The White People
by Arthur Machen

QUESTIONNAIRE

We will read this story in four parts: the Prologue, The Green Book Part One, The Green Book Part Two, and the Epilogue.

Vocabulary words encountered in each part are defined in the questionnaire, listed in the order in which they occur in each passage.

There are thirteen study questions for each part of the story; students will select and answer one question per part briefly, in writing, and present their answers in class.

By the end of this unit, each student will have answered four questions about "The White People."

These answers may then be used as the foundation for a paper, analyzing the themes and imagery of Machen's tale.
PROLOGUE

Vocabulary (in order of appearance)

prologue -- a prologue introduces a story, often detailing who tells that story, to whom, when, where, how and why.
sorcery -- the art of performing magic rituals
sanctity -- holiness, the sacred
ecstasy -- going beyond the self
mouldering -- getting old, aging (applied to things, not people)
epicure -- someone who knows all about food, especially fancy food
carnal -- obsessed with sex
ascetic -- someone who keep himself under control by refusing to do pleasurable things
teetotal -- someone who drinks no alcohol; the "teetotal sect" is a group of social reformers who discourage others from drinking alcohol.
paradoxes -- a paradox is a logical problem that cannot possibly be solved
Romance Conti -- a type of very fancy wine
four ale -- cheap beer ... Ambrose is saying, you don't need to know bad beer to know good wine
trium -- a statement that is obviously true, like "pain is unpleasant"
connexion -- old fashioned spelling of "connection"
spectacles -- can mean either eyeglasses, or a grand thing to see; Machen uses this word in the first sense here, and in the second sense at the Prologue's end.
qua -- as; "murderer, qua murderer" here means "a murderer, considered only as a murderer without taking any other particular details into account"
judicious -- thoughtful, careful about labeling things
sage -- a wise man
infractions -- crimes
bye-laws -- a secondary law, based on another, higher law
prevalence -- what is prevalent is frequently encountered, successful
Highland caterans -- traditional Scottish peasant warriors
moss-troopers -- traditional Scottish bandits
company promoters -- people who aggressively seek out investors for a new company
placid -- calm
amply -- fully
the Fall -- refers to the story of Adam and Eve; the Fall is the fall of mankind from a state of grace into sin
pertain -- have to do with
Gilles de Rais -- a French nobleman executed for Satan worship and the murder of hundreds of children
endeavours -- activities, things one tries to do
persecuted Anglican Church -- some English Catholics, like Ambrose, claimed that there was really no difference between the official Anglican Church, which was Protestant, and the Catholic church; they wanted the two to be reconciled.
dereliction -- failure to do your duty, failure to do the right thing
key-note -- the main idea
material -- made of matter, physical rather than spiritual
incidental -- coming along with
materialism -- this refers to the weakening of religious faith in modern times, explaining all of reality in terms of matter only
the 'Blackwood' review of Keats -- John Keats was an English poet of the early 19th century; his poetry received a very negative, some would call it 'unfair,' review in Blackwood's magazine. Keats is now recognized as one of the greatest poets in world history. Ambrose is suggesting that the bad review was motivated by hatred of Keats' goodness.
Hierarchs of Tophet -- lords of hell
rapture -- being mentally or spiritually overwhelmed by something
transcendent -- reaching for something above the level of ordinary life
surpass -- go beyond
faculty -- mental ability
generically -- by category
analogy -- a comparison of two structures or processes
miner ... puddler ... 'tiger man' -- here Ambrose is talking about a category of human beings, men who are not what he would call cultivated, who act purely on feeling and instinct, a little like animals.

quart or two -- of beer. Ambrose is imagining a rough working man who gets drunk one night and murders his wife.

gulf -- here means a very great distance or separation.
flagrant 'Hobson Jobson' -- obvious nonsense, meaningless talk.
Juggernaut and Argonaut etymologically related -- etymology is the study of where words come from and how they develop. "Juggernaut" and "argonaut" both have "naut" in them, which might make someone think these two words are related to each other, but, in this case it's just a coincidence. Ambrose is saying that we should be careful not to assume that things are connected just because they look alike.

