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TO REACH THE UNREACHABLE STARS: REEXAMINING THE SHARED ARTHURIAN
VISION OF C. S. LEWIS'S SCIENCE FICTION TRILOGY AND RAYMOND
CHANDLER'S MARLOWE NOVELS

By

HOLLIS THOMPSON, Bachelor of Science

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Stephen F. Austin State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

December, 2020

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ABSTRACT

Although Raymond Chandler and C. S. Lewis seem to be a rather strange pairing, the ways in which they both borrow from Arthurian literature and use the myth to speak to their cultural moment are strikingly similar. Following T. S. Eliot's use of the Grail quest in *The Waste Land* (which set a standard for the use of such material in Modern literature), these authors use Arthurian elements as a means of exposing hidden connections between the fragments of the literary past and the present within Chandler's Marlowe novels and Lewis's science fiction trilogy. Both men present Western identity as fundamentally dialectical, with every nation and individual struggling between an idealized and corrupted system of values. By making their heroes modern version of Galahad the sacred knight and exploring their conflicts with twentieth-century culture, both authors suggest that the Western world must move beyond corrupted moral codes like chivalry and accept a higher standard of moral idealism in order to escape from this dialectic and destroy the evil that threatens to consume their world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Though listing all the people who made this thesis possible would take up many a parchment of medieval manuscript, I must acknowledge my debt to those who have invested the most in it.

First, I must give gratitude to my family, who not only put up with my obsessions with King Arthur and C. S. Lewis, but actually encouraged them! Vanessa Thompson deserves credit for teaching me to read and write and for allowing me to chase my dreams while growing up. Scott Thompson gets the credit for being my first and most generous patron. I thank Rhett and Grayson Thompson for being my first fans. Finally, Chris Manzo deserves the credit for making reading C. S. Lewis a generational tradition in the family.

Next, I thank my brilliant and beautiful wife, Haley Patillo, for the massive amount of work she put into helping me edit this *entire* study and for supporting me through this rigorous and exhausting process. She deserves the credit for supporting me through many a breakdown and anxiety-ridden day. I love you!

Next, I must thank the amazing members of my thesis committee. Thank you, Kevin West, for being my thesis director and for your tireless efforts to ensure that this thesis became the best that it could be. You also deserve the credit for introducing me to some of the key Arthurian texts for this study, like Wolfram's *Parzival*. Thank you, Kenneth Untiedt, for your constant mentorship and for teaching *The Big Sleep* in my first

graduate course (which gave me my first chance to write about it). Thank you, Ericka Hoagland, for ingraining MLA 8 style in me during your Bibliography and Research class and for helping to fuel my obsession with fantasy and science fiction. Thank you, Troy Davis, for joining me on this scholarly journey, your enthusiasm about the topic, and your ensuring that I commit few mistakes regarding the history of the twentieth century.

I must thank every teacher who ever worked to show me how to read and write about literature. In particular, I can never give enough gratitude to Brian Billings and Craig Nakashian. Dr. Billings, thank you for introducing me to Chandler's work and for being my mentor. I would not be the scholar nor the person I am today without you. Thank you, Dr. Nakashian, for introducing me to the classic Arthurian texts and explaining the concepts of chivalry to me; this thesis owes much to your teaching.

My fellow graduate students at Stephen F. Austin State University have been a second family for me. I want to thank Andrew Markus and Athena Hayes, in particular, for the many conversations we have had over the topic of this study and the proofreading with which you both helped. Andrew, you also deserve a lot of credit for putting up with me in the program for two and a half years. Thank you for being such a great friend. Athena, thank you for your encouragement and support on this project; I wish you the best with your thesis next semester.

Finally, I thank Yeshua Messiah, the Lord to whom I owe allegiance and to the glory of whose court I dedicate this thesis, for His inspiration, love, and constant

compassion on His knight. Though this knight is often more scared than sacred, You
never have forsaken him.

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INTRODUCTION: “THESE FRAGMENTS I HAVE SHORED AGAINST MY RUINS”

Modern Arthuriana

Literature scholars of the past few decades have routinely considered English-language literature of the early and mid-twentieth century as the epoch of the Modernists, a group of disillusioned, experimental, post-World War I writers who were characterized “by the search for an authentic response to a much-changed world” (“Modernism” para. 3). It has become an academic truism that these artists, which include the likes of T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, H.D., William Faulkner, and Gertrude Stein, shared life-shattering experiences with the horrors of the Great War, industrialization, and Western imperialism that led to their rejecting the prevailing myths and literary styles of Western (and especially Victorian) culture as naïve and inadequate to express reality as they had come to understand it in the metaphorical and literal trenches. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* succinctly summarizes the position of these authors: “[t]he enormity of the war had undermined humankind’s faith in the foundations of Western society and culture, and postwar Modernist literature reflected a sense of disillusionment and fragmentation” (para. 3). Within this view, one might expect the Modernists to regard the old romantic tales of damsels in distress, fantasy, knights errant, and battles between good and evil as,

at best, irrelevant to a world that had witnessed trench warfare and, at worst, lies that duped readers into believing the world to be a rational and morally unambiguous place.

In the words of twentieth-century literary scholar Taylor Driggers, “From a modern perspective, the world of Western mythology is defined by violent forms of heroism largely discredited by the brutality and destruction of World War I” (266). Nowhere were these elements more apparent to the Modernists than in English Poet Laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson’s retelling of the Arthur myth in *Idylls of the King*. While all of Tennyson’s “works, from 1850 onward, occupied a significant space on the bookshelves of almost every family of readers in England and the United States” (“Alfred, Lord Tennyson” 1156), his Arthurian material proved to be the most enduring.

Idylls of the King became *the* version of the Arthur story for the generation that was to face WWI. As Driggers points out, the work was, “[f]or most well-read young men at the time, the main frame of reference for such tales” (268). Tennyson’s Arthuriad, with its high Victorian morality, fantastic world, glorification of righteous warfare in service of the empire, and rigorous adherence to traditional poetic structures and rhythms, represents everything that the survivors of WWI would find to be false and come to oppose in their own works. In their rejection of Tennyson and his like, the Modernists turned to stream-of-consciousness, nonlinear narrative, tales of ordinary people, and examinations of psychological interiority in order to express the reality of their complex, ambiguous, and traumatic experiences. Wilfred Owen’s “Dulce Et Decorum Est,” Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, E. E. Cummings’ “next

of course to god america i,” and Stein’s *The Making of Americans* epitomize this kind of literature. Even a casual reading of these works shows the extent to which such authors actively oppose the literature of their predecessors and attempt to show how it has become meaningless within the ambiguities and chaos of modernity.

