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Frustrated Redemption: Patterns of Decay and Salvation in Medieval Modernist Literature

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Frustrated Redemption: Patterns of Decay and Salvation
in Medieval and Modernist Literature

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts of the City College of the City University of New York

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Preface

“The riddle of the Grail is still awaiting its solution,” Alexander Krappe writes, the “riddle” referring to attempts to discover the origin of this forever enigmatic object, whether Christian or Folkloric,¹ yet “one thing is reasonably certain: the theme of the *Frustrated Redemption*” (18).² Krappe explains that the common element of the frustrated redemption theme is “two protagonists: a youth in quest of adventures and a supernatural being . . . frequently plunged into a magic sleep in some inaccessible place.” The Grail is often what needs to be discovered by the young hero in order for the supernatural being to be saved. This theme informs the interaction between these two beings, the salvation of one, the “supernatural being,” depending on the actions of the other, the “youth in quest of adventures.”

At its heart, frustrated redemption seems to be a theme concerning restoration, and the often arduous journey to achieve it. A being or object, once glorious, has fallen into decay and ruin. In stories such as Perceval’s or those of other heroes of medieval epic and romance, it can be argued that emphasis often seems to be placed on the initial decline of the “supernatural being” (with interest in what caused the fall, or why) or on the salvation achieved by the hero at the end. “Frustrated redemption,” however, appears to focus on the entire period in between: that is, on the growing anticipation and tension of one or both of the protagonists, as they strive for salvation.

¹ Weston, Jessie. *From Ritual to Romance*. Mineola, New York: Dover, 1997. 2.

² Krappe, Alexander H. “The Fisher King.” *The Modern Language Review* 39.1 (1944).

As the following chapters will attempt to demonstrate, the theme of frustrated redemption applies not only to the Grail legend, but also to many other stories and elements of medieval literature—as well, it may be argued, as to a good deal of other literature. Especially, perhaps, this yearning for healing, and the frustrated discouragement of prolonged expectation, seems to be a sentiment profoundly applicable to the Modernist era.

Standards of technological innovation, morality, and industry were shifting dramatically in the wake of World War I. Modernists earned their name in part because they rejected the outdated, genteel values of religion, art, and other cultural institutions in favor of a modern and reinvented post-war world. The Modernist writer's self-conscious break with traditional styles of writing, and the restructuring of artistic narrative that followed, created an interest in and a need for new forms of expression. Despite their apparent rejection of seemingly old-fashioned prose and poetry, many Modernist writers drew on themes, mythological symbolism, and motifs of medieval literature for inspiration, even as many Modernists openly acknowledged doing so.³ Interestingly, it was precisely medieval literature, created several centuries earlier, that seemed to resonate with many writers—in part, perhaps, due to the theme of what Krappe was to call frustrated redemption. As Linda Pratt notes, “The Modern writer's need for myth [was] acute in a society which lack[ed] any cohesive belief or coherent design of

³ As in T.S. Eliot's notes on *The Waste Land*, from “The Waste Land and Other Poems,” edited by Helen Vendler. New York: Signet, 1998. 51.

its own.”⁴ After the War, many felt that Western society had experienced a decline and that it had become engulfed in a tense expectation of salvation.

T.S. Eliot suggested that in drawing from the medieval period, writers could “[manipulate] a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity” that gave “a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.”⁵ To the innocent reader, it might easily have seemed that the medieval period, with its chivalric code and possibly archaic language, was old-fashioned and out-of-date. Yet when suffused with the sensibilities of Modernism, allusions to medieval literature felt fresh—“new,” as Ezra Pound was to argue in his exhortation to Modernist writers to “Make it new.”⁶

The chapters that follow are therefore intended to illuminate the strong connections of symbols, ideas, and themes between two seemingly random time periods—the medieval and Modernist. The plight of the Fisher King and his deteriorating kingdom in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval* is reflected in the poetry of Hope Mirrlees, Nancy Cunard, and T.S. Eliot, who wonder whether salvation can be found in the modern wasteland. Parzival, a young Knight of King Arthur’s Round Table, must undergo a series of increasingly intimate, soul-searching tests to prove himself worthy of completing his quest for the Holy Grail—even as Ezra Pound experiences, as I hope to show, a comparable hero’s journey in his poem

⁴ Pratt, Linda Ray. “The Holy Grail: Subversion and Revival of a Tradition in Tennyson and T.S. Eliot.” *Victorian Poetry* 11.4 (1973): 307-321. Print. 307.

⁵ Eliot, T.S. “Ulysses, Order, and Myth.” *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*. Ed. Frank Kermode. New York: Harcourt, 1975. 177-8.

⁶ Pound, Ezra. *Make It New*. London: Faber and Faber, 1934.

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, in which he mourns the spiritual and intellectual decline of his society and yearns for the return of the purest forms of beauty and classical forms of art. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Ernest Hemingway challenges previously held notions of the permanence of death, fate, and time, all of which are similarly confronted in legends of King Arthur's messianic return to rule England. The stories and poems resorted to in these chapters thus pursue a journey from decay to salvation, and the frustration in between, perhaps clarifying Eliot's declaration, "Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method."⁷

⁷ "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," cited previously, page 178.

The Legend of the Fisher King and the Search for the
Modern Grail in *The Waste Land*, *Paris*, and *Parallax*

In his notes on *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot cites Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*—a book tracing the origins of the legend of Holy Grail and the Grail quest—as one of the chief sources for the title, plan, and “a good deal of the incidental symbolism” of his poem (51). King Arthur, courtly love, and the elusive Grail feel miles away from Modernism's post-World War I milieu, but these two worlds find common ground in the wasteland motif. *From Ritual to Romance* explores various aspects of the legend of the Holy Grail, including the injury of the Fisher King, the subsequent deterioration of his land, and the quest of the hero to restore both. Weston's exploration of these ideas helps elaborate the larger theme of decay and redemption found in both the medieval legend and Eliot's work. Indeed, the wasteland motif proves so helpful when interpreting *The Waste Land* that it naturally invites comparison with other Modernist poems. Hope Mirrlees' *Paris*, published in 1919, and Nancy Cunard's *Parallax*, published in 1925, both join the conversation with Eliot's *Waste Land* about society's moral decay after World War I. These poems channel symbols, motifs, and themes of the Fisher King and Grail legend, allowing for a further exploration into the pattern of decay and redemption.

As he is traveling home to visit his mother, the eponymous hero of Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* encounters a wide river and two men in a boat in the middle of it, one of them calmly fishing. Perceval asks, “Gentlemen, tell me, if you please, / Is there a bridge across / This river?” (3013-15). The man fishing

replies that there is none, offers him lodging for the night, and directs him to “The house I live in” (3034). After only moments of being unable to find the house, the young knight exclaims,

“What am I hunting, up here?
 Such a stupid waste of time!
 May God heap infinite shame
 On the man who sent me here!
 He told me that when I reached
 The top of this cliff I’d see
 The house he lived in! Fisherman,
 Every word you said
 Was a lie, and you said them all
 To make me miserable” (3041-50).

Soon afterwards, however, he spots this man’s magnificent “house,” and learns that “From there to Beirut there was nothing / Lovelier or better built” (3053-4). The young knight immediately reverses his tone,

Swearing, now, that the man
 Who’d sent him had guided him well.
 He was full of praise for the fisherman,
 No longer calling him cheater
 And trickster, disloyal, a liar,
 Since he’d found his lodgings
 (3060-65).

Perceval's quick shift from overblown frustration to selfish content (he curbs his complaints only when "he [finds] his lodgings") demonstrates his immaturity and foreshadows the irresolution that he will demonstrate when confronted with the Grail. In her book *The Education of the Hero in Arthurian Romance*, Madeleine Cosman comments on his immaturity: "Many of Perceval's actions would not appear folly if they took place in the forest. But Perceval's rustic standards which are sufficient for the forest are absurd for the court" (58).

As Perceval sits down to dinner with the fisherman, a servant enters the hall carrying a white lance. From the top of the lance falls a "drop of blood / That roll[s] slowly down / From the iron point until / It reached the servant's hand" (3196-3202). Perceval watches this happen—yet

kept himself from asking
 What it might mean, for he'd never
 Forgotten—as his master at arms
 Had warned him, over and over—
 He was not to talk too much.
 To question his host or his servants
 Might well be vulgar or rude,
 And so he held his tongue (3205-12).

A bleeding lance would itself be mystery enough, yet later, a "beautiful, elegant, / Extremely well dressed girl" enters holding a "grail-dish" which glows so bright that "the candles / Suddenly seemed to grow dim, / Like the moon and stars when the sun / Appears in the sky" (3222-30). A palpable "atmosphere of awe and

mystery” surrounds the “enigmatic Vessel” (Weston *Ritual* 130). According to romance writers, the Grail was something “secret, mysterious and awful, the exact knowledge of which was reserved to a select few, and which was only to be spoken of with bated breath, and a careful regard to strict accuracy” (Weston 131).

The young knight does not ask about the beautiful girl or the grail-dish—in marked contrast with his earlier impetuous outburst when he cannot find the fisher’s home. The dinner goes ahead, and “With every course, the grail / [Is] borne back and forth, / Uncovered, plainly visible / And still [Perceval does] not know why” (3300-03). Chrétien observes,

And the boy watched them, not daring
 To ask why or to whom
 This grail was meant to be served,
 For his heart was always aware
 Of his wise old master’s warnings.
 But I fear his silence may hurt him,
 For I’ve often heard it said
 That talking too little can do
 As much damage as talking too much
 (3244-3252).

One might think that Perceval is doing well in remembering the teachings of his tutor, Gornemant, who a few pages earlier has told him,

“Nor should you let yourself

Talk too much, or gossip.
 Whoever talks too much
 Is sure to say something
 That someone will find offensive.
 Wise men declare, over
 And over, ‘Too much talking
 Is sinful’” [1648-1655]).

In fact, the *Perceval* story seems to present his obedient behavior as an example to follow. Cosman points out, however, that “Chrétien’s characterization of the naïve hero depends for its excellent humor upon the incongruity inherent in good advice well followed by the wrong person in the wrong place . . . the child’s penchant for questioning the unknown suffices for the simple problems of appearances in the forest but not, when superficially censored, for the high mysteries of the Grail. Chrétien’s hero, then, suffers not from natural witlessness but from circumstantial ignorance” (58-9). What Perceval does not know is that his fantastical, mysterious confrontation with the Grail transcends the rules that Gornemant has outlined for him. His immaturity causes him to misinterpret the scene and bungle a clearly important moment.

By this point, indeed, the Grail has been presented to Perceval multiple times, but his “circumstantial ignorance” and “thoughts of his master / . . . kept him from speaking” (3295-6), and the story picks up from here:

Although he wished to know
 He told himself he’d surely

Make some safe inquiry
Before he left; someone
Would tell him. He'd wait until morning,
When he was taking leave of the lord
Of this castle and all who served him.
And so he postponed his questions,
And simply ate and drank (3304-12).

He foolishly sacrifices the asking of a question for the pleasures of the meal, about which Chrétien ominously remarks, “And so he stayed silent too long” (3299). By the end of the meal, the king says, “My friend, / It's time we went to bed / . . . I cannot walk, / So they'll have to carry me out” (3338-3344). The young knight is surrounded all evening by objects and people prompting him to speak—the king even refers once more to his injury and inability to walk—but ultimately Perceval does not ask any sort of question.

The next morning he awakes to discover that his possessions have been left out for him to take, and that no servants are present to assist him with dressing. The doors are locked, he is ignored, and his horse is saddled. The sumptuous benefits of wealth, which he enjoyed so fully the night before, are now denied him, because he has exhibited no awareness that he has entered a wasteland awaiting salvation.

Eliot, Mirrlees, and Cunard believed that the moral and spiritual wasteland after World War I was also in need of redemption. In their opinion, commonly held traditions and beliefs seemed to be declining in a post-war age; sensibilities

had been dulled and a great many people did not care about the classic values of the past. The trauma of the war affected the literature that emerged as these three writers (among many others) meditated on the illness of society and longed for it to be healed. Mirrlees' *Paris* presents a series of observations and images the speaker—perhaps Mirrlees herself—makes and sees while on a nighttime walk. The Tuileries, the Etoile, the Champs Elysées, and other landmarks of Paris are all included in the poem, whose lines often end in ellipsis as the speaker wanders:

Secrets

exquisite significant

fade plastic

Of the XIIIth Duchess of Alba

Long long as the Eiffel Tower

Fathoms deep in haschich

With languid compelling finger

Pointing invisible Magi

To a little white Maltese:

The back-ground gray and olive-green

Like le Midi, the Louvre, la Seine . . .

Of ivory paper-knives, a lion carved on the handle,

Lysistrata had one, but the workmanship of these is

Empire . . .

Of . . . (40-54).

These lines are fantastical, almost nonsensical, presenting a pastiche of impressions of a crowded city struggling to maintain meaning after the loss of so many lives. To end the segment with “Of . . .” is to demonstrate a mind on a journey, even a quest, to fully represent a city altered by war. The ellipsis seems to represent a moment of silence as the speaker struggles to articulate everything she is taking in around her. *Paris* is a relentlessly allusive visual poem which uses white space, word placement, and font size to reflect the barrage of sights and sounds of Paris—something that language cannot always express.

The opening lines immediately establish the poem as a collection of fragments of advertisements, landmarks, general metropolitan chaos, and overheard conversations in a war-torn city:

NORD-SUD

ZIG-ZAG

LION NOIR

CACAO BLOOKER

Black-figured vases in Etruscan tombs

RUE DU BAC (DUBONNET)

SOLFERINO (DUBONNET)

CHAMBRE DES DEPUTES

Brekekekek coax coax we are passing under the Seine . . .

Vous descendez Madame? (2-14).

The words in capitals refer to a now non-existent Paris subway line, a cigarette company, shoe polish, and a cocoa advertisement, respectively. The next series of

lines in caps are a series of subway stops. This blow-by-blow account of how the speaker makes her journey, even down to tracking the stops she passes on the metro, indicate a literal journey through Paris.

Her observations run on in the same way:

It is pleasant to sit on the Grand Boulevards—

They smell of

Cloacæ

Hot indiarubber

Poudre de riz . . .

Never the catalepsy of the Teuton

What time

Subaqueous

Cell on cell

Experience

Very slowly

Is forming up

Into something beautiful—awful—huge”

(197-231).

Her notice of the everyday (in this case, the Grand Boulevards, something that can be observed by anyone on the street) initiates a train of thought that blossoms into references to the Teutons, a Germanic tribe whose women killed each other rather than serve the Romans as slaves. The end of the excerpt above, however, noticeably builds up into “something beautiful—awful—huge.”

She have here be referring to the workers' strike in Paris in 1919, during the peace conference also held there that year. The conference turned the city into a global capital of sorts. The lines "The first of May / *Thereis nolilyofthevalley*" (234-258) indicate not only the lack of pure beauty in wartime, but also the literal absence of the traditional selling of the flower on May Day, a day that instead erupted in violent clashes between police and protesters. Additionally, the "*Thereis nolilyofthevalley*" line seems to be another example of the strong visual component of Mirrlees' poem: the line looks like a flower, with "The first of May" at the top acting as the bud, while the stem is made up of the single-lettered vertical progression of the words "There is no lily of the valley," like this:

The first of May

T
h
e
r
e
i
s
n
o

and so on. This visual arrangement may also refer to the line of demonstrators, who paraded to disastrous effect. In his book *Paris and the Spirit of 1919*, Tyler Stovall estimates that roughly 300 demonstrators and 400 police were injured in the riots on May Day that year, while two demonstrators were killed (168). Regarding the significance of May Day in 1919, he continues, "The events . . . provide a rich symbolic repertoire for the shifting nature of working-class politics and identity in Paris at the end of World War I" (167). The conflict would have

been well known to Mirrlees, who divided her time between Paris and the United Kingdom. Regarding its atmosphere, when national unrest coincided with international attempts at peace, Stovall asks, “How can one explain, in a nation preparing to celebrate victory after four long years of war, this eruption of revolutionary sentiment? . . . the war might be won, but times were still hard and the specter of . . . revolution beckoned” (260).

Mirrlees appears fascinated with this juxtaposition: in a single city, violent protests occur side-by-side with a Peace Conference officially concluding the war (the treaty of Versailles was signed less than two months after the May Day strike). The lines immediately following the “Lilyofthevalley” pattern are notable: Mirrlees writes, “There was a ritual fight for her sweet body / Between two virgins—Mary and the moon / The wicked April moon” (259-261). “Her” could refer to Paris itself, where conflict blossomed as the city attempted to rebuild its identity after World War I. The two beings fighting for her “sweet body” are the Virgin Mary, the traditional, even safe entity embodied by the police quelling the demonstrators on May Day, and the ethereal moon, the more radical, passionate presence representing the working class. Regarding this working class, Stovall comments, “The May Day riots provided a dramatic representation of the Parisian working class as a symbol of disorder, chaos, and danger” (168). Perhaps Mirrlees would have wished to side with the working people, yet she calls their symbol, “The wicked April moon.” Additionally notable is the fact that only a few lines later (and in some prints of the poem it mirrors the placement of “The wicked April moon” line on the page) Mirrlees writes, “Whatever happens, some day it

will look beautiful” (286). This is a line full of hope, much different from its appearance a page earlier, possibly condemning the protestors as “wicked.” The speaker, and perhaps Mirrlees herself, alternates between optimism and despair, making it initially unclear whether she feels that society can recover from the atrocities of the war.

This alternation continues throughout the poem. In her observations, the speaker takes note of the unpleasant along with the beautiful:

And petites bourgeoises with tight lips and strident
voices are counting out the change and saying *Mes-*
sieursetdames and their hearts are the ruined province
of Picardie

They are not like us, who, ghoul-like, bury our friends
a score of times before they’re dead (189-194).

She depicts “petites bourgeoises” (middle-class women) as people whose hearts have been attacked like Picardie, a city in northern France that was the site of over one million casualties. Perhaps because of the hardships they have suffered, their voices are “strident” as they continue in their day-to-day duties. This aggressive depiction of rebuilding life after war is juxtaposed with “us,” who “bury our friends a score of times before they’re dead.” “Us” could be a number of people—poets, pessimists, expatriates, or others who forego the staunch insistence of the Parisian middle-class women. Instead they mourn the loss of friends and family who are enlisted to fight, perhaps before they’re even dead. This observation of

the Parisian population is an example of Mirrlees looking in on Paris from the outside, imbuing her speaker with flaneuse-like qualities of observation.

The *flaneuse* (the French word for “saunterer,” or “stroller,” the male version of the word being *flaneur*) is a character Charles Baudelaire calls “the lover of universal life” who “moves into the crowd as though into an enormous reservoir of electricity” (102). Use of the word “electricity” communicates the idea that a flaneuse is an active member of society instead of an aimless wanderer. Quietly contemplating and processing the images she comes across, the speaker manages to be fully present in the moment while simultaneously disappearing into it completely. Baudelaire compares a flaneuse to a “mirror as vast as [the] crowd; to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which with every one of its movements presents a pattern of life, in all its multiplicity, and the flowing grace of all the elements that go to compose life” (105). The double role the flaneuse plays, at once enveloped within and quietly apart from city life, is to the benefit of the reader, who is able to access both her outward movement and inner commentary. Paris becomes the setting for contemplation, each new scene or architectural landmark catalyzing a new series of reflections, such as:

We went to Benediction in Notre-Dame-des-Chaps,

Droning . . . droning . . . droning.

The Virgin sits in her garden;

She wears the blue habit and the winged linen head-

dress of the nuns of Saint Vincent de Paul . . .

