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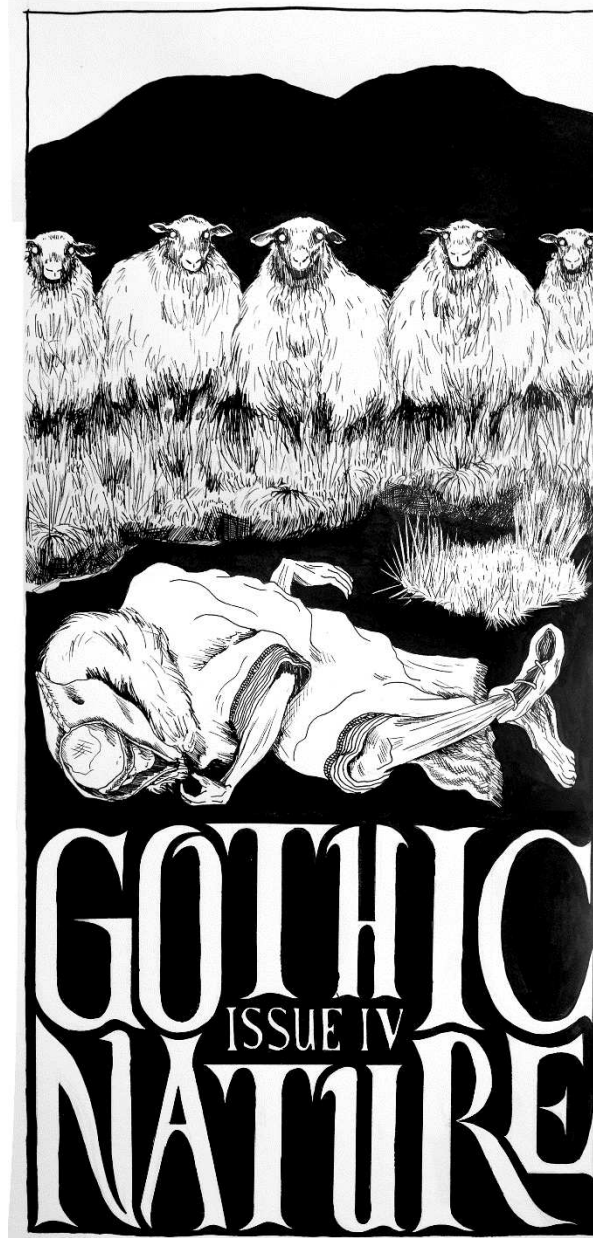
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**Machen, Meat Eating and the First World War:
Arthur Machen's Vegetarian Epiphany**

Andrew Smith

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how Machen's views on meat eating were developed during the First World War. It argues that Machen saw humanity as confronting a spiritual crisis in which representative forms of animal embodiment make visible the animal (the meat) that humans have become. Machen's belief that meat eating represented a form of physical, rather than spiritual, nourishment was re-appraised during a period when models of spirituality were significantly under pressure. Machen's views on spirituality, vegetarianism, and animals provide an ecologically inflected evaluation of the consequences of the war. Machen's changing attitudes towards propaganda and media censorship are also explored as these influence his views on meat eating and the possibility of reaffirming a threatened spiritual identity.

To consider war as an ecological disaster seems like a self-evident environmental consideration. The destruction of the landscape and the generation of a near uninhabitable no-man's-land represents a clear, fundamental, moment of ecological crisis. It may also seem as though the consequences of such human activity sit beyond the critical subtleties and nuances of ecoGothic criticism, but there is a way of addressing this issue which does not fall back on evaluating the starkly obvious. Indeed, there is an important body of critical work which has addressed this topic. Ryan Hediger in *Animals and War* (2012) argues that 'the history of nonhuman animals in human war reveals a great deal about the nature of human relationships with other animals and about the nature of war' (p. 2). This is because the systems of domination between human and nonhuman are seemingly challenged in war due to the

