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05

BIOLOGICAL HORROR IN ARTHUR MACHEN'S *THE GREAT GOD PAN*[1]

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Abstract: This article analyzes a work of Welsh Gothic literature under the perspective of biological horror, as outlined by Jason Colavito (2007), as an expression of the social and cultural anxieties that emerged in late 19th century Britain. The analysis seeks to understand how the apprehensions of British society brough on by the *fin de siècle* are expressed in the novella *The Great God Pan* by Arthur Machen. Along with the general concerns about quick scientifical development and perceived moral degeneration, it can be argued that Machen's work, as a Welsh author who struggled to identify as such, displays underlying fears of Otherness and of threats to a stable identity. Then,

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this article seeks to debate how the Gothic mode, and specifically the structure of narratives of biological horror, intertwine with narratives of complex and hybrid cultural identities. The first section explains the concept of biological horror in Colavito's (2007) terms and briefly reviews Welsh history to detail the reasons why Welsh identity is an amply debated issue in literature; the second section recounts the plot to the novella and applies the aforementioned concepts in a critical analysis of the text. It is possible to conclude that Arthur Machen materializes within the literary text the fears of Otherness with the particularities of a Welsh author writing in English — portraying Wales as a dangerous, yet appealing land, with ambiguous and demonic characters.
Keywords: Welsh literature. Welsh Gothic. Cultural identity. Body horror. Arthur Machen.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa uma obra de literatura gótica do País de Gales sob a perspectiva de horror corporal como definido por Jason Colavito (2007), como uma expressão das ansiedades sociais e culturais que emergiram na Grã-Bretanha no fim do século XIX. A análise busca compreender como as apreensões da sociedade britânica trazidas pelo *fin de siècle* são expressas na novela *The Great God Pan*, de Arthur Machen. Em conjunção aos rápidos desenvolvimentos científicos e a possível deterioração moral, é possível argumentar que a obra de Machen, como um autor galês que expressava dificuldades em se identificar como tal, demonstra um medo oculto do Outro e de ameaças à identidade estável. Assim, este artigo procura debater como o modo Gótico e especificamente a estrutura de narrativas de horror corporal se entrelaçam com narrativas de identidades culturais complexas e híbridas. A primeira seção explica o conceito de horror corporal nos termos de Colavito (2007) e revisa brevemente a história do País de Gales para detalhar as razões que levam a identidade galesa

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a ser um tema amplamente debatido na literatura; a segunda seção retoma o enredo da novela e aplica os conceitos previamente mencionados em uma análise crítica do texto. É possível concluir que Arthur Machen materializa em seu texto literário os medos do Outro, com as particularidades de um autor galês que escreve em língua inglesa — retratando o País de Gales como um lugar perigoso, mas atraente, com personagens ambíguos e demoníacos.
Palavras-chave: Literatura galesa. *Gótico galês*. Identidade cultural. Horror corporal. Arthur Machen.

INTRODUCTION

In the opening of the book titled *Welsh Gothic*, Jane Aaron (2013) points out that few studies have focused on the wealth of Gothic literary material which has been produced in Wales, particularly that of the nineteenth century. In fact, Aaron (2013) notes that *compendia* such as the *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2002) hardly register Welsh contributions to the Gothic genre, generally categorizing Welsh authors as merely "British". Such is the case of Arthur Machen. Born Arthur Llewellyn Jones in 1863, his first literary works would only be published in the final decade of the nineteenth century. Machen's early years were spent at his place of birth, Caerleon, Monmouthshire, in south-eastern Wales; his studies took place in Hereford, England. These locations are relevant for the present analysis because they have been historically understood as a frontier region — the borderlands in which Welsh and English cultures merge. In fact, the county of Monmouthshire was designated "English" territory from 1543 to 1974 for administrative and legal purposes (AARON, 2013). The complicated cultural relations which take place between Wales and