Lilies bloom, blue, green, and pink,

The bulbs were votive offerings

From a converted Jap

An angelic troubadour

Sings her songs

Of little venial sins.

Upon the wall of sunset-sky wasps never fret

The plums of Paradise (377-391).

Initially, this reference to the Virgin Mary seems again to represent only a strict religious ideal, much like the police quelling the protesters on May Day. Yet just as the speaker does her duty by attending Benediction but is bored during the “droning,” Mary sits in her garden, playing her part and wearing the proper attire like she is supposed to, but possibly bored as well. The speaker looks at the brightly colored votive candles, then focuses on the color purple in the “plums of Paradise” line. Purple is a color commonly associated with Lent, which occurs during the six weeks before Easter. Lent is designated for the preparation, repentance, and self-denial of the believer, awaiting the rebirth that will come on Easter in celebration of Christ’s resurrection. Mirrlees’ poem could also be seen as a type of Lent—a time of preparation for the rebirth of a world recovered from World War I. Through this lens, the poem is a penitent prayer, and the city of Paris is personified as a person struggling to repent after it committed the “sin” of war. The expectation and hope of rebirth is linked to the image of the flaneuse, who also embodies the idea that the land is (possibly inextricably) connected to the way it affects those living on it.

The Fisher King's fate is likewise closely tied to his land—either both are saved together, or neither are. Therefore, Perceval's Grail quest is to rescue both the Fisher King and his land. In *From Ritual to Romance*, Weston writes,

The main object of the Quest is the restoration to health and vigour of a King suffering from infirmity caused by wounds, sickness, or old age; . . . and whose infirmity, for some mysterious and unexplained reason, reacts disastrously upon his kingdom . . . This much seems certain, the aim of the Grail quest is two-fold; it is to benefit (*a*) the King, (*b*), the land. The first of these two is the more important, as it is the infirmity of the King which entails misfortune on his land, the condition of the one reacts, for good or ill, upon the other; how, or why, we are left to discover for ourselves" (19).

She goes on to explain that the king's desolate land has been treated by many scholars as secondary and subordinate to the main elements of the story (Perceval's background, for example, or his subsequent adventures after encountering the Fisher King). On the other hand, she points out, the 'wasting of the land' occurred long before the quester even appears. It is a failure that precedes Perceval's failure to ask any sort of question. The wasteland is a long-standing component of Perceval's world, and Weston argues it is an element that needs to be recognized as lying at the very heart of the legend:

This is a point which has hitherto escaped the attention of scholars; the misfortunes of the land have been treated rather as an accident, than as an essential, of the Grail story, entirely subordinate in

interest to the *dramatis personae* of the tale, or the objects, Lance and Grail, round which the action revolves. As a matter of fact I believe that the 'Waste Land' is really the very heart of our problem (60).

James G. Frazer's book *The Golden Bough* supports this belief by relating the common practice of many countries and religions throughout history to associate rulers with nature and the surrounding land. This in turn will assist in a greater understanding of the significance of the Fisher King's injury and its tie to his land. The practice of connecting rulers with nature finds origin in the ancient belief in a benevolent woodland spirit that makes the crops grow, withholds rain, "makes the herds to multiply," and blesses women with offspring (Frazer 70). Frazer goes on to cite ancient Indian, African, European, and Cambodian rituals to appease and worship the tree-spirit (such as placing coins on a felled tree stump, offering sacrifices to a tree, sprinkling goat's blood on a tree before cutting it down, dipping a tree branch in water, and more [63, 65, 67]).

While this spirit was originally believed to reside in trees, the belief progressed to the point that trees came to be viewed "no longer as the body of the tree-spirit, but simply as its dwelling-place which it can quit at pleasure . . . as men quit a dilapidated house" (62-5). Frazer continues, "As soon as the tree-spirit is thus in a measure disengaged from each particular tree, he begins to change his shape and assume the body of a man, in virtue of a general tendency of early thought to clothe all abstract spiritual beings in concrete human form . . . But this change of shape does not affect the essential character of the tree-spirit" (Frazer

66). The tree-spirit in human form came to be as venerated and worshipped as when it was housed in a tree. In springtime traditions and customs of medieval Europe and earlier (99), “the spirit of vegetation [was] often represented both by the May-tree and in addition by a man dressed in green leaves or flower” (Frazer 86). As the tree- or vegetation-spirit increasingly came to be represented by a single person in these spring festivals and feasts, the “leaf-clad person” was called the “May King, Whitsuntide King, Queen of May, and so on,” implying that “the spirit incorporate in vegetation is a ruler, whose creative power extends far and wide” (90).

Of this examination of European folk-custom, Frazer concludes, “We have seen that the living person who is believed to embody in himself the tree-spirit is often called a king [or King of the Wood]” (106). In linking the Fisher King’s injury to the state of the surrounding land, Chrétien de Troyes was drawing upon a vast mythological and religious precedent.

The King of the Wood’s relation to the titular “Golden Bough” only further confirms the ruler’s (and thus the Fisher King’s) connection to nature and vegetation. The Golden Bough refers to an Italian folk custom: if one were successful in pulling down a branch from a special golden tree in the sacred forest of Nemi (modern Riccia in central-southern Italy), he would have the chance to fight the king who guarded this tree. The king who guards the tree has a fascinating description:

At any time of the day and probably far into the night a strange figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and

he kept peering warily about him as if every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him he held office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier (Frazer 2).

If triumphant in killing this king, the challenger would become the next King of the Wood. He would be viewed as an incarnation of the tree-spirit and rule the forest of Nemi, but would also possess a darkness—he would be a murderer, just like his predecessor. Also, like his predecessor, the King of the Wood's fate was tied up with vegetation—namely, the Golden Bough. Frazer writes, “his life was safe from assault so long as the bough or the tree on which it grew remained uninjured “ (107).

This knowledge from *The Golden Bough* establishes an entirely new lens through which to view the Fisher King. As a medieval interpretation of the King of the Wood, the state of the Fisher King is closely tied to the state of his land. As the incarnation of the spirit of vegetation, he could be credited with “those miraculous powers of sending rain and sunshine, making the crops to grow, women to bring forth, and flocks and herds to multiply,” and “if drought, famine, pestilence, or storms arise, the people attribute the misfortune to the negligence or guilt of their king” (Frazer 107-109). In both Frazer's opinion and the *Perceval* story, this tie between ruler and land extends to include the physical body of the king. Frazer writes,

His person is considered, if we may express it so, as the dynamical centre of the universe, from which lines of force radiate to all quarters of the heaven; so that any motion of his—the turning of his head, the lifting of his hand—instantaneously affects and may seriously disturb some part of nature. He is the point of support on which hangs the balance of the world; and the slightest irregularity on his part may overthrow the delicate equipoise. The greatest care must, therefore, be taken both by and of him; and his whole life, down to its minutest details, must be so regulated that no act of his, voluntary or involuntary, may disarrange or upset the established order of nature (110).

If the relationship between a king's body and his land is so sensitive that even the lifting of his hand could upset the "established order of nature," then it is not surprising that the Fisher King's debilitating injury between the legs has led to the desolate condition of his land.

The extent of the king's injuries are revealed in *Perceval* when the young knight enters the castle to dine with him:

Seated on a bed, in the middle
 Of the hall, he saw a handsome
 Knight with grizzled hair . . .
 He lay leaning on his elbow . . .
 The servants conducting the guest—
 One to the left, one
 To the right—led him to his host,

Who seeing them come immediately
 Greeted the boy, saying,
 “My friend, don’t be offended
 If I don’t rise to give you
 Welcome, because I can’t” . . .
 With a great effort
 The knight sat up as far
 As he could (3086-3116).

The king’s injury is so serious he can move only with “great effort,” unable even to rise to greet his guest. As established by Frazer, a wound of such severity has a disastrous effect on the surrounding countryside: Weston refers to the fallout of the injury as a “wasting of the land” (12) and “a Land laid Waste” (17). The form this waste takes is subject to interpretation—Weston explains, “either through drought, or war, there is no mention,” and later suggests that the king’s infirmity, “for some mysterious and unexplained reason, reacts disastrously upon his kingdom, either depriving it of vegetation, or exposing it to the ravages of war” (19). “Waste” here can also be defined as a waste of potential—the king, and his land, could have been (and were at one point, readers can assume) richly majestic. Instead both are deteriorating, living in squalor with no hope for salvation until the arrival of Perceval, whose appearance and question could have (and will, readers can assume, although Chrétien’s text was not completed) ushered in an overthrow of the curse and a healing of the land.

By titling his poem *The Waste Land*, Eliot explicitly draws a comparison between two wastelands: the Fisher King's, and that after World War I. He invokes the Fisher King with the lines,

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
(424-6).

This phrase illustrates the static situation of the injured king. All he can do is fish in the “arid plain” that was once his lush kingdom. The line, “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” is said from the king’s point of view. It exudes a twinge of helplessness, because the king’s injury leaves him powerless to cure himself or his decayed land. The question “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” is one without a satisfying answer; no matter how much he would like to, the king himself cannot substantially improve his land. He has to wait for someone else to bring it about—namely, the young, sometimes foolish, Perceval.

This passage reflects the helplessness Eliot could be feeling in the wake of the war and the damage it has caused. Similar to Mirrlees’ belief that Paris is attempting to rebuild a new identity after the war, Eliot feels London society needs a comparable restructuring. The depths to which humanity and technology sank during the war tossed out civilization’s entire catalogue of morals and beliefs, requiring a new set to be put in place.

No matter how much Eliot would like to see redemptive change and the healing of society, he feels the situation is left up to forces out of his control. He describes the mood of post-war London:

Unreal City,
 Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
 I had not thought death had undone so many.
 Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
 And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
 Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
 To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
 With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine (60-68).

These crowds of listless beings all affected somehow by the war (Eliot notes, “I had not thought death had undone so many”) differ from the middle-class women depicted in *Paris*, who endure despite the losses they suffered. Those in Eliot’s poem mindlessly travel to work and back, eyes fixed on the ground, clumped together like sheep following each other down King William Street. It is a bleak view of society, and one critic calls them “The dead,” saying they are “inhabitants of the modern metropolis which for Eliot has become the epitome of the desolation of the time” (Owens 5).

This “sterility in men’s relations one to another” becomes a focus for Modernists such as Mirrlees, Cunard, and Eliot (Owens 5). As in the *Waste Land*,

Paris includes an allusion to the Fisher King, which patterns the helplessness or, perhaps more fitting, the loneliness of a post-war world.

The Seine, old egotist, meanders imperturbably to-
wards the sea,

Ruminating on weeds and rain . . .

If through his sluggish watery sleep come dreams

They are the blue ghosts of king-fishers.

The Eiffel Tower is two dimensional,

Etched on thick white paper (14-15).

To Mirrlees, the Fisher King seems to become the haunter. Due to the fact that he has a lot of time on his hands, he has left the realm of legend to actively haunt the Seine in dreams. His wasteland is a nightmare that afflicts instead of inspires. Like the “Eiffel Tower” reduced to nothing but a “two dimensional” drawing “Etched on thick white paper,” the once powerful king is reduced to a bored man who cannot even move on his own.

After being kicked out of the castle the next morning, Perceval meets with Arthur’s court and the Knights of the Round Table. On the third day of his coming to court, a woman rides into court and addresses Perceval by name, saying,

What an unlucky fool!

How wrong to sit there, silent,

When just a simple question

Could have cured that rich

And noble king of his suffering . . .
 But now he never
 Will. Do you know what will happen,
 Now that he'll never be cured,
 Never be able to rule
 His own lands? Ladies will lose
 Their husbands, countries will be ruined,
 Girls will have no guidance
 And be forced to linger as orphans,
 And a host of knights will die,
 And all because of you" (4666-4684).

The condition of the once-powerful king haunts Perceval after he leaves the Fisher King's presence, as he is scolded for his foolishness in staying silent during the mysterious procession of the Grail. Cunard furthers the idea of haunting in *Parallax*, this time moving the ghosts to London. She likens the generation of World War I survivors to ghosts, wondering if they, not the dead, have become the phantoms that haunt the living:

Do ghosts alone possess the outworn decade?
 Souls fled, bones scattered— . . .
 Are the living ghosts to the dead, or do the dead
 disclaim
 This clutch of hands, the tears cast out to them?
 (Cunard 10-11).

Cunard seems to suggest that post-war survivors are such disenchanting shadows of their former selves that actual spirits “disclaim” them. Each side views the other as an empty reflection of what used to be.

Cunard returns often to the symbols and images of death, decay, and premonitions of impending doom in a poem that is darker and more grotesque than *Waste Land* or *Paris*:

Moths drift in the room,
 Measure with running feet the book he reads.
 The month is golden to all ripening seeds;
 Long dawns, suspended twilight by a sea
 Of slow transition, halting at full ebb;
 Midnight, aurora, daytime, all in one key—
 The whispering hour before a storm, the treacherous hour
 Breaking—
 So wake, wind’s fever, branches delirious
 Against a riven sky.
 All houses are too small now,
 A thought outgrows a brain—
 Open the doors, the skeleton must pass
 Into the night.
 In rags and dust, haunted, irresolute,
 Its passion cuts new furrows athwart the years (34-49).

A feeling of suspension is created with the images of moths aimlessly drifting in a quiet room, dawn dragging out, and the sea transitioning slowly from high to low tide. Midnight, daytime, and twilight all blend into one, and it is difficult to note any sort of passage of time. The sea is depicted as a hypnotic, dreamy vision that lures in viewers, but after “the whispering” and “treacherous” calm before the storm, it breaks into a delirious, disastrous mess. Suddenly a skeleton runs into the night, possibly symbolizing a thought that “outgrows a brain” and must escape into the open. The skeleton is “in rags and dust,” but it has a “passion” so strong it “cuts new furrows” across the years. Even though the thought takes the form of a skeleton—a symbol of death—it is an active, moving thing, unlike the images of blurred suspension that open this passage. Cunard hints at what this skeletal thought could be in the next lines: “Sorrow, my sister— / yet who accepts / At once her tragic hand?” (50-52) Sorrow brought about by the war, perhaps, could be the thought that outgrows the speaker’s brain and escapes into the night, a skeleton extending a “tragic hand” that no one accepts.

The other thought possibly symbolized by the skeleton is the death of true beauty and love. *Parallax* continues:

O vulgar lures of a curl!
 Tricks, catches, nimble-fingered ruffian adolescence
 Whose beauty pulls
 The will to fragments—
 Young beauty in raffish mood,
 Love to be sold,

Lily and pleasant rose,

Street lily, alley rose,

For all Love-to be-sold, who will not buy? (56-65)

Here the virtues of beauty and love are taken out into the street, among pick-pocket “ruffian” adolescents. The “young,” upcoming beauty is in a “raffish” mood, and beauty has warped into something that can pull one’s will into fragments. Love has turned into a commodity, and the pure “lily and pleasant rose” is contrasted with “Street lily, alley rose”—flowers that can grow in the street. Cunard seems to be mourning the decline of true beauty, which comes back to haunt the speaker in the forms of skeletons and ghosts.

Her disillusioned, pessimistic view of survivors in the post-war wasteland echoes a description of the king’s decaying quality of life given by a maid whom Perceval encounters:

He was wounded in battle, and so badly

Hurt, so maimed, that without

Help he can’t even walk.

A spear struck him right

Between the legs, and the pain

Is still so great that riding

A horse is impossible. And when

He needs to amuse himself

A bit, to rest and relax,

He has himself put in a boat

And sits in the bow, fishing,
And that's why he's called the Fisher
King. Fishing is his only
Distraction: every other
Sport or amusement is too painful
(Chrétien 3522-24).

Due to the wound that leaves him in agony, the king is left living in monotony and searching for distractions, much like society searching for meaning after World War I. Eliot uses the fishing motif once again to describe the all-too-present boredom and disillusionment of his time:

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him
(Eliot 187-192).

These lines illustrate not only the grotesque, fading quality of life in the wasteland (where one can only sit and muse on the tragedies of the past while fishing, something the Fisher King perhaps does), but also the fact that Eliot's multiple references to fishing are not a coincidence. Patricia Sloane suggests the Fisher King is the protagonist of the entire poem (33), giving voice to Eliot's thoughts.

This information adds new significance to the king's title as "Fisher."

Sloane suggests, not without sarcasm, that from Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* Eliot borrows "the Fisher King, his mysterious wound, the waste land over which he presides, and the question of whether the Fisher King received his name because he liked to go fishing" (33). In all seriousness, it is possible the Fisher King is not named solely for his fishing hobby. To fish is to float in a tension of expectation. It is both an active and passive anticipation, waiting with bait at the end of a fishing rod for something good to happen: the fish to bite, the quester to ask the question, the kingdom to be healed. Inherent in the king's very title is the act of expectation: he might as well be called the Waiting King.

Fishing is also not without its religious connotations: Christ tells Simon Peter and his brother Andrew that if they follow Him, He will make them "fishers of men," active participants in the search for willing followers and disciples (Matthew 4:19). However, it might be restrictive to associate the act of fishing with the Christianity narrative alone. Jessie Weston points out that while the key to better understanding the Fisher King "is to be found in the rightful understanding of the *Fish-Fisher* symbolism . . . students of the Grail literature have been too prone to treat the question on the Christian basis alone, oblivious of the fact that Christianity did no more than take over, and adapt to its own use, a symbolism already endowed with a deeply rooted prestige and importance" (*Ritual* 118). She then goes on to outline a cursory list of divine beings associated with fish: Adapa the Wise in Babylonian myth is the "Wise Fisher;" Buddha is "The Fisher" and regularly depicted in the act of fishing or holding fish; the first

Avatar of Vishnu the Creator is a fish; in Chinese Buddhism the goddess Kwanyin, the female Deity of Mercy and Salvation, is depicted either riding or holding a Fish; and the ancient Greek prophet and musician Orpheus is associated with Fish (*Ritual* 119-121, *Quest* 95). Just as with the King of the Wood folklore, Chrétien de Troyes draws on longstanding religious connotations by using the Fisher King.

Beyond his numerous associations with other Deities, the Fisher King is the embodiment of what Alexander H. Krappe calls “Frustrated Redemption,” a folk-tale theme wherein the presence of two protagonists emerge: “a youth in quest of adventures and a supernatural being... frequently plunged into a magic sleep in some inaccessible place” (18). The supernatural being typically would be more powerful than the youth, but his powers are frustrated as he is put in a space beyond his control and has to rely on another to be saved.

Elements of this frustrated redemption can be found in the works of Eliot, Mirrlees, and Cunard in their search for the quester, or hero, who would come to redeem society after the war made their surroundings a wasteland. This post-war wasteland can potentially be understood as existing both literally and figuratively. While much of the poem’s content deals with society’s cultural decay, large stretches of landscape were in reality torn up by horrific weaponry. This strengthens *The Waste Land*’s connection to the wasteland motif, because the king is faced with a similarly dull, infertile land (Weston 19). The effect of war on land is addressed in *Paris* as well. Throughout the poem, Mirrlees often personifies Paris, at one point saying, “Paris is a huge home-sick peasant, / He carries a

thousand villages in his heart” (71-2). These “villages” seem to be all the places in France destroyed in battle. Paris holds these places in “his” heart (the gender assignment here notable, since earlier in the poem Paris was a “she” that Mary and the moon fought over) as a memory for the losses suffered there, and is “home-sick” for the pre-war days of simplicity, before conflict destroyed the landscape. On the outside, Paris is a busy, growing metropolis, but in “his” heart is the memory of all the places that did not survive.

Parallax also addresses this juxtaposition between the abundance and emptiness of a city:

London—

Old.

Dry bones turfed over by reiterant seasons,

Dry graves filled in, stifled, built upon with new

customs”

(205-208).

In the early twentieth century London seemed a pinnacle of modernity—at least, until the arrival of World War I. After the war, London became “Old,” which Cunard further outlines:

Sunday’s bell

Rings in the street. An old figure

Grins—(why notice the old,

The scabrous old that creep from night to night

Bringing their poor drama of blenched faces and fearful

Hands

That beg?)

Two old women drinking on a cellar floor

Huddled, with a bearish look at the scavenging rat—

A fur-collared decrepitude peers

From tattered eyelids

That shrivel malignant before an answering stare—

Old men in the civic chariots

Parade with muffled protestations,

Derelicts spit on the young.

Oh symbol, symbol,

Indecorous age and cadence of christian bell (133-148).

Cunard uses the repetitious, familiar chimes of the bell that opens and ends this portion to ground the reader in the harsh reality she presents. None of these people are part of the young generation—there is the grinning old figure, two drinking old women in a cellar watching a “scavenging rat,” and the old men (possibly leaders in the town) paraded around to “muffled protestations.” They ignore the pealing of the church bell “ring[ing] in the street,” and at the end of the passage, “Christian” is not even capitalized—subtle critiques of the institution of religion and its post-war breakdown.

This is a grim view of London, even more graphic than Eliot’s description of the downcast pedestrians in King William Street. By crying, “Oh symbol,

This rumination turns even more troublesome in the lines that follow, when the speaker (and perhaps Cunard herself) spirals into an intense, visceral reaction to the deterioration of London:

London—

youth and heart-break

Growing from ashes.

The war's dirges

Burning, reverberate—burning

Now far away, sea-echoed, now in the sense,

Taste, mind, uneasy quest of what I am—

London, the hideous wall, the jail of what I am,

With fear nudging and pinching

Keeping each side of me

Down one street and another, lost—

Returned to search through adolescent years

For key, for mark of what was done and said.

Do ghosts alone possess the outworn decade?

Souls fled, bones scattered—

And still the vigilant past

Crowds, climbs, insinuates its whispering

Vampire-song:

(No more, oh never, never . . .) (169-186).

Sounds of war dirges, whether real or imagined, set off in the speaker an almost panicked feeling of being trapped by London—but this entrapment does not seem to be fully brought about by the city. The speaker calls London “the jail of what I am,” and his own fear seems to be what is nudging and pinching him, keeping him lost “down one street and another.” The search for redemption becomes a personal journey, spurred on by personal issues, and he searches “through adolescent years” for what was done or said to instigate this lost feeling. Readers are left doubtful this search will ever reach completion when the speaker says, “No more, oh never, never.” There is a hopelessness, and bitterness, to the near-resignation of the speaker. This passage is also notable in that it openly addresses a “quest,” similar to the one Perceval must undergo for the Grail, yet similar to the jail line, this is an “uneasy quest of what I am.” This is a journey of personal discovery for Cunard (or the speaker), and the Grail sought here is more than just the one that will heal society—it will also heal the panicking narrator.

The tone of *Parallax* often shifts quickly, much like *Paris*, from pessimistic to joyous and back again. Only one page after the panicked, soul-searching breakdown just mentioned, the speaker calls forth these images:

The south, and its enormous days;
 Light consuming the sea, and sun-dust on the mountain,
 Churn of the harbour, the toiling and loading, unloading,
 By tideless seas
 In a classic land, timeless and hot (210-214).

These lines about the sea, the rippling of light on the water, and the active churning of the harbor strike a vastly different tone than those about the drunken old women in the cellar watching a scavenging rat. They seem hopeful, not stagnant, and full of light. Yet, true to the shifting form of the poem, the next lines downplay this optimism:

Trees
 Bowed to the immemorial Mistral
 The evergreens, the pines,
 Open their fans—
 Red-barked forest,
 O vast, brown, terrible,
 Silent and calcinated
 Moonstruck, dewless . . .

The sunset's huge surrender
 Ripens the dead-sea fruit in decaying saltmarsh.
 Then brain sings out to the night in muffled thirds,
 Resumes the uneasy counting and the planning— (215-
 229).

Grotesque natural imagery juxtaposes the sublime description of the ocean written just before. At the end of this portion, the speaker resumes his “uneasy,” perhaps obsessive, counting and planning which contributed to the earlier panic. Such tonal shift, found in *The Waste Land*, *Paris*, and *Parallax*, makes it difficult to

determine whether these poets are hopeful or doubtful that civilization's quest for healing can be achieved.

Cunard acknowledges these contrasting situations of hope and doubt, saying, "deep underground / Brood the eternal things, but in the street / No whisper comes of these, no word is found" (319-321). While questions of redemption and the possible salvation of London are considered by some deep underground, the masses of people on the streets are too occupied with the act of day-to-day survival to contemplate these matters. Few have time to consider the state of the post-war world. Such burdens are reserved for writers like Eliot, Cunard, and Mirrlees. Eliot addresses this loneliness:

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.

The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,

Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends

Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are
departed.

And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors,

Departed, have left no addresses.

By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .

Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,

Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.

But at my back in a cold blast I hear

The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear

(176-186).

The speaker has been universally abandoned: the “nymphs,” or perhaps any semblance of magic left in the world, have departed. Nymphs are also referenced in *Paris*, as Mirrlees writes, “These nymphs are harmless, / Fear not their soft mouths— / Some Pasteur made the Gauls immune / Against the bite of Nymphs” (30-33). This could be a reference to the abduction of Hylas, an arms-bearer in Greek mythology who was tempted and abducted by water nymphs and never found again. The nymphs fell in love with the youth’s beauty, but Mirrlees says that since then “Some Pasteur” has created an immunity to the tempting nymphs. Nymphs embody the idea of passion, sexuality, and love—all which have deserted the speaker in the *Waste Land* excerpt. *Parallax* summarizes the elimination of nymph temptation with a possible reference to Hylas, speaking of a “Fool that was gulled by love and paid his bond— / Young love is dead” (90-1)—a further line illustrating the Modernist’s belief that classical values have evaporated in their era.

Returning to the *Waste Land* passage, the “loitering heirs of city directors” have left as well. Even the garbage typically found on the banks of a river—cardboards, cigarette butts, or another other evidence of civilization—has washed away. The speaker (possibly the Fisher King) sits in loneliness by the Thames, the river being the only object left to hear his song that will not be “loud or long.” These lines illustrate not only the loneliness felt by the injured Fisher King, but also the despair in a post-war world of modernist pessimism.

The final component of the Fisher King legend is “the task of the hero [to] *restore*” the ruler’s former glory (Weston 21). An outside party or quester—in

this case, Perceval—must acknowledge the Grail to bring about the Fisher King’s salvation. Therefore, as discussed previously, the world of the Fisher King is one of anxious waiting—truthfully, he is a victim to the actions of others. When Perceval (and readers) are first introduced to the king, they are introduced to a man engulfed in the tension of expectation. As mentioned previously, Perceval comes upon the king when he is trying to cross a river in order to visit his mother:

he saw

A craft descending the river,
 With two men on board.
 He paused, waiting for the boat
 To draw nearer, expecting
 The current would surely carry them
 Close to the bank. But instead
 They stopped dead in the middle
 Of the stream, completely motionless,
 Firmly anchored in place.
 And then the man sitting
 In the bow cast his line,
 Baited with a fish as small
 As a minnow (2997-3010).

This simple fishing scene is symbolic of the king’s static existence. Instead of moving along with the river, his boat stops “dead in the middle,” while the current rushes past him on all sides. Similarly, his life is at a standstill, where time and

progression have all but stopped. He cannot move forward with his life even if he wanted to—just as he has to wait for the fish to bite his small bait, so does his salvation depend on waiting for an outside party. His injury causes him figurative and literal stasis (he can barely move because of the pain) while life continues on for everyone around him.

Complicating this idea of the Fisher King as a stagnant, helpless ruler is this point made by Jessie Weston: “the Fish is a Life symbol of immemorial antiquity, and . . . the title of Fisher has, from the earliest ages, been associated with Deities who were held to be specially connected with the origin and preservation of Life” (119). So, although the king is stuck while waiting for a youthful quester to appear, in folklore he represents the growth of Life and, as pointed out by Frazer earlier, vegetation.

The conflict between Life and stasis is one Eliot explores as well. Section IV of *The Waste Land* is titled “Death by Water,” a juxtaposition inherent in the title due to the fact that water often brings life and growth, yet here it causes death. The section reads:

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
 Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
 And the profit and loss.

A current under sea
 Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
 He passed the stages of his age and youth
 Entering the whirlpool.

Gentile or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
 Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you
 (312-321).

Phlebas is a sailor who is now decaying in the ocean. A single current “picked his bones in whispers”—actually, an oddly cleansing ritual—and he passed through “stages of his age and youth” as his body slowly deteriorated. Like the Fisher King, he was once in a much better period of his life—that is, alive, and “handsome and tall as you.” Eliot even turns the gaze back to the readers, those who “turn the wheel and look to windward,” implying that they are sailors just like Phlebas. In doing so, he points out that anyone could end up like Phlebas. Both the young sailor and the Fisher King have fates closely tied to the water: the king spends a great amount of time on the water because “Fishing is his only / Distraction” (Chrétien 3522-23), while it is Phlebas’ final resting place.

In the midst of this tension between decay and redemption it must be remembered that, in actuality, fishing and water are not the King’s final fate. What can save the king is the Grail, and the hero is the only one who can access it by asking a question. It is in this final element of comparison, however, that comfortable parallels between the three Modernist poems and the medieval legend lose their footing a bit. Who—or what—is to play the part of the hero for society after World War I? What is the modern Grail, and where is it to be found?

Eliot could possibly be suggesting that a spiritual and emotional rebirth is the healing society needs. R.J. Owens posits, “The poet is sickened by the realities

of his time and years to escape from them, but at the same time he thirsts for a renewal of life” (3). The dual yearning for both escape and renewal overlap, influencing Eliot’s view of what form a modern Grail could take. He concludes the poem with these words:

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih (433-4).

The three words *Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, and *Damyata* are Sanskrit for “give,” “sympathize,” and “control yourselves,” respectively. Their use as solitary sentences, followed by the repetition of “Shantih” three times (which Eliot translates in his notes to “the peace which passeth understanding”) almost creates the feeling that they are being said as instruction, or a mantra, to calming effect.

Yet these words are still problematic—the line right before this couplet is, “Hieronymo’s mad againe” (432). Hieronymo is a character in Thomas Kyd’s revenge play *The Spanish Tragedy* who emerges as protagonist once he discovers his son has been murdered. His erratic behavior, inner turmoil over the ethics and methods of seeking revenge, and Machiavellian transformation over the course of the play leads him to lose his sanity, bite his tongue off in order to maintain his silence, and ultimately kill himself. George Williamson equates the repetition of “shantih” with Hieronymo’s mad ravings (154), and in fact, the repetition of the final lines of *The Waste Land* echo the repetition often used by Hieronymo in the play, as in this moment:

Behoves thee then, Hieronimo, to be revenged.

The plot is laid of dire revenge:

On then, Hieronimo, pursue revenge,

For nothing wants but acting of revenge (Kyd IV.iii.27-30).

A reference to Hieronimo is a gruesome and puzzling way to end a poem, especially when the reference is immediately followed by Sanskrit words typically associated with peace and prayer, and possibly changes the way readers should view the last two lines.

Regarding the repetition of “Shantih” at the end of Eliot’s poem, K. Narayana Chandran argues that even a perfunctory knowledge of the Hindu tradition shows that “a reader might find nothing more devastatingly ironic in the whole poem” than this last line (681). In order for the chanting of the “shantih” mantra (said three times) to officially benedict Vedic recitations, it must be preceded by the mystic syllable *Om*, the supreme symbol of Brahman and in fact “the only means of meditation” in Vedic cosmology (Chandran 682). Eliot’s notes on the translations of “datta,” “dayadhvam,” “damyata,” and “shantih” demonstrate his understanding of the “shantih” mantra, and it can be inferred he would have been aware of the importance of *Om*. Chandran states, “As a poet whose ear was ever so finely attuned to the resonances of the Word, Eliot could hardly have missed the mystical nuances of [this] Hindu Word” (682).

With this knowledge, it’s suddenly glaringly obvious that *Om* is missing from the last line of the poem, yet the rest of the mantra is there. Chandran ingeniously suggests, “Eliot’s propriety in severing *Om* from “shantih” rests on the fact that in a poem that offers little more than non-essences in “broken images,” *Om*, the quintessential source of all order and harmony in life . . . does

not and cannot find a place. Distraught and divided, the personages in *The Waste Land* can neither meditate in *Ōm* nor utter it” (683). The half-hearted attempt to mimic a Hindu prayer mirrors the hollow, barren wasteland that society has become and its disinterest in accurate classical knowledge. This culminates in “a medley of half-heard echoes . . . The poet’s irony in matching “shantih” with the mind shoring fragments and the tongue raving imprecations is hard to miss: “shantih” here is not so much wished as wished for” (Chandran 683). Fragments of hope do exist in *The Waste Land*, as evidenced by moments like the invocation of sacred Sanskrit used in Vedic recitations. Yet Eliot’s modernist, ironic sensibilities and disgust at society hinder him from fully leaning towards optimism. His exclusion of *Ōm* illustrates just how far gone he believes society is, and how much healing is required.

Paris contains feelings of disillusionment, monotony, and decay as well. By inviting readers on her midnight walk, Mirrlees could be demonstrating that she also is seeking emotional and spiritual healing—a journey just as much as her physical journey through the city. Several lines indicate she could be in search of political healing as well: as mentioned earlier, the Paris Peace Conference is not far from her mind, and she irreverently references many political and religious figures. One of the key players in the Peace Conference was President Woodrow Wilson, who does not escape her irreverence:

President Wilson grins like a dog and runs about the
city, sniffing with innocent enjoyment the diluvial
urine of Gargantua (125-127).

She likens the actions of the war to children playing in the streets:

Little boys in black overalls whose hands, sticky with
play, are like the newly furled leaves of the horse-
chestnuts ride round and round on wooden horses till
their heads turn (23-26).

A few pages later, she mentions the Catholic Church, saying,

During the cyclic Grand Guignol of Catholicism
Shrieks,
Lacerations,
Bloody sweat—
Le petit Jésus fait pipi (131-135).

Catholicism is equated with the Grand Guignol, a theater in Paris that specialized in graphic horror shows. Even Jesus is satirized: the French translates to “The Baby Jesus went peepee.” This passage is notable because it is a humorous parody of a church that Mirrlees actually references often in the poem. Lent, the Virgin Mary, saints, and Catholic rites and iconography are all mentioned and used as symbols in her poetry, and she even gives an account of a boring trip she takes to Benediction at Notre-Dame (377). In undermining these institutions, Mirrlees demonstrates her awareness of the political and religious atmosphere after the war. Catholic values seem tired and irrelevant in a modernizing world. She is mimicking the way others might view these traditional establishments—a commentary on the declining morals of society.

Like Eliot, though, Mirrlees includes both ridicule and hope in her poem. Various clues hint at a hope for regeneration. Along with her irreverent pokes at religion and politics, she writes,

Hidden courts

With fauns in very low-relief piping among lotuses

And creepers grown on trellises

Are secret valleys where little gods are born (73-76).

Far away from the outdated stateliness of Notre-Dame's rituals or the halls and rooms of the Paris Peace Conference are quiet "hidden courts" and "secret valleys" of the average Parisian. This is where the real living of Paris happens. Ivy creeps on trellises and low-relief fauns watch as families and individuals make their living. This is another instance in which Mirrlees ponders the individuals that make up the city (another one being the moment she notices the middle-class women mentioned previously in this paper), emerging as "little gods" who will hopefully contribute to a generation better than the current one.

After walking through the night, the poem ends with these quiet thoughts at sunrise:

The President of the Republic lies in bed beside his
wife, and it may be at this very moment . . .

In the Abbaye of Port-Royal babies are being born,

Perhaps someone who cannot sleep is reading *le Crime et le
Châtiment*.

The sun is rising,

Soon les Halles will open,
 The sky is saffron behind the two towers of Nôtre-Dame
 JE VOUS SALUE PARIS PLEIN DE GRACE (435-442).

Even though the poem is spent in a constant, even noisy chronicle of history, sight, and travelogue, the speaker shifts her focus back to the present as the sun rises. She focuses on the individual, a tactic that seems to give her hope for humanity, because even the President of the Republic must be having a quiet moment with his wife. Babies—“little gods”—are being born, and she wonders if someone is reading *Crime and Punishment*. These moments are not earth shattering, or even of great importance to anyone outside the small circle of respective participants in each scene. In spite of this, Mirrlees posits that perhaps society could do with more of these quiet, special moments rather than the decay and destruction that came before.

Not by accident, the plot of *Crime and Punishment* mirrors the outcome Mirrlees hopes for Paris. After committing a murder, the proud former student Raskolnikov endures a torturous, harrowing psychological journey of guilt and paranoia. It is not until the epilogue, after he has confessed his crime and is serving his sentence in Siberia, that he begins to feel remorse for his actions and begins his journey of moral regeneration. Dostoevsky writes,

[Raskolnikov] did not know that the new life would not be given him for nothing, that he would have to pay dearly for it, that it would cost him great striving, great suffering. But that is the beginning of a new story—the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual

regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life (542).

The passage above marks the end of the novel while marking the beginning of Raskolnikov's new life. His journey from degeneracy to redemption mirrors not only that of Modern society after the war, but of the Fisher King.

The speaker envisions the les Halles food market opening for the day and notices the color of the sky. The final sentence of the poem is—in capital letters, significantly—“JE VOUS SALUE PARIS PLEIN DE GRACE.” This line translates to “Hail Paris full of Grace,” a play on the typical Catholic prayer pleading for the intercession of the Virgin Mary. Although this is another reference to the Catholic Church (readers have seen the way Mirrlees treats this institution in other places in the poem), its mention here feels more reverent, even anthemic in capital letters, than satirical.

Parallax also searches for redemption, yet as discussed previously in this paper, in a tone much darker than either of the other two poems. A focus on death, the grotesque details of quotidian life, and nervous near-paranoia permeate the poem. The speaker seems to have almost entirely given up hope in finding any sort of spiritual healing. Along with the deterioration of values and quality of life is the deterioration of any kind of meaningful relationship with others:

‘Think now how friends grow old—
 Their diverse brains, hearts, faces, modify;
 Each candle wasting at both ends, the sly
 Disguise of its treacherous flame . . .

Am I the same?
 Or a vagrant, of other breed, gone further, lost—
 I am most surely at the beginning yet.
 If so contemporaries, what have you done?
 We chose a different game—
 But all have touched the same desires
 Receded now to oblivion'
 (118-128).

This is a focus on the inevitable fact that the “brains, hearts, [and] faces” of friends grow old and change over time—alterations possibly brought about by the trauma of the war. Instead of this change being positive, though, the speaker sees it as a slow, unavoidable waste—a “candle wasting at both ends.” The speaker views the passage of time as “sly,” but also worries if everyone around him is “wasting at both ends,” he could possibly be, as well.

Cunard interjects to answer the speaker’s question with an observation:

See now these berries dark along the hedge
 Hard as black withered blood drawn long ago
 Whose sap is frozen dry; a windy sedge
 Hides field from ashen field, pale lapwings go
 Whining above the heath, . . .
 His life is a place like this, just such a place.
 For him no house, but only empty halls
 To fill with strangers’ voices and short grace

Of passing laughter (322-332).

Emptiness is a prominent theme of *Parallax*, first introduced earlier in this chapter with the passages of empty rooms and forgone cellars housing scavenging rats. In the passage above, Cunard first introduces images of decay in hard, unripe berries, likening them to gruesome, dried blood “drawn long ago.” Ashen fields, whining birds, and frozen, unforgiving sap are all vestiges of a land laid waste—one can imagine these could even be elements in the Fisher King’s wasted kingdom, as well.

She establishes these warped images of nature and says, “His life is a place like this, just such a place.” The speaker, whose thoughts readers have had access to for pages now, actually has a life as empty as the halls of home filled only with the echoes of strangers’ laughter. His ordinary life is a shell of his former one, and the poem suggests that, especially after the war, there might not be a way to fill the emptiness:

This thin edge of December

Wears out meagerly in the

Cold muds, rains, intolerable nauseas of the street.

Closed doors, where are your keys?

Closed hearts, does your embitteredness endure forever?

(149-153).

Perhaps there can be no positive answer to the questions posed at the end of the excerpt. Like the poems by Eliot and Mirrlees, *Parallax* rapidly shifts between

hope and resignation. At the poem's end, a figure introduced earlier in the poem returns:

—And at last, before me . . .

The articulate skeleton

In clothes grown one with the frame,

At the finger-post waiting,

aureoled with lamentations.

'Hail partner, that went as I

In towns, in wastes—I, shadow,

Meet with you—I that have walked with

recording eyes

Through a rich bitter world, and seen

The heart close with the brain, the brain crossed

by the heart—

I that have made, seeing all,

Nothing, and nothing kept, nor understood

Of the empty hands, the hands impotent through

time that lift and fall

Along a question—

Nor of passing and re-passing

By the twin affirmations of never and for-ever,

In doubt, in shame, in silence.'

(585-603).

Recall that towards the beginning of the poem, a “thought [outgrew] a brain,” took the form of a ragged skeleton, and escaped into the night. This paper suggested the skeleton represents the sorrow felt at the deterioration of love and beauty. Since then, that sorrow has only grown, becoming “articulate” and fully outfitted, no longer in rags. It stands haloed in “lamentations,” bringing nothing but unfortunate news. The skeleton has watched civilization with “recording” eyes, documenting the moments of humanity’s failure.

Emptiness, a recurring theme of the poem, is returned to again as this articulate skeleton speaks of hands that lift “along a question” only to be brought back empty and “impotent.” These hands could be those of Cunard, Eliot, Mirrlees, or the Fisher King, lifting and pleading towards the question of regeneration. Despite a growing sense that this regeneration might not ever arrive, the hands have a pattern: every time they fall in despair, they ultimately lift again, indicating the faint persistence of hope.

“My burden threatens to crush me”: The Transformative Power of the Hero’s
Quest in *Parzival* and Ezra Pound’s *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*

The path from decay to redemption is found not only in the vast wastelands of T.S. Eliot and the Fisher King, but also in the more intimate landscape of the soul. For the eponymous hero of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival*, what begins as a naive boy’s straightforward quest for the Grail quickly morphs into something infinitely more profound—even life-changing. The esoteric and otherworldly nature of the Grail requires, and even demands, entrance into his soul, as if peeling back layers to expose his very core. Several hundred years later, Ezra Pound undergoes a quest of his own (or so it can be shown to be) in the poem *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. *Mauberley* is Pound’s response to a post-war civilization suffering from materialism, consumerism, and the dismissal of valuable artistic texts. Ronald Bush describes the poem as “a funeral elegy, hoping against hope to discover the core of creativity that survives death” (57). Pound uses, among other poetic devices, multiple voices (his own, and of a poet named Mauberley), references to Greek mythology and epic literature, the juxtaposition of negativity with hope, and images of crass wealth to express his frustration with his poetic failure and World War One as a betrayal by civilization. That both a medieval knight and a skeptical Modernist can experience similar quests for their respective Grails may signal the surprisingly strong connection that these two seemingly disparate time periods have to each other.

Although he is in pursuit of something less tactile than Parzival's Grail, Pound's journey to "resuscitate the dead art / Of poetry" ("E.P." I 2-3) presents both personal and spiritual challenges to a man who vacillates between feelings of self-loathing, self-reflection, and striking out "against nearly everything he finds wrong with modern society" (Cebulski 146). Due to the tragedies of the war and the lack of artistic appreciation, the world around Pound is deteriorating and in need of salvation.

Parzival is equally ill-fitted, at least at the start, to the society of his day. Wolfram's story opens with the boy living with his mother in the rustic "wilds of Soltane, cheated of a royal style of life in all things" (71). He is a *dümmling*, described by Madeleine Cosman as "guileless and ingenuous . . . [knowing] nothing of knowledge or restraint" (50). Yet over the course of his journey for the Grail, Parzival matures as his weaknesses and desires are tested in painful ways. These weaknesses and desires, and the ways in which they are challenged, are significant: the young Parzival must develop knightly skills—such as humility, compassion, a greater sense of identity, and the power of recognition—to become worthy of the Grail. These traits are all part of his initiation ceremony—a transformative quest which culminates in his ascension to a position beside the Grail King.

Pound undergoes his own trials in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, bogged down by the complex disillusionment of his day and lacking the clear-cut, outlined course of Parzival (who has the object he must obtain paraded right in front of him, thus erasing any doubt for everyone, including readers, as to what his final

goal is, and what it looks like). *Mauberley* begins with a line from the Roman poet Nemesianus, which reads, “*Vocat æstus in umbram*”—loosely translated as, “The heat calls us into the shade.” Even with these few opening words, the pattern of decay and redemption is established: the torment of oppressive heat causes one to seek salvation in cool and welcome shade. This situation is mirrored in the oppression Pound faces and documents in the first half of the poem, experiencing the “heat” Nemesianus writes about. Calling his persona “E.P.,” he views himself “born / In a half savage country, out of date” (I 5-6) with his time and yearning for the beautiful artistic tradition of the past.

He is frustrated not only with the lack of appreciation of classical poetry and art (calling society a “botched civilization” [“E.P.” V 4]), but also with modern society’s entry into what he believes is a “senseless” war. Pound’s is an artist’s journey that begins with dismay at the betrayal of society with its shallow, decaying tastes. However, it is doubtful if this journey ultimately reaches the same level of salvation as does Parzival’s, because it is unclear what E.P.’s ideal “redemption” would actually be. Three possible scenarios are each as likely (or unlikely) as the next: he could accept the inevitability of society’s cultural downfall, live and write in hermit-like defiance, or crusade to correctly realign a general ideology in favor of a renewal of the classical tradition. It is left up to the reader to conclude which of these three triumphs in the end.

Complicating matters further, however, is the introduction of the character of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley halfway through the poem. Critics have disagreed over whether Mauberley is simply another manifestation of Pound/E.P., or a

completely different character. Stephen Adams argues that “there is no necessary reason to summon a speaker other than ‘Pound’ at any point in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*” (159). William Spanos submits that the voices in *Mauberley* are “unified,” but that “the key to this unity resides precisely in the irregular orientation of the point of view” (75). In a letter to a friend, Pound himself once declared, “I’m no more Mauberley than Eliot is Prufrock” (letter to Felix E. Schelling, 180), yet it is a tricky matter to distance the two when the voices are coupled in the same work. Due to the uncertainty of speaker and tone, Pound’s Grail is much harder to define than Parzival’s for many reasons—recall again that the knight has the Grail presented to him at the beginning of the book and there is an uncertainty of speaker and tone of *Mauberley*, but beyond that, the medieval grail has a long tradition full of meaning and mystery behind it. Establishing what form Pound’s Grail takes is an important element of the overall journey of “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley”—as is whether or not he ultimately achieves it. It cannot be automatically assumed that Pound’s quest ends successfully, which is yet another way in which his narrative differs from Parzival’s. This difficulty—of defining and achieving a meaningful artistic quest—mirrors the skepticism and disillusionment of many of Pound’s Modernist contemporaries.

Although it is clear that Parzival is meant to seek the Grail—unlike Pound’s more undefined goal—the nature of the Grail is not as clearly indicated. Wolfram’s Grail is an enigmatic object, with a mind and will seemingly of its own. Take, for example, the Grail’s method of choosing those to serve as its caretakers: “Under the top edge of the Stone an Inscription announces the name

and lineage of the one summoned to the glad journey . . . as soon as a name has been read it vanishes from sight!” (Wolfram 240). Fleeting in its pronunciations, the Grail is a living, opinionated object. *Parzival* makes it clear that its hero was fated to find it. According to Parzival’s uncle Trevrizent, “No man can win the Grail other than one who is acknowledged in Heaven as destined for it” (Wolfram 239). Jessie Weston in *From Ritual to Romance* adds to this atmosphere of mystery surrounding the miraculous object:

There is a secret connected with it, the revelation of which will entail dire misfortune on the betrayer . . . none can hearken to the recital [of the Grail] without shuddering, trembling, and changing color for fear . . . to the romance writers the Grail was something secret, mysterious and awful (130-1).

If the Grail is a unique object, it comes with unique requirements that only Parzival can develop or fulfill—and perhaps not right away. It will take him years to meet the requirements that the Grail puts forth.

His first Grail comes as he eats with a king at his magnificent castle. This king, Anfortas, has endured a battle injury, inflicted years ago, which left him “suffering such agony that knights and maidens both [hear] his frequent cries . . . his wound was beyond all cure” (Wolfram 392). Due to his daily pain, Anfortas cannot sit up straight or fully lay down—he can only recline. Parzival does not know the extent of the wound as he dines with Anfortas. As they eat, the Grail is paraded back and forth in front of them in a grand but oddly quiet and mysterious

spectacle. This marks the first time that Parzival sees the Grail, putting into motion events that will alter the course of his life.

Parzival is deeply curious about the ceremony before him, yet because of a mentor's warning to avoid impudent curiosity, holds his tongue. Yet in order for the king and his entire kingdom to be healed, all that he needs to do is recognize his situation and ask the king a question about the spectacle. A single utterance will unleash the restorative waters, allow "the [king] of sorrows be released from living death" (Wolfram 134), and unlock healing powers for an entire kingdom. Little does the young knight know that he has stumbled upon a kingdom anticipating the arrival of its hero—it is interesting to speculate on why this specific act of speech is the task that the grail requires of Parzival. The entire household is engulfed in a tension of expectation, waiting for Parzival to ask a question that ultimately goes unasked that night.

Parzival's silence also demonstrates a moment of *zweifel*. Wolfram opens the book with the sentence, "If vacillation [zwivel] dwell with the heart the soul will rue it" (15). Unfortunately, this vacillation and doubt (or *Zweifel*, in modern German) is exactly what Parzival feels as he sees the Grail for the first time.

Regarding the pivotal moment of the Grail's procession (it is the turning point of the story), Wolfram writes, "When [Parzival] chanced upon the Gral, his joy and sorrow were staked on one throw, with his eyes, no hand, and no dice" (131).

Fortuitous and subject to fate, the outcome of the Grail quest is risky and fleeting. Parzival exhibits *zweifel* instead of uttering a single word.

While Parzival is unaware of the massive failure of his silence, Ezra Pound is all too aware of his failure as a poet. As mentioned previously, the first half of *Mauberley* is written from Pound's perspective, or that of "E.P." The section is called "Ode Pour L'Élection de Son Sépulchre," or "Ode on the Selection of His Tomb." This is a macabre beginning, made even more so by the fact that the page looks like a tombstone, with the title emblazoned at the top like the name of someone departed. Pound begins by outlining all the modern betrayals, as part II reads,

The age demanded an image
Of its accelerated grimace,
Something for the modern stage,
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace,

Not, not certainly, the obscure reveries
Of the inward gaze;
Better mendacities
Than the classics in paraphrase! (1-8)

He feels out of touch with his age, which demands something "modern" and nothing "Attic" (or having to do with Athens and ancient Greece). Pound fills *Mauberley* with references to classical authors that he believes his peers have abandoned—Dionysus, Heracleitus, Sappho, Samothrace, the Muses, Pisistratus, and Apollo—all of which are cited in the first three sections of the first half of the poem alone (about fifty lines). The "inward gaze" or self-reflective poetry which

Pound favors (and writes himself) consists of reveries too “obscure,” and would yield too many unwelcome and painful truths. The world would rather hear “mendacities” than anything that could condemn them—a sentiment especially powerful after the atrocities committed during World War One.

E.P. displays a tone of disgust as he recounts that his age would rather have—is, in fact, “demanding”—a “mould in plaster” rather than “alabaster” or the “‘sculpture’ of rhyme” (“E.P.” II 9-12). Plaster is a thin, cheap material that can be mass-produced, unlike the more permanent, yet more difficult to work with, alabaster. Pound sees society as settling for the quick, easy fix of commercialized art instead of the beauty of something more meaningful and lasting.

He goes on to bemoan his contemporaries in another segment of *Mauberry*, “Mr. Nixon.” He describes sailing “in the cream gilded cabin of [Mr. Nixon’s] steam yacht” and receiving advice that perfectly exemplifies civilization’s preference of plaster to alabaster. Mr. Nixon is a writer with his own newspaper column, and advises Pound how to achieve a similar level of success:

“I was as poor as you are; . . .

Follow me, and take a column,

Even if you have to work free.

Butter reviewers. From fifty to three hundred

I rose in eighteen months; . . .

I never mentioned a man but with the view
 Of selling my own works.
 The tip's a good one, as for literature
 It gives no man a sinecure.

And no one knows, at sight, a masterpiece.
 And give up verse, my boy,
 There's nothing in it" (5-20).

Mr. Nixon has made a career by trading artistic feeling and integrity for positive reviews and selfish networking. Pound thinks he is, in short, a sellout. For Nixon, writing is only a means to a yacht or three hundred reviewers. He does not think that the sort of "literature" Pound writes will lead to a "sinecure," or the ease of a well-paying job requiring little effort. *Mauberley* indicates that others have given E.P. similar advice, such as "Don't kick against the pricks, / Accept opinion" ("Mr. Nixon" 22-3). Essentially, everyone around the author seems to have given up on, or not even entertained in the first place, the thought of creating art for anything other than money or recognition. Ronald Bush, who defines *Mauberley* as "Pound's best satire," writes that the poet's frustration is "rooted in a horror of life emptied of all that makes it worth living" (58). He is attempting to create in a sea of impersonal, "plaster" writing made only for consumption by the masses. The work of someone like Mr. Nixon does not engage in self-reflection or stem from any real emotion or thought; he writes only what people want to hear.

Pound's interaction with Mr. Nixon is an important part of his search for the "Grail," which also offers readers a clue to what form his Grail might (or might not) take. He is repulsed by Mr. Nixon's money-driven mentality, enough to want to retreat from it altogether. This seems to suggest that of the three possible paths mentioned at the beginning of this paper (accept civilization's decline, escape society and watch its downfall, crusade in the hopes of getting society back on the right track), Pound is considering the second as best. He writes about the run-down dwelling he would live in, away from society:

Beneath the sagging roof

The stylist has taken shelter,

Unpaid, uncelebrated,

At last from the world's welter

Nature receives him;

With a placid and uneducated mistress

He exercises his talents

And the soil meets his distress.

The haven from sophistications and contentions

Leaks through its hatch;

He offers succulent cooking;

The door has a creaking latch (X 1-12).

As a “stylist,” he is “unpaid” and his work is “uncelebrated,” and he escapes into nature and away from the “world’s welter.” The imagery shows that he escapes to live in a shack in the woods. It is distance he is seeking, a vantage point from where he can watch the world (figuratively) burn. His “Grail,” in this case, would be a Thoreau-like refuge in nature. However, several key words and specific lines indicate that this Grail is faulty, and his flight would not be a glamorous one: the roof sags, the hatch leaks, and the door creaks. He would receive, at best, a “placid and uninterested mistress.” This could either be a literal girlfriend unimpressed by his talent, or the “mistress” of nature herself, who kindly receives him but is not able to offer any feedback or appreciation of his writing.

The phrase “the soil meets his distress” also has a tone of warning—in meeting his distress, the soil could be alleviating it, yet the word could also mean the soil is rising to, or matching, his level of distress. The lines do not strongly point to one meaning more than the other, but when coupled with the images of a deteriorating living space and a less-than-attentive mistress, the overall sense is that Pound feels conflicted about the idea of fleeing society and living alone in nature. This realization is a setback in his hero’s quest for salvation, which will come in a form yet to be discovered.

Parzival also experiences a setback, starting soon after the Grail is paraded before him. After dining with King Anfortas and remaining silent during the Grail procession, he awakes the next morning to find the castle deserted. After dressing himself (an essentially unheard of way to treat a guest in this time), he barely

crosses over the drawbridge before it is pulled up, shutting him out. A page from inside the castle calls out to him, “You silly goose! Why didn’t you open your gob and ask my lord the Question? You’ve let slip a marvelous prize!” (Wolfram 131). Significantly, this is the very first instance—of many—in which others reprimand Parzival over the soon-to-be infamous events of the night before. Here the hero begins to suspect that something went awry during dinner—although he still does not know what. Wolfram observes, “Trouble is now rousing him to wakefulness” (131).

Before the Grail encounter, Parzival had been living life as a silly young boy. His mother has sheltered him, keeping him ignorant of the violent world of knights and the Round Table. He has been unused to any sort of trouble—especially the deeply emotionally sort of trouble that the Grail quest was going to bring. Being scolded by a castle page shakes the proud Parzival’s entire world, but he needs to be jolted out of his pampered stupor and awakened to a sense of sensitivity and compassion—traits that the Grail requires of him. The young knight fails in the task he still did not quite know he had. After the slipup, the true seriousness of his failure will slowly be revealed to him.

To enlighten Parzival to the seriousness of his failure, there arrive two very different women, both of whom also play significant roles in his eventual pursuit of the Grail. The first of these is Sigune. Soon after being thrown out of Anfortas’ castle, Parzival encounters her: he has met her once before. It is significant that she is the first person he happens to see in his long, as-yet-unrealized journey back to the Grail. Parzival first met her soon after leaving his

mother's house to become a knight. When Sigune asks his name, he replies that the only thing he has been called is "Bon fiz, cher fiz, bea fiz" (Wolfram 81). Sigune suddenly and without warning replies: "Upon my word, you are Parzival! Your name means 'Pierce-through-the-heart'" (Wolfram 81). This is a crucial moment on his journey, because when one knows his name—his real name, not just "Bon fiz, cher fiz, bea fiz"—he seems to be provided with his identity. He has a place in the world; he has a way to recognize and be recognized. Parzival takes a huge leap not only on his Grail journey, but also for himself, simply by learning his name. He is able to look at the world through the eyes of "Parzival," not just a nameless boy.

Sigune also tells Parzival a great deal about his lineage (during which she identifies herself as his maternal cousin), adding another element to his sense of identity. She teaches him about his father, Gahmuret, who was a great warrior of Angevin, and his mother, Herzeloyde, who is actually a queen. In declaring herself his cousin, she helps him realize that he has other family besides his mother, expanding his world view.

When next Parzival meets Sigune, as previously mentioned, he does so very soon after his bizarre encounter with the unknown object. It is not long before she finds out that he has been with Anfortas at Munsalvæsche, and did not ask him the question. Her subsequent horror at Parzival's foolish silence echoes that of the page's back at the castle: "You witnessed such great marvels! To think that you could not be bothered to ask in the very presence of the Gral! . . . You live, yet as far as Heaven's favor goes you are dead!" (Wolfram 135). Here again,

within minutes of his first reprimand at Munsalvæsche, is the second time that Parzival is rebuked because of the question he has failed to ask. He still does not realize his destiny to retrieve the Grail, though, and is confused by his cousin's admonishment. After Sigune's scolding, Parzival merely replies, "My dear Cousin, do be a little kinder. If I have done amiss in any way I shall make amends" (135). This response—a trite apology for something he does not understand—demonstrates that he does not yet have a sense of how grave has been the mistake which he has committed.

To compare his trivial apology to Sigune with one that appears later in *Parzival*: after years of wandering and the slow realization that finding the Grail is his fate that he may have missed out on forever, Parzival is directed to a holy man on Good Friday. The man gives him food and lodging, and they discover that he is the young knight's maternal uncle, Trevrizent. Their conversation will be returned to later, but Parzival's poignant confession of his failure at Munsalvæsche stands in stark contrast to that which he offered Sigune:

My dear lord and uncle, if shame would let me reveal it I would tell you of a sad misfortune that befell me. I beg you of your courtesy to pardon my misdeed . . . I have erred so greatly that if you assent to my being punished for it, farewell to consoling hope: I shall never be freed from sorrow. . . The man who rode to Munsalvæsche and saw all the marks of suffering and who nevertheless asked no question was I, unhappy wretch! Such is my error, my lord (Wolfram 248).

Here Parzival demonstrates stunning humility—such a difference from the “If I have done amiss in any way I shall make amends” line he has given to Sigune. The raw honesty and emotion in his confession to Trevrizent demonstrates an understanding of the nature of the Grail quest that he has not possessed in earlier years. Another important point in this exchange is his willingness to reveal his error. Trevrizent has been speaking of the rumor that someone has actually made it all the way to the Grail without asking the question—but he has not known that he was talking about Parzival. Parzival, meanwhile, could have concealed this information and remained silent, as with Anfortas. However, with regrets of remaining silent at that earlier juncture in his life, he confesses to his uncle. Parzival has developed the boldness and skill to know when to speak up on critical matters.

Parzival encounters Sigune one more time during his journey. In this final interaction, he demonstrates a maturity and depth previously displayed with Trevrizent. Once each realizes who the other is (they seem not to recognize each other every time they meet), Sigune asks, “Tell me, how have you fared with regard to the Gral? Have you at last got to know its nature?” (Wolfram 226). Her question about the “nature” of the Grail speaks to the fact that it is a living object. According to its inscription, stewards and caretakers—and it has revealed Parzival as the one destined to be king of the Temple of the Grail. He has to become acquainted with it and its nature just as one meets and learns about another human being. His response to his cousin’s question illustrates how much his quest has affected and changed his life. “I have forfeited much happiness in that endeavor,”

he says. “The Gral gives me no few cares” (Wolfram 226). Regarding his failure years ago, he says, “I acted as an ill-starred man . . . I should mourn your sorrows”— Sigune lost a beloved suitor—“did I not bear a greater load of suffering than ever any man bore. My burden threatens to crush me” (226). This excerpt demonstrates how acutely Parzival feels the weight of his responsibility and how deeply he cares about his success.

Parzival’s interactions with Sigune may add meaning to his journey, and upon an initial reading, Ezra Pound’s conversation with the yacht-owning “sellout” Mr. Nixon seems much less instructive. However, when explored further, this might not actually be the case. Pound views his conversation with Nixon as formative enough in his artist’s journey to include it in his poem, almost as a signal of what to avoid in a literary career. A character in *Mauberley* who has an influence on Pound similar to Nixon’s is the Lady Valentine. Just as Parzival meets women who seem to take on the role of sirens along his journey, Pound is also inadvertently instructed by women on his quest. Interestingly, the women of *Mauberley* do not specifically instruct in the manner of teacher to student as in *Parzival*—in fact, Pound learns most when he simply observes the effect of his desire for women on his writing. Of Lady Valentine, he says, “No instinct has survived in her / Older than those her grandmother / Told her would fit her station” (XI 6-8). Pound is unimpressed by this woman who is told what to do—in his mind, she reflects the “half savage country” he’s from that has no interest in personal discovery or intellect (I 6). Poetry is at the very “border of [her] ideas,” and Pound is considering “blending” classical literature into her reading list (XII

13-14). He considers it, but also remembers that with women like Valentine, “The sale of half-hose has / Long since superseded the cultivation / Of Pierian roses” (XII 26-28)—that is, even the sales of stockings are of greater interest to Valentine than the roses of ancient Greek myth. To him, this is the tragedy of women of his day: she is a modern reader who has no interest in the times that he cherishes. Recognizing that the current tastes of society, and of the women he interacts with, are not interested in and even scorn classical works is a necessary step in Pound’s journey.

The character of Lady Valentine is contrasted moments before with the image of Daphne, a Greek figure who refused Apollo’s sexual advances and manages to transform herself into a tree: “Daphne with her thighs in bark / Stretches toward me her leafy hands” (XII 1-2). Pound’s vision of an ancient, entreating woman (likely sexualized) is quickly juxtaposed with a modern female in a “stuffed-satin drawing room” (XI 3). Run-ins like this between the ancient and the modern appear earlier in the poem as well: “The tea-rose tea-gown, etc. / Supplants the mousseline of Cos, / The pianola “replaces” / Sappho’s barbitos” (III 1-4). Pound observes that plastic, plaster, and various cheap items continually replace the lush, soft images of the past, pointing to “A tawdry cheapness / [that] Shall outlast our days” (III 11-12).

The idea that Pound yearns to preserve classical art because of a romantic, perhaps even sexual attachment, is significant. It adds a new lens through which to view his hero’s quest. Readers are given clues to his ambition early in the poem, when he mentions not only Dionysus and phallic-based objects, but also

being driven to distraction by Circe's hair and the song of sirens—images that should be understood as female distractions. Furthermore, while Pound hastens to distance himself from the invented persona of the failed poet Mauberley who inhabits the second half of the poem, their sexual (and literary) failure is almost identical. It is said that “For three years” Mauberley “drank ambrosia” (“Mauberley” II 1-2). Earlier in the poem, the word “ambrosia” is associated with Dionysus in the lines “Christ follows Dionysus, / Phallic and ambrosial” (“E.P.” III 5). One possible interpretation of these lines is that he has essentially given in to his infatuation with women, and neglected his literary work, for three years. Additionally, much of Mauberley's portion seems to refer to a soprano with an oval face and a “basket-work of braids” (“Medallion” 9-10). Peter Nicholls believes that these recurrent references to love, women, and desire stress “the conjunction of sexual and aesthetic impotence,” and that a main concern of Pound's is “the relation between artistic endeavor and sexual passion . . . [namely] artistic failure with sexual temptation” (68).

Scholars have been quick to point out that at least early in his life, Pound was not successful with women, or as Nicholls observes, “This particular sense of the dangers of sexual desire may have some autobiographical basis” (71). In his biography of Pound, Humphrey Carpenter writes of the poet's long-delayed initiation into sexual activity, suggesting that his 1913 marriage was not passionate and that “the innocent Ezra was ‘devirginated’ around 1917” (332). In short, Nicholls posits, “Pound's wry presentation of his and Mauberley's sexual

inexperience suggests that writing may be some sort of defense against the ‘troubling’ and ‘exacerbation’ caused by the sudden surge of desire” (71).

Despite the stronger connection he has with ancient women than with the Lady Valentine, Pound nevertheless seeks her approval, saying, “I await The Lady Valentine’s commands” (XI 3-4). He cannot rid himself of his desire, which plagues both him and Mauberley. He writes of his anxiousness, awkwardness, and lack of courage around Valentine in a way that can be described as Prufrockian: “Knowing my coat has never been / Of precisely the fashion / To stimulate, in her, / A durable passion” (XII 5-8). Despite his lofty dreams of a return to classical values, he suffers an all-too-human insecurity: worrying about his appearance. This is one of the moments in which Pound’s exterior is peeled back, and he is forced to confront a particular insecurity. Central to his concerns are sexual failure, becoming an object of ridicule, and a consequent, inextricable artistic failure.

Parzival is unaware of the depth of his failure with the Grail until much later, but Pound invokes images and ideas of his perhaps personal failure from the beginning in *Mauberley*. He writes about being “Wrong from the start” in his attempts to “resuscitate the dead art / Of poetry,” but quickly counters this by saying, “No, hardly” (I 2-5). These two words display that in actuality, Pound does not think his poetry is a failure so much as completely out of place in his day. He is very aware of the sexual, social, and literary setbacks he faces on his quest, and the way he writes has a distinct air of metapoetic reflection: he uses the medium of poetry to comment on his poetry specifically as well as the state of

poetry in the modern, post-war world. He finds Mr. Nixon's aspirational technique disingenuous, and a modern disinterest such as the Lady Valentine's as discouraging, yet openly writes that his own approaches are not much more effective. Ronald Bush writes,

Pound intended in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* . . . to assert the value of a "quicken sense of life" and to affirm the power of romantic art to transcend culture and redeem the present. But . . . in the act of writing his attempt was resisted by emerging suspicions that poetry was itself implicated in the conditions of cultural and economic life. It is perhaps the final irony of the poem's compositional history that this reluctant recognition only amplified the elegiac power of Pound's satire (58).

Pound is learning more about the nature of poetry as *Mauberley* takes shape. In this way, the form of the poem itself, along with its content, signifies his journey. He has a growing suspicion that poetry itself may be a reason for his frustration. This realization leads him to infuse an even greater sense of irony into what he writes, which leads *Mauberley* to be full of "good satire," because, as Bush suggests, good satire causes one "to consider time wasted" (45). The idea of poetry as a waste of time influences Pound's heroic journey because he has reached an important conclusion before the poem has even begun: that what he is writing is possibly not worth the time spent on it. If he starts out with all the answers, then why even write *Mauberley*? What sort of Grail does he hope to seek?

While Ezra Pound's journey (a meta-commentary on the implications of poetry) is an internal process, Parzival's is not. Several characters are aware of and publicly provide their opinion of the knight's shortcomings and decisions. Sigune is a strong female character crucial to his journey, and Cundrie the second woman to play a significant role in his pursuit of the Grail. While different from Sigune in many ways, Cundrie also calls direct attention to Parzival's first trip to Munsalvæsche. The way she does this, however, is incredibly painful and public.

After being admonished by Sigune for failing to ask Anfortas the right question, Parzival eventually finds his way to King Arthur and the Round Table. During the feasting of the traveling party, Cundrie rides in the festivities and says to King Arthur, "You once stood high above your peers for glory, but your ascendant fame now plunges down! Your prestige, which used to go by leaps and bounds, *hobbles* at the rear! . . . The mighty reputation of the Table Round has been maimed by the presence at it of Lord Parzival" (164). After this horrifying pronouncement, she addresses Parzival, recounting his experience with the wounded king, lamenting the future of the land and his adored parents, and ultimately declaring, "You are dead to honor" (165)—all in front of a court of hundreds of people. While he still does not fully understand the reason for his guilt, he is "mortified" (166).

When a page in Anfortas's castle, and Sigune, sharply reprove Parzival for not asking the question, he offers little or no apology. They do not sway him from his other knightly adventures. Cundrie's public humiliation of him, however, is the breaking point. He is mortified enough to announce to the Table Round:

I shall never own myself happy till I have seen the Gral, whether the time be short or long. My thoughts impel me to that goal, from which nothing shall sever me till the end of my days . . . I am in great haste to take my leave of you. Whilst my reputation flourished you all gave me your company. I now declare you free till I have gained that thing the lack of which has seared my verdant joy! (Wolfram 171-2).

This is the most that Parzival has spoken out loud about the Grail to this point. While the two previous scoldings elicited a less passionate response, it is clear that their words remained in his head. In a way, then, it is actually good that Cundrie has chastised him in public. Her rebuke succeeds in prompting him to begin his quest for the Grail.

By this point, it seems, the Grail has already provided him with many major tests. Three counts of sharp and personally offensive contact (Cundrie calls him at various times a “ban of salvation, “curse on felicity,” and “the sport of Hell’s guardians” [165]), and once before hundreds of people, he still does not fully realize his guilt. Yet the Grail will continue to test the hero.

After his grand shame at the Round Table, Parzival begs leave of the knights and disappears from the story. Several chapters—and several years—pass with no mention of him (the story focuses on Gawain in the meantime) until suddenly the story swings back to him once more. Regarding the sort of adventures Parzival is involved in over the years, Wolfram von Eschenbach says, “Parzival has ranged through many lands on horseback and over waves in ships . .

. He has defended himself from discomfiture in many fierce wars and . . . spent himself in battle” (222-3).

Spending oneself in fierce wars and traveling across many lands and waters are acceptable practice for a normal knight. Parzival, however, is not a normal knight: he is destined to become king of the Temple of the Grail. Drifting in loneliness for so long without any outward signs of progress in his journey is troublesome. Although it is difficult to discern what the Grail wants, it seems that during these years the object waits because Parzival is still not ready. After the scoldings he receives from a page, Cundrie, and Sigune, he recognizes that something unfortunate happened when he did not speak up while dining with Anfortas, and that no one is letting him forget about this failure anytime soon. He gives a grand speech to King Arthur and the knights, admitting that he will never be happy until he finds the enigmatic object. He even leaves behind his wife, the Table Round, and all other aspects of his knightly life to engage in this quest. At a cursory glance, Parzival seems to be successfully completing the many requests which the Grail makes.

While he does complete necessary steps in his initiation process, he is really only at the beginning. The Grail is soon going to move inward, bringing a literal realization to the meaning of his name as “Pierce-through-the-heart” (Wolfram 81). It is difficult to change his nature and have his emotional and spiritual nature tested in such a way. The process is similar to a literal piercing through the heart. The word “pierce” is especially significant, pointing to the pain this transformation brings about in him. “Pierce-through-the-heart” is one of the

links inextricably connecting the Grail quest to Parzival. The young knight is bound to the Grail because the “piercing of the heart,” a necessary step in the journey, is inherent in his very name. This idea of a spiritual journey leading to, or being connected with, physical pain adds a new element to the theme of decay and redemption. Deterioration happens internally in the soul, or “heart,” of the hero, but the draining physicality of the journey is yet another factor leaving him in need of salvation.

There are several instances of similarly body-based imagery in *Mauberley*, reflective of the notion that the journey for the Grail transcends a spiritual, incorporeal process of transformation. An especially compelling example appears when Pound likens his journey to that of Odysseus after the Trojan War:

seeing he had been born

In a half savage country, out of date;

Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn; . . .

Caught in the unstopped ear;

Giving the rocks small lee-way

The chopped seas held him, therefore, that year . . .

His true Penelope was Flaubert,

He fished by obstinate isles;

Observed the elegance of Circe’s hair

Rather than the mottoes on sun-dials

(I 10-16).

Conjuring up images of hair, ears, and even natural elements like rocks, lilies, and acorns roots Pound's journey firmly in the familiar world of the reader. The "ears" allude to the story in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus' sailors plug their ears with wax as they sail past sirens who lure men's ships to sharp rocks. Contrarily, Pound's ears are "unstopped," causing him to be distracted from his goal and to lose focus by listening to Modern sirens. William Spanos adds,

Like Odysseus, who lingered in "chopped seas" to listen to the enticing song of the Sirens . . . forgetting in the meantime his Penelope, so the poet was drawn by the voices of the contemporary commercial sirens that promised escape from the conflicts inherent in the life of art and the "troublesome energies" they generate. The reference to the Sirens' song also suggests his attraction to the sensuous pleasure of aesthetic contemplation. Both interpretations are appropriate, for both mean the abandonment of the poet's credo (80).

His failure to focus causes rocks to hinder his journey, and he is held by "chopped seas"—both signifying failure for the earnest poet. This distraction continues when his decisions again mirror Odysseus's: he notices the elegance of Circe's hair (which Bush describes as "[devoting] himself religiously to the imitation of concrete beauty") instead of the "mottoes" typically etched on sundials ("the time honored banalities about social life that the traditionalists demanded of poets" [80]).

Comparing himself to Odysseus not only reemphasizes the extent to which Pound is lost on his quest—his failure can only be matched by someone out of a Greek epic poem—but also elevates and romanticizes his situation. He is a modern-day Odysseus, in conflict with forces that seek to hinder the artistic renaissance he wants to bring about. These points appears to contradict the point made earlier that he writes with an ironic awareness of the dwindling influence of poetry, and approaches his own poem with the conclusion that it is a waste of time. Does this new information shed any light on the question, posed previously, what journey Pound undergoes in *Mauberley*, and why he even sets out in the first place?

One possible answer comes when the poet begins to talk about the war, or, more specifically, its aftermath—one critic calls this period a time “when Pound smelled decay in the streets of London” (Sutton 15). He devotes two sections to his unfiltered, rapid-fire views on the waste of war, and few are spared his vitriol. In a poem that denounces “materialism” and “philistinism” (Bush 66-68), his language is strongest in these moments:

These . . .
 walked eye-deep in hell
 believing in old men’s lies, then unbelieving
 came home, home to a lie,
 home to many deceits,
 home to old lies and new infamy;
 usury age-old and age-thick

and liars in public places.

Daring as never before, wastage as never before . . .

There died a myriad,
 And of the best, among them,
 For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
 For a botched civilization
 (IV 13-19, V 1-4).

He begins by targeting “old men” and the “lies” they have told to engage in a conflict that would leave legions of people dead. He believes that World War I was a waste in more ways than one: in his mind, it was a waste of life (of people the poet calls “the best”), but also of resources, energy, talent, and more. In Pound’s eyes, the entire war was shrouded in lies from beginning to end: the lies of old men spurred it on, and whoever was lucky enough to survive “came home . . . to a lie,” “deceits,” “old lies,” and “liars in public places.” To Pound’s dismay, the lies of the war have lingered even after the smoke has cleared. Modern society has rejected truth (which he likens to alabaster in a world demanding “mould in plaster” [II 9]) for insubstantial matter—or, essentially, lies. He laments, “The age demanded an image / Of its accelerated grimace, / Something for the modern stage, / . . . No, not certainly, the obscure reveries / Of the inward gaze” (II 5-6). William V. Spanos calls these demands “the standard by which [Pound’s] age evaluated artistic effort and thus reveals the difficulty of serious creation . . . a

vulgar and imitative product of mass production—not the grace and dignity of classic art; titillating melodrama or propaganda, not hard, clear-cut beauty in stasis” (82). The deception of war is the point from which cultural deterioration has spread. It is the catalyst for the materialistic, shallow society of Pound’s day.

The condemnation in *Mauberley* starts on a small scale, then by degrees gains in momentum. At the opening, Pound writes about himself and his sphere of artistic endeavor. The poem then moves outward to include society and the paltry substitutes for art that “the age demanded” (II 1). By section IV, the bounds of the sphere have moved out even further, to denounce a war that involved nearly the entire world. Pound illustrates that these three domains are inextricably connected. What happened in an immoral, devastating war was created by “the corrupt and hypocritical capitalistic society that made the war,” which negatively influences the poet striving to preserve the classical traditions of the past (Spanos 83).

Throughout the rest of *Mauberley*, society as a whole is referred to only indirectly, and it is individuals or groups who Pound mentions specifically. In the war sections of IV and V, the poet points a finger directly at society, calling the guilty “a botched civilization.” He even seems to take a certain pleasure in unapologetically calling society “an old bitch gone in the teeth” that millions of lives were not worth losing over. It is these lives he sincerely mourns. The front lines of innocents, sent by old men on behalf of a botched civilization, are the only group excused from Pound’s rage. The poet seems to be spitting these words out (Spanos observes, “the sense of the speaker’s intense and genuine

commitment to his subject is reflected in the rapid and repetitious movement”
[83]), growing more and more indignant with each line:

These fought, in any case,
and some believing,
 pro domo, in any case . . .