historical reliance that humans have had on animals during various conflicts (Hediger notes how at different historical moments, horses, dogs, pigeons and porpoises have all played a role, albeit an enforced one, in supporting the activity of war). The cultural representation of meat's production, and consumption, also invites us to question how animals were regarded during a time of war. Nick Fiddes (1991) has noted how meat consumption 'tangibly represents human control of the natural world' (p. 2), which echoes the attempt to master the environment through the machinery of war: a mastery which, for Fiddes, is also a feature of a certain type of agricultural practice. The experience of war is, however, also one in which, as Vicki Tromanhauser (2019) has noted, the wounded soldier's damaged flesh evokes 'the matter of our own *meatness*' (p. 17, italics in original). The horror of war is that humans become animal-like at such moments and it is these elisions between humans and animals that are explored by Arthur Machen—author, journalist, actor, and mystic of the 1890s and early twentieth century. The war writings of Machen, which are a mixture of journalistic propaganda and fictional precautionary warnings, provide an illuminating way in which we might think about war and environmentalism, and the starting point for these considerations can be located in Machen's interest in food. Food, as we shall see, provides Machen with a way of thinking about forms of domination (relating to animals and environments) which are employed in his broader consideration of the domination of nature during the war.

The relationship between accounts of nature, animals, and meat eating are triangulated in Machen's writings as a way of asserting the importance of a spiritual dimension challenged by a war which, for Machen, unsettles natural and spiritual relations. Machen represents animals as challenging what it means to be human during a time of war in which it appears as though humanity has lost spiritual direction by embracing the carnality of war. How to reclaim a spiritual identity is the issue that Machen confronts and he achieves this reclamation by arguing for a new way of thinking about animal and human relations.

For Machen the war represents a moment of metaphysical crisis and to some degree this type of disruption is refracted through Machen's associations with the weird, which was a chief characteristic of his writings of the 1890s such as *The Great God Pan* (1894) and *The Three Imposters* (1895). Jonathan Newell (2020) has noted that in *The Great God Pan*, Helen Vaughan is 'a hybrid of human and non-human: her body destabilises taxonomic boundaries, blurring the borders of "humanity" and throwing into crisis the scheme by which we make

sense of the world' (p. 72). This is similar to how Machen conceives of animal and human relations in some of his war writings (most notably in *The Terror* [1917]). Roger Luckhurst (2017) argues that the weird moves beyond the repetition which characterises the uncanny (and its associations with the Gothic) by, paradoxically, entertaining a dread of the future combined with a comparative (that is, less Gothic) optimism that the weird's 'radical disarticulation and reformulations of traditional binaries' (p. 1053) might lead to future change. This also bears some similarity with what we witness in Machen's war writings, although there is a didactic edge to Machen which addresses immediate, rather than future, concerns. There will be some brief reference made here to Timothy Morton's view of the weird and how it relates to ecology, although the principal focus is on the cultural significance of meat eating and what it means, for Machen, to be human, rather than the literary form of the weird, as this helps to demonstrate the links between animals and humans at the time. As we shall see, in Machen the turmoil of war radically reconfigures the relationship between animals and humans, even while his longstanding, and highly abstract (Machen was no vegetarian), critique of meat eating is employed at this time to emphasise just how far by his estimation humanity had fallen. These issues are closely tied to Machen's reflection on propaganda, which prompts him in *The Terror* (1917) to revisit the patriotic impulse that led him to write 'The Bowmen' (1914). It is a reflection that raises questions about the metaphysical status of the nut cutlet—a status seemingly embraced in 'The Bowmen' but mocked in an article from 1917, for quite specific anti-propagandist reasons.

Machen's 'The Bowmen,' first published in the *Evening News* in September 1914, purports to be an eye-witness account of the British Army's retreat during their ill-fated campaign against the Germans near Mons. The tale is famous for originating the myth of the Angel of Mons, who appears surrounded by ghostly archers who lay to waste the German forces, so enabling the British to retreat. Critics have noted, but rarely explored, the moment where the soldier makes his desperate appeal for help to St. George. Seemingly facing imminent death, suddenly:

'...he remembered—he cannot think why or wherefore—a queer vegetarian restaurant in London where he had once or twice eaten eccentric dishes of cutlets made of lentils and nuts that pretended to be steak. On all the plates in this restaurant there was printed a figure of St. George in blue, with a motto,

Adsit Anglis Sanctus Georgius—May St. George be a present help to the English [...] as he fired at his man in the grey advancing mass—300 yards away—he uttered the pious vegetarian motto.’ (Machen, 2001b: p. 224, italics in original)

At this point St. George and his ‘Agincourt Bowmen’ appear and attack the German forces (p. 226). This vegetarian epiphany during a moment of deathly attack feels incongruous and strategically unpromising. Nevertheless it represents a way of reflecting on the war which Machen develops in the short story ‘The Great Return’ (1915) and his novella *The Terror* (1917). The reference to St. George is telling. Elsa Richardson (2021) has examined the proliferation of vegetarian restaurants in Britain in the 1880s and 1890s. Many of these were founded by political progressives and provided affordable food mainly to office workers in big urban cities such as Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. She also notes the existence of St. George’s House Café in St. Martin’s Lane in London, which catered for ‘a higher class of customer’ and appealed to celebrities such as George Bernard Shaw and the actress Fanny Brough (pp. 134-5). Such a high-profile establishment is likely to have been known by Machen when he was resident in London and its evocation in ‘The Bowman’ indicates just how self-aware Machen was of the reality of the vegetarian context.²⁸

The reason as to why the soldier reaches out for a vegetarian vision illuminates how Machen saw the war as a battle between physicality and spirituality (or, bodies and souls) which is lost within the very bloody carnality of the war itself. This position is developed, and indeed revised, in his fiction which reflects upon war. Before examining ‘The Great Return’ (1915) and *The Terror* (1917) more closely, however, it is necessary to chart how Machen’s earlier views on meat eating relate both to his long-running critique of Protestantism and to an interest in how animals and humans interact. For Machen, how the human subject can live in the world is intimately associated with the nature of the world that they perceive. His short novel *A Fragment of Life* (1904) and two journal articles ‘Sancho Panza at Geneva’ and ‘Consolatus’ and ‘Church-member,’ from 1907, help to establish how and why Machen sought to offset a spiritual vision against a material world, with the latter associated with meat eating.

²⁸Mark Valentine also makes this link in ‘Invoking the Angels—Machen’s Original Vegetarian Restaurant’: <http://wormwoodiana.blogspot.com/2015/02/invoking-angels-machens-original.html>

A Fragment of Life focuses on the lives of the recently married Edward and Mary Darnell who reside in a lower middle-class suburban home. Their lives are constrained by financial hardship and a growing sense of disappointment with the narrowness of their lives. The novella makes visible the machine-like world of work which frames Edward and Mary's mundane reality. It also makes visible the spaces existing beyond it, which invite them to consider an alternative way of living in the world, requiring them to engage with the world's mystical, and spiritual, hidden realities.

Edward struggles with the conventional 'nonsense' that 'assured him that the true world was the visible and tangible world' (Machen, 2011a: p. 205), which is challenged by 'a faint glimmering light [...] risen within him that showed the profit of self-negation' (p. 205). This world becomes visible to him in dreams which mix desire with memories of an earlier version of his self, one that existed before the conventions of the adult world had suppressed his spiritual impulses. In these moments he becomes transformed:

'So I awoke from a dream of a London suburb, of daily labour, of weary, useless little things; and as my eyes were opened I saw that I was in an ancient wood, where a clear well rose into grey film and vapour beneath a misty, glimmering heat. And a form came towards me from the hidden places of the wood, and my love and I were united by the well.' (p. 222)

The novella is clear about what needs to be cast off, the narrow world of work and the routines of a lower-middle class life, in order to enable both Edward and Mary to discover this spiritual world. Revealingly, food also plays an important role in this.

The domestic world of the Darnells is given some focus through what they eat. The world of work only pays for 'a certain quantum of bread, beef, and house-room' (p.205). Edward reflects on a period when he had been profligate in buying 'cutlets [...] braised beef [...] fillet steak' (p. 159), whereas in his married life he settles for 'chops, a bit of steak, or cold meat' (p. 160). Meat consumption is not simply part of the conventional world that the Darnells seek to renounce; it stands in opposition to a spiritual life. Edward shares one of his spiritual visions with an enraptured Mary, after which:

‘...as they looked out into the clear light they could scarcely believe that the one had spoken and the other had listened a few hours before to histories very far removed from the usual current of their thoughts and of their lives. They glanced shyly at one another, and spoke of common things [...] “And I think, if I were you”, said Darnell, as he went out, “I should step over to the stores and complain of their meat. That last piece of beef was very far from being up to the mark—full of sinew”.’ (p. 185)

Meat is not just part of the ‘common things’ which constitute their conventional life, it is also, as this scene establishes, a topic which banishes a spiritual vision because in *A Fragment of Life* spiritual nourishment is what is denied in a focus on physical nourishment. Machen returned to this issue in his non-fiction, where he addresses what he sees as the limitation of a grey Protestantism which is prosaically immune to the poetry of a quasi-Catholic view of the world (and *A Fragment of Life* includes a poem at the end, celebrating that ‘Ever the Song is borne on high/That chants the holy Magistry’ [p. 221]).

In ‘Sancho Panza at Geneva,’ published in *The Academy* in June 1907, Machen critiques what he sees as a puritan strand within Protestantism, which is a consequence of feeding the body rather than the spirit because ‘Protestants live on roast beef and plenty of it’ (p. 559). This carnality means that it cannot constitute a true faith, leading Machen to conclude that ‘Protestantism is a revolt against Christianity’ (p. 560). Feeding the body in this way turns the Protestant into a subhuman figure, because Machen claims that Protestantism ‘is a recurrence [...] to the state of the beast-man before it had received the quickening’ (p. 560). Meat eating leads to atavism and places the subject on a pre-human and non-spiritual path. This is different to the type of reconnections which are advocated in *A Fragment of Life*, which centre on the disappearance of bodily needs. Machen returned to these issues in ‘Consolatus’ and ‘Church-member,’ published in *The Academy* in December 1907, in which he claims that ‘The modern Puritan accepts the good things of life with an apologetic grumble which he calls “grace,” conscious in a dim way that he has no real right to enjoy his roast beef’ (p. 267). At this point Machen appears to advocate vegetarianism as an antidote to all this unspiritual consumption of meat—‘there is a sect apart which gives no obedience to the command, kill and eat’ (p. 268). These issues are returned to by Machen in his war time writings, which have a noticeably robust focus on how to spiritually dwell in a world that seems threatened by violence. The question

he re-examines is how it is possible to maintain a spiritual identity in a conflict which constitutes a spectacle of brutal carnality.

It is important to acknowledge that these issues about spirituality and meat eating can also be found more broadly within the culture of vegetarianism as it developed from the 1840s onwards. Vegetarianism created alliances between socialists who saw the issue as socially progressive and certain members of the church who saw the abjuring of meat as a return to the purity of an Eden before the fall (when Adam and Eve subsisted on fruit and vegetables). Such a ‘meeting of communitarian socialists and religious reformers laid the groundwork for the foundation of the Vegetarian Society, enshrining the meat-free regimen as a kind of Edenic ideal or alimentary route to God’ (Richardson, 2022: p. 138). The Vegetarian Society was established in 1847 under the auspices of the Bible Christian Church (founded by the Rev William Cowherd in 1809). While it would be difficult to see Machen as drawn to the issue by socialism (he was a supporter of Franco during the Spanish Civil War) the spiritual element clearly shapes his position. Later figures such as Henry Salt, a leading campaigner for animal rights, established the Humanitarian League in 1891, which promoted a range of social reforms, attracting vegetarians, literary figures, and occultists. Salt was supported in his aims by Henry Carpenter, whose *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure* (1889) argued that civilisation had become soft through its consumption of animals (and their by-products, such as fur) and that ‘[t]he only way to halt this rapid decline’ was ‘to rediscover nature and develop a relationship with the animal world’ based on co-operation rather than ‘exploitation or consumption’ (Richardson, 2019: p. 127). This constitutes a view of human and animal relations which is glossed in Machen’s ‘The Great Return,’ which also addresses the unspiritual consumption of meat that we have witnessed in the earlier essays.

‘The Great Return’ focuses on some strange occurrences in the real-world Welsh town of Llantrisant (in inland South Wales, although in the story it is identified as coastal). The war provides a context to the tale with references made to bombardments and fears about Germans supporting spies at a time when ‘We had invaded Thibet’ (Machen, 2011c: p. 232), an intrusion which, for Machen, encapsulates the violence done to spirituality at this time. The narrator asks a parishioner about the services which are held in the local chapel and she tells him that the refrains are, for her, the ancient ““Blessed be His Name for Paradise in the meat and in the drink.” “Thanksgiving for the old offering.” “Thanksgiving for the appearance of the old altar.”

“Praise for the joy of the ancient garden.” “Praise for the return of those that have been long absent.” And all that sort of thing. It is nothing but madness’ (p. 240). This prompts the narrator to address the specific praising of food and drink:

‘And I thought, if there be paradise in meat and in drink, so much the more is there paradise in the scent of the green leaves at evening and in the appearance of the sea and in the redness of the sky; and there came to me a certain vision of a real world about us all the while, of a language that was only secret because we would not take the trouble to listen to it and discern it.’ (p. 241)

The landscape around the town represents a different type of spiritual engagement than that found in the church. The implication is that at a time of national crisis the formal religious ceremonies cease to work; their claims are ‘nothing but madness,’ whereas nature represents the resurrection of an older spiritual power: ‘The sun went down to the mountain red with fire like a burnt offering, the sky turned violet, the sea was purple,’ as the narrator records ‘the wonder that had returned to the land after long ages’ (p. 250). This is a form of nature which is both spiritual and touched by the war, reflected in the ‘burnt offering’ and the vivid, unnatural, colouration of nature. The idea that nature can be looked at differently at this point is extended to animals, when the narrator critiques the idea that one can only know the world through the senses, so that ‘The ordinary man [...] says that he sees a cow, that he sees a stone wall, and that the cow and the stone wall are “there”,’ whereas ‘metaphysicians are by no means so easily satisfied as to the reality of the stone wall and the cow’ (p. 250). This leads him to contemplate that ‘a real existence, this much is certain [...] is not in the least like our conception of it,’ meaning that ‘If we could “see” the real cow she would appear utterly incredible’ (p. 250). In the context of Machen’s wider engagement with hidden spiritual realities, this turns the cow into a spiritual being, and therefore not one that should be considered as ‘the meat’ that the discredited preacher associates with ‘Paradise.’ Machen addresses this issue in *War and the Christian Faith* (1918) where he argues that although ‘It will seem a violent paradox,’ nevertheless, ‘I do believe that the chief aim of prayer is to raise us to the condition of the beasts; to raise us, not to reduce us, to their state’ (p. 29). This is because he sees that humans, not animals, were driven out of paradise and therefore animals still live in a state of grace that informs how they dwell in the world. Animals are true to their nature ‘because they are wholly immersed in their proper businesses; they are fish altogether in the water’ (p. 34), whereas ‘We

are not sure of our real business' because we are distracted by work and so estranged from our 'only one real business' (p. 35), which is reaching God through prayer.

Animals in 'The Great Return' are thus associated with the divine because at this time of national crisis, nature is revitalised, peaceful and bountiful, which is reflected in a moment when:

'a farmer, was roused from sleep one night by a queer yelping and barking in his yard. He looked out of the window and saw his sheep-dog playing with a big fox; they were chasing each other by turns, rolling over and over one another, "cutting such capers as I did never see the like," as the astonished farmer put it. And some of the people said that during this season of wonder the corn shot up, and the grass thickened, and the fruit was multiplied on the trees in a very marvellous manner.' (Machen, 2011: p. 262)

In 'The Great Return' the cow is not meat; animals play in harmony and dwell in the world in a superior way than humans. Indeed animals appear to be freighted with the type of natural spirituality that has been banished from those churches which see animals as food.

To see the animals (at least cows) as food is to assert the type of subject-object dichotomy that is intimately associated with the mastery of nature. It is revealing that a farmer bears witness to the antics of the dog and the fox as his sense of astonishment is rooted within a farming mindset which regarded nature as something that needed to be subdued and controlled by the demands of agricultural need (hence a view in which 'play' is notably absent from the working life of a sheep-dog). It is also telling that in the above passage the benign animals cavort in a scene associated with fruit and corn, rather than meat. The possibilities of a non-animal harvest thus shape how the animals are tied by kinship rather than hostility—an idea that reflected a vegetarian notion of a 'Greater Kinship' which was 'a concept derived from an interpretation of evolutionary theory that emphasized the connectedness of all organic creatures' (Richardson, 2019: p. 127), a core belief of those associated with Salt's Humanitarian League. The tale indicates that for the cow to be seen differently it requires a metaphysical re-evaluation. This chimes with Fiddes' (1991) view that the industrial processes which came to drive changes in agricultural practice generated not just an economic transition, but also a

philosophical one because these mechanical developments indicated that nature was there to be controlled. For Fiddes 'control over nature, and over animals' reproduction, lives, and deaths, denotes the emergence of civilisation metaphysically as well as physically' (p. 59). Agricultural life and the machines of war are conceptually brought into alliance in Machen's *The Terror* as we witness the animals rebelling against both. The understanding of the causes of that rebellion effects the metaphysical shift that Machen saw as necessary in order to rethink the cow as an animal which has a presence that transcends its position within the agricultural economy.

Animals in 'The Great Return' are playful and benign; the same, however, cannot be said for the animals in *The Terror*, which purposefully attack the military complex suggesting they have come to see humans as unspiritual entities, or as little more than meat. Animals challenge humans for dominance in a world associated with the carnality of war.