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

England arguably hold strong influences on the Gothic expression of Machen's literature. A closer look upon one of Machen's novellas, *The Great God Pan*, may unveil unique themes and narrative constructions which reveal a Welsh look upon Gothic tropes. When analyzing Machen's work in *Postcolonialism Revisited*, Kirsti Bohata (2004) observes that,

> welsh readers, and indeed writers, can find themselves simultaneously inside and yet outside the implied British audience who, collectively, can relate to constructions of non-European racial otherness while yet being internally divided, since the Welsh themselves may be constructed as marginal or threatening others to an Anglocentric norm, in terms that are common to racist colonial discourse. (BOHATA, 2004, p. 30)

Bohata (2004) makes an in-depth study of Welsh authors writing and English. The critic argues that the relations between Wales and England both resemble and challenge the current understanding of colonial relations — as the Welsh are incorporated into the "British" identity, but have been historically perceived as less intellectual or evolved than the English. This is precisely the place Machen occupies, and this analysis seeks to demonstrate that the horror in *The Great God Pan* stems from the anxieties surrounding the complicated Welsh position of being both inside and outside the British identity.

In light of these observations, the present article aims at debating how the Gothic motif of biological horror is employed by a Welsh author writing in English; further, this study intends to discuss how the complex historical and social relations of Wales and

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

England are expressed in Welsh Gothic literature. Moreover, the analysis intends to discuss how the cultural anxieties that emerged in late nineteenth century Britain may have contributed to the development of Machen's work. I seek to analyze how the idea of Welsh otherness — in relation to the English identity — generates certain anxieties, which come through in Gothic literature in the shape of monsters and ambiguous figures.

OUTLINING BIOLOGICAL HORROR

Jason Colavito analyses horror motifs in correlation to the social and historical context in which those themes first appeared, and also to the times in which they have been revisited in fiction. The critic explains the emergence of iconic horror figures like Frankenstein's creature, Mr. Hyde, and Dracula by linking them to anxieties brought on by the nineteenth century's technological discoveries. These characters are monstrous and hybrid, existing between the human and the animal forms and unable to reconcile "mankind" and the "natural world". The source of their monstrosity is often linked to their physicality, or to how they impinge upon the bodies of others; in being so, Colavito defines biological horror (also called body horror) as "horror directed towards the physical being of the protagonist and the supernatural entity" (COLAVITO, 2007, p. 78). At the heart of biological horror is the binary notion of civilization *vs*. savagery, and how the prior could easily dissolve into the latter. Another prevalent aspect in biological horror is the dangers of knowledge: exacerbated ambitions, learning some forbidden art — and at times, willful ignorance — are often the cause for a character's downfall.

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Two prominent features in a narrative of biological horror, as Colavito (2007) describes, are the Discovery Plot and the Overreacher Plot. Both of these concepts were coined by Noël Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990), carrying the common theme of knowledge as a source of horror. The Discovery Plot features a protagonist who unearths something horrific and their subsequent attempts to suppress the hellish discovery — while attempting to prove to the world that that horror is indeed real. Meanwhile, the Overreacher Plot portrays one who hubristically pursues knowledge beyond human boundaries; the search for this knowledge, often unholy or forbidden, unleashes evil onto the world. The Overreacher's protagonist is "in essence, science unchained, and he symbolizes fears about the destruction that untethered knowing can bring" (COLAVITO, 2007, p. 78). Frequently, this protagonist is materialized in the figure of a mad scientist. Furthermore, narratives of biological horror hold links to social anxieties concerning the unchecked expansion of science and defiance of established moral values.

Colavito (2007) correlates the dawn of biological horror to the scientific developments which occurred during the nineteenth century in England: mainly, the emergence of Darwin's theory of evolution and the invention of psychoanalysis. As the evolutionary theories — along with medical studies — became more widespread, there was an increasing fear of the consequences that these discoveries could bring. From a moral and theological standpoint, defying the creationist view would imply that humans were no ultimate, perfect creation of the Christian God — instead, they were animals as much as any other natural beast. Such destabilization

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

of religion proved an uncomfortable notion to Victorian society, because it deemed humanity capable of savagery. It confronted people with the notion that the "civilized" man was constantly on the edge of giving in to base animal instincts, which only gained traction as a variety of serial killers emerged towards the end of the century (COLAVITO, 2007). In regards to the rise of violence during the nineteenth century, the critic describes:

> Across the nineteenth century landscape, the paradox of progress led to a schizophrenic century, one simultaneously defined by progress and by brutality, by science and by savagery. It is therefore unsurprising that this period created the horror fiction icons that ever after defined the genre […]. These horror figures attempted to bridge the contradictory impulses of the society in which they were formed, and they attempted to navigate the shifting boundaries between humanity's traditional role as separate from and ruling over nature with its new position as merely one part of a bloody, violent world of competition, exploitation, and fear. (COLAVITO, 2007, p. 77)

These events that disturbed Victorian values can be interpreted as being, at its core, fears of losing identity: fear of becoming the Other. Within the binary nature/civilization, societies outside the European norm would be portrayed in nineteenth century English literature as belonging to the "natural", beastly sphere, thus posing a threat to the stable identity. Several critics have exemplified this point: Claudio Zanini's (2007) analysis demonstrates that the vampire in Bram Stoker's Dracula could easily be replaced with "'exotic', 'outsider', 'foreigner'" (ZANINI, 2007, p. 127); then, the monster stands as that which opposes white, western identity.

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

Moreover, *Dracula* is pointed out by Colavito (2007) as a prime example of the Discovery Plot, as an Englishman travels to a distant country in the East and encounters the evil vampire in a foreign land. Similarly, Colavito (2007) points out that Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* portrays Africa as a place of evil, in which the white colonizers are made to descend to their basest instincts. The critic also recalls Chinua Achebe's reflections upon the novel, as the author argues that *Heart of Darkness* presents African peoples as a part of the jungle — animalistic and primitive.

Therefore, the scientific discoveries and imperialistic expansions of England during that era brought about several anxieties surrounding identity and alterity; while the evolutionary theories engendered a fear that humans were not above other animals, and consequently capable of committing atrocities, colonization confronted the white European identity with different cultures and ethnicities. Bohata (2004) remarks that the prevading concepts of race, gender, and sexuality which have been established through colonial narratives were the foundational ideas for European imperialism. While the nineteenth century was a time of great scientific development, many of those fields of knowledge sought to categorize, and thus segregate, different peoples of the world; consequently, they often aided in cementing a sense of hierarchy and otherness among ethnicities and genders. Bohata (2004) debates how these discourses constantly inform popular and literary portrayals of otherness, even beyond the ages of Imperialism and Enlightenment. The critic claims that such images of alterity are frequently expressed in Welsh literature written in English. The force of colonial discourse over the Welsh identity has resulted in

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

a recurrent construction of a marginal, internally divided Wales, which could explain why works such as Arthur Machen's express the complex position of being simultaneously inside and outside the British identity.

It seems relevant to briefly dwell on the recurrent attempts at cultural erasure that were imposed onto Wales throughout the centuries. Such processes arguably with the Anglo-Saxon invasions in the Early Middle Ages; when Germanic peoples sailed to land on the shores of Britain, they referred to the native peoples of the island as *wealas*, a term that has been interpreted as "foreigner" and that later would transform into the word Welsh (FEAR, 2016, p. 46-47). Thus, named as strangers in the place they had inhabited for a few centuries, some British peoples began calling themselves *Cymry*, which can be translated as "fellow countrymen". This appears to be a first step to the development of an identity by clearly marking a difference to another, as explained by Hall (1990, p. 228): firmly placing boundaries between "us" and "them" in language and narrative.