Some quick to arm,
some for adventure,
some from fear of weakness,
some from fear of censure,
some for love of slaughter, in imagination,
learning later . . .

some in fear, learning love of slaughter;
Died some, pro patria,
 Non “dulce” non “et décor” . . .

Young blood and high blood,
Fair cheeks, and fine bodies”
(IV 1-22).

Men went to war for various reasons of their own—adventure, imaginative love of battle and slaughter, fear of censure—unaware of the “old men’s lies” that actually sent them, and ultimately led to their death. These men are in their prime, with “fair cheeks, and fine bodies,” whose talents and presence are wasted with early deaths.

Interestingly, he uses parts of the Latin saying “Dulce et Decorum est Pro patria mori” (or “it is sweet and right to die for one’s country”) in a departure from his typical use of ancient language in *Mauberry*. He often draws from classical languages (Latin and ancient Greek) to propel his images and arguments. In the war sections, however, he uses Latin to sneer at those who use grandiose and nostalgic languages and images to advance some kind of holy world war. What makes Pound’s Latin acceptable and “Dulce et Decorum Est” not, in his eyes, is the cause which each is promoting. The poet mourns the aftereffects of “Dulce et Decorum Est,” that is, the incorrect use of Latin that resulted in millions of deaths and an altered world. He uses classical allusions to illustrate his struggle (as when he compares himself to Capaneus, a Greek warrior whose overconfidence in attacking a city caused Zeus to strike him fatally with lightning) and to call his countrymen to change. The war Pound fights is poetic—not literal.

This is a significant step on Pound’s heroic journey: openly denouncing the deterioration of society and the crooked politics that led to War. Though he doubts the effectiveness of poetry as a vehicle to communicate with the masses, he uses it because the lies and deceptions of the war cannot go unpunished. Regarding the three scenarios posed at the beginning of this chapter in respect to the form Pound’s Grail will take, he is certainly not going simply to accept society’s decay. His clear horror at the way “the age demanded” a war prompts him—even forces him—to speak out and seek redemption. It is still to be seen if he does find the redemptive Grail he seeks.

Although Parzival's Grail is as clear-cut as Ezra Pound's is indistinct, he loses his way for several chapters—and several years—of Wolfram's story. When he disappears from the story for a time, it is not necessarily because he loses sight of the Grail journey so much as it seems natural for him to do so. Why, then, does the knight wander with no progress, so out of touch with the world as not even to know “when the year begins or the number of the passing weeks or what day of the week it is” (Wolfram 229)? One clue, given moments before his departure from the Table Round, explains why. In comforting Parzival after his public humiliation, Gawain says, “It is plain to me that you will not escape fighting on your journey. May God then grant you a favorable outcome” (Wolfram 172). Parzival, still in a passion of shame and anger after Cundrie, replies,

‘Alas, what is God? . . . Were He all-powerful—were God active in his almightiness—he would not have brought us to such shame! Ever since I knew of Grace I have been His humble servitor. But now I will quit His service!’ (Wolfram 172).

This is an outright rejection of God and a denial of His power. Parzival declares that he is walking away from the service of God because of the shame it has brought him. This is why he is unsuccessful after leaving on his own to search for the Grail: he no longer wants or warrants divine help. This is also a noteworthy instance of pride—Parzival thinks he can achieve the task on his own, without any sort of assistance from God. Just as he left his mother to become a knight without even turning back and regarding her feelings, he selfishly rejects God. This pride

and selfishness are the exact opposites of what the Grail requires, and Parzival suffers in his search.

For Parzival to regain his footing after the period of wandering, he needs to overcome his alienation from God. On Good Friday he meets a grey knight who is shocked that he is fully armored and traveling on horseback on such a day. He gives the hero directions to a holy man who can remit his sins—a concept Parzival has not thought about since he renounced God years ago. As Parzival travels to the holy man, feelings and realizations bubble to the surface of his reverie:

Remorse began to stir in [his heart]. Only now did he ponder Who had brought the world into being, only now think of his Creator and how mighty He must be. ‘What if God has such power to succor as would overcome my sorrow?’ he asked himself. ‘If He ever favored a knight and if any knight ever earned His reward or if shield and sword and true manly ardor can ever be so worthy of His help . . . then let Him help, if help He can!’ (Wolfram 231).

Such are Parzival’s thoughts about God. He is tiptoeing back to the realm of the God he once served. By the time he approaches the holy man, his heart is primed and open, humble enough to listen to the hermit’s teachings. This humility and newfound compassion after times of hardship lead Parzival to utter a line that once more shifts the tide of the entire story: “Sir,” he says, “guide me now: I am a sinner” (233).

As these words are uttered, several different movements are set in place. The first is Parzival's demonstration of his maturity in speaking up, a skill of utmost necessity to the Grail initiation. The second is Parzival's development of his relationship with the hermit and of a greater sense of personal identity. As the two are talking, the old man, Trevrizent, realizes that Parzival is his nephew, his sister Herzeloide's son. Trevrizent is also a brother of the Grail king, Anfortas—meaning that when he was at Munsalvæsche, Parzival was unknowingly dining with his uncle, a man suffering from the debilitating wound and living in daily, agonizing pain. He also learns that the Grail-bearer who he saw years ago in the procession was Repanse de Schoye, sister of Trevrizent, Anfortas, and his own mother Herzeloide. He is told that even his great-grandfather, Titurel, was present the night of his failure. The closer Parzival comes to the Grail, the more he uncovers about his family and, consequently, his own identity and place in that family. Parzival is descended from a long tradition of Grail kings and Grail-bearers. Becoming the next Grail king is in Parzival's blood. The third movement put into place is his ensuing tutorial from Trevrizent. He says,

Only now do I realize how long I have been wandering with no sense of direction and unsustained by any happy feelings . . . All this time I was never seen to enter any church or minster where God's praise was sung. All I sought was battle. I am deeply resentful of God, since He stands godfather to my troubles: He has lifted them up too high, while my happiness is buried alive (235).

After Parzival confesses his sins and his unhappiness, Trevrizent teaches him the nature of the Grail and its long history tied with their family. He even repeats a rumor that someone actually made it to Munsalvæsche without asking a Question, saying of the failed knight, “He went away saddled with sin in that he said no word to his host on the sad plight in which he saw him” (Wolfram 241). Little does he realize he is speaking of his very own guest, who can do nothing but sit and listen to the story of his shame repeated to him.

Parzival remains with Trevrizent a fortnight, enduring a difficult hermit-like life and eating nothing more than herbs and roots. It is noted that he “endured this hardship for the sake of the glad tidings, for his host took away his sins and nevertheless counseled him as a knight” (Wolfram 254). What a departure from his youth, such as the time he awoke at Munsalvæsche so thrown off by the fact he had to dress himself. At that time, he selfishly asked, “‘Oh, where are the pages, seeing they are not in attendance here? Who is to hand me my clothes?’ With such thoughts the warrior waited for them till he fell asleep again” (Wolfram 130). He has lazily waited as long as he possibly could for someone to come and help him, and it was only much later that he has finally given in and dressed himself. Now, he lives a humble, unglamorous life for nothing but spiritual enlightenment and Grail knowledge in return.

While Parzival undergoes a mighty spiritual conversion which transforms him into a humbler, more sincere version of himself, *Mauberley* makes a drastic change midway through by introducing an entirely new character—the person

after whom the poem is named. Pound employs an interesting variation of form for the Mauberley portion, as F.J. Cebulski notes,

The double ironic attitude allows Pound himself to step into the poem and set the background in the first section, and then to show us the effects of such a background upon the creative individual in the “Mauberley” section. The first section provides the *facts* against which we can evaluate the truth of the representation of Mauberley in the second section of the poem (147).

Essentially, Pound has set up a world in which the role and creations of poets are diminished, disrespected, and rejected. He then creates a character and places him in this decaying world, watching how he struggles, and possibly ultimately fails, in his attempts to reconcile his work with the demands of his era. Mauberley is an avatar of Pound’s, not so much a completely separate character as an echo of the poet, personifying his deepest fear of failure.

Mauberley’s portion of the poem is “the ironic self-contemplation of the ineffectual aesthete-poet” (Sutton 19), who “chance found / Him of all men, unfit” (“The Age Demanded” 1-2). Due to his growing disillusion with both the effectiveness of poetry and his own talent, he is easily distracted by women, various twinkling trappings that catch his eye, and dreams of escaping to live the rest of his life on a tropical island. He is unable to make poetic connections between a beautiful object and any sort of broader, literary thought:

The glow of porcelain
Brought no reforming sense

To his perception
Of the social inconsequence.

Thus, if her colour
Came against his gaze,
Tempered as if
It were through a perfect glaze

He made no immediate application
Of this to relation of the state
To the individual . . .

The coral isle, the lion-coloured sand
Burst in upon the porcelain reverie:
Impetuous troubling
Of his imagery
("The Age Demanded" 5-20).

Mauberley is losing his poetic talent for finding meaning in his world (the world that Pound has created for him), and William Spanos calls Mauberley "weaker" than Pound, who has a rebellious, defiant streak even as he documents his failure (73). One particular distraction in the form of a gold pattern leaves Mauberley spiraling and certain of rejection from his superiors:

The unexpected palms

Destroying, certainly, the artist's urge,
 Left him delighted with the imaginary
 Audition of the phantasmal sea-surge,

In capable of the least utterance or composition . . .

Nothing, in brief, but maudlin confession . . .

Non-esteem of self-styled "his betters"

Leading, as he well new,

To his final

Exclusion from the world of letters

("The Age Demanded" 42-61).

One purpose in writing, from Mauberley's point of view, is to further emphasize Pound's desire to comment on the evils of modern life. Here is a poet who actually wants the same thing Pound does—artistic integrity reminiscent of classical literature—but he is losing his inspiration in a deteriorating, uninspiring world, distractions of women, and dreams of escape. Walter Sutton agrees: "It is recognized that Mauberley's sensuous and subjective preoccupations have insulated him from social reality" (20). Pound is demonstrating that he is not the only poet at odds with the rest of the world. In this interpretation of *Mauberley*, there are two distinct voices at work: one is Ezra Pound's—or at least his persona, and often an ironic one at that—and one is Mauberley's. Interestingly, it is their

distinction that gives the poem unity; Hugh Kenner describes the Mauberley poems as a “coda” in which “the Mauberley persona comes to the fore; gathering up the motifs of the earlier sections, the enigmatic stanzas mount from intensity to intensity to chronic the death of the Jamesian hero who might have been Pound” (176). The fact that the two voices are different but give meaning to each other will be useful in understanding the apex of the poem, the moment when one voice ends and the other begins: the “Envoi.”

The apex of the *Parzival* story is to be found when the knight is spiritually converted under the tutelage of Trevrizent. After the difficulty of that task, the denouement seems nearly effortless. Parzival leaves Trevrizent as a changed man; he has been converted to faith in God and forgiven of his sins, and is thus closer than ever to completing his quest. After Parzival returns to the company of the Round Table, the sorceress Cundrie returns. Her appearance, however, is much different than her first:

“God is about to manifest His Grace in you! . . . The Inscription has been read: you are to be Lord of the Gral! . . . Had you known no other good fortune than that your truthful lips are now to address noble, gentle King Anfortas and with their Question banish his agony and heal him, who could equal you in bliss?” (Wolfram 387).

Where she was once the bearer of awful news, she now provides the opposite. Cundrie’s words bring up a notable point previously unmentioned in this paper. As a boy, Parzival was destined to find the Grail—that is, the Grail had selected

him just as it had selected other members of his family. This selection appeared as an Inscription on the actual Grail itself. Yet even though Parzival had the birthright and the Inscription pointing him to the throne, he took the test and failed. The offer from the Grail was withdrawn. In the following years, Parzival had to prove his worth to re-take the test already offered him once.

It has taken years, but Cundrie's announcement confirms that Parzival is ready—or really, the Grail confirms he is ready. “Tears—the heart's true foundation—streamed from his eyes, so happy was he” (Wolfram 388). He demonstrates his re-conversion at Trevrizent's, saying, “If I have been found worthy in God's eyes . . . and my sinful self and my wife and any children I have are to share in it, then God has been very kind to me” (388). After Parzival's first encounter with Cundrie, he was left angry and shamed. The second visit is vastly different, as Cundrie is the one who actually leads him to Munsalvæsche.

Before he takes leave of the knights, Parzival gives an announcement that indicates his familiarity with the nature of the Grail. He repeats to them a teaching of Trevrizent's, saying “no man could ever win the Gral by force ‘except the one who is summoned there by God’” (389). Word spreads of Parzival's proclamation and Wolfram writes, “many abandoned the Quest of the Gral and all that went with it” (389) that very day.

Those at Munsalvæsche wait joyfully “a second time for the man whose happiness had eluded him there, and for that liberating moment when his lips would frame the Question” (Wolfram 391). Anfortas would soon be put out of his misery, and Cundrie has prophesied his assured triumph. As Parzival approaches

Munsalvæsche, an entire force of Templars in full armor gallop towards him in joy, exclaiming, “Our trouble is over! What we have been longing for ever since we were ensnared by sorrow is approaching us under the Sign of the Grail!” (Wolfram 393). Once inside the castle, the knight is covered in robes of splendor and received with tears of joy by “fine old knights in number, noble pages, [and] many men-at-arms,” for “the mournful Household had good cause to rejoice at their coming!”(393).

The hero has so succeeded in his Grail initiation rites that when the time actually comes for him to frame the question, it barely needs to be asked. Parzival has proved himself ready to rise to King of the Temple of the Grail—which is why everyone at Munsalvæsche receives him with such joy. He banished the foolishness of his youth and had been reprimanded enough to learn the seriousness of his undertaking. He has heeded the teachings of Sigune, Trevrizent, and others placed along his path, and developed the humility to apply their instruction in his life. His heart had been “pierced” and his soul exposed to the painfully precise alterations the Grail needed to make. In all ways he is the living embodiment of everything the Question represents. These skills all collide in the moment Parzival’s life has been building towards, the moment when he rises to his “full height” to ask, “Dear Uncle, what ails you?” (395).

Parzival has completed his quest and found his Grail; Pound’s journey, which has been a slower, more brooding process, is nearing its conclusion. The poet has criticized the war and its puppeteers, lamented the decay of his society like a prophet exiled to the wilderness, and delved deeper into his psyche by

writing from the point of view of a failing poet. Parzival's journey was a clear ascent from failure to salvation, with the narrative directed in a straight trajectory from a starting point to a triumphant end. Pound's journey is more oblique, wandering and pausing before various ideas in a way that reflects the post-war skepticism of his era. The truest note of sincerity in a *Mauberley* otherwise perpetually laced with Modernist irony comes in the "Envoi," right before E.P.'s voice transitions into Mauberley's. The "Envoi" is the only part of the poem in italics, and Spanos believes "that in distinguishing between the "Envoi" and the other pieces, Pound is announcing that the "Envoi" is the only one in which he speaks in his own voice" (76). It suggests the feeling that the poet is coming out from behind the cover of his various voices and personas to give one statement to his readers that is stripped of irony.

Beauty is the focus of the "Envoi." Pound spends the entirety of the poem lamenting the decay of society after World War One, but pauses in the "Envoi," for a moment, to reflect that beauty is much more permanent than his passing era. He charges his "dumb born book" ("Envoi" 1)—a term of endearment in this case, not of frustration—to tell his beautiful, musical mistress that though her mortal beauty and talent may fade, they will be perpetuated in this poem. Sentiment is a risk in such a Modern, irony-driven work, and while Pound sacrifices the security of a distant persona by speaking so openly, he is, ultimately, "a modern poet" (Sutton 19), and writes truthfully of the unavoidability of death:

Tell her that goes

*With song upon her lips
 But sings not out the song, nor knows
 The maker of it, some other mouth,
 May be as fair as hers,
 Might, in new ages, gain her worshippers*
 (“Envoi” 17-22).

He juxtaposes these darker notions with an image of roses preserved in amber, which captures the simple, traditional beauty of the flower:

*I would bid [her graces] live
 As roses might, in magic amber laid,
 Red overwrought with orange and all made
 One substance and one colour
 Braving time*
 (“Envoi” 12-16).

This is a Pound who believes in the “durability of ‘Beauty’” (Scanlon 842), such as roses set in amber in a way that will outlast his mistress, himself, memories of the war, and even his generation of uninterested peers. Even though Pound will die, and he fears he will leave no lasting influence on the literary world, classical beauty will find a way to survive, “braving time” and opening up the potential to touch future generations.

There is a tenderness in the way Pound writes of his mistress and of art and a musicality in the way he closes the “Envoi” with the idea of Beauty as the ultimate redemption:

*When our two dusts with Waller's shall be laid,
Siftings on siftings in oblivion,
Till change hath broken down
All things save Beauty alone*
(23-26).

Hugh Kenner comments on the difference between the language of the “Envoi” and the rest of the poem as an indicator of Pound’s sincerity:

Seventeenth-century music, the union of poetry with song,
immortal beauty, vocalic melody, treasure shed on the air,
transcend for a single page the fogs and squabbles of the preceding
sections in a poem that ironically yearns for the freedom and power
which it displays in every turn of phrase, in triumphant vindication
of those years of fishing by obstinate isles. The poet who was
buried in the first section amid such deprecation rises a Phoenix to
confront his immolators, asserting the survival of at least this song
(176).

Pound’s care to unite his “poetry with song” in this moment signifies that this is his passion and his Grail: the redemptive power of Beauty—referencing also Keats’ ideal of Beauty and its relationship to truth. Out of the potential scenarios suggested as Pound’s ideal “redemption” (to accept the inevitability of society’s downfall, write in proud and angry defiance, or fight to save the classical tradition), the result actually seems to be an amalgamation of all three: he has accepted the possibility of society’s cultural downfall and has all but given

up on his own generation. He defiantly chooses to continue to create, however, while ultimately believing that Beauty will crawl out of the rubble. The final lines of the “Envoi” illustrate his belief in Beauty as salvation after the decay of war and artistic complacency: “*Till change hath broken down / All things save Beauty alone.*” His wandering, turbulent hero’s quest for a Grail has led him to believe in its endurance.

Hemingway, the Once and Future King, and Salvation's Second Coming

The previous chapters explore the themes of disintegration and hope for restitution as it applies to land, post-war national ideology, and the soul of a hero on a spiritual and artistic journey. This theme will now be taken into the realm of mortality, a place where decay and redemption take on higher stakes because they now deal with the actual life and death of men. King Arthur, an ancillary character at best in the previous chapters, will be the focus here, drawn from stories in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* and T.H. White's modern retelling *The Once and Future King*.

King Arthur's reign, including such auspicious events as the removal of Excalibur from a boulder and the creation of the Round Table, seems a glory that cannot last. The betrayal of Lancelot and Guinevere is the chemical reaction that catalyzes the disintegration of his kingdom and the unity of the Knights of the Round Table. In respect to Arthur's future, even after his death, Malory writes, "Men say that he shall com agayne," and inscribed on his tomb are the words "Hic iacet Arthurus, rex quondam rexque futurus" [Here lies Arthur, king once, king to be] (Malory 689). An "ancient and enduring aspect of the Arthurian legend" holds that King Arthur will return to once again lead Britain and restore the glory of his first reign (Green 240). The hint at resurrection is not too far off: while one version of the legend asserts Arthur did not die, but sailed to mystical Avalon in a transfiguration-like departure to heal from the wounds he suffered at the hands of his nephew (or son, in some versions). Mordred, in another version,

maintains that he died but that his royal return will come about through a resurrection.