theologian -- someone who tries to come up with logical systems to explain and justify religious beliefs.
pieties -- simple religious lessons.
disputant -- a debater.
hobnails of the murderous puddler -- Ambrose is comparing two irrelevances; the particular characteristics of the shoes (hobnails) of the crude working man who kicks his wife to death are irrelevant to any consideration of his evil, and the dates and other historical details in the Bible, are just as irrelevant to the higher truths Ambrose is interested in.
esoteric -- something is esoteric if it has two meanings, one for outsiders and others for insiders, people who have been taught how to interpret deliberately hidden meanings.
occult -- secret.
infernal -- from hell, the inferno.
supernal -- from above, heaven.
pedal pipes of the organ -- church organs have foot pedals as well as keys, and the pedals play the very deep bass notes; these notes were sometimes hard to hear because they were so low in pitch, but you could still feel the vibrations caused by the organ.
Apostle -- one of the original followers of Jesus.
deduce -- figure out from logically from a few ideas, rather than by gathering evidence.
preamiss -- plural of "premise" ... logic deduces conclusions from given ideas called premisses.
personage -- a person.
St. Paul -- one of the Apostles.
Sir Galahad -- one of the Knights of the Round Table, with a special reputation for faith.
capital company -- very pleasant to have around.
de Maupassant's tale -- refers to a story called "Who Knows?" by French author Guy de Maupassant, in which the narrator sees his furniture come to life and walk out of his house one night.

inanimate -- not alive, something that never had life.
ascent -- upward movements.
descents -- downward movements.
Tophet -- hell.
antiquarian -- someone who studies old things, especially the fading traces of past generations in his or her own society.
paleontologist -- someone who studies very ancient things, before mankind.
pterodactyl -- a winged dinosaur.
dabbled -- dabbling in something is like adopting it as a hobby or pastime, nothing serious.
venerable -- very old.
sash -- the part of the window that you raise to open it.
maimed -- badly injured, disfigured.
purulent sloughing -- infected and oozing pus.

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Questions

Answer each of the following questions in 1-3 sentences:

1.) What does Ambrose mean by "common life"?
2.) Ambrose says the saints and sinners eat dry crusts (of bread) and drink water with great joy. Dry, plain bread and water are not delicious; they are very plain. Why would saints and sinners take great joy in eating and drinking such plain fare? Why is Ambrose talking about bread and water?

3.) Ambrose is against the "teetotal sect" and gives his visitors whiskey. In this paragraph, Machen is showing us something about Ambrose by what he says -- that he doesn't agree with the "teetotal sect" -- and also by what Ambrose does. What do you notice about what Ambrose does in this paragraph, and what does that tell you about him?

4.) Ambrose draws a distinction between sin and the kinds of actions that are called sin. He says: sinful acts are to sin what the alphabet is to great literature. What is the relationship of the alphabet to great literature? Put sinful acts and sin into that same relationship.

5.) Ambrose describes sin, or evil, from two points of view. From one point of view, evil/sin is considered one thing, from the other point of view, evil/sin is considered in another way. What are those two points of view, and how are the two ideas of sin/evil different?

6.) Ambrose says the murderer lacks something a non-murderer has. What is the murderer missing?

7.) Ambrose associates sin with horror. When Cotgrave asks Ambrose what sin really is, Ambrose answers by asking him how he would feel if he witnessed certain strange things. What strange things does Ambrose mention here, by way of example? Ambrose says that Cotgrave, and probably anybody else too, would feel horror if he witnessed these things happening. Why would these strange events cause horror?

8.) Horror and fear don't mean the same thing. What is the difference between horror and fear?

9.) Ambrose defines sin as "taking heaven by storm." What does he mean? Explain in your own words what Ambrose thinks sin is.

10.) What is the difference, according to Ambrose, between a sinner and a saint?

11.) Ambrose says that we would recognize evil if we were "more natural." What does he mean? What is the connection between "being natural" and recognizing evil? What stops people from "being natural," according to Ambrose?

12.) Why does Ambrose tell the story of Dr. Coryn?

13.) Describe Ambrose's personality.

-- end of PROLOGUE section --
THE GREEN BOOK: Part One

Vocabulary (in order of appearance)