The Terror begins with an account of the war up until 1917 and addresses what it sees as two years of inaction by British forces, which had only recently come to an end. The focus is on a media blackout on any references to problems encountered by British forces during this period. This is an allusion to the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) which was passed in August 1914, granting the government wide ranging powers, including the right to censor. *The Terror* thus purports to be an exposé of what the government had tried to conceal. The narrator discusses the presence of a 'secret circular' consisting of suppressed eye-witness accounts of unusual activity and aggression by animals towards the military. It includes an account of a Royal Flying Corps plane that had been brought down by 'a flight of pigeons' which had broken the propeller 'and the machine had fallen like lead to the earth' (Machen, 2011d: p. 275), with the pilot killed. Pigeons had been used during the war to relay messages from the trenches and their attack should be seen as a form of revenge for animal co-option in the war at this time. There is also a report of an explosion at a munitions works with the dead hastily interred before their relatives could see them because the faces of the dead, according to an eye-witness 'were all as if they had been bitten to pieces' (p. 278). The investigation of these strange circumstances takes the narrator to west Wales.

Whereas in 'The Great Return' nature has a positive aspect to it which produces the type of spirituality sadly lacking in the Church, in *The Terror*, the landscape is desolate and

mysterious: 'a wild and divided and scattered region, a land of outland hills and secret and hidden valleys' (p. 281), populated by towns which are little more than 'clusters of poorish, meanly-built houses, ill-kept and down at heel' (p. 280). These are, in environmental terms, dwellings associated with alienation. Nature becomes a hostile place in which to dwell because it is devoid of the spiritual dimension that characterises Machen's earlier writings. The narrator recounts the death of the Williams family (mother, father and three children), who live in a cottage 'on the edge of a dark wood' which sits on 'a lonely and unfrequented by-road that winds for many miles on high and lonely land' (p. 283). They are found with 'Their skulls [...] battered in as if by some heavy iron instrument; their faces were beaten to a pulp' (p. 283). It turns out that they have been killed by horses. Hediger notes of the First World War that 'Horses loom like a ghost presence through this conflict' (p. 10), because although eight million horses were killed in the war their loss was often left out of discussions of the fighting. For the narrator the news censorship of these stories of animal unrest means that such accounts 'must somehow be connected with the war' (p. 291), and the novella invites the reader to make these links. War and a now hostile nature are aligned and the narrator's investigation is in part a contemplation of why these links have appeared and how they relate to the war. For Fiddes, issues about the consumption of meat are closely tied to the ambition to control nature. However, in the tale, the issue of meat consumption is turned on the humans as they become victims of the animals and in their human death become constituted as a type of meat that can be disposed of. Before the narrator also reaches this conclusion he, at first, thinks that the Germans must be responsible but the evidence, ultimately, takes him in a different direction.

He investigates an incident in 1915 when horses attacked an army camp at night by stomping on tents and killing two soldiers. This was followed by attacks made by swarming bees. The playful sheep-dog of 'The Great Return' is now transformed in stories about 'sheep dogs, mild and trusted beasts, turning savage as wolves and injuring the farm boys in a horrible manner' (p. 295). There is some discussion of secret Z Rays being used to make the animals aggressive, or even German forces living underground who are orchestrating these attacks.

The occupants of a farm house are found dead and evidence is discovered inside that they appear to have been under siege and died of thirst, despite having easy access to a well in a nearby wood. The body of Mr Griffiths, the head of the family, is found outside of the house with a deep gash in his side. A visitor to the house, who has died with them, leaves behind an

account of what happened. Everything was normal until one night they saw what appeared to be a tree with points of light in it which rose above the house and settled around it 'like a burning cloud' (p. 342). Mrs Griffiths took the environmentally informed view 'that ancient devils were let loose and had come out of the trees and out of the old hills because of the wickedness that was on the earth' (p. 342). Mr Griffiths was killed after being gored by one of his animals, and it is noted of the others that they 'were closely besieged by their own cattle and horses and sheep' (p. 353), until they ran out of water. Here we can see the rebellious tendency of animals associated with meat attacking those who seek to subdue them.

It transpires that these lights, which seem to form into a tree-like cloud, are in fact moths which attack anyone outside, effectively choking them to death by entering the mouth, and a number of other people who have been killed in this way are subsequently discovered. The final scenes of *The Terror* indicate that all of this activity took place between 1915-16, and that since then the animals have returned to their more usual patterns of behaviour. The reasons for this outbreak of malevolence are explored.