Inherent in this legend, but usually not stated outright, is the waiting: a now centuries long active hope, for Arthur's return. This quasi-messianic return seems to have a strong parallel to the tension of expectation of Jesus Christ's return to Earth. *Le Morte Darthur* addresses head-on this direct association with Christ: "Some men say in many partys of Inglonde that Kynge Arthure ys nat dede, but had by the wyll of Oure Lorde Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall com agayne, and he shall wynne the Holy Crosse" (689). The tension also finds itself on familiar ground in the Modernist era. Here, the brutality of World War I is seen to match the the breakdown and subsequent upheaval of King Arthur's court, and just as England waits for its beloved ruler to reappear, so Modernist writers waited and searched for some kind of salvation after the war obliterated an entire generation. Few writers seem to have been more aware of the death of the quasi-religious ideal than Ernest Hemingway. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, which actually focuses on the Spanish Civil War, not World War I, explores loss of hope and the toll it takes on mankind in a world altered by savagery. Hemingway uses subtle symbols, such as a merry-go-round and the number three, and patterns, such as the appearance of pine needles, to hint at the coming of an improved era, or even salvation, among noisier scenes of distrust, battle, and death. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* suggests that future generations are thus not beyond saving.

Time unifies *For Whom the Bell Tolls* with *Le Morte Darthur* and *Once and Future King*—specifically, the manipulation or repetition of time. This is a theme underlying the entirety of *The Once and Future King*. In the book, Arthur’s journey from a boy of uncertain origin, Wart, to King of the Knights of the Round Table is a fantastical one—in fact, too fantastical to be maintained. From the moment he first meets the unrecognized but royal boy, Merlyn makes several prophecies about the tenuousness and ultimate end of King Arthur’s reign. He also explains why he is able to do so: “Now ordinary people are born forwards in Time, if you understand what I mean, and nearly everything in the world goes forward too . . . But I unfortunately was born at the wrong end of time, and I have to live backwards from in front, while surrounded by a lot of people living forwards from behind. Some people call it having second sight” (White 35). Essentially, Merlyn has already foreseen the series of events which will lead to Camelot’s end. This knowledge helps readers better appreciate three moments between Merlyn and Wart in the early pages of White’s book.

The first is the moment in which Merlyn first encounters Wart: “He gazed and slowly blinked at the little boy in front of him. He had a worried expression . . . His mild blue eyes . . . gradually filmed and clouded over as he gazed at the boy, and then he turned his head away with a resigned expression, as though it was all too much for him after all” (29-30). By means of his second sight, Merlyn is overwhelmed the first time he sees Arthur, because he has already experienced, or least foreseen, his death, the downfall of Camelot, and his reign (perhaps in that order). For Wart, this is his first encounter with the magician, but for Merlyn, this

is the last (because he is moving backwards in time). It is a complicated idea, and signifies one of the first instances in *The Once and Future King* in which the narrator plays with time. Past, future, present—even the title of the novel suggests the tenuous hold of time and the place these characters have in it.

In an additional note regarding Merlyn's preternatural relationship to Arthur, *Le Morte Darthur's* account tells how the wizard learns of Arthur's destiny long before he was born. He tells Uther Pendragon, Arthur's father, "Syre, this is my desyre . . . whan [your child] is borne, that it shall be delyverd to me for to nourisse there as I wille have it—for it shal be your worship and the childis availle, as mykel as the child is worth" (Malory 5). Time does not necessarily flow in one direction for these characters, and Merlyn seems to be merely one character through whom fluidity of time is expressed, especially as it relates to Arthur's life. The fact that his second sight is an acceptable phenomenon in the world of *The Once and Future King* and *Le Morte Darthur* renders Arthur's future resurrection more plausible.

A second instance in which Merlyn indicates his knowledge of future events happens during a conversation between Merlyn and Wart one night after Merlyn is instated as the boy's tutor. They are discussing the approaching knighting ceremony of Wart's master, Kay:

"If I were to be made a knight," said the Wart, staring dreamily into the fire, ". . . I should pray to God to let me encounter all the evil in the world in my own

person, so that if I conquered there would be none left, and, if I were defeated, I would be the one to suffer for it.”

“That would be extremely presumptuous of you,” said Merlyn, “and you would be conquered, and you would suffer for it.”

“I shouldn’t mind.”

“Wouldn’t you? Wait till it happens and see . . . Well, anyway, suppose they did not let you stand against all the evil in the world?”

“I could ask,” said the Wart.

“You could ask,” repeated Merlyn.

He thrust the end of his beard into his mouth, stared tragically at the fire, and began to munch it fiercely (White 181-2).

Besides chewing on his facial hair, the notable element of Merlyn in this passage is the ominous way in which he treats Wart’s questions. While naïve, Wart’s sentiment is a noble one reflecting how he will rule as king benevolently.

Merlyn’s reaction to his statement needs to be carefully watched, as it is an indication of what is to come, that he knows how Arthur’s reign will end, but that readers do not. If time can be manipulated, with someone having seen into and even been to the future who is now also in the present, who is to say that Wart could not be there too, to wit, in the present, but also resurrected and returned to the future?

Yet another statement by Merlyn also plays with time, highlighting its triviality within the context of Arthur's life. After Wart pulls Excalibur out of an anvil on top of a stone and is crowned king, Merlyn shows up, saying,

“Well, Wart, here we are—or were—again . . . I know the sorrows before you, and the joys . . . In future it will be your glorious doom to take up the burden and to enjoy the nobility of your proper title: so now I shall crave the privilege of being the very first of your subjects to address you with it—as my dear liege lord, King Arthur.”

“Will you stay with me for a long time?” asked the Wart, not understanding much of this.

“Yes, Wart,” said Merlyn. “Or rather, as I should say (or is it have said?), Yes, King Arthur” (White 209).

The difference between this example and the two provided earlier here is that at Arthur's coronation, the magician makes pronouncements about his future, while earlier he offers cryptic statements and dismal glances. Merlyn calls Arthur's burden as king a “glorious doom” and mentions the sorrows that he is doomed to experience as king.

Merlyn's prophetic statements and advice constantly appear in *Le Morte Darthur*—in specific, direct statements similar to the statement made at Arthur's coronation above. Merlyn counsels his protégé to marry. After Arthur chooses Gwenyvere, the text reads, “Marlyon warned the Kyng covertly that Gwenyver was nat holsom for hym to take to wyff, for he warned hym that Launcelot

scholde love hir, and sche hym agayne” (Malory 62). While discussion of Merlyn’s targeting Gwenyver as “nat holsom” simply because she does not reciprocate Arthur’s love can be saved for another paper, he gives a clear declaration about the future—which proves to be true—demonstrating his ability to navigate the past, present, and future. However, Merlyn’s talent is not always met with appreciation by his student. When Merlyn warns Arthur that Lancelot and Guenever are falling in love in *The Once and Future King*, Arthur ignores his words because “he always hated knowing the future and had managed to dismiss [Merlyn’s warning] from his mind” (White 335).

White goes on to comment on the fluidity of time throughout *The Once and Future King*, many years after Arthur’s coronation:

A new generation had come to court. In their own hearts the chief characters of the Round Table felt the ardent feelings which they had always felt—but now they were figures instead of people. They were surrounded by younger clients for whom Arthur was not the crusader of a future day, but the accepted conqueror of a past one . . . To these young people, a sight of Arthur as he hunted in the greenwood was like seeing the idea of Royalty. They saw no man at all, but England (420-1).

Even while yet alive, Arthur has become a mythical, nostalgic figure out of the past, a symbol of something greater than himself. His already legendary status only increases after his death, and now symbolizes the future salvation of a

nation. His spheres of influence are firmly housed in a time already gone and a time to come—not in the present day.

As evidenced, years pass for Arthur—he marries, creates the Round Table with Merlyn, and becomes a symbol of England—yet for the reader time seems to pass more slowly. In fact, it lasts only a few hundred pages. Time passes at two separate rates: many years in the turn of a page, yet much slower in the life of the one reading. White uses this disjunction to create in the reader's mind an even more tangible conception of time's mutability. The juxtaposition of novel-time and reader-time becomes an almost physical experience for the reader, and by the end of the novel so much time has passed in Arthur's world that his possible return seems even nearer than when the novel began. Merlyn blurs the lines of past, present, and future. To an extent, the reader experiences this blurring effect as well.

The blurring of time also serves to more fully develop Arthur's expected return by undermining previously accepted facts. If time can be manipulated, so can other certainties of life. Even death, assumed to be final and absolute, is not as definite in this context. Malory's account of Arthur's death destabilizes the finite nature of mortality:

Thus of Arthur I fynde no more written in bokis that bene
auctorysed, nothir more of the very sertaynté of hys dethe harde I
never rede . . . [at hys grave] the ermyte knew nat in sertayne that
he was verily the body of Kynge Arthur . . . som men say in many

partys of Inglonde that Kynge Arthure ys nat dede, but had by the
 wyll of Oure Lorde Jesu into another place (689).

Arthur's body has entered that malleable space of time created by *Le Morte
 Darthur* and *The Once and Future King*: a place where certain facts are not fixed,
 and it may be possible for a king to return from the dead.

Hemingway also reconfigures the previously unalterable notion of time in
For Whom the Bell Tolls, introducing it as a circular, repetitive motion similar to a
 merry-go-round. Over the course of Robert's four-day journey from the beginning
 of the story to his death at the end, several images and concepts emerge again and
 again. Their emergence creates the effect both of a clock, constant and reliable
 and cyclically marking the passage of time, and a detonator, drawing closer to the
 tragic conclusion:

It is like a merry-go-round, Robert Jordan thought. Not a merry-
 go-round that travels fast, and with a calliope for music, and the
 children ride on cows with gilded horns . . . No, it is not that kind
 of a merry-go-round . . . This is like a wheel that goes up and
 around. It has been around twice now. It is a vast wheel, set at an
 angle, and each time it goes around and then is back to where it
 starts . . . No one would choose to ride this wheel. You ride it
 each time and make the turn with no intention ever to have
 mounted. There is only one turn; one large, elliptical, rising and
 falling turn and you are back where you have started. We are back
 again now, he thought, and nothing is settled (225).

Many of Robert Jordan's experiences in the days before his death seem suffocatingly, even eerily similar, as if he were on a wheel that ventures out in its rotations yet continually returns to the same spot. In fact, a pattern of threes emerges in much of what he encounters, beginning with the quote above. Robert notes that the wheel has "been around twice now," going around and ending up back where it began. The third turn of the wheel is to end with his death, the entire novel takes place over the course of that amount of time—Robert's travels, Pablo's company of guerilla soldiers, his love for Maria, and everything else, takes place in just three days. Robert himself confirms this fact after convincing Maria, Pilar, Pablo and the rest to leave him to die: "Well, we had all our luck in four days. Not four days. It was afternoon when I first got there and it will not be noon today. That makes not quite three days and three nights. Keep it accurate, he said. Quite accurate" (466).

This time span of three days might be recognizable from another story: it is the amount of time that Christ spends dead in his tomb before resurrection. In deploying three days in this way, Hemingway may be, indeed seems to be, alluding to the popular Biblical story of one individual's grand, miraculous return from the grave (the precedent that makes it possible for others, such as King Arthur, also to overcome the grave). If this is the case, the commentary the pattern of three provides on the inescapable nature of mortality is injected with a sense of hope. Three days, in a religious context, is nothing but the waiting period leading up to salvation. The merry-go-round not only signifies the passage of time until death, but also means that hope is on the horizon.

An ancient and biblical parable seems a surprising context through which to view Hemingway's ostensibly bleak novel, which also touches upon the idea of resurrection in the form of Robert and Maria's relationship. Early in the book, the lovers begin to tell each other that they are one:

“Thou wilt not be cold?” [Robert asks]

“No . . . we will be as one animal of the forest and be so close that neither one can tell that one of us is one and not the other. Can you not feel my heart be your heart?” [Maria responds]

“Yes. There is no difference.”

“Now, feel. I am thee and thou art me and all of one is the other. And I love thee, oh, I love thee so. Are you not truly one? Canst thou not feel it?”

“Yes,” he said. “It is true” (262).

The idea of love unifying them takes on a more urgent significance when Robert is dying. In attempting to not only comfort Maria but hasten the guerrilla's safe departure with her in tow, he reminds her that they are now one:

“Listen. We will not go to Madrid now but I go always with thee wherever thou goest. Understand? . . . If thou goest then I go, too. Do you not see how it is? Whichever one there is, is both . . . I am thee also now . . . There is no goodbye, *guapa*, because we are not apart” (463-4).

Robert Jordan may die, but there are indications his spirit could live on in Maria. Since they believe they have become one, in essence he would continue to live

after death—bringing to pass a resurrection, of sorts. He could return from the dead as one with her—and Hemingway does even more to legitimize this idea. After Maria departs with the rest of the company, leaving Robert Jordan alone, he thinks, “It does no good to think about Maria. Try to believe what you told her. That is the best. And who says it is not true? Not you. You don’t say it, any more than you would say the things did not happen that happened” (466). After falling in love in three days, experiencing Pilar’s powers of divination, and more, Robert Jordan seems prepared to believe anything—including the possibility that he will go with Maria wherever she goes. It is a subtle tactic, but Hemingway seems to be playing with the idea of resurrection, or at least of the tenuous boundary between life and death.

Returning to the pattern of turns of the wheel of Robert’s life, another example is to be found in the descriptions of nature given at three crucial moments in Robert’s journey. The first comes in the opening sentence of the novel, in the first few moments of Robert’s mission when he meets Anselmo and subsequently joins up with Pablo’s company: “He lay flat on the brown, pine-needled floor of the forest, his chin on his folded arms, and high overhead the wind blew in the tops of the pine trees” (1). The second meshes with the morning of Robert’s last day alive: “[He] lay behind the trunk of a pine tree on the slope of the hill above the road and the bridge and watched it become daylight . . . The pink trunks below him were hard and clear now, their trunks solid and brown . . . the forest floor was soft and he felt the give of the brown, dropped pine needles under his elbows” (431). The final turn of the wheel leads back to the same

images of pine needles, many given in rapid succession as Robert Jordan attempts one last military action before his death:

Robert Jordan saw [the enemy soldiers] . . . below he saw the road and the bridge and the long lines of vehicle below it. He was completely integrated now and he took a good long look at everything. Then he looked up at the sky. There were big white clouds in it. He touched the palm of his hand against the pine needles where he lay and he touched the bark of the pine trunk that he lay behind. Then he rested easily as he could with his two elbows in the pine needles and the muzzle of the submachine gun resting against the trunk of the pine tree . . . He was waiting until the officer reached the sunlit place where the first trees of the pine forest joined the green slope of the meadow. He could feel his heart beating against the pine needle floor of the forest (471).

Readers are inundated with images of pine trees as Robert fades. The descriptions of the pine tree trunks and the bed of needles on which he rests reflect almost word for word those of the opening passage and that in the middle of the story. Just as the novel's morbid pattern of three has a surprisingly meaning of hope, these closing moments of both the novel and Robert's life are actually some of the most vivid and beautiful of the entire book. Over the course of the novel, Robert struggles to unite his romantic feelings with his military work, his politics and his worries about his future. In the end, his quickly extinguished life offers him one final, focused purpose: to keep the Fascist soldiers from discovering his team. His

beloved Spanish land encircles him—it is one of his motivations for joining the rebel cause to begin with—and he has a few moments of silence to appreciate its beauty before he carries out his decision. He becomes “completely integrated” with his surroundings, with a hyperawareness similar to Pilar’s or Merlyn’s. The last line mentions his beating heart—a powerful image of life and hope, even as he is dying.

Another aspect of Robert’s life that settles into a rotating wheel of sameness is his relationship with Maria. A clockwork feeling of urgency informs their coupling, as if they were both complying with a schedule and careening to an end at the same time. After an episode of lovemaking, they agree that “the earth [moved]” for both of them—a precious occurrence seemingly arising from the sporadic intensity of the moment. Yet even this is ritualized and labeled as a measurement of time when Pilar tells them, “It never moves more than three times in a lifetime” (174). Involved here again is a pattern of three. Robert has experienced one turn of this kind of wheel with Maria, yet this is a merry-go-round that will not return to the same place two more times as do the others in the novel. In this way, the methodical rotations of the wheel, or the lack thereof, form a way of tracking Robert’s movements towards the end of his life.

During another episode with Maria, which Hemingway ominously calls “late in the last night,” she tells Robert, “I do not wish to disappoint thee but there is a great soreness and much pain . . . I think it was from when things were done to me that it comes. Not from thee and me” (she is referring to the pain she endured while being raped by the Falangists who raided her city [341]). This is a

modification of the schedule they had adopted, and Robert takes note of the fact, thinking, “It was not good luck for the last night” (341). However, it is difficult for them to leave their seats on the merry-go-round for long. The next morning Robert Jordan wakes before Maria and, significantly, watches the hands move on his wristwatch (another reference to the passage of time). The image of the clock moving begins to coincide with their physical relationship, as if the clock were an alarm set to notify them to take up again their pattern of sex:

His throat swelled when his cheek moved against Maria’s hair and there was a hollow aching form his throat all through him as he held his arms around her; his head dropped, his eyes close to the watch where the lance-pointed, luminous splinter moved slowly up the left face of the dial. He could see its movement clearly and steadily now and he held Maria close now to slow it . . . He could see the hand moving on the watch and he held her tighter (378).

Like clockwork, she wakes up, and in sensing his advances says, “Nay, there is no pain.” Hemingway writes, “then they were together” (379)—a nice moment which also has the effect of punching a time clock for a daily shift.

While there has been an undeniable attraction between them to begin with, Robert and Maria’s relationship is propelled forward by Pilar, who sends Maria to Robert’s sleeping bag on the first night when he joins the camp. She is the matron of the guerilla company, with a prophetic sense similar to Merlyn’s and the ability to recognize the fickle nature of time:

So [Pilar] made things easier [Robert Jordan thought]. She made things easier so that there was last night and this afternoon. She is a damned sight more civilized than you are and she knows what time is all about. Yes, he said to himself, I think we can admit that she has certain notions about the value of time . . . you might as well admit it and now you will never have two whole nights with her. Not a lifetime, not to live together, not to have what people were always supposed to have, not at all. One night that is past, once one afternoon, one night to come; maybe. No, sir (Hemingway 168).

Pilar, like Merlyn, possesses an elusive hyper-awareness of time and an uncertainty about the present. She has powers of divination, alternate means of perceiving the world, and explains her powers to Robert Jordan: “Thou art a miracle of deafness . . . It is not that thou art stupid. Thou art simply deaf. One who is deaf cannot hear music. Neither can he hear the radio. So he might say, never having heard them, that such things do not exist” (Hemingway 251). She knows about the fragile nature of Robert Jordan’s life, which he is also starting to understand. Three nights is what he predicts he will have with Maria, as noted above, and which readers later learn proves to be true.

Robert Jordan’s visions of a wheel of life and the repetition of its rotations are not limited to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The wheel of Fortune, as it is called in *Le Morte Darthur*, is revealed to Arthur as well. Towards the end of his life, during the night before he is to fight Sir Mordred, Arthur has a “wondirfull dreame”: “In hys dreame hym semed that he saw upon a chafflet a chayre, and the

chayre was faste to a whele, and thereupon sate Kynge Arthure in the richest clothe of golde that might be made” (683). In the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed that Fortune was a goddess who turned a wheel to which people were strapped. The wheel either pointed up, to signify rising into glory, or down, as a sign of downfall and defeat—both outcomes brought about as easily as the spinning of a wheel.