morocco -- a kind of leather; the book is a notebook, filled with handwriting, not a printed book.
minute -- here means "small"
Aklo letters -- an imaginary alphabet
Chian language -- Machen made this up, too, although it may refer to Chios, one of the Greek islands
Mao Games -- Machen made this up
Nymphs -- female nature spirits from Greek myths, often associated with trees and springs
Dôls -- made up word
Jeelo -- made up word
voola -- made up word
Alala -- made up word
queer -- weird
Xu language -- made up word
corn -- this refers to grain in general, not just what we call "corn"
nurse -- not a medical nurse, but a caretaker or nanny
brook -- a small stream
dismal -- something that lowers your spirits
thicket -- plants growing densely together
smarting -- hurting, stinging
stunted -- twisted, inadequately developed
voor -- made up word
voorish -- made up adjective based on voor
Deep Dendo -- made up
basin -- a large bowl or a broad bucket
Tales of the Genie ... The Arabian Nights -- collections of fairy tales
spires -- tall thin pointed towers or spikes
peculiar -- strange, unique
giddy -- dizzy
extraordinary -- unusual
nettle -- a stinging plant
for ever and ever, world without end, Amen -- the end of a commonly repeated prayer
well -- here, she means a place where water naturally bubbles out of the ground
looking in a glass -- she means a mirror
earth-children -- Machen invented this term
solemn -- serious, impressive
wailed -- crying
heathen -- pagan, pre-Christian, like the gods of the Greeks, the Romans, the Celts
tale -- a story, particularly a folk story or legend
the Court -- the public hearings held by the King and Queen
black man -- not an African, but a figure of darkness
venture not upon your life -- don't try it, or you will die
a fit -- a seizure
charm -- a spell, especially a protective spell
indistinct -- meaning the air wasn't clear
in his study -- like an office, a room filled with books, papers, a desk, etc.
dusky -- gloomy, like twilight, darkening
gulfs -- dark spaces that open wide
fairies -- European nature spirits, dating from before Christianity
brake -- a dense growth of trees; this word is not used much anymore
stag -- a deer with great antlers; stags are almost never white, so this one is very unusual
dead light -- sometimes rotting plant matter can give off a dim glow, mainly from bioluminous fungi growing on it
will-o'-the-wisps -- these are mysterious lights, about as bright as candle flames, that seem to float in the air around swamps and marshes; they were once thought to be ghosts, now there are various different scientific explanations for them; if you see one, don't follow it!
vault -- a stone cellar or basement; underground tombs can also be called vaults
gibbet-posts -- a gibbet is a wooden structure from which criminals are hung
like death -- meaning, as if it were deadly sick
blasted oak -- blasted by lightning
Tole Deol -- invented by Machen
pies -- here she means mud pies
elder and meadowsweet -- flowering plants used in traditional folk medicine
perspiration -- sweat

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Questions

Answer each of the following questions in 1-3 sentences:

1.) Machen fills the girl's story with made-up words and phrases (Aklo, Xu, voolas), and terminology (Scarlet Ceremonies, the Comedy) that are never defined or explained. What does he want the reader to think?

2.) The girl remembers a story about a woman who disappears on her wedding night. How is the girl like the woman in the story?

3.) The girl finds something in the woods, but she doesn't say what it is. Machen doesn't tell you what she found until the end of the story -- why not?

4.) The girl also remembers a story about a man who hunted a stag. How is the girl like the man in that story?

5.) When the nurse tells the girl about the meetings her great-grandmother attended on the hill, what do you think she's talking about -- why do you think that meeting was?

6.) The nurse shows the girl how to make a clay doll, but she does a great deal more than simply forming a figure out of clay. She walks around, sings, hides the doll, takes it back out again, and so on. Why?

7.) Describe the girl. How old is she at the time she's writing? What sort of place does she live in? What do you know about her family? What is unusual about her?

8.) Describe the girl's nurse.

9.) What does the wilderness symbolize in the story?

10.) The girl will often see something first one way, then another way. Find three examples of this.

11.) The girl is frightened several times, but overcomes her fear in different ways. What are some of these ways?

12.) How would you describe the girl's overall attitude toward what she's describing [ie, her "tone"]?

13.) What feelings do you think Machen wants the reader to experience?

-- end of THE GREEN BOOK: PART ONE section --
THE GREEN BOOK: Part Two

Vocabulary (in order of appearance)

gentry -- the prominent families, nobles
shib-show -- term invented by Machen
glame stone -- glame is an invented word, but it may relate to the word "glamour," which used to
mean magic power or enchantment, especially a pleasing illusion that hides a trap
for all the world -- a phrase that means something like "I swear this is true!"
begat -- was the father to
aumbry -- a wall cabinet of a kind often used in churches
Dickon -- a nickname for Richard
wan -- pale
ford -- a shallow place in a river, where it's possible to wade across
span -- length of time
Noll -- nickname for Oliver
fancied -- imagined
halsy cumsy helen musty -- this appears to be a phrase of garbled Latin and Greek combined
dinner -- lunch, the last meal of the day was called supper
turfy -- covered in thick grass
wind -- not what blows, but the verb "to wind" which means to turn
rubbish -- trash, nonsense
scolded -- accused, reprimanded
walls have ears -- an expression meaning that you're less like to be overheard outside than when
you have walls around you
copse -- a grove of trees
rapping -- knocking
stratagems -- schemes, plots
prophet -- someone who knows the future
Alanna -- made up name

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Questions

Answer each of the following questions in 1-3 sentences:

1.) How does Lady Avelin use dolls?

