unclear signs. One of the ways of encouraging deciphering attempts is the use of English derivational morphology: 'It all looked black, and everything had a voor over it. It was all still and silent, and the sky was heavy and sad and grey, like a wicked voorish dome in Deep Dendo.'[40] The adjective 'voorish' is obviously derived from the noun 'voor', which apparently refers to a kind of fog. Both should probably be linked to the 'Kingdom of Voor' that is later alluded to, but the path ends there, and the reader reaches a dead-end in the maze.

More generally, the text forces the reader to actively participate in the uncovering of meaning. The frame story thematises the act of reading and interpreting by introducing a reader figure in the text. His name, Cotgrave, points to his status as a neophyte: his life, it suggests, is circumscribed within the limits of birth and death (Cot/grave). In contrast, the name of the wise man, Ambrose, indirectly refers to immortality. After going through the manuscript, Cotgrave admits that, though he has understood the gist of it, many elements remain beyond his grasp. Ambrose states that knowledge of alchemical symbolism may help decipher, or interpret, the manuscript and identify the hidden references to what he calls 'processes',[41] which he does not name, of course. As in *The London Adventure*, 'processes' is placed between inverted commas, thus underlying the obscurity of what the word refers to. The references to unidentified 'processes' are described as hidden in the obscure text; they have to be found before they can be elucidated. Ambrose the initiate does not explain, he does not give a key to unlock the text, and it is left for the reader to try and interpret the narrative. The text as labyrinth remains an open symbol.

While Ambrose states that the reader must patiently forge the key for himself, the Hermit in *Hieroglyphics* points out that he has given the key to his listener, but not opened the door: 'The key is in your hands, and with it you may open what chambers you can.'[42] Thus, the Hermit underlines that there are many doors – in other words, many potential interpretative routes – and it is left for the reader to wander in quest of the 'right' one, if there is such a thing. The statement appears in a long, meandering discourse about 'high literature', yet another maze-like text, full of twists and turns. The maze promises to lead to the secret of making fine literature, which, in the end, is very explicitly not revealed because, as the Hermit explains, art is one of the ineffable mysteries. The key he gives is that all fine literature is written in symbolic language. In other words, the only key given is that such texts require deciphering.

**Secret Knowledge**

The wise men in *The White People* and *Hieroglyphics* share several traits in common with their creator, among which is a thorough knowledge of alchemy. Machen's fiction abounds in references to the occult science, some of which call for elucidation. For example, in *The Great God Pan*, the scientist Dr Raymond briefly quotes Crollius, whom he presents as one of his main influences. Oswald Crollius, a disciple of the school of Paracelsus, wrote *De Signaturis internis rerum* (1609), a book in which he maintains that those who have been initiated into occult writings are able to decipher the signatures God imprinted on his creations. Such information is not given within Machen's novella, however, so the reference remains rather obscure. The theme of secret knowledge also appears in his many references to Kabbalah, Rosicrucianism, or Freemasonry. They are often mere allusions and therefore point to the existence of esoteric knowledge without giving information about its content. Machen borrows from the esoteric mode of writing in an allusive way when writing about esoteric knowledge and, in some cases, even identifying the secret society requires deciphering. In the short story 'Ritual' (1937), for example, the name Hiram Abiff is used in passing, without any reference to Freemasonry. The members of the society are then designated by 'the Widow's offspring', a circumlocution that is a form of encoding.[43] Allusions, be they textual or non-textual, function as hints and thus open up a signifying space. They engage the reader by promising access to further meaning. If not grasped, however, they remain unfilled gaps. Indeed, Machen's reader is often made to feel that they do not possess the superior knowledge required to fully understand the texts. Obscure references to esoteric knowledge or mythological traditions are part of the writer's strategies of secrecy and they create an impression of elitism. They do not prevent global comprehension, but still create shadowy areas that signal superior knowledge.

Machen's texts often suggest the existence of an esoteric tradition within the literary world. The authors that are most often referred to or quoted are those who, in the writer's view, manage to intimate the existence of a world unseen: François Rabelais, William Blake, Samuel

Taylor Coleridge, Thomas De Quincey, John Keats and, of course, Edgar Allan Poe. Their texts are presented as containing secret knowledge of the world, and the reader is incited to turn to other texts in order to try and unlock the one they are reading. Thus, the narrator of 'The Children of the Pool' (1936), after referring to the psychologist Kurt Koffka, turns to Poe in order to try and account for the terror triggered by a gloomy landscape.[44] More precisely, he refers to Poe's 'Landscape Garden' (1850), which he does not name, leaving it to the reader to identify the text he is discussing. In *The Secret Glory* (1922), Keats, Rabelais, and Walter Map are all mentioned within a few lines. Map, however, is merely designated as the 'old poet' who wrote '*Mihi est propositum in Taberna Mori*'.[45] The average reader is unlikely to identify the source of the obscure quotation. Moreover, the untranslated Latin may be an obstacle in the reader's path since it requires deciphering. Machen's fiction thus constructs a knowledgeable implied reader sharing the writer's secret knowledge and literary erudition. In other words, a reader who belongs to a small circle of initiates.

Allusion comes from the Latin *alludere*, which means to jest or to play with, an etymology that points to the element of playfulness contained in the device. Allusion partakes of both revelation and concealment, and Machen makes it an essential ingredient in the veiling that characterizes his fiction. The Welsh writer goes further since he plays at mingling real and invented knowledge (or imaginary erudition). For example, his novella *N* (1936) includes extracts from a book written by a man named Hampole entitled *A London Walk: Meditations on the Streets of the Metropolis.*[46] A knowing reader will be reminded of the title of Machen's autobiographic text, *The London Adventure; or the Art of Wandering*. The fictive text is also discussed in *The Green Round*, where the reader learns more about the book and its author. Hampole is said to have corresponded with a real author, the little-known Mary Anne Atwood, which reinforces the illusion of the fictive author's existence.[47] Similarly, in *The Terror* (1916), several characters discuss the views expressed by a philosopher called Huvelius in his *De Facinore Humano.*[48] Both the name and the title ring true, but they are both fake. Unsurprisingly, critics have tried to identify the real

philosopher Machen may be alluding to, and have come to the conclusion that Huvelius is a mask for Schopenhauer. This is evidence of the way Machen's texts constantly encourage the reader to turn into an active detective and to pick up clues that may help solve the enigma. The writer also suggests the potential for unmasking when he gives a character the same initials as his own, for example Ambrose Meyrick in *The Secret Glory*, a young man who is described as both an artist and a mystic. Should the character be seen as a mask for the author? And would it be going too far to point out that the first letters of the words 'artist and mystic' are also the initials of both the character and his creator, A. M.? The mere idea of doing so suggests an awareness that one is playing a sort of deciphering game. This more playful dimension of Machen's fiction has often been overlooked, and it is one of the components of the author's 'secretive' writing. Machen's comments on *romans à clef* help shed further light on this strategy of secrecy. His persona in *Hieroglyphics* does not think highly of 'novels with a key', because once unlocked they lose all mystery. He places detective stories (with the exception of Poe's) in the same category, describing them as more or less ingenious 'tricks'. He admits, however, that the curiosity such texts arouse may be a first step towards ecstasy:

> Indeed I imagine that this trick of stimulating the curiosity may be made subservient to purely aesthetic ends, it may become a handmaid to lead one towards the desire of the unknown which I think was one of the synonyms I gave you for the master word – Ecstasy.[49]

Curiosity may be a step towards the most highly prized goal, which is not access to higher realities, but a sense of awe and mystery.

**Syntax and Shadows**

Although Machen was well versed in occult and esoteric matters, his own Platonic worldview may be summed up in one simple sentence: we see only shadows. The visible world is a veil hiding higher realities. 'We live in an enigma', Machen wrote, and his work calls to mind the

words of the Belgian symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck: 'The Great Secret, the only secret, is that everything is secret.'[50]

Machen's esoteric erudition provided him with strategies of secrecy that he deploys in his texts to insist that there is a most secret secret. In her discussion of *The Great God Pan*, Susan Navarette makes a revealing parenthetical comment: 'By knowing (or pretending to know) more than it reveals, the text forces us […] to reveal more about our inner selves than we wish to know'.[51] 'Or pretending to know' reveals the working of Machen's text: it acts as if it knows and lures the reader with the prospect of a higher knowledge that may not exist. The labyrinth may well be without a centre; the veil may hide another veil. Secrecy is valued over whatever may be concealed so as to cause wonder and a sense of the unknown. However, secrecy also serves as a 'mark of distinction and prestige', as Hugh B. Urban convincingly argues in an article about secrecy and symbolic power in Freemasonry.[52] Urban underlines that secrecy is an adornment that signals superiority. It turns knowledge into something rare and precious, and the 'happy few' who possess it gain prestige. Thus, secrecy may also be seen as a strategy used by Machen to confer distinction and prestige on his texts, with the hope, perhaps, of having them placed on the shelf of 'high literature'.

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[1] Arthur Machen, 'The Cult of the Secret' (1926), in *The Secret of the Sangraal & Other Writings*, ed. by R. B. Russell (Leyburn: Tartarus Press, 2007), pp. 260-62.
[2] Arthur Machen, *Things Near and Far* (New York: Knopf, 1923), p. 215.
[3] Arthur Machen, 'The Literature of Occultism' (1899), in *The Terror and Other Stories*, ed. by S. T. Joshi (Oakland: Chaosium, 2005), pp. 306-12 (p. 307).
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Arthur Machen, *Hieroglyphics: A Note upon Ecstasy in Literature* (New York: Knopf, 1923).
[7] Ibid., p.18.
[8] This quotation is from *A Fragment of Life* (1904), in which the protagonist goes through an ecstatic experience and becomes aware that the visible world is but a veil: 'He saw that, in a sense, the whole world is but a great ceremony or sacrament, which teaches under visible forms a hidden and transcendent doctrine. It was thus that he found in the ritual of the church a perfect image of the world.' *A Fragment of Life*, in *The White People and Other Stories,* ed. by S. T. Joshi (Oakland: Chaosium, 2003), pp. 98-173 (p. 166).
[9] Eva Valentová, 'Dreaming in Fire and Working in Clay: The Problem of Translating Ideas into Words in Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan', Brno Studies in English*, 43.1 (2017), 213-32 (p. 213).
[10] Andrew McCann, *Popular Literature, Authorship and the Occult in Late Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 150.
[11] The key points developed in this article are further elaborated upon in Sophie Mantrant, *Arthur Machen et l'art du hiéroglyphe* (Cadillon: Le Visage Vert, 2016).

[12] Jean Baudrillard, *De la séduction* (Paris: Galilée, 1979), p. 50.
[13] Arthur Machen, 'Riddles and Symbols', in *The Secret of the Sangraal & Other Writings*, pp. 321-23.
[14] Arthur Machen, 'The Red Hand' (1895), in *The White People and Other Stories*, pp. 1-28 (p. 9).
[15] Ibid., p. 14.
[16] Arthur Machen, 'Beneath the Barley' (1931), in *Eleusinia and 'Beneath the Barley'* (West Warwick: Necronomicon Press, 1988), pp. 10-11 (p. 10).
[17] Machen, *Hieroglyphics*, p. 71.
[18] Ibid., p. 141.
[19] Arthur Machen, *The Great God Pan* (1894), in *The Three Impostors and Other Stories*, ed. by S. T. Joshi, (Oakland: Chaosium, 2007), pp. 1-50.
[20] In Gérard Genette's terminology. See *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982).
[21] Machen, *The Great God Pan*, p. 43.
[22] Nicholas Freeman, *Conceiving the City: London, Literature, and Art, 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[23] Sage Leslie-McCarthy discusses their specialist knowledge in 'The Detective as "Expert" in Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*', *Australian Victorian Studies Journal*, 13.1 (2008), 35-45.
[24] Arthur Machen, 'The Inmost Light' (1894), in *The Three Impostors and Other Stories*, p. 52.
[25] Arthur Machen, *The London Adventure; Or, The Art of Wandering* (1924) (London: Village Press, 1974), p. 89.
[26] Like W. B. Yeats, among others, Machen presents both drunkenness and dancing as triggers of mystical ecstasy, and he frequently sings the praises of the Bacchic cult. For example, in *Far Off Things*, he writes that 'the Ancient Greeks truly taught us that man was raised from the brutish to the spiritual state by Bacchus, the giver of the vine. By wine is man made divine.' Arthur Machen, *Far Off Things* (New York: Knopf, 1922), p. 138.
[27] My translation of the French 'épiphanie d'un mystère'. Gilbert Durand, *L'Imagination symbolique* (Paris: PUF, 1964), p. 8.
[28] Kostas Boyiopoulos, '"The Serried Maze": Terrain, Consciousness and Textuality in Machen's *The Hill of Dreams*', *Victoriographies*, 3.1 (2013), 46-63 (p. 58).
[29] The image, borrowed from Henry James's 'The Figure in the Carpet' (1896), is repeatedly used by Machen, both in his fiction and in his essays. See, for example, Machen's letter to Montgomery Evans (9 May 1934), in *Arthur Machen & Montgomery Evans: Letters of a Literary Friendship, 1923-1947*, ed. by Sue Strong Hassler and Donald M. Hassler (London and Kent, OH: Kent University Press, 1994), pp. 75-76.
[30] Machen, *The Great God Pan*, p. 13.
[31] Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 216.
[32] Machen, *The Great God Pan*, p. 17.
[33] Arthur Machen, *The Terror* (1916), in *The Terror and Other Stories,* ed. by S. T. Joshi (Oakland: Chaosium, 2005), pp. 1-106.
[34] Ibid., p. 91.
[35] Arthur Machen, *The Hill of Dreams* (1907), in *The Great God Pan and The Hill of Dreams* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2008), p. 235.
[36] Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 160.
[37] Kostas Boyiopoulos discusses the girl's labyrinthine dance in '"The Serried Maze": Terrain, Consciousness and Textuality in Machen's *The Hill of Dreams*', p. 49.
[38] S. T. Joshi, *The Weird Tale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 22.
[39] Arthur Machen, *The White People* (1899/1904), in *The White People and Other Stories*, pp. 62-98 (p. 70).
[40] Ibid., pp. 72-73.
[41] Ibid., p. 96.
[42] Machen, *Hieroglyphics*, p. 96.
[43] Arthur Machen, 'Ritual' (1937) in *The Terror and Other Stories*, pp. 300-03 (p. 301).
The legend of Hiram Abiff, also known as the widow's son, is the foundation of Freemasonry's ritual of the third degree.
[44] Arthur Machen, 'The Children of the Pool' (1936), in *The Terror and Other Stories*, pp. 164-86 (p. 185).
[45] Arthur Machen, *The Secret Glory* (1922) (Los Angeles: Aegypan Press, 2006), p. 110.
[46] Arthur Machen, *N* (Leyburn: Tartarus Press, 2010), pp. 12-15.
[47] Arthur Machen, *The Green Round* (1933) (London: Ernest Benn, 1968), p. 122.
[48] Machen, *The Terror*, pp. 47-49.
[49] Machen, *Hieroglyphics*, p. 24.
[50] My translation of the French: 'Le Grand Secret, le seul secret, c'est que tout est secret.' Maurice Maeterlinck, *Le Grand secret* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1921), p. 19.

[51] Susan Navarette, *The Shape of Fear: Horror and the Fin de Siècle Culture of Decadence* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), p. 199.
[52] Hugh B. Urban, 'The Adornment of Silence: Secrecy and Symbolic Power in American Freemasonry', *Journal of Religion and Society*, 3 (2001), 6.