The narrator notes that some of his friends:

'...are inclined to think that there was a certain contagion of hate. They hold that the fury of the whole world at war, the great passion of death that seems driving all humanity to destruction, infected at last these lower creatures, and in place of their native instinct of submission, gave them rage and wrath and ravening.' (p. 356)

The animals have become conscious of their superior physical strength, as one Dr Lewis (who summarises many of the issues) tells the narrator:

““The mildest old cow, remember, is stronger than any man. What can one man or half a dozen men do against half a hundred of these beasts no longer restrained by that mysterious inhibition, which has made for ages the strong the humble slaves of the weak?”” (p. 352)

It is the limits of this 'mysterious inhibition' that the narrator wants to explore. Animals associated with agriculture have become seemingly wild, or unprepared to act as 'humble slaves.' Fiddes' analysis of agriculture's generation of a version of nature as othered and to be dominated is relevant here. This is also an idea that Timothy Morton (2018) has explored in relation to the weird, seeing 'weirdness' as the antidote to this strategy of demarcation between the human and the non-human. At the heart of this lies a paradox which Morton states as:

'What is most uncanny about human being is its attempt to rid the world of the uncanny. Or, and this is putting it in its most ecological register: human being disturbs Earth and its lifeforms in its desperate and disturbing attempt to rid itself of disturbance.' (p. 64)

The human subject disturbed by the idea of belonging to a world in which they are threatened by an 'othered' nature, is forced to manufacture the types of divisions (between humans and animals, for example) which generates an alienation that ultimately reproduces the feeling of being under siege that the act of division was intended to eradicate. In *The Terror*, the narrator's concern is that the relationship between animals and humans appears as a response to the crisis generated by the war. Within this weird moment there is also epiphany. The narrator concludes:

'I believe that the subjects revolted because the king abdicated. Man has dominated the beasts throughout the ages, the spiritual has reigned over the rational through the peculiar quality and grace of spirituality that men possess, that makes a man to be that which he is.' (p. 356)

This conclusion is more complex than it initially appears. The elevation of the spiritual over the rational identifies the type of instrumental thinking about the world which generates the crisis that rationality was meant to solve. This is similar to Morton's position on the uncanny human, who uses rationality to generate demarcations only to find that divide and rule creates an internal division. These ideas are relevant to a way of thinking about the war as an act of self-destruction. For Machen the war was a physical, political, and national conflict which had generated new imperatives which meant that people were in danger of losing sight of spiritual values. As Tromanhauser states in their analysis of nurses' accounts of surgical wards in the First World War, 'Flesh menacingly gums up the metaphysics of human subject formation and

jams the machinery of our making and world-building' (p. 20). Also, as Fiddes notes, with meat eating 'Bloodshed is central to meat's value' (p. 65), because 'We eat not only the animal's flesh; with it we drain their lifeblood and so seize their strength' (p. 68). The metaphysics of what it means to be human becomes reversed in *The Terror* as predatory humanity becomes subject to predation. The novella establishes a critical view of human and animal relations which reflects Hediger's conclusion that a contemplation of the treatment of animals in war time 'offers a route to unwork further the human/animal distinction and hierarchy' (p. 17). The novella also challenges the idea that animals can be seen through an agricultural lens which would see them merely as meat. The narrator claims:

'... the beasts also have within them something which corresponds to the spiritual quality in men—we are content to call it instinct. They perceived that the throne was vacant—not even friendship was possible between them and the self-deposed monarch. If he were not king he was a sham, an imposter, a thing to be destroyed.' (p. 357)

The animals see that humanity has lost sight of spirituality because humans have made themselves animal-like and so consequently have lost authority. In *War and the Christian Faith* (1918), Machen goes on to argue that animals 'being in paradise, cannot so much as conceive the desire for an order and life which do not belong to them' (p. 36), and this spiritual vision might seem different to what we witness in *The Terror* as animals attempt to take over from humans. However, Machen's idea of 'instinct' as a form of spirituality indicates that animal behaviour is directed by a force which seeks to protect the world. In this way the novella can be read as a trenchant indictment of how war has corrupted an already fallen (and so post-vegetarian) humanity, to a degree that animals are prepared to conceive of a world which is devoid of humans, because in deposing of humans animals seek to restore a spirituality that they perceive humanity to have lost. Animal violence is a righteous one in which they attack specific formations of organised activity associated with agriculture and the military. Why animals have given up the fight is not clear, but the idea that they pose a continuing threat is apparent, with the last line noting, in a tacit evocation of the eco-horror, that 'They have risen once—they may rise again' (p. 357).

The Terror not only establishes a different formation of nature than that found in ‘The Great Return,’ it also refutes myths about the war, including a popular one at the time about the presence of secret Russian troops in Britain, and also ‘The Angel of Mons’ myth that Machen had created in 1914. These myths are debunked ‘as vain rumours and fantastic tales’ (p. 274), which were only granted a bogus credibility because they had appeared in newspapers. Machen, as a journalist, was acutely conscious, as *The Terror* demonstrates, of forms of censorship which might conceal the truth even while ‘fantastic tales’ such as ‘The Bowmen’ are permitted publication because they work as propaganda. What constitutes ‘reality’ at this time is clearly politically loaded and while many commentators saw ‘The Bowmen’ as proof that God was on their side, they did not dwell on the soldier’s reference to nut cutlets. The representation of food and its relationship to Protestants and animals is associated by Machen to a truly spiritual path. St. George with his archers from Agincourt is manifestly a false, propaganda inspired vision and that this is a fake spiritual vision has implications for how we read those nut cutlets.

Machen’s support for a vegetarian vision accords with his idea of feeding the spirit rather than the body. Meat eating does obvious violence to animals and is repeatedly referenced as an illegitimate form of nourishment centring on strictly bodily needs. However, the soldier’s vision in ‘The Bowmen’ is ultimately a sham spiritual vision because it is associated with the war and not pure spirit. This in turn is reflected in *The Terror* in the view of the human subject, noted above, that ‘If he were not king he was a sham, an imposter, a thing to be destroyed’ (p. 357). This is a view not far removed from how Machen viewed vegetarians, like his soldier, who eats ‘cutlets made of lentils and nuts that pretended to be steak’ (Machen, 2001b: p. 224). In an item titled ‘Let Us Keep the Tavern’ published on 22nd August 1917 in the *Evening News*, Machen lampoons this type of vegetarian:

‘He is ridiculous with his “Nut Cutlets,” shameless with his “Fruitarian Roast Turkey.” His whole bill of fare is like a tale told by an idiot to an idiot [...] we have the vicious make-shift, the corrupted rather than the substituted word.’
(n.p.)

The tone of the article is light-hearted but the idea of corruption rather than substitution points towards the idea of truth-telling which is so important in *The Terror*. This type of vegetarianism

is a bogus one because it seeks to emulate something which it is not. It is as false as the vision of St. George. In this context it represents a type of false thinking which denies, as Machen also puts it in his article, 'the attractive power of vegetables' (n.p.). The question this begs is whether Machen had always intended the vegetarian vision of his besieged soldier to be questionable, or whether he came to this view in 1917 as a way of critiquing what had become a popular propaganda myth? The balance of evidence would suggest the latter. *The Terror* indicates that to see animals as potential meat compromises any possible spiritual vision, so that envisioning vegetables or nuts as meat-like is to come too close to maintaining this unspiritual view.

For Machen, it is necessary to find a way of living in the world which is spiritually authentic. *A Fragment of Life* charts this anxious journey as Edward and Mary engage with the positive disorientation that Morton identifies as a key aspect of the weird. Food is a factor in Machen's spiritual vision. The consumption of meat elevates the corporeal over the spiritual and leads to feelings of estrangement. Animals are freighted with a spiritual identity that they share with humans, but this common bond is undone both by the war and in agriculture. These war time writings reflect upon how to live spiritually in a world at a time of international crisis, when spiritual considerations seem to be in abeyance. The lack of authenticity is what, for Machen, positions his soldier in 'The Bowmen' as a sham vegetarian, trapped in a propaganda narrative about a bogus spiritual intervention. How to get back to the truth, and work beyond the censor, is addressed in *The Terror*, and is embraced as the point at which the limitations of the human becomes manifested in a devastated landscape, populated by vengeful animals. Machen's contribution to thinking about animals and the war is an important one. His First World War writings indicate that national turmoil can be registered as a spiritual turmoil which implicates food, animals, and the landscape as critically speaking back to what is truly threatened on the Western Front: what it means to be human.

BIOGRAPHY

Andrew Smith is Professor of Nineteenth-Century English Literature at the University of Sheffield where he co-directs the Centre for the History of the Gothic. He is the author or editor of over 20 published books including *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma, 1914-1934:*

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