2.) The word "glame" is related to the word "glamour," which originally meant a pleasing illusion, often hiding a trap. Identify some illusions in the girl's stories.

3.) At the end of the story of Lady Avelin, the girl wonders if she minded being burned and if it hurt very much. Why would she wonder that?

4.) "Troy Town" and the other games the girl learns from her nurse are obviously magic spells, but the girl doesn't think of them as spells. Why do you think Machen chose to make her so naive?

5.) What is the significance of the girl's saying that she feels full of fire?

6.) Why is the girl so disturbed and anxious about what she found in the wilderness?

7.) The nurse keeps insisting that the special things she tells the girl must be kept secret. Why are these things secret?

8.) At one point, the daughter tells her father one of the nurse's stories, and he scolds her. What do you think the girl's father represents in this story?

9.) The nurse shows the girl how to turn the house upside down, and the girl plays this trick on the cook. What is the girl describing in this scene?

10.) We don't know the significance of the girl's discovery, but we can get a sense of its importance to her from her behavior. Speculate about what she has found, what she hopes for.

11.) Adam and Eve and only those who know the story can understand what they mean -- the story has a hidden meaning. What is the surface meaning, the ordinary meaning, of the story of Adam and Eve, and what do you think the hidden meaning might be?

12.) Looking into the pool for the last time, she thinks she knows who the white lady was. What does she mean?

13.) The girl lives in two worlds. What are those two worlds?

-- end of THE GREEN BOOK: PART TWO section --
EPILOGUE

Vocabulary (in order of appearance)

epilogue -- the conclusion, a wrap-up piece that follows the end of the action and summarizes what happened next
recluse -- someone who lives alone by choice
drift -- general idea
purview -- what you can see
alchemy -- the old medieval version of chemistry, which involved trying to transform one element, usually some kind of worthless metal, into gold; alchemists also tried to come up with a medicine that would give eternal life.
veritable -- real, genuine
suggestion -- refers to the idea that a person might see what they want to see "a schoolboy 'suggesting' the existence of Aeschylus to himself, while he plods mechanically through the declensions" -- English schoolboys had to learn ancient Greek, which involved memorizing many different forms of words, called "declensions;" Aeschylus was an ancient Greek poet. So Ambrose is saying that, just as a schoolboy learning the nuts and bolts of ancient Greek would not therefore suddenly imagine the poetry of a writer like Aeschylus, so it would be just as impossible for someone studying physics to come up with the idea of a nymph, or other "processes" such as are described in this story.
obscurity -- secretiveness
dictated -- ordered, demanded
sovereign -- the best
virulent -- very deadly
phials -- medicine bottles
elixirs -- medicines, especially magical medicines, like the alchemist's elixir of immortality
erroneous -- wrong
image -- in this case, a statue
desolate -- empty, barren
luminous -- glowing
Sabbath -- pagan or Satanic rituals
vouchsafed -- given, entrusted
persistence -- tendency to last, to keep going
parish -- a rural neighborhood
unabated -- undiminished, still strong
vigour -- life, power

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Questions

Answer each of the following questions in 1-3 sentences:

1.) What does Ambrose mean when says the nymphs are processes?

2.) Alchemy is the medieval ancestor of modern chemistry and physics. Ambrose only says there's some connection between alchemy and the girl's story, but he doesn't say what it is. Looking at the definition of alchemy above,
speculate about the possible connection.

3.) Ambrose says he knows that these processes are real. What does that suggest about Ambrose?

4.) What does Ambrose mean when he talks about making a key for yourself?

5.) When the girl goes missing, the servants assume that she has done something bad, but Ambrose says they are mistaken. Later, Ambrose says she could not be criticized for having done anything that people would normally call "bad." What "bad" behavior do you think he and the servants mean?

6.) Why do you think Machen introduces the topic of that "bad" behavior?

7.) Why did the girl poison herself?

8.) What do you think Ambrose means when he says she poisoned herself "in time"?

9.) The girl is found dead a year after the events she describes in the notebook. What does the interval of a year suggest?

10.) Why do you think Ambrose mentions Dr. Coryn's story about the woman who sees her child's fingers crushed by a window?

11.) Machen waits until the end of the story to tell what the girl found in the wilderness. What effect do you think he was looking to create in the reader by waiting until the end?

12.) What do you think the statue represents? Don't describe the way you think it might look, but what you think it means, what its power is.

13.) Machen deliberately doesn't explain many things in the story. What effect do you think he wanted to create for the reader by leaving out so much information?

-- end of EPILOGUE section --
-- end of QUESTIONNAIRE --