The year of 1066 marked the landing of King William I of England, a Norman monarch, on the coasts of Great Britain to soon begin an expansion towards the west; those events led to the local peoples being forced to retreat west into the territories which are now Wales and Cornwall, quite literally being pushed to the margins. Later, political measures would be imposed to further dominate the Welsh, such as granting the rule over south Wales to "English'' barons, meaning they would have control over the borders. These Norman expeditors consolidated their place by constructing castles as they moved into Welsh territory, while

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

prohibiting locals to construct their own, which inevitably altered the power structures within that region and effectively imposed English law over Welsh territory (TURVEY, 2002).

In the sixteenth century, a series of parliamentary measures known as The Laws in Wales Acts 1535-1542 were passed by King Henry VIII of England. These laws annexed Wales to English territory and prohibited Welsh-speaking people from taking public office in Wales. Some of these restrictions, which eventually contributed to the decline of the Welsh speaking population, were only repealed in the late twentieth century. Later, the nineteenth century would witness a wave of immigrants who came to Wales looking for employment in the emerging industry of coal mines. This new diverse workforce inevitably changed the cultural landscape of the country, while the industrialization process increased the gap between English and Welsh speaking people: the former represented the progress, affluence, and intellectuality, while the latter was marked as backwards, rural, and linked to the working class (FEAR, 2012). Beyond that, the industrialization changed the scenery of rural Wales; the south region of Wales lent itself to strong Gothic imagery, as the mining of iron, slate, and coal darkened the landscape with pollution and the unsanitary work conditions to the population. As Jane Aaron explains, south Wales in particular suffered with lack of opportunity for employment as anything other than a coalminer, which "created the sense of a doomed or haunted community sacrificed to the needs of Westminster and the British Empire" (AARON, 2013, p. 6-7).

Moreover, the impositions on Welsh school curriculum vastly contributed to the decline of Welsh language — and such intent

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

was made explicit by government representatives, which evaluated education as the most effective method of control (BOHATA, 2004). The impact of these education policies — which constructed the Welsh language as inferior — on Welsh authors and on Welsh literature written in English is described by Bohata, as the critic points out the example of writers like Dylan Thomas "being 'protected' from the language; consequently, like Achebe and others, these writers found themselves writing in a 'colonial' language and yet one which was undeniably their own" (BOHATA, 2004, p. 21). All the aforementioned acts had a lasting impact on Welsh cultural identity: "from the 13th century onwards, Wales was subjected to a series of events and social upheaval, with an imposition of English laws, language and culture that national identity has been mutated, possibly beyond recognition" (FEAR, 2016, p. 13). This history has led to a symbolic construction of Wales as Other which opposes England in its identity.

As Bohata (2004) explains, Welsh writing in English may perpetuate the images of alterity which have been ascribed to Wales, reproducing themselves the imperial discourses which construct Wales as the Other. Arthur Machen is presented by the critic as one of the authors who forwards the dominant discourse of otherness and "clearly reflects *fin de siècle* anxieties about social, racial, sexual and cultural degeneration" (BOHATA, 2004, p. 29). Thus, Machen's *The Great God Pan* was written during the critical moment of industrialization of south Wales and the already established dangers of scientific developments — which, beyond the moral discomfort they caused to Victorian society, were also used to legitimize inequality and violence directed towards those

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

who were categorized as "less human" due to their ethnicity or sex. Having established the concept of biological horror and how that could relate to the context of Wales during the nineteenth century, this article now turns to the analysis of Machen's novella *The Great God Pan*, seeking to identify how this narrative presents elements of biological horror, and outlining how this work of Welsh writing handles the contradicting, complex perspectives surrounding Wales.

THE GREAT GOD PAN

The Great God Pan was first published as a short story in the magazine *The Whirlwind* in 1890; it would later be extended into a novella and published as a book in 1894; in a similar fashion to much of Machen's early work, this novella portrays Welsh territory as the stage to evil and supernatural events. Aaron (2013) comments that the novellas contained in Machen's *The Three Impostors* are populated by fairies who commit mischievous and cruel acts, and the Welsh landscape is described as barren, desolate hills. In fact, Machen often depicted English narrators who would refer to south Wales as "the west of England' in his fiction, which attests to the author's constant writing from "two differing points of view — he sees the country through English eyes as well as through his own" (AARON, 2013, p. 72). These early works led to harsh criticism, which is summarized by Aaron (2013):

> His critics see him as a Welsh writer who 'wants to be 'English' (the superior race) but fears he is contaminated by (un-desirable) Welshness', and as a betrayer of his people who wrote a 'unionist narrative of doomed native races'. Yet, while it is

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

> certainly the case that the characteristic Machen tale pits Saxon rationality and material progress against primitive forces preserved by the 'little people' of the underworld 'in the west', it is not always clear where his allegiances lie. (AARON, 2013, p. 71)

After 1900, however, the portrayal of Wales in Machen's fiction evokes less horror and instead shows a certain awe with the landscape; *The Hills of Dreams* (1907) nostalgically narrates a teenage boy's experiences in south Wales, as he reminisces about the history and magic of "Gwent" and the pre-Roman myths of Wales (AARON, 2013). As Aaron (2013) points out, the romanticization of the land and the mystical experiences that the protagonist of *The Hills of Dreams* undergoes is looked down upon by the cynical, logical English narrator — once again presenting the dual perspective which seems to haunt Machen's work. In the 1922 *Far-off Things* and his auto-biographical work, Machen clearly expressed regret about his previous writings, now looking at Wales as an enchanted land of noble Celts: a shift in point of view which would persist (perhaps to an exacerbated amount) throughout the author's remaining years.

Machen's change in perspective interestingly remains within the Gothic genre; as commented previously in this article, the monster in Gothic fiction is often an expression of anxieties surrounding something Other — an opposition to identity. On the other hand, the Gothic mode can be employed to express the alternate voices of those who are often depicted as animalistic and "less human". Maisha Wester describes the Gothic as a "series of tropes and themes used to meditate upon a culture's various anxieties, particularly through discourses of Otherness" (WESTER,

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

2012, p. 2). The critic also notes that the Gothic is mutable, shifting to accommodate ideals and inquiries of its culture. Even its Other is rarely singular and never stable, as "the Gothic Other typically condenses various cultural and national threats" (WESTER, 2012, p. 2). As Wester observes, one of the aspects that makes the Gothic so haunting and pervasive is that it allows for containing and condensing an apparent infinitude of discourses and threats, such as biological, cultural and national ones.

The Great God Pan presents a narration typical of Machen's initial fiction, a story of "men of letters and scientists, Londoners to a man, enter this hallowed territory of Gwent and attempt to penetrate what they see as its dark secrets" (AARON, 2013, p. 77-78). Aaron's (2013) description immediately recalls the Overreacher Plot, which is further supported by the following events of novella. At the center of the story is a scientific experiment that breaches the boundaries of human knowledge, releasing an evil which takes root in the mystical, frontier space of south Wales. Throughout the following analysis the characterization of such evil will be pointed out, as it seems that the narrative correlates alterity to wickedness.

The narration follows the perspective of Mr. Clarke, a character who is hardly given a background; instead, he serves as a point of identification to the reader, as it is through this figure that one is introduced into the strange ideas and experiments of Clarke's friend, Dr. Raymond. While Clarke is curious but cautious, his friend is decidedly unscrupulous in the pursuit of his research. Raymond is investigating ways to gaze into the world of the spirits, trespassing the boundaries between natural and supernatural worlds, which he believes to be the true reality; he performs

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

certain experiments to achieve that goal, and his test subject is a young woman named Mary. Raymond explains to Clarke that Mary would undergo a surgery which would alter a part of her brain "a trifling rearrangement of certain cells, a microscopical alteration" (MACHEN, 1996, n.p.) to the gray matter — thus allowing the girl to see into the world of the spirits, and to glimpse at the god Pan. Although Clarke advises his friend to thread carefully, Raymond shows little regard for Mary's safety, for the pursuit of knowledge is, to him, of utmost importance. As the doctor handles levers, strange liquids, and mechanical apparatus, the fumes lead Clarke into a daze; in this state, he witnesses as the doctor performs the incision on an unconscious Mary. In five minutes, she awakes, expressing both awe and terror:

> They [her eyes] shone with an awful light, looking far away, and a great wonder fell upon her face, and her hands stretched out as if to touch what was invisible; but in an instant the wonder faded, and gave place to the most awful terror. The muscles of her face were hideously convulsed, she shook from head to foot; the soul seemed struggling and shuddering within the house of flesh. It was a horrible sight, and Clarke rushed forward, as she fell shrieking to the floor. (MACHEN, 1996, n.p.)

The experiment leaves Mary with permanently debilitated cognitive abilities; Dr. Raymond implies that this mental state would have been the result of meeting with the Great God Pan. Years later, Clarke is still haunted by the image of Mary in suffering; horror stories have ceased to entertain him; instead, he endeavors to compile and arrange a book of his own, called "Memoirs to prove the Existence of the Devil". In revisiting his notes, Clarke comes

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

across a report he had written down, which had been told to him by a friend coming from Caermaen, "a village on the borders of Wales, a place of some importance in the time of the Roman occupation, but now a scattered hamlet, of not more than five hundred souls" (MACHEN, 1996, n.p.). This is Machen's fictional Caerleon, in South Wales. The report tells of Helen Vaughan, a young orphan girl who presented unexplainable behaviors throughout her childhood. The circumstances under which she had come to live in the village are mysterious; she was sent there by her adoptive father, who sends specific instructions about the girl's upbringing: she should sleep alone and should be able to go out and do as she pleases. Indeed, Helen disappears into the woods surrounding the little village from dawn to dusk, being sometimes spotted playing with a "strange naked man" resembling "faun or satyr". Her appearance is different from the other people in her village: "her skin was a pale, clear olive, and her features were strongly marked, and of a somewhat foreign character" (MACHEN, 1996, n.p.).

After Helen's arrival, many incidents take place; a boy who witnesses her playing with the faun in the woods is accosted by a sudden freight, shrieking and contorted with terror — which leaves him with an irreversible "weakness of intellect". A little girl called Rachel M., who is friends with Helen, starts to display certain aloofness after long days playing with Helen in the woods; one day, after coming home, the girl is found weeping and lying half undressed on her bed. In evident distress, Rachel blames her mother for allowing her to go into the woods with Helen. Both occurrences clearly resemble the effects of Dr. Raymond's experiment upon Mary. The report ends telling of Helen's

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

disappearance: she leaves the village, and is last seen "walking in a meadow, and a few moments later she was not there" (MACHEN, 1996, n.p.). Mr. Clarke, upon recalling this story, tries to find a logical explanation for these events.

Mr. Clarke is then contacted by an old friend called Villiers of Wadham. Villiers came to search for Clarke after meeting with a certain Charles Herbert, who had disappeared after telling Villiers of the strange behavior of his wife. Mr. Herbert had confessed to Villiers that Mrs. Herbert had corrupted him in body and soul; she would tell and show him terrifying things, which Mr. Herbert dared not to repeat — and left him suddenly, disappearing with his possessions. Mrs. Herbert is, of course, Helen who had reappeared in London eleven years after the events in Caermaen; those who saw her "said she was at once the most beautiful woman and the most repulsive they had ever set eyes on" (MACHEN, 1996, n.p.). Not long after Helen's vanishing once more, Charles Herbert is found dead in his residence. Villiers shares the story with Clarke looking for advice, and the latter again attempts to rationalize the episode reported to him by looking for a medical explanation for a man's sudden passing. Nevertheless, Villiers suggests that they look for Helen; upon seeing a drawing of the woman's face, Mr. Clarke is deeply disturbed to find that Mrs. Herbert has a striking resemblance to Mary.

At this point, both men set out to investigate Helen's past; they learn that she is the daughter of Mary, who bore a child after the experiment she endured. They also discover a series of unsolved murders, unexplained deaths, and suicides — all linking back to Helen, who used different aliases to roam England. She is eventually

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

cornered by Villiers and Clarke, being given the choice to either reveal herself and admit to what she had done or be killed. Helen chooses the latter, taking her own life. The narrative then moves on to display the report of the doctor who attended Helen's deathbed; he describes that the woman's body deteriorated at an unnatural speed, which raises the question of what sort of being was Helen. She is a child born out of a supernatural encounter, and therefore it can be inferred that she is half human and half god, or maybe half demon. Helen is likely the offspring of Pan — a faun, who himself is a hybrid of human and animal, and who was associated with nature and sexuality in the Roman pantheon. Perhaps Machen chose this figure to represent the other-world because of its connection to imagery of hybridity and its opposition to civilization.

The symbols surrounding the image of Pan reflect on Helen's characterization — which arguably makes her monstrous, according to the definition of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in *Monster Theory* (1996). Cohen's criticism is anchored in the field of Cultural Studies, and his definition of monstrosity comes from a constructivist perspective on culture. Thus, the critic understands that the monster is "an embodiment of a certain cultural moment — of a time, a feeling, and a place" (COHEN, 1996, p. 4). Cohen explains that the word monster comes from the Latin, and it could mean both "to warn" and to "reveal"; this notion reinforces the point previously discussed in this article, that the figure of the monster materializes anxieties which emerge either from a clash between two cultures or great moments of transition in society. To Cohen, the body of the literary monster is a construct and a projection of the fears of the society that conceives them, be it in

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

face of difference (confronted with other cultures), or fear of the shifts in moral and social parameters.

When it comes to *The Great God Pan*, Helen centralizes alterity; otherness is marked in her olive skin, her facial features, her seductive yet repellent demeanor, and her seeming lack of morality. To the austere Victorian values, her moral and physical ambiguity could be great sources of discomfort. Other critics of this novella have pointed out that the story presents an almost moralizing message, implicitly condemning and rejecting everything that Helen is. Jane Aaron explains that,

> what Helen reveals here are 'secret forces at the heart of things, forces that should, the narrator moralizes, remain buried, no doubt because their sexual nature is linked to female desire'. [...] But in nineteenth-century upper-class London society it cannot be tolerated; it constitutes such a destabilizing threat to a gentleman's view of the feminine, of himself and of his civilization that it is unendurable. (AARON, 2013, p. 76)

Beyond such anxiety concerning gender and sexuality which prevailed during the Victorian era, Helen embodies the fear of losing identity. Her supernatural birth not only touches upon the nineteenth century's apprehension regarding scientific experiments, but it also threatens the Christian order for hinting at the interactions with another god. Moreover, Helen is, like Pan, closely connected to the natural world — a notion which would be rejected at that time, since there was great concern about dissolution of boundaries between humans and other animals. In fact, Cohen (1996) describes that monsters are "disturbing hybrids

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration [...] a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions (COHEN, 1996, p. 6). As Cohen explains, the monster always emerges in times of crisis at the conjunction of two categories: it is the hybrid, like a centaur or a werewolf. It represents the impossibility of classifying things into orderly sections, always in between two worlds.

In the context of Welsh writing in England, Helen's ambiguity moves into the realm of national belonging and cultural identity. Machen's depiction of a monster — which is, by nature, a liminal figure at the threshold of two or more categories — could indicate anxieties specific to his Welsh origins. As the monster threatens to break the constructed social categories, Helen could symbolize Machen's preoccupation with the dissolution of boundaries between Wales and England; in his portrayal of Wales as a primitive space in which Helen grew unchecked, there appears to be reluctance on the author's part of identifying with the Welsh nationality. This character's construction reveals an inherent fear of crossing the boundary which would thrust one into the marginal, outside space reserved for hybrids such as Helen. Now, returning to the matter of biological horror, Dr. Raymond's transgression into forbidden knowledge created a monster in every sense of the word; Helen's nature is reinforced as her body is diluted at the moment of her death, being described as follows:

> I was then privileged or accursed, I dare not say which, to see that which was on the bed, lying there black like ink, transformed before my eyes. The skin, and the flesh, and the muscles, and the bones, and the firm structure of the human body that I

http://dx.doi.org/10.12957/abusoes.2024.84137

> had thought to be unchangeable, and permanent as adamant, began to melt and dissolve. [...] I saw the form waver from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then again reunited. Then I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended, and that which was on the heights go down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being. The principle of life, which makes organism, always remained, while the outward form changed. (MACHEN, 1996, n.p.)

As Helen's dying form shifts from human to animal, her sexual organs transform from female to male in her quickly disintegrating body demonstrates the fluidity of boundaries and uncertain categorization which so haunts Welsh literature. As a Welsh author who strongly attempts to deny his relation to Wales, Machens inability to outline his own belonging is presented as a great source of horror.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although the nineteenth century witnessed great political and scientific progress, it was also a time of great to violence. These contradictions are present within the story of *The Great God Pan*: on one hand, Dr. Raymond is a very knowledgeable man who has studied many scientific fields and is able to perform a surgery that is both very anatomically specific, but also occult. On the other hand, he displays a great disregard for his human subject, thus proving capable of great cruelty. The overall themes and structure of the novella closely follow Carroll's (1990) outline of the Overreacher Plot, in which a character sets out in search of forbidden knowledge with disastrous results, as he trespasses a threshold of human capacity. It can be said that Dr. Raymond attempts to achieve something

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that is beyond humanity — to allow mankind to be in touch with the other-world — and consequently unleashes a "spirit" into the world. Helen is characterized as a supernatural being, capable of great evil and who frequently causes death and trauma.

Thus, the narrative in *The Great God Pan* directly points to knowledge as a source of the horror. This aspect often impinges on a physical body: Dr. Raymond experiments with the brain's gray matter and the subsequent feelings of awe and suffering which afflict those who gaze into the supernatural. Furthermore, Helen's destructive potential is hinted at and linked to her physical appearance; she is sensual and seductive, but also looks somewhat unsettling. She has darker skin than those around her, and the description of her characteristics as looking "foreign" contributes to establish her Otherness — which makes her dangerous. Helen's constant dwelling within the forest further marks her alterity, as the woods are a transitional space in which a variety of animals inhabit. This space both reinforces her connection to the supernatural world and to the realm of beasts — the natural world — which was, to the understanding of nineteenth century Victorian morals, a sign of primitive irrationality.

Helen exists in an uncertain category between human and animal, and that clearly expresses the anxieties of that era: is there truly a boundary between humans and other animals? What is it that keeps civilization from dissolving into savagery? Then, it appears that the story of *The Great God Pan* is deeply rooted in the fears that loomed over nineteenth century British society: the unchecked advancement of science, human nature, and the lack of a defined identity. Helen, in a way, embodies all these elements

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into one terrifying figure. She represents the fear of otherness, of hybridity, the anxieties surrounding lack of categorization which apply both to the scientific developments of the nineteenth century and to the ambiguous position of Arthur Machen as a Welsh author writing in English.

To conclude, it can be argued that the anxieties which were present in Great Britain as a whole are displayed in Machen's novella with the particularities of a Welsh author writing in English. Wales was undergoing drastic changes, both socially and politically, and its landscape was also altered by the industrialization of the southern regions. It is also possible to observe that *The Great God Pan* portrays the south of Wales as a dangerous and mysterious place, that is, a transitional space in which this foreign and mysterious woman is able to operate, to get in touch with supernatural forces and perform her acts of evil. Both the portrayal of Helen and her connection to Welsh territory reveal the complex position from which Machen wrote: being simultaneously attracted and repelled by the idea of Wales, and the ambivalent attachments towards his own nation.

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