



The Terror

Arthur Machen

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"Explosion at Muniton Works in the Northern District: Many Fatalities." The working man told me about it, and added some dreadful details. Corpses so terribly maimed that coffins had been kept covered; faces mutilated as if by some gnawing animal. . . . I took a tram to the location of the disaster; a raw and hideous shed with a walled yard about it, and a shut gate. The roof was quite undamaged -- this had had been a strange accident. There had been an explosion of sufficient violence to kill work-people in the building, but the building itself showed no wounds or scars.

The Terror • (1916) • novella by Arthur Machen

The Elixir of Life • (1881) • short story by Richard Garnett

The Terror Details

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Oscar says

Esta es una de las historias menos conocidas de Arthur Machen; apenas se cita, y sin embargo es una joya imprescindible.

Los hechos que se cuentan en 'El terror' transcurren en el año 1915, en plena Primera Guerra Mundial, cuando el mundo civilizado estaba amenazado por Alemania. Machen juega con los rumores que corrían por tierras inglesas en aquella época, donde era difícil saber lo que estaba sucediendo realmente en el frente, y las noticias llegaban a destiempo. Y si esto pasaba en las ciudades, en las zonas rurales todavía se acentuaba más esta falta de información.

En la región de Meirion, nombre ficticio que le da el narrador, se suceden diversos crímenes inexplicables, brutales y sin motivo aparente, que parecen producto de un loco. Al mismo tiempo también son destruidas algunas fábricas de municiones, y es entonces cuando se empieza a pensar que es cosa de los alemanes, que están infiltrándose en el país. Pero los hechos extraños no paran aquí, porque algunos animales parecen haber enloquecido y actúan de manera irracional. La gente empieza a ver y oír cosas fantásticas, alucinantes casi, y no se sabe si tiene algo que ver una cierta sugestión colectiva. La población no sabe qué pensar de todo ello, y las noticias no llegan, hay orden de controlar toda la prensa.

La grandeza de esta breve pero intensa novela, radica en la maestría de Machen a la hora de construir su historia, donde el lector va asistiendo al desarrollo de los acontecimientos cada vez con más angustia por saber lo que realmente está pasando y saber cuál es la naturaleza del terror, hasta llegar a un final sorprendente.

Ciertamente, 'El terror' podría enmarcarse dentro del llamado horror cósmico, por lo que de terror primigenio tiene, aunque no tiene mucha relación con la obra de Lovecraft propiamente dicha. Tampoco es que sea una historia de miedo al uso, sino que está más cerca del relato de misterio. El terror aún así está presente, pero se trata de un terror sugerente, que transcurre en lugares idílicos, a la luz del día, en contraste con otro tipo de historias más oscuras.

Los puntos fuertes de 'El terror' radican en la estructura de la narración, donde se van desvelando los sucesos paulatinamente, como si de las capas de una cebolla se tratase, así como la sensación de extrañeza que logra transmitir al lector, y la resolución final del terror, redondo, pero aún así dado a múltiples interpretaciones, donde la crítica a la incongruencia de la guerra, la barbarie del hombre y su incapacidad de comprensión del mundo que le rodea, quedan patentes.

Sistermagpie says

This was a fun story about mysterious goings-on in the English countryside during WWI. The Terror is explained (to an extent) in the end, but the atmosphere really comes from strange things going on here and there that don't quite seem to fit together: a glowing tree, a strange, mournful scream in the night, people jumping off cliffs, people falling down dead, explosions, shipwrecks. It's so nebulous that people stop talking about it and just live with uneasiness. Though of course when they do talk about it they assume it's some dastardly German plot.

It's tightly written and has some really effective set pieces too.

Ethan says

Arthur Machen at his most rational. While he spins an intriguing mystery with *The Terror*, it ultimately falls flat of my expectations of a Machen story.

Unexplainable deaths descend across the British Isles, especially concentrated on the rural countryside. Could it be the work of rogue serial killers, or perhaps the doing of a secret subterranean German invasion? Machen's use of war-time paranoia is admirable, but over the course of this short novel these possibilities are systematically deemed implausible.

The story reaches its climax in the journal entry found at the isolated Treff Loyne farm where we finally get some (albeit very vague) eyewitness description of the titular terror. This scene is admittedly very tense and quite disturbing. It is here where, especially if you've read Machen's more supernatural fiction, that you are lead to speculate mystic supernatural forces at work. Perhaps it could be the work of the Little People or something more horrific?

What I had speculated was far more fascinating than the actual reveal, this is the reason that many authors leave their horror tales up to interpretation. It is ultimately revealed to be an uprising of the animal kingdom against mankind for their transgressions that is responsible for the murders, and the mysterious clouds of fire just moths.

Really, that is it. Now I must give Machen some credit, this concept must have been far more novel during the time of his writing. And he does well to place subtle clues pointing to animals turned mad throughout the story, but perhaps I didn't think any of it because I was expecting something far more supernatural and less mundane.

A decent mystery though disappointingly lacking in the fantastic and supernatural, not what I read Machen for.

Helder says

Encontrei esta preciosidade na feira de Massamá com um valor simbólico.

Não conhecia Arthur Machen, mas com esta sinopse: “Arthur Machen foi um dos grandes e incontornáveis escritores do início de século xx. A sua obra é imprescindível à compreensão de autores como H.P. Lovecraft, Stephen King, Bram Stoker, Sir. Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, ou mesmo Alfred Hitchcock. Foi apontado por Luís Borges como a grande influência do realismo mágico. ”, como poderia eu resistir? O livro é constituído por três contos «O Terror», «A Mão Vermelha» e «O Grande Retorno».

No conto «O Terror» escrito em 1917, Arthur Machen, repórter durante a 1ª guerra mundial, desempenha o papel de narrador do ano 'presente': impasse na guerra das trincheiras, a censura na imprensa e o medo generalizado no Reino Unido. Com esta premissa, Arthur cria um terror desconhecido que alastra-se por todo o território.

Dr. Lewis, medico de uma pequena região isolada à oeste de Gales, desempenha o papel de Sherlock Homes e tenta solucionar este terror que mata discriminadamente.

Gostei bastante deste conto, o meu favorito deste livro. O ritmo da narração, o suspense, as referências bibliográficas e o terror psicológico.

O conto «A Mão Vermelha» escrito em 1895, foi o que menos gostei do livro, suponho em parte por este ser uma sequela de «The Three Impostors». Não percebo porque é que a editora não publica os contos no mesmo volume. O leitor que não leu «The Three Impostors» (eu) é catapultado para um diálogo sem sentido entre duas personagens Phillips e Dyson provenientes dessa mesma obra.

Mesmo depois de uma releitura, as quatro primeiras páginas são incompreensíveis para mim, o que é muito num conto. Depois o conto desenrola-se bem entorno de um homicídio, nas ruas de Londres ao género de Arthur Conan Doyle, cometido por um biface anciano.

Em «O Grande Retorno» (1915), Arthur Machen, outra vez como repórter/narrador, vai à cidade Llantrisant investigar uma estranha referencia de luzes numa notícia sucinta do jornal, em parte por causa da censura. Um excelente exemplo duma simbiose entre a realidade, a fantasia e a mitologia galesa. Um conto simples em modo de relato, pouca ação, suspense ou terror. Um conto descritivo que nos leva a conhecer País de Gales e as suas lendas.

Fiquei bastante agradado por 'conhecer' Arthur Machen, a seleção peca pelo número reduzido de contos, os contos «The Bowmen» e «The Novel of the White Powder» enriqueceria em muito este volume. O primeiro volume «O Grande Deus Pã» publicado pela editora já foi adicionado à minha 'wishlist'.

Adam Carter says

Bloody hell!

Chris Purser says

Machen really was a good writer. I enjoyed this story and think it is one of the best of his that I have read so far.

David says

This fantastic story was filled with suspense and intrigue at every turn... a real page turner!

I read the Project Gutenberg ebook version, and I probably read it in under 3 hours. It is incredibly readable and I am more than slightly chuffed that my hometown of Newport was name checked early in the Novella :)

The plot centres around the mysterious deaths of people around the country during the middle of WW1, all with different MO's yet something mysterious seems to connect them all. The majority of the book centres around how these strange activities centre on a small seaside town in West Wales given the codename 'Meirion' and how the residents, townsfolk and visitors attempt to untangle the mystery as it impacts them in their part of the world. To give away any more details of the story will spoil it, so I'll stop.

H.P. Lovecraft was a fan of Machens work, with even the English town of 'Dunwich' appearing in The Terror, a name copied by Lovecraft for the name of the fictitious town featured in his excellent work 'The Dulwich Horror'. There is also a nod to Machen in Lovecrafts work in 'The Rats in the Wall' relating to Machen's 'The Great God Pan', but you will have to work that one out for yourself.

This genuinely frightening work is a marvelous piece of literature, and seen as it is now in the public domain it is freely available for you to enjoy from the likes of Project Gutenberg. I highly recommend giving this easy to read scarefest a go.

Luis Del Aguila says

Me gusta la forma de cronica que tiene el libro y los sucesos que van dando forma al "terror" son muy bien narrados, lo que no termino de convencerme es el final, me parece que despues de describir tanto los acontecimientos la historia se merecia un final menos simple, pero bueno fue decision del autor, igual es un libro que tiene momentos muy buenos, los que mas me gustaron fueron el rayo Z y las ultimas palabras de Secretan donde se puede apreciar el corte sobrenatural de los relatos

Luis Francisco Martínez says

A pesar del final, que es bastante anticlimático (me recordó algunos finales de Stephen King), esta pequeña novela se disfruta en la narración atmosférica que va envolviendo por su origen en apariencia inexplicable. Un libro que no es de lo más famoso de Machen pero que tiene un gran valor dentro de su literatura de horror.

Cheryl says

Suspenseful novella about strange deaths in England during World War 1. Are these deaths somehow connected, and could the Germans have something to do with it? The ending was a bit laughable, when you find out the explanation. It completely ruined the story for me.

Mafalda Fernandes says

O Terror - 4.5*
A Mão Vermelha - 4*
O Grão Retorno - 3*

M.J. Johnson says

What a brilliant story. I read this novella at bedtime over seven days and thoroughly enjoyed every moment of it. It is well-paced, containing more dialogue and is consequently less descriptive than a great deal of Machen's earlier work. Written in 1915 during WWI, it has an edge of the twentieth century about it and less of a more florid nineteenth century style that will appeal more to modern tastes, I think. I would describe it as more of a horror/thriller than the fantastic world of fauns and (bad) faeries that populate so many of his tales which I've read previously. I think this story has probably had great influence on many other writers of horror fiction. I wonder if Daphne Du Maurier, either consciously or unconsciously, used it as something of a template for her classic story The Birds. Simply excellent.

Bill Kerwin says

This short novel may not be Machen's best work, but it is his only serious—albeit indirect—attempt to address the effects of the international trauma which I believe precipitated his literary decline: the cumulative horror of the trenches of World War I.

“The Coming of the Terror,” a short story first published in 1917 *Century Magazine*—later reprinted in the second volume of Joshi's collection, *The White People*--is an abridged form of the same tale, but I consider the original novel—four times the story's length—more effective. Its longer, episodic form allows not only for a greater accumulation of horrors but also for more opportunities to meditate on the significance of this disturbing series of events.

Originally serialized in the *Evening News* in 1916, this novel offers us a journalist narrator a lot like Arthur Machen, which adds a note of verisimilitude to an otherwise fantastic tale. A rash of sudden deaths had been visited upon small factory towns and farming communities in England soon after the start of the war, and our journalist relates for us both the strange facts accompanying these horrors and the attempts of the English government to conceal them from the public--now at last, when the story can be told. After a series of individual witness testimonies, and the reflective conversations of a few intelligent men, both the journalist and his readers begin to understand the nature of this recent horror.

You'll have to read the book yourself to find out the immediate cause of these deaths, but I think I can share the ultimate reason Machen suggests without creating spoilers. Machen's reason is very old fashioned, almost Shakespearean: he senses that the carnage of the Great War has dislodged man from his position in earth's hierarchy, our sublunary portion of the universe's Great Chain of Being. Man has violated his once secure position as earth's steward and master, and now there is nobody in charge. Everything is up for grabs.

This is a disturbing book, and more so now, in the 21st century, when man's abdication of the role of earth's steward is becoming clearer and clearer everyday.

Marco Spelgatti says

Dopo aver letto i racconti di "Oltre la soglia", ho deciso di continuare l'esperienza con Machen, e ne sono felice. Questo racconto lungo è riuscito a trasmettermi un'inquietudine costante per tutta la lettura. Il non sapere cosa stia accadendo e perché, e il fatto che stia accadendo su di una scala estesa... Non ho apprezzato molto il finale "didattico", la necessità di spiegare il perché ed il perché le cose sono accadute, ma tutta la narrazione precedente è scorrevole ed intrigante.

Rispetto ai racconti brevi poi di "Oltre la soglia", qui ho trovato un'abilità di Machen che non conoscevo, ovvero quella di far convergere i vari indizi ed elementi che ha sparso lungo la narrazione in un culmine esplicativo coerente.

Jim Smith says

Most essential Machen work is from the 1890s, but *The Terror* is one of his most developed horror tales

from his later career. This often waffling novella is meandering and less focused than his dark folk masterpieces *The Hill of Dreams*, *The Great God Pan*, *Novel of the Black Seal* and *The White People*, but also gleefully manic and quite inspired in parts, developing an atmosphere of magical mystery and dread around the countryside and featuring moments of terror, particularly the harrowing final siege diary, which is worthy of Machen at his best as a horror writer.