Arthur’s dream provides a fascinating glance into his mind—or at least, into his dream-like subconscious. When he looks at himself, dressed in opulent gold and sitting in a chair on the wheel of Fortune, he sees a combination of self-detachment and self-reflection. This suspended moment twists as the wheel turns, and as the dream continues:

And the Kynge thought there was undir hym, farre from hym, an hydeous depe blak water, and therein was all maner of serpentis and wormes and wylde bestis, fowle and orryble. And suddeynly the Kynge thought that the whyle turned up-so-downe, and he felle amonge the serpents, and every beste toke hym by a lymme (683).

The dream now becomes significantly more traumatic, in other words, and Arthur sees horrible beasts in deep black water. The chair turns upside-down, he falls in with them, and they seize him. The perspective also shifts, from Arthur looking at himself, to the reader seeing the serpents from Arthur’s point of view. Felicity Riddy expounds on this portion of Arthur’s dream, observing that this part of his vision is more private, more terrifying, and more vertiginous” (889):

the [perspective] shift from outside to inside comes the possibility that the ugly forms Arthur sees are within. They are ‘undir hym’—that is, not only beneath him physically but subordinated to him as well . . . ‘and every beste toke hym by a lymme’ suggests the disintegration of the self . . . the king-self is torn apart, no longer able to ‘holde togydirs’ in unity, but preyed upon by monstrous forms that it knows of old (890).

The wheel in Arthur’s dream serves a significantly different purpose than that in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Robert Jordan’s merry-go-round is a timekeeper that illustrates the tedium of his situation in close quarters on the fringe of a rebellion. Surprisingly, it is also a symbol of hope for the condition of the world to improve after war. Arthur’s wheel is less a hopeful one than a final judgment of his life and reign. It prophesies what actually ends up happening to his kingdom—in the same way that his limbs are attacked from every direction, his Round Table dissolves into several opposing groups.

The wheel in *Le Morte Darthur* functions in two significant ways. First, it adds a renewed feeling of tragedy to the already fractured end of Arthur’s rule, as well as a renewed tension in expecting Arthur’s return. He is forced to kill his traitorous nephew-son, his Round Table disintegrates as his knights turn against each other and divide according to rival loyalties (“Sir, they Kynge may do as he wyll,” Sir Gawayne tells Lancelot, “But wyte thou well, though and I shall never be accorded whyle we lyve”); and he is unable to restrain the destructive force of his wife’s relationship with the Round Table’s greatest champion, Lancelot (668).

His traumatic dream of dark water and beasts only adds to the despair of Camelot's end and heightens the need for his resurrection. The second function of the wheel is to demonstrate the indefinite nature of the future. At one moment, Arthur is at the top of the wheel, dressed in his royal finery, but the mood quickly shifts as the chair "suddeynly" spins upside down and he falls into the water. With his wheel exhibiting such fluctuations, it is only a matter of time before it returns him to the top, ushering in his legendary reappearance.

The concept of a spinning wheel or merry-go-round is not the only one used to track the passage of time in both the *Morte Darthur/The Once and Future King* duo and Hemingway's novel. At first, readers might barely register the role of the month of May in these works. A second glance, however, might reveal that May is actually mentioned with such frequency that one would be hard-pressed not to attribute important meanings to its inclusion.

References to May are found in *The Once and Future King*. At the novel's end, Lancelot and Guenever (or "Jenny," as Arthur and Lancelot called her) have been having an ongoing affair for at least twenty years. As they sit together one evening, they sing, and the narrator observes,

Their voices, no longer full in tone like those of people in the strength of youth, were still tenacious of the note. If they were thin, they were pure. They supported one another.

"When that the moneth of May (sang Lancelot)

Comes and the day

In beames gives light,

I fear no more the fight.”

“When,” sang Guenever,

“When that the sonne,

His daily course y-ronne,

Is no more bright,

I fear namore the night”

(White 540).

A few moments later, after they have stopped singing, Lancelot says,

“Come and sit close to me, Jenny.”

“Are you unhappy about something?” [Jenny responds]

“No. I was never so happy in my life. And I dare say I shall never be so happy again . . . because the spring has come after all, and there is the bright summer in front of us” (540-1).

These references to spring and the month of May are made even more significant by the fact that as Jenny and Lancelot converse and love, Arthur steps into the room unnoticed. By this point in *The Once and Future King*, Arthur has become a deeply complex, developed, and psychological man. As he slips into the room, he is described as having the “noble oldness of self-respect . . . He was so plainly dressed, so gentle and patient of his simple things. Often when the Queen was entertaining distinguished company under the flambeaux of the Great Hall, Lancelot had found him sitting by himself in a small room, mending stockings” (544). This marks the first time that the humble ruler has a direct encounter with the lovers. Before now, he has received various warnings and hints about his

wife's relationship with his friend, from Merlyn, his half-sister Morgan le Fay, and others, but has either denied or ignored them. At this moment however, for the first time he has to confront this longstanding affair out in the open. Notably, Lancelot and Jenny have just been singing of May and talking of spring—significant to remember as the time when such a life-altering event befalls Arthur.

The feast of Pentecost is another important holiday to consider along these lines, especially in respect to the Arthurian legend. Occurring either on the fiftieth day after Easter, or encompassing the entirety of the fifty days after Easter (according to Western Christianity and Eastern Christianity, respectively), it is a holiday celebrated in the spring—mostly in May. Pentecost commemorates the day on which Christ's Twelve Apostles receive an overwhelming rush of the Holy Spirit after Christ's crucifixion. Most believers view it as commemorating the symbolic founding of the Christian church, which becomes crucial information as Arthur's story unfolds.

Arthur, for instance, pulls his sword out of the stone several times in *Le Morte Darthur* before all the lords accept him as king. These lords “had indignacion that Arthur shold be kyng, and put if of in a delay tyll the feest of Pentecoste” (10). On that day, too, he triumphantly removes the sword—again—and this no one can deny that he is the rightful king. Many cry, “We wille have Arhut unto our kyng . . . we all see that it is Goddes wille that he shalle by our kyng” (11).

About 150 pages in, the book introduces Sir Launcelot du Lake, and King Arthur holds a festival of jousting tournaments. The breakout star of these

tournaments is Launcelot, who then “[thinks] himself to preve in straunge adventures” (Malory 152) and departs after the tournament is over. In his later adventures, he comes into contact with several knights of the Round Table, battling many and leaving them to return and report to King Arthur about his power. In time, Launcelot decides to return to court, saying, “hit drawyth myghe to the feste of Pentecoste—and there, by the grace of God, ye shall fynde me” (173). During this time, Arthur has been hearing from a string of knights about their defeat at the hand of Launcelot, so by the time he returns to Camelot, he “[has] the grettyste name of ony knight of the worlde, and moste he was honoured of hyghe and lowe” (Malory 176-7). Essentially, the man who plays a part in bringing about the dissolution of the Round Table and Arthur’s entire kingdom returns to great fanfare for precisely this springtime feast. In normal circumstances, such an occurrence would not necessarily command much attention, but in respect to the pattern established in this paper, it seems significant: many important landmarks in Arthur’s life can be connected with Pentecoste.

In a story that already attributes such value to Pentecoste, Arthur thus adds even more: “So evir the Kynge had a custom that at the feste of Pentecoste in especiall, afore other festys in the yere, he wolde nat go that day to mete unto [until] that he had herde other sawe of a grete mervayle. And for that custom, all maner of strange adventures com byfore Arthure, as at that feste before all other festes” (177). No truer statement can be imagined: many strange things seem to congregate around this time of the year in these tales, and more specifically, in the

Pentecoste holiday and the month of May. If this paper has accepted Pentecoste as the time when Arthur proves his destiny as king by pulling Excalibur out of the stone, and when his trusted friend-turned-rival returns to court having already won the notice of the Queen and the respect of knights of the Round Table (both of which play important parts in the kingdom's downfall), the similarities only continue: in the last chapter of *Le Morte Darthur*, "The Deth of Arthur," Malory steps forward to ruminate on the month of May in a significant aside:

In May, whan every harte floryshyth and burgenyth—for, as the season ys lusty to beholde and comfortable, so man and woman rejoysyth and gladith of somer commynge with his freyshe floures, for winter wyth hys rowghe wyndis and blastis causyth lusty men and women to cowre and to syt by fyres—

So thys season hit befelle in the moneth of May a grete angur and [unhap] that stynted nat tylle the floure of chivalry of [alle] the worlde was destroyed and slayne (646, brackets included in original text).

This excerpt yields several different observations. The first is of its the relatively lengthy, almost seemingly random focus on a specific month within a story about knights and kings. Added significance emerges from the fact that Pentecoste and springtime have been mentioned multiple times in the story, so that by now any mention of its time of year needs to be understood as significant.

The second observation can be posed as a question: why does a chapter about a kingdom's downfall open with such hopeful, promising imagery? Only a

few pages after lines about the “lusty,” “comfortable” season with its “freyshe floures,” Arthur says, “My harte was never so hevy as hit ys now. And much more I am sorryar for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre queen; for quenys I might have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no company. And now I dare sey . . . there was never Crystyn kyng that ever hylde such a felyshyp togydyrs” (658). “The Deth of Arthur” is packed with the bleak conclusions of several different storylines, many of which have run on for several hundred pages: those of Mordred’s betrayal and death, of Arthur’s traumatic wheel of Fortune dream, of Gwenyver and Launcelot’s final confrontation and with the king, of Arthur’s death and burial (or interment in a lake), of Gwenyver’s decision to become a nun, of Launcelot’s despair and death, and of the remaining knights’ decisions to retreat “to theyr contreyes” (Malory 697).

The references to May in *Le Morte Darthur* also continue in a passage similar to the one just cited, in which Malory steps back to reflect on a condition of the Arthurian past. He begins,

The moneth of May was com, whan every lusty harte begynnyth to blossom and to burgyne. For, lyke as trees and erbys burgenyth and florysshyth in May, in lyke wyse every lusty harte that ys ony maner of lover spryngith, burgenyth, buddyth, and florysshyth in lusty dedis. For hit gyvyth unto all lovers corrayge, that lusty moneth of May, in somthyng to constrayne hym to som maner of

thyngge more in that moneth than in ony other monethe, for diverse causys (624).

A theme is beginning to emerge: Malory employs May as the time of year when people's spirits—and hearts—are renewed, a time when the land blossoms as well. May is almost a charmed time, complete with auspicious events that would not otherwise happen. This theme is expanded in the next paragraph:

For, lyke as winter rasure dothe allway arace and deface grene summer, so faryth hit by unstable love in man and woman: for in many persones there ys no stabylité . . . Therefore, lyke as May moneth flowryth and floryshyth in every mannes gardyne, so in lyke wyse lat every man of worship florysh hys herte in thys worlde, firste unto God, and nexte unto the joy of them that he promised hys feythe unto . . . So faryth the love nowadays, some hote, some colde: thy sys no stabylité. But the olde love was nat so; for men and women coude love togydirs seven yerys, and no lycoures lustis was betwyxte them—and than was love trouthe and faythefulnes (624-5).

Malory makes the leap from springtime to love, comparing the vacillating, unstable love of “nowadays” with the “olde love,” such Lancelot and Gwenyver's, which can last for years. The love of Malory's day is flighty, burning hot and then cold and back again, while people “deface and lay aparte trew love.” They discard something “trew,” with the coldness of winter, instead of

letting love slowly burn and endure, just as winter gives way to the slow but inevitable unfolding of spring.

Malory winds up his thoughts by saying, “Therefore all ye that be lovers, calle unto youre remembraunce the monethe of May, lyke as ded Quene Gwenyver, for whom I make here a lytyll mencion, that whyle she lyved she was a trew lover, and therefor she had a good ende” (625). Even though Gwenyvere can be viewed as half of the adulterous couple who dissolved an entire kingdom, here readers receive Malory’s personal opinion: Gwenyvere’s devotion to Launcelot is part of the dying heritage of genuine courtly love. True to the definition of courtly love, the man she loves is not properly her husband, and there is something to be said for her unwavering devotion to him over many years. Their love is stable, unlike the “unstablyté” of his era. Malory closely associates the tradition of courtly love with May, likening the flourishing of the flowers to man’s flourishing heart.

As Felicity Riddy notes, both the “impulses to renewal and the impulses to destructiveness” figure in this passage (885). Malory’s argument displays a “shifting pattern of contrasts—between summer and winter, heat and cold, remembering and forgetting, true love and negligence, the present the old days—and its development proceeds in a similarly ambivalent and contrasting way, with assertions which are then qualified or denied” (885). Undeniably, it is difficult to follow Malory’s argument all the way to the end of the passage—not least because it is hard to disassociate the Queen from her deceitful relationship. Yet his “impulses to renewal” and “impulses to destructiveness” actually reflect the

nature of what he has in mind. The form of the passage reflects its message in that, like a spinning wheel, the turning of the seasons, or the juxtaposition of summer and winter, his argument fluctuates between two opposing ideas, always returning to the one by exploring the other.

The multiple appearances of May in Arthurian legend are deployed in the same way as the wheel of Fortune. The wheel rotates, leaving its starting position as it spins away, yet it always and inevitably returns back to where it begins. Similarly, May marks the starting position of Arthur's life as king. As the years progress and adventures come and go, May always reappears, and can be counted on to bring yet other crucial events into his life. This repetition allows for optimism, because even though unfortunate events such as Launcelot's reintroduction at court and Arthur's death occur in May, so does Arthur's triumphant episode with Excalibur, his coronation, the coming of spring after winter—and, possibly, Arthur's messianic return one day in the future. Although Christ was crucified and killed, he famously returned three days later—or on the day that would come to be known as Easter, a springtime holiday.

It would almost seem too good to be true that comparable references to springtime and May show up in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as well—but they do. In fact, the whole book takes place in May: “Now the morning was late May, the sky was high and clear and the wind blew warm on Robert Jordan's shoulders” (289). It is the time of year when the last remnants of winter are finally giving way to spring. Since the entire story takes place in the caves, forests, and hills of Spain, there is also a considerable amount of natural imagery standing in for spring and

renewal. Earlier on in the book, it snows—a contrasting fact that everyone in the company is surprised about, given the time of year: “By the time they reached the camp it was snowing and the flakes were dropping diagonally through the pines. They slanted through the trees, sparse at first and circling as they fell, and then, as the cold wind came driving down the mountain, they came whirling and thick and Robert Jordan stood in front of the cave in a rage and watched them” (178).

The pattern of death’s relation to life is played out, first, on a grand scale in the legend of King Arthur, and second, on a worldwide level. The weather and the changing of the seasons might be seen as uninteresting, or even unnoticeable, yet in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, they become important—and not just because the characters are out of doors and victims to the weather throughout the story. As the plot develops, the snow stops falling and begins to melt—a sign of burgeoning hope:

Robert Jordan . . . watched it become daylight. He loved this hour of the day always and how he watched it; feeling it gray within him, as though he were a part of the slow lightening that comes before the rising of the sun; when solid things darken and space lightens and the lights that have shone in the night go yellow and then fade as they day comes (431).

With this more understated approach, descriptions of the weather come to signify the same kind of expectation and even optimism as do the other uses of time documented here. The snow, which shows up in the middle of the story, suggests the moral toll taken on a society guilty of the horrific acts of war of the period, or

of Arthur's kingdom and the eons of waiting for his return. Yet just as winter inevitably arrives, and year after year with literal clockwork precision, the merry-go-round continues to spin, and winter will always eventually give way to the regeneration of spring.

It is this hope of salvation that carries all these Modernist novels through to the end, even when their characters lose faith. At the conclusion of *The Once and Future King*, Arthur, now an old man, sits in his tent (his kingdom has been plunged into war with Mordred) sadly reflecting on the state of his life: the Queen is a prisoner, Lancelot banished, Mordred wants to kill him, and the Round Table dispersed:

he could have breasted all these things in some way, if the central tenet of his heart had not been ravaged. Long ago, when his mind had been a nimble boy's called Wart—long ago he had been taught by an aged benevolence, wagging a white beard. He had been taught by Merlyn to believe that man was perfectible: that he was on the whole more decent than beastly: that good was worth trying . . . the whole structure depended on the first premise: that man was decent (628).

Arthur believes that his childhood teachings from Merlyn have been betrayed, and why not? His reign's end is tragic, and he must witness its failure firsthand. His thoughts run on in this vein for several pages, and while the passage is too long to cite in full, it should be understood as poetic, melancholy, and more than a little acerbic:

The blessing of forgetfulness: that was the first essential. If everything one did, or which one's fathers had done, was an endless sequence of Doings doomed to break forth bloodily, then the past must be obliterated and a new start made. Man must be ready to say: Yes, since Cain there has been injustice, but . . . let us now start fresh without remembrance, rather than live forward and backward at the same time . . . Unfortunately men did say this, in each successive war. They were always saying that the present one was to be the last . . . When the time came, however, they were too stupid. They were like children crying out that they would build a house—but, when it came to building, they had not the practical ability (631-2).

Even here at the end, time emerges as the focal point—in this case, as a tool of both good and evil. To start afresh would mean to forget the past and focus on the future instead of living “forward and backward at the same time.” It is an interesting proposition—to obliterate history and start over—but it is not necessarily how Hemingway or Arthurian legend see redemption as playing out.

As Arthur waits, the final turn of the wheel returns to someone who was present at the beginning of his life:

The King, drained of his last effort, gave way to sorrow. Even when his visitor's hand lifted the tent flap, the silent drops coursed down his nose and fell on the parchment with regular ticks, like an ancient clock. He turned his head aside, unwilling to be seen,

unable to do better. The flap fell, as the strange figure in cloak and hat came softly in. ‘Merlyn?’ But there was nobody there: he had dreamed him in a catnap of old age (White 638).

Even Merlyn’s appearance is described according to clock imagery, as when Arthur’s tears fall on the parchment, making ticking noises “like an ancient clock.” Time, fluid and changeable, has swung around again, bringing Merlyn into the close of Arthur’s life. Arthur’s mind seems attuned to Merlyn’s, and he thinks back on all the many things that his tutor taught him as a young, hopeful boy.

The activity revives his spirits, and he is described as feeling “refreshed, clear-headed, almost ready to begin again.” The notion of return floats to the surface, and he thinks, “There would be a day—there must be a day—when he would come back . . . with a new Round Table which had no corners, just as the world had none—a table without boundaries between the nations who would sit to feast there . . . If people could be persuaded to read and write, not just to eat and make love, there was still a chance that they might come to reason” (639). Return seems to be what Hemingway establishes as well—a future grounded in intelligence and reason, and stripped of prejudice.

Perhaps his last few moments of realization allow a proper understanding of the most ambiguous scenes in *Le Morte Darthur*. After recounting the men’s rumors of Arthur’s return, Malory observes, “Yet I woll nat say that hit shall be so; but rather I wolde sey, here in thys worlde he changed hys lyff” (689). At the end of a life filled with magic, adventure, and betrayal, what changes Arthur’s

“lyff” most is his realization of how he would rule if he were given a second chance—the sort of reign he might set up after his messianic return. With this recognition, *The Once and Future King* closes: “The cannons of his adversary were thundering in the tattered morning when the Majesty of England drew himself up to meet the future with a peaceful heart” (639). There can be no denying the harsh reality of his present—war is literally right on Arthur’s doorstep, just as Robert Jordan plans one last attack on the approaching enemy as he lies dying. The King’s epiphany allows him to meet battle with a “peaceful heart,” much like the comfort and stability of the pine trees in Robert Jordan’s last moments of battle and life.

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