More recent scholarship, however, has pointed out that most of the texts produced during the twentieth century embrace, retool, expand upon, and revisit the motifs of ancient myths and legends, rather than simply rejecting them out of hand or actively opposing them. Such texts have especially been concerned with the element of the fantastic within such literature. Tom Shippey (J. R. R. Tolkien’s successor at Oxford and one of his greatest interpreters) convincingly argues (in the face of the critically pretentious preference for literature that is “true-to-life” or “realistic”) that “[t]he dominant literary mode of the twentieth century has been the fantastic” (vii). He elaborates:

Those authors of the twentieth century who have spoken most powerfully to and for their contemporaries have for some reason found it necessary to use the metaphoric mode of fantasy, to write about worlds and creatures which we know do not exist, whether Tolkien’s ‘Middle-earth,’ Orwell’s ‘Ingsoc,’ the remote islands of Golding and Wells, or the Martians and Tralfamadarians who burst into peaceful English or American suburbia in Wells and Vonnegut. (viii)

Shippey’s exhaustive catalogue of examples of the fantastic from such monumental authors render his conclusion inescapable—the language of fantasy is the rule rather than

the exception of literature produced post-WWI. Within this mode, such authors do not, by and large, reject Arthurian legend, but possess a renewed interest in such literature. Indeed, the twentieth century saw a renaissance of new Arthurian literature unlike anything since the time of Chrétien de Troyes, and it occurred beside and within the “Modernist” movement that had supposedly put away the king and his knights as the toys of a naïve and artificial cultural childhood. In fact, some of the most “modern” authors not only found meaning within the mythical “Matter of Britain”¹ but also actively produced texts that use the myth as a kind of metaphoric language for communicating their perception of the contemporary world.

The list of mid-twentieth-century authors who have recreated the Arthurian mythos to speak to their own age is almost as staggering as Shippey’s catalogue of those who used fantasy as their primary medium. J. R. R. Tolkien echoes moments from the Arthur myth throughout *The Lord of the Rings* and even tried his hand at creating a Modern version of the *Alliterative Morte d’Arthur* in his unfinished *The Fall of Arthur*. Edwin Arlington Robinson produced three poems about central characters from the Arthur stories. Charles Williams created his own lyrical cycle of Arthurian poems (published in the two volumes *Taliessin through Logres* and *The Region of the Summer Stars*). T. H. White eclipsed Tennyson as the new interpreter of the Arthurian epic

¹ This is the common medieval term for the body of stories about Arthur and his knights. Writers commonly considered this material one legitimate source for the stories of romances, along with the Matter of France (which concerned Charlemagne) and the Matter of Rome.

through his *Once and Future King* series. While some may contend that such authors do not represent literary Modernism (strictly defined),² even three of the authors whom scholars now hold to be among the most “Modern” of their generation produced new Arthurian texts: John Steinbeck retold the stories in his *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* and *Tortilla Flat*; David Jones wrote two poems, *In Parenthesis* and *The Anathémata*, which use Arthurian motifs and images to communicate his personal experiences; and T. S. Eliot used the Arthurian Grail quest as the central metaphor of his masterpiece, *The Waste Land*. It is apparent that, whatever qualms the modernists would come to have with the Tennysonian treatment of Arthur, they most emphatically did not reject the king himself.

Eliot, characteristically, proved to be one of the most influential of these new Arthurian chroniclers. The significance of his contributions lie in his application of the Matter of Britain to his “mythical method” of approaching the modern world through art. Eliot explains this method in the essay “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*,” which examines the ways in which the magnum opus of his contemporary, James Joyce, succeeds “in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity. . . a method

² Many current scholars (such as Shippey) would probably question this position, however. The works of Tolkien, White, and C. S. Lewis contain many of the same literary elements and themes as those of the more recognized “Modernists” (see, for example, Shippey’s discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Ulysses* in *Author of the Century*). It is likely that exclusion of such writers from discussion of Modernist literature results more from critical biases against the fantasy genre than from any significant dichotomy between these authors and people like Steinbeck and Eliot.

which others must pursue after him” (para. 6). Far from rejecting the literary past as irrelevant or fallacious, Eliot states that exposing the continuity between the past and the current, anarchic world after the War is “a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. . . It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art” (para. 6). Eager to continue what he saw Joyce attempt in unveiling the connections between the lives of ordinary Dubliners and Homer’s epics, Eliot took a similar step himself by using the character of the wounded Fisher King and his cursed kingdom to explore the state of Inter-War England within *The Waste Land*.³ The poem ties the story of Galahad’s quest for the Holy Grail⁴ to the modern poet’s attempt to bring order and stability to his world through finding and exposing its hidden continuity with the worlds of mythology. Just as Galahad must obtain the Grail in order to bring healing to the king and fertility to his land, Eliot shows that poets can only hope to restore meaning to their desolated cultures by successfully synthesizing the ancient with the modern.

³ This understanding has long been commonplace in discussions of the poem. My interpretation of these elements relies upon the work of Evans Lansing Smith, Linda Ray Pratt, Jahan Ramazani, and Jon Stallworthy. Scholarship on Eliot is expansive, however, and a detailed analysis of Arthurian elements in *The Waste Land* is beyond the scope of this work.

⁴ Eliot does not actually provide the name of the knight. In the medieval tradition, it was originally Percival who achieved the Grail, but later sources (like Malory’s text) made Galahad the central hero of the quest. I have used the Galahad name for convenience’s sake because of his importance to both the later tradition and modern authors.

This theme shows itself most clearly at the conclusion of the poem, where Eliot links Galahad to the modern poet. As the poem reaches its climax, Eliot recounts Galahad's arrival at the Chapel Perilous, where the knight will finally find the Holy Grail. Eliot makes clear, however, that to achieve the Grail, Galahad must first pass a test of perception. The poem describes the chapel as appearing to be a place of gloom:

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
It has no windows, and the door swings,
Dry bones can harm no one. (lines 386-91)

At first glance, the chapel appears to be a (literal) dead end. The decay and darkness in the place are antithetical to the life and light that the Grail brings. This contradiction is only superficial, however. As a footnote to the Norton edition of this poem explains, “[t]his illusion of nothingness is the knight’s final test” (2541). Galahad must discern the reality behind the façade in order to save the kingdom.⁵ Later, the poem indicates

⁵ One should note that Eliot is blending multiple Arthurian stories in his depiction of this scene. Technically, the “Chapel Perilous” is not the location of the Grail in any version of the quest story. Rather, it comes from Book VI of Malory’s *Morte*. In that work, the chapel is the place where the sorceress Hellawes attempts to trap Lancelot, whom she is sexually obsessed with, during a quest unrelated to the Grail. Though it may be easy to understand Eliot’s use of the name as a simple confusion on his part, one could also argue that it is another example of the mythological and temporal blending that characterizes *The Waste Land*.

Galahad's success by describing the Fisher King: "I sat upon the shore / Fishing with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (lines 424-26). The fact that the arid waste is now behind and the fertile water ahead, along with the king's concern with restoring order, hints at Galahad's success at bringing life back to him and his kingdom. The final lines of the poem connect both of these moments to the poet-speaker's own creation of meaning through verse. The speaker, referring to the story of Galahad and the Fisher King (along with every piece of literature and myth that he has incorporated into the poem) explains, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (431). This line is most easily understood in light of Eliot's project of connecting the past to the present—the poet must use the "fragments" of the past in order to fend off the ruin of the modern world. However, it can also be read as referring back to the apparent ruin of the Chapel Perilous and Galahad's using his faith in the Grail to expel the illusion of the chapel's emptiness and reveal its true nature as the place that houses the very source of all fullness. In the same way, Eliot shows that the modern poet must use the fragments of Arthurian myth (and whatever else his culture has passed on to him) in order to see the contemporary world for what it really is and, thereby, save it from cultural and spiritual oblivion.

The Waste Land, therefore, proves an important point that fellow poet, medieval literature scholar, and fantasy novelist C. S. Lewis made in his ground-breaking study on medieval romance, *The Allegory of Love*. Against both the pretentiousness of modernists

who felt that they were living in a unique epoch of world history and progressives who believed that modern man had transcended his predecessors, Lewis argues that

Humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind.

Whatever we have been, in some sort we are still. Neither the form nor the sentiment of this old poetry [the medieval romantic tradition of which Arthur and his knights formed an important foundation] has passed away without leaving indelible traces on our minds. We shall understand our present, and perhaps our future, the better if we can succeed, by an effort of the historical imagination, in reconstructing that long-lost state of mind for which the allegorical love poem was a natural mode of expression. (2)

Though often viewed as representatives of two vastly different poetic traditions and worldviews, Lewis and Eliot agreed on the continuing relevance of medieval literature to their culture and time. Both men also saw that new artistic interpretation of these legendary narratives could actually be the key to flattening the apparent distance between the mythic past and the damaged present.

This task of revealing the truth of the modern world through the medieval Arthurian mythos is not exclusive to these two thinkers, however. As Modern literature scholar Evans Lansing Smith contends, “[t]he importance of the mythologies of King Arthur to literary Modernism has not been sufficiently examined, beyond the commonplace recognition of the role of the Grail legends in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste*

Land” (50). Though scholarship has not fully recognized the fact until recently, this combination of Arthurian elements with the mythological method is also present “in an extraordinary variety of novelists and poets working in the Modernist mode” (50). White, for instance, uses the tragic tale of the fall of the chivalrous, utopian Camelot as an anti-war manifesto for the ravaged contemporary world. Tolkien’s *The Fall of Arthur*, as Driggers points out, “ironized Tennysonian ideals by linking them with events like those of World War I” (275) within its treatment of Arthur’s self-destructive militarism and downfall.

In the preface to *In Parenthesis*, Jones states that he uses Arthurian and other mythical images to describe “things I saw, felt, & was part of” (ix), i.e. his experiences in the battles of WWI. He even directly affirms the Arthurian writer Thomas Malory’s importance to understanding the war: “I think the day by day in the Waste Land, the sudden violences and the long stillnesses, the sharp contours and unformed voids of that mysterious existence, profoundly affected the imaginations of those who suffered it. It was a place of enchantment. It is perhaps best described in Malory, book iv, chapter 15—that landscape spoke ‘with a grimly voice’” (x-xi). Steinbeck directly related the myth to the current world by breaking down its basic story elements into an archetypal plotline and rebuilding it as a story of paisanos in California within *Tortilla Flat*. Even Williams, who was arguably the most interested in using the Arthur story in the service of theological and philosophical abstractions, crafts his presentation of the Arthurian finale through the eyes of a pope who, in the words of Lewis, contemplates a situation which “is

of course very like that which Williams contemplated in 1944 and which we still contemplate in 1946” (*Williams* 364).

Though on the surface this Modernist approach to Arthur may not appear very different from Tennyson’s appropriation of the material to voice his own Victorian cultural values, careful analysis of their works reveals an intrinsic difference in the manner in which these authors approached the sources. As C. S. Lewis observes, “All through Tennyson’s *Idylls* the Arthurian story is pulling against nearly everything that Tennyson wants to say” (*Williams* 383). Tennyson found much in the Matter of Britain that disturbed him; this fact is obvious to anyone who compares the stories of *Idylls of the King* to the original versions in Chrétien de Troyes’ romances and Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*. Whereas those texts are more than comfortable with their heroes possessing thoroughly ambiguous or even conflicted moral characters and do not flinch when presenting the worst of human sins—adultery, incest, betrayal, and horrific violence are daily realities—Tennyson’s poem presents a squeaky clean Round Table where chivalry is always righteous and does not create any significant conflicts of loyalty or values for the characters. His constant facelifts have major ramifications for the overall worldview that he tries to make the stories espouse.

One of the greatest examples of this effect is the way in which he alters the origin of Arthur. In one of the very few details which all of the medieval versions of this story share (from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *The History of the Kings of Britain* to Malory’s *Morte*), Arthur’s birth is the result of an adultery between Uther Pendragon and Igraine,

the wife of one of his subordinates. In fact, one could even call the conception a rape, as the lustful king has Merlin transform him into the likeness of her husband so that he can have his way with her, even though she is a righteous woman. Tennyson could not stomach the idea of the national hero being “the child of shamefulnes” (“The Coming of Arthur” line 238) and centers the opening of the *Idylls* around a general uncertainty regarding Arthur’s origins within Britain. Instead of simply cleaning up the conception narrative to make the relationship between his parents more legitimate, the poet transforms Arthur into an immaculate messianic figure whom the Faërie Otherworld sends to be Britain’s savior.

As the narrative reaches its climax, King Leodogran, father of Guinevere, discovers that Arthur is no son of Uther at all, but was a passenger on a heavenly, dragon-shaped ship piloted by “a shining people on the decks” (375). Tennyson paints a striking picture of his Arthur’s miraculous coming—“all the wave was in a flame: / And down the wave and in the flame was borne / A naked babe, and rode to Merlin’s feet” (381-83). This alteration, thus, rejects the major themes of the original stories. Whereas the medieval texts posit Arthur as the redemption of Uther’s sin or suggest that the rape begins a pattern of sexual evil that forever haunts Arthur, Tennyson uses his Christ-like, heavenly infant to establish a nationalistic vision of God’s providential intervention in the creation of Britain. One can see the same concern in the text’s presentation of the

decidedly non-incestuous conception of Mordred⁶ and Arthur's divine calling to subdue and dominate the island (which can easily be read as having colonial overtones).

Conversely, twentieth-century authors were very careful readers and emulators of texts like Chrétien's romances, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the *Alliterative Morte*, and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. As Arthurian scholar Elizabeth Archibald rightly observes, "[f]rom its beginnings, Arthurian romance shows itself to be far from monolithic, far from uncritical. . . the idealisation of the Arthurian world was questioned in both Latin and vernacular texts" (139). In these texts, the modernists and their contemporaries discovered everything that Tennyson had edited out: Chrétien's *Le Conte du Graal* displays the destructive tendencies into which chivalry could lead a knight just as easily it could into heroism; *Sir Gawain* questions the ability of any knight (no matter how pure) to achieve perfection; the *Alliterative Morte* problematizes the very nature of violence; and Malory's work exposes the fundamental conflicts of loyalty to which medieval values inevitably lead.

Far from attempting to revise these stories and their characters to conform to some moral standard or ironing out the stories' messy themes, these writers allowed themselves to fully embrace the ways in which the Arthurian texts question their own ideas and reveal the deeply conflicted nature of kingship, love, violence, and chivalry itself. It was only through emulating this questioning of seemingly ideal heroes and

⁶ There are no self-destructive tendencies in this Arthur!

values—sometimes explicitly in opposition to Tennyson—that Modernists discovered the continuing relevance of these stories and their symbolic language to the authors’ contemporary world.

This present work attempts to illustrate the ways in which mid-twentieth century authors engage with Arthurian material in more detail by examining two authors whose work, at first glance, seems vastly different but use, as I will demonstrate, the Matter of Britain in very similar ways. These two writers are the aforementioned C. S. Lewis and his hard-boiled, American contemporary Raymond Chandler. These two are ideal for this purpose for three main reasons. First, they represent the renewed interests of both England and America in Arthur. Lewis himself noted that the legend’s “modern developments are almost exclusively English and American” (“Genesis” 24), and any study that seeks to identify some shared characteristics of these texts ought to represent both nations. Second, both authors are interested in making their connections between Arthur’s world and their own through fiction that takes place in the author’s present, as opposed to simply retelling Arthurian stories in their original settings. This direct temporal mixing, thus, highlights the “mythological method” of connecting past and present that they both employ. Finally, Chandler and Lewis saw Western identity as fundamentally dialectical, with every nation and individual struggling between an idealized and corrupted system of values—between the ideal of Arthur and his shadow, Mordred.

C. S. Lewis and Raymond Chandler on the Dialectic of Chivalry

Lewis's *That Hideous Strength* contains one of the writer's most succinct expressions of the central struggle that animates the Arthurian legend:

Something we may call Britain is always haunted by something we may call Logres. Haven't you noticed that we are two countries? After every Arthur, a Mordred; behind every Milton, a Cromwell: a nation of poets, a nation of shopkeepers; the home of Sidney—and of Cecil Rhodes. Is it any wonder they call us hypocrites? But what they mistake for hypocrisy is really the struggle between Logres and Britain. (367)

Though this conception of cultural identity as a struggle between the ideal, spiritual version of national identity and its secular, demonic shadow is not, of course, exclusive to Arthurian literature, it is extremely pervasive within medieval versions of the myth. Malory's work, for example, portrays this clash both on the societal level in the final civil war between the fractured Round Table and the individual level through the dual-natured portrayals of Lancelot (his lord's first knight who is also his greatest betrayer), Guinevere (the queen and adulteress), and Arthur himself (both Messiah of Logres and the British Herod). Layamon's *Brut* and the *Alliterative Morte* also portray an Arthur who is equally pious and vicious. Tennyson would flatten out the dialectic nature of the Arthur story for his Victorian age, but it would become one of the most relevant aspects of the story for the Modern world.

The theme, accordingly, not only animates the overriding conflict of Lewis's science fiction books but also that of Raymond Chandler's hard-boiled detective fiction. Both authors firmly believed in the reality of this struggle as the central truth of Western society, as opposed to the more popular belief in social progression. Additionally, the events of both world wars and their less-than-optimistic outcomes gave both men evidence that the primeval battle between the kingdom of light and darkness was still raging in their own time. This conviction led them to craft fiction that revealed the continuing relevance of Arthurian legend by reincarnating its narrative structures, characters, and themes into contemporary genres of fiction set in modern society. This concern with the Arthurian myth unites Lewis and Chandler with the previously mentioned writers who also produced Arthurian re-workings in the twentieth century, but their attention to the legend's dialectic model of national identity distinguishes their work from other pieces of Modern Arthuriana.

Both authors use the figure of the knight as the central symbol of this dialectic.⁷ Historically, the class of knights were the fighters of the three major groupings within medieval society—"those who pray, those who work, and those who fight" (Salisbury 51). On a basic level, one could see the existence of these warriors as an uncomfortable

⁷ The following overview of knighthood and its development is general and highly simplified because of the nature of this work. Study of the historic knight and its many variants is an extensive field of inquiry that lies beyond the scope of literary analysis. My understanding of this topic relies on the work of Craig Nakashian, Joyce E. Salisbury, C. Warren Hollister, Robert C. Stacey, and Robin Chapman Stacey.

necessity for society; it was better for one group of people to perform the acts of violence that protected the territory than for all the people to dirty their hands and risk their lives. These knights, therefore, were ambivalent figures (especially within Christian communities) whose power was both a constant source of protection and danger to a people group. In a 1940 article on “The Necessity of Chivalry,” Lewis explains that society needed these knights to embody two apparently contradictory characteristics. He must be a warrior “of blood and iron, a man familiar with the sight of smashed faces and the ragged stumps of cut-off limbs” who also “is almost a demure, maidenlike, guest in hall, a gentile, modest, unobtrusive man. . . he is fierce to the *n*th and meek to the *n*th” (13). Given these concerns, it is understandable that the knight’s identity came to depend on the complex code of ethics known as “chivalry” that endeavored to inculcate both qualities into a person. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Medieval Life and Culture* explains the core values of chivalry—“knights were not only to be strong, but also to be disciplined, religious, and ready to use their power to defend the poor, women, and others in need” (Salisbury “Chivalry” 95). These values both made the knights optimally able to serve the interests of the community and put internal checks on their power to harm it.

The most fundamental aspect of this code is the concept of *comitatus*, which is “[t]he status or relationship of . . . a body [of warriors] to their chief” (“comitatus”). The idea goes back to at least the early Anglo-Saxon tribal governments, and it was the key relationship with which literature from the time of *Beowulf* is concerned. This personal bond between knight and lord depended primarily on the knight’s unyielding loyalty,

despite the personal cost involved in fighting for a king. Though chivalry would come to include other elements and obligations to individuals other than the knight's primary lord, late medieval romances continue to position this fidelity as one of the knight's most fundamental duties—and the cause of much narrative conflict and tragedy.

As the concept of Courtly Love began to develop and become codified in the twelfth century, an additional element became essential to chivalry—a good knight must necessarily be a good lover. As Lewis explains in *The Allegory of Love*, the qualities of the ideal lover from authorities like Andreas Capellanus overlap with many of the aforementioned values of chivalry—“The lover must be truthful and modest, a good Catholic, clean in his speech, hospitable, and ready to return good for evil. He must be courageous in war. . . and generous of his gifts. He must at all times be courteous” (*Allegory* 42). The final addition of courtly love to chivalry lies in the fact that a knight must serve not only his lord but also both women in general and, once he has proven himself worthy of a lady's love, that person, in particular. This service did not flow from a platonic affection but, rather, from a decidedly sexual passion. As Salisbury explains, “Marriages were for alliances, not love” (98), and religious thinkers of the time actually condemned passion within marriage more than outside of it because its presence allegedly abused the sacrament of marriage (*Allegory* 50). Writers like Capellanus, however, praised this adulterous love as the source of “all that is good in this present world” (*Allegory* 42). Poets often bore this out in their romances by showing that knights

like Lancelot only achieve their greatest feats of prowess and noblest deeds because of their passion for their lord's wife.

Finally, the knight's relationship with both the lord and lady required him to achieve glory for accomplishments of prowess, righteousness, and piety. Such deeds both increased the honor and power of his lord and proved the knight worthy of his lady's love. For this reason, knights pursued personal glory and verified their value through adhering to the chivalric code and performing feats of prowess. Conversely, breaches of the code or failure to a lord brought shame on a knight, his lord, and his lady. In order to win glory for themselves and their patrons, knights would often embark on quests to assist various needy individuals. Chivalric romances developed out of this practice of knight-errantry, and their plots revolve around knights seeking to right random injustices and save distressed ladies whom they happen to encounter.

Even from this overview, it is obvious that tensions and contradictions exist within chivalry itself and the Christian ethics of medieval culture. Just as Lewis showed "that the rift between the two worlds [of courtly love and Christianity] is irremediable" (*Allegory* 50), so, too, was the rift between chivalry and the Way of Christ. However, just as many later medieval writers like Dante began to modify the conception of romantic love to try to make it consistent with the Biblical worldview, some poets would also present a new conception of knighthood that rejects chivalry in favor of a devotion to Jesus as the lord to whom the warrior owes allegiance. Wolfram von Eschenbach is the most obvious example of these. In his *Parzival*, Wolfram negatively contrasts the secular

knight who follows chivalry (embodied by Gawain) with the sacred knight who is dedicated to God alone (embodied by Parzival and the Templars). The narrative ultimately shows that there is a kind of glass ceiling on the glory that a secular knight can achieve through Gawain's failure to fulfill the quest for the Grail. Parzival's sacred knighthood, however, allows him to achieve the Grail, bring the infidel to salvation, and become a king himself. Accordingly, other authors like Malory would follow in Wolfram's footsteps by presenting sacred knights like Percival and Galahad, who seek the Holy Grail above all else, as the only ones who successfully synthesize the power and meekness that society needs from those who fight.

The ways in which Lewis and Chandler both continue the medieval wrestling with knighthood and the consequences of a person transcending chivalry into the sacred is the underlying commonality between their works. At first glance, these authors seem a very strange pairing. Lewis was a Cambridge professor of Medieval and Renaissance English literature, a popular Christian apologist, and (later) an icon of children's literature. Chandler was a trained classicist, a failed American businessman, and one of the most innovative authors of hard-boiled detective fiction. These surface differences have camouflaged their similarities from serious consideration, however. Though Lewis remained a citizen of England his entire life and Chandler is commonly considered an American writer, both men grew up in England, received an English education, and served in WWI. Each author came to have a writing career in which he constantly walked the line between appealing to popular audiences and producing work of literary merit.

Even more important to this study, both men possessed a profound understanding of the Arthur cycle and consistently used it in their fiction as a means of understanding the current state of the world.

The most significant connection between them, however, is the fact that both men were part of what Shippey calls the “traumatized authors” whose “close or even direct first-hand experiences of some of the worst horrors of the twentieth century” left them “bone-deep convinced that they had come into contact with something irrevocably evil” (xxx). For Lewis and Chandler, this evil was not external, but living within the very heart of Western culture, just as it did in the code of chivalry itself. Their works both bring the narratives of sacred knighthood into the modern world and posit that sacred knighthood as society’s only hope for salvation from its conflicted nature—the only way out of the dialectic.

With this common theme in mind, one can perceive three distinct periods within the authors’ careers. Following WWI, both authors attack the basic cultural assumptions and moral decline that have rendered the West a spiritual waste land. Both authors also use the figure of the knight and the contrast between the secular and sacred codes as an overriding metaphor for this theme. Later, WWII leaves a profound impact on both men, and their writing reflects a sense of hope that the literal and ideological conflicts with the Nazis will lead to the West finally exorcising its dark shadow and becoming a new Camelot. After the defeat of the Axis Powers, both men find that the war did not leave the world radically better. Their disappointment and concern over the ways in which their

culture blatantly continues in corruption is obvious as their sacred knight characters face rejection and exile in the later novels.

Chandler's novels of the detective Philip Marlowe—the most famous of which are *The Big Sleep* (1939), *The Lady in the Lake* (1943), and *The Long Goodbye* (1953)—also make extensive use of the knight archetype and the quest narrative. Marlowe is essentially an Arthurian knight reborn in modern America, and the themes of Chandler's novels hinge on the conflict between his chivalric values, the corruption of the Los Angeles cityscape in which he ventures out on quests for his various clients, and the potential of America's emerging out of its internal and external conflicts as a new Camelot of heroic brotherhood. Rather than forming a cycle such as Lewis's trilogy, Chandler's mystery novels appropriate the winding, complex plots of the medieval romance, which favors each individual episode in the quest and the insights that it gives to the central conflicts of knighthood more than overall narrative coherence. However, the development of Marlowe's character from an energetic Galahad figure into a tired, modern version of Thomas Malory provides the novels with an overriding narrative arc and reveals Chandler's overall conception of knighthood's fading place in American society.

Lewis's most important Arthurian works are his three science fiction books—*Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (1945)—which together follow the adventures of Elwin Ransom, a philologist who blunders his way into a secret colonial expedition to the planet Mars. This voyage transforms Ransom

into an intercessory figure between Earth and the Heavens, and he subsequently visits Venus in order to thwart a second primeval Fall on that world. Finally, Ransom becomes the leader of a secret resistance group that foils the machinations of the demonic government agency N.I.C.E., which planned to release Merlin from his long imprisonment and use his knowledge to rule the world. Together, these novels portray Ransom's development from a fearful and inexperienced layman into a spiritual warrior and, finally, a wise king in ways that parallel Arthur's development from naïve youth to knight to king of the Britons. Additionally, Ransom's adventures in other worlds, though clearly drawing from the space adventures of authors like H. G. Wells, also share the structure of medieval otherworldly journeys, such as Arthur and his knights experience frequently.

Considered together, the similarities among these novels reveal both the immense adaptability of the Arthurian material and the thematic continuity that it brings to diverse types of retellings. The fact that it inspired works of such vastly different genres as science fiction and hard-boiled detective fiction and styles as unique as Lewis's and Chandler's attests to its timeless quality. Additionally, the authors' shared conception of Western identity and the overall narrative arcs of both groups of novels flow out of their engagement with medieval Arthurian texts. The ways in which they connect figures and events from the Arthurian and Modern worlds further reveal a shared Eliot-esque mythical method that collapses the gulf of time between those texts and their own current cultural moment.

At the same time, the Marlowe and Ransom novels bear significant differences. Similarly to the distinctions between Tennyson's and Eliot's approaches to the Grail quest that Linda Ray Pratt points out, Chandler is ultimately concerned with the human struggles and tragedies that result from attempting to realize a sacred knighthood in the contemporary world, while Lewis emphasizes the Biblical hope of Christ's ability to incarnate Himself within everyday people and, thus, bring the once and future kingdom to fruition. Understanding this difference allows us to distinguish the very different senses in which both Marlowe and Ransom are "messianic" and what this identification means for their authors' respective hopes for their world.

Literature Review

The general critical conversations regarding these texts have tended to focus themselves around two major issues: how they fit into established genres and the ideological conflicts between medieval and modern worldviews within the novels. Because Lewis and Chandler have never been considered as two voices in an artistic conversation, scholarship on both authors has also developed in ways which have no obvious overlap. Scholarship on Lewis, for example, has traditionally been concerned with connecting the author's creative works with his theology, while scholarship on Chandler became very interested in using the works to psychoanalyze the author. These concerns dominated the first decades of scholarship on these authors, but, in recent years,

scholars began to shift these general critical focuses by introducing and reintroducing questions regarding the place of these authors within the larger contexts of their cultural and historical moments and the ways in which their works react to the events of WWII. Given the diversity of critical interests and approaches, this overview will not attempt to provide a detailed summary of general scholarship on these authors, but it will only cover the works which are relevant to an Arthurian examination.

The preliminary pieces of scholarship on the two authors appeared relatively close to their deaths. Chandler passed in 1959, and Lewis followed in 1963. Scholars began to seriously study their works within their lifetimes; significant scholarly attention would begin in the 1960s and 1970s. Within study of Lewis's science fiction novels, John H. Timmerman and Margaret Hannay would begin to examine the Arthurian elements in the third book in his trilogy with "Logres and Britain: The Dialectic of C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*" and "Arthurian and Cosmic Myth in *That Hideous Strength*," respectively. As for relevant Chandler scholarship, Philip Durham's *Down These Mean Streets a Man Must Go: Raymond Chandler's Knight* first examined the ways in which the character of Marlowe descends from the knight archetype through the American tradition of the cowboy and pulp detective.

Jonathan Holden subsequently expanded on Durham's work in "The Case for Raymond Chandler's Fiction as Romance." This article made the first serious attempt to create a detailed analysis of the connection between the novel's narrative structures and medieval knightly romances. Additionally, Paul F. Ferguson began to examine the

significance of character names within the Marlowe novels in “The Name is Marlowe.” He noted that many of the names are references to medieval or classical characters and argued that their presence in the decidedly non-chivalrous setting of Los Angeles highlights the contradictory nature of the American identity. He further argued that the name “Philip Marlowe” connects Chandler’s hero with both the medieval knight through his first name (derived from a Greek word that means “horse lover”) and the modernist tradition by way of *Heart of Darkness*’s protagonist.

The 1980s would see significant development in such conversations. Lewis scholars would continue to examine medieval elements in the trilogy within articles like Darlene Logan’s “Battle Strategy in Perelandra: *Beowulf* Revisited.” Joe McClatchey’s “The Affair of Jane’s Dreams: Reading *That Hideous Strength* as Iconographic Art” provided one of the most thoughtful examinations of the Arthurian elements within that novel by showing the ways in which it conforms to Lewis’s own understanding of the Arthurian narrative within Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen*. Significant development on scholarly appreciation of Chandler’s use of such elements would also continue in this decade. Jerry Speir’s book-length study on Chandler would be the first to read *The Big Sleep* as a “chronicle of the *failure* of romance” (30), in which the initially cocky Marlowe is brought low through his failure to help Carmen Sternwood and comprehend the truth of the human condition as he encounters it in the plot. Finally, the oft-cited article “Chivalry and Modernity in Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*” by Ernest Fontana would also be published in this decade. In it, Fontana expanded on Speir’s

argument regarding *The Big Sleep* and examined Marlowe's relationship with General Sternwood as that of knight and king. Fontana demonstrated how villainous relationships throughout the work (especially that of Camino and Eddie Mars) are dark mirrors of the knight/lord relationship and that they reflect America's fundamental corruption of romantic social codes.

The 1990s brought the first book-length study of Lewis's trilogy—David C. Downing's *Planets in Peril: A Critical Study of C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy*. Downing attempted to conduct a holistic analysis and assessment that considered Lewis's academic concerns, theology, and personal history in order to understand the science fiction novels. While this study also provided the most extensive analysis of Lewis's use of medieval ideas within the novels up to that point, it remained extremely general in its scope. The decade would see many more examinations of these elements within *That Hideous Strength* in David A. Branson's "Arthurian Elements in *That Hideous Strength*" and Dorothy F. Lane's "Resurrecting the 'Ancient Unities': The Incarnation of Myth and the Legend of Logres in C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*." Chandler studies, on the other hand, would not see a richer examination of medieval or Arthurian narratives within the Marlowe novels throughout this decade.

The 2000s, on the other hand, was, by far, the most important decade for scholarship on Arthuriana in Chandler. Charles J. Rzepka's seminal essay "'I'm in the Business Too': Gothic Chivalry, Private Eyes, and Proxy Sex and Violence in Chandler's *The Big Sleep*" argued that the novel does not directly censure chivalric (or "gothic" as he

rather imprecisely calls it) code but uses it to criticize American consumption culture. He demonstrated that every evil or corrupt character within the novel “participate[s] in a debased form of chivalric relationship” (698) with extensive analysis of Sternwood and Eddie Mars. Rzepka also argued, however, that the novel features a couple of characters (like Mona Mars) who display true knightly loyalty. Additionally, Andrew E. Mathis’s *The King Arthur Myth in Modern American Literature* provided the first extensive intertextual analysis of Chandler’s Arthurian sources. In approaching *The Big Sleep*, Mathis built off of Fontana’s examination of the *comitatus* relationship between Marlowe and Sternwood, argued that Sternwood is a version of the Fisher King, highlighted the novel’s references to more Celtic/Irish-influenced Arthurian texts (particularly “The Book of Sir Tristram” and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*), and argued that Chandler places this Celtic/Irish subtext into the novel “to make a decidedly American statement against Britain” (59) through the linked history and anti-colonial sentiments of America and Ireland.

Finally, the last decade of scholarship has seen a decrease in such Arthurian examination of the Marlowe novels but an explosion of interest in examining Lewis’s science fiction novels through such a lens. *That Hideous Strength* remains the most popular text for analysis, and articles like Thomas L. Martin’s “Merlin, Magic, and the Meta-fantastic: The Matter of *That Hideous Strength*” have added new dimensions to previous discussion of the novel. Paul R. Rovang would also push the conversation on the influence of *The Faerie Queen* on Lewis into new territory by arguing that not only *That*

Hideous Strength but also *Perelandra* bears its influence. The most significant publication in this decade, however, is the anthology *The Inklings and King Arthur: J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, and Owen Barfield on the Matter of Britain*, which presented the most thorough examination of the subject to date. Within it, Brenton D. G. Dickieson's "Mixed Messages and Hyperlinked Worlds: A Study of Intertextuality in C. S. Lewis' Ransom Cycle" is a seminal piece of scholarship that provided the first extensive examination of Lewis's theoretical approach to intertextuality and the ways in which it informs the use of the Arthurian universe throughout his trilogy. Benjamin Shogren's "Those Kings of Lewis' Logres: Arthurian Figures as Lewisian Genders in *That Hideous Strength*," also included in this volume, examined the novel's combination of the figures of Arthur and the Fisher King in Ransom in light of Lewis's portrayal of gender in the novel and argues that the two kingly titles are icons of masculinity and femininity.

Methodology

Though it is obvious that many scholars have investigated the Arthurian elements and allusions within the works of Lewis and Chandler, few have considered these two authors within the shared context of the literary sub-movement of Modern Arthuriana. The scholarly focus on either author as part of their respective genres (science and detective fiction) has obscured the central Arthurian theory of a cultural struggle between

good and evil that energizes the two bodies of work. The many studies which have ignored or misunderstood the presence of these themes have led to many narrow readings of the Arthurian material within the texts. For example, a common critical assumption about Chandler's novels is that they rely on the dichotomy of a supposedly idealized image of the chivalrous knight from Arthurian legend and the moral filth of Los Angeles. This assumption ignores the many conflicted portrayals of knighthood and the internal friction inside of the Round Table's conception of chivalry within major Arthurian works such as *Le Conte du Graal* and *Le Morte D'Arthur* and the ways in which Chandler used such sources to shape his presentation of the relationship between the medieval and the modern worlds.

Given this hole in the body of scholarship on Lewis and Chandler, this study has three main objectives:

- To examine the way in which the Arthurian conception of a central conflict between a chivalric and fascist national identity serves as the overriding theme of both Lewis's science fiction trilogy and Chandler's Marlowe novels;
- To analyze and reassess the authors' use of Arthurian narrative structures and character types from works like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, and *Le Conte du Graal* within contemporary settings as attempts to demonstrate the continuing relevance to modern society of this internal national conflict;

- To use this examination to refute certain critical assessments of these texts which have taken neither the centrality of this national dualism nor their place within the context of Modern Arthuriana into account.

This study relies primarily on close reading and intertextual examination of the primary texts. These include Lewis's three science fiction novels, three of Chandler's most popular Marlowe novels, multiple medieval Arthurian texts that inform or influence them, and contemporary works of Modern Arthuriana from authors like Eliot, Tolkien, and Williams. I also often cite relevant secondary scholarship on the primary texts, giving special attention to Lewis's own medieval scholarship, that of his contemporaries, and seminal works on Lewis and Chandler.

At the same time, I am aware that merely discovering and noting the presence of archetypes and influences does little to increase understanding of any given text. Scholar Alexander M. Bruce's warning to Tolkien scholars on this subject is just as applicable in approaching Lewis and Chandler's works—scholars must “focus not just on cataloging similarities and differences . . . but more on seeking a greater perspective on how” the author “re-shaped” the material (Bruce 104). This work, therefore, does not seek exhaustively to catalogue the Arthurian archetypes and themes that appear in these texts. Rather, by revealing the ways in which engagement with the Arthur myth created significant overlaps in political and narrative thought between Lewis and Chandler, this study contributes to scholarship on all three subjects beyond mere identification of influences. Instead, it reexamines and complicates discussion of the two authors' debts

and contributions to late Modern literature's reconsideration and application of Arthurian narrative structures, elements, and themes.

This work approaches its task through three chapters, each of which examines two novels—one by Chandler and one by Lewis. The first chapter considers the ways in which *The Big Sleep* and *Out of the Silent Planet* introduce their heroes as chivalrous men inhabiting the modern world and how their narratives make use of medieval tropes to both connect the present to the past and critique Inter-War society. The second chapter examines the ways in which *The Lady in the Lake* and *Perelandra* continue this blending in order to present the authors' shared hope that WWII will cause Western society to become a kind of new Round Table of brotherhood that can finally overcome its evil shadow—Nazi Germany. Finally, the third chapter shows the ways in which *The Long Goodbye* and *That Hideous Strength* concern themselves with the aftermath of WWII by using the Arthurian downfall narratives to warn that the West is inviting a repetition of the destruction of the Round Table through its rejection of sacred knights in favor of a collectivist, Darwinian society. A conclusion considers the Arthurian-messianic elements of the novels through analyzing Marlowe and Ransom as distinct interpretations of the Galahad figure.

THE INDUCTION TO KNIGHTHOOD: THE EVOLUTION OF THE SACRED
ARTHURIAN HERO IN *THE BIG SLEEP* AND *OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET*

The Evolution of the American Knight: Philip Marlowe as Hard-Boiled Galahad

In his 1895 essay “The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher,” Owen Wister argued that, on arriving in the western frontier, an American of English descent found “the slumbering untamed Saxon awoke in him, and mindful of the tournament, mindful of the hunting game, galloped after wild cattle” (37). Wister, thus, perceived the rebirth of the medieval knight in America, despite the centuries of comfort and complacency that had almost overridden the chivalrous gene in Anglo-Saxons. These men of valor became the heroes of the frontier in Wister’s fiction, and he developed the prototypical cowboy-knight in his seminal novel *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* (1902). Raymond Chandler, a later (but no less significant) writer, also became enamored of the American frontier, but he wrote of a time when there were no more horses in the west. In depicting the grimy world of Los Angeles between the World Wars, Chandler also found inspiration and drama in America’s complex relationship with its knightly heritage.

Whereas Wister saw the reborn knightly identity as a stable, positive one, Chandler found it to be internally conflicted. In his premier novel, *The Big Sleep* (1939),

Chandler explores the adventures of private detective Philip Marlowe, who is perhaps the last remnant of chivalry left in the city. By setting this knight-detective in opposition to the corruption and evil of the Inter-War cityscape, the writer exposes the limits of the chivalric code and points towards an alternative form of knighthood that aligns itself with universal values, rather than the conflicted tenets of chivalry. In other words, by infusing the novel with Arthurian archetypes and thematic parallels to *Le Conte du Graal* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,⁸ Chandler portrays the pressures of Modernity forcing Marlowe to evolve past the medieval conception of secular knighthood and into a Galahad-like sacred knight who sacrifices not only himself but also the chivalric code itself to protect others from the darkness of the new American society.

Arthurian archetypes exerted a particularly strong influence on Raymond Chandler from early in his life. The author lived in London from his childhood to early adult years, where the English culture exposed him to the legends of Arthur. *The Big Sleep* annotators Owen Hill, Pamela Jackson, and Anthony Dean Rizzuto even go so far as to say that “Chandler grew up steeped in the Arthurian revival” that swept through the culture at that time (325). His earliest poems reflect an avid interest in medieval themes and images, as “The Quest,” “When I Was King,” and “The Perfect Knight” show. The influence is also evident from Chandler’s very first short story, “Blackmailers Don’t

⁸ I am indebted to Andrew E. Mathis’s *The King Arthur Myth in Modern American Literature* for first connecting *The Big Sleep* and *Sir Gawain*, though my analysis proceeds along different points of comparison than his.

Shoot,” in which Chandler named his prototype detective-knight (who would eventually become Philip Marlowe) “Mallory” in homage to Sir Thomas Malory, author of *Le Morte D’Arthur*.

Many of the characters in *The Big Sleep*, accordingly, are hard-boiled versions of characters or figures from Arthurian legend. The most important of these is the knight, of whom Marlowe is an urban, Americanized version. In his exceptional essay on chivalric themes in *The Big Sleep*, Charles J. Rzepka states that “Chandler gives us a portrait of his detective hero as ideal knight” (720). One must be careful with this idea, however, because, as I will argue below, the portrait of Marlowe in *The Big Sleep* is not a static one—the novel portrays the ways in which the increasingly un-romantic events of the novel force the detective to evolve from one conception of idealized knighthood to another.

At the opening of the novel, Marlowe proves himself to be a remnant of the secular chivalric ethic to which most of Arthur’s knights (especially Gawain) hold. The novel reveals that Marlowe possesses a moral code that is very similar to the medieval concept of chivalry (which the Introduction of this work outlines). The first chapters of the novel, for example, emphasize that Marlowe understands the importance of the knight-lord relationship and appears to be eager to live it for himself. Rzepka argues that Marlowe, who became a private detective after witnessing employers like the district attorney prove unworthy, is “looking for a liege lord worthy of a ‘true’ knight like

himself" (704). In *The Big Sleep*, the detective seems to see General Sternwood (his current employer) as potentially filling the role.

Chandler highlights Sternwood's position as a potential lord for Marlowe by giving him a striking resemblance to the Fisher King from Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Conte du Graal*.⁹ Most broadly, Sternwood holds the two essential qualities of any competent king—military authority through his status as a retired general and his possession of immense wealth that he can use to reward the worthy. The Fisher King displays these same qualities, as do all other competent monarchs within medieval literature. The general resembles the Fisher King more specifically in the fact that both men are crippled and aging rulers who provide the story's hero with a quest. Sternwood and the Fisher King were also once respected war heroes—a fact which highlights the tragedy of their present need for the care of servants.

The initial presentations of both characters also feature some key similarities. Chrétien offers the following description of the Fisher King:

In the middle of the hall he saw a handsome nobleman with graying hair seated upon a bed. His head was covered by a cap of sable—black as mulberry, with a purple peak—and his robe was of the same material. He was leaning on his elbow before a very large fire of dry logs, blazing brightly between four columns. Four

⁹ I am, once again, indebted to Mathis for this connection, but the comparisons between the specific passages I cite from Chandler and Chrétien are my own.

hundred men could easily sit around that fire, and each would have a comfortable spot. (419)

Chandler's description of Marlowe's first meeting with General Sternwood in his steamy greenhouse echoes this passage: "Here, in a space of hexagonal flags, an old red Turkish rug was laid down and on the rug was a wheel chair, and in the wheel chair an old and obviously dying man watched us come ... His long narrow body was wrapped—in that heat—in a traveling rug and a faded red bathrobe" (*Sleep* 20, 22). Both passages describe the rulers inhabiting dwellings that express their wealth, while undercutting their current power through emphasizing their physical impairments. Percival (Chrétien's knight) notes that the Fisher King sits on a bed, not a throne or chair. This detail indicates the king's impairment, as the wheelchair does for Sternwood. Both characters wear attire that connotes wealth—the Fisher King's sable robe and Sternwood's bathrobe. Finally, both characters have an abnormal association with heat. The Fisher King reclines alone by a fire warm enough for a small army and Sternwood requires a traveling rug to stay warm within a humid greenhouse.

Additionally, Sternwood and the Fisher King both have questions that they want their knights to ask them. In Chrétien's text, the Fisher King brings the Holy Grail before Percival in hopes that the young knight will ask him to reveal its true nature (an action that would have healed the king's wounds). The knight, however, fails to inquire about it because of his strict adherence to his code of etiquette. Marlowe also comes to realize that Sternwood "put those Geiger notes up to me chiefly as a test" (418), and that his real

desire was for Marlowe to investigate the disappearance of his son-in-law, Rusty Regan. In this instance, Marlowe shows up the imbecilic Percival in that the detective eventually does discover his employer's true wishes and proceeds to search for Regan.

Chandler also emphasizes Marlowe's loyalty to Sternwood and his interests as a central theme throughout the novel. During Marlowe's meeting with the district attorney, for example, he admits to holding back information on the case "[b]ecause my client is entitled to that protection, short of anything but a Grand Jury" (240), and he even admits that it was "against my principles to tell as much as I've told tonight, without consulting the General" (244). These comments show that his principles require fierce loyalty to his employer, even if it costs him favor with the police. This loyalty, as western American literature scholar Ernest Fontana holds, is paramount to *comitatus*: "[Sternwood] is the lord that Marlowe as knight serves and whom he will not betray" (183). These echoes of past lords and knights within the characters' relationship, therefore, reveal Marlowe's dedication to chivalric values in the teeth of cultural change—he does not let the modern lack of *comitatus* obscure his knowledge of the noble roots of the worker/patron relationship.

The lord/vassal relationship is not the sole connection between Marlowe and the knight, however. Chandler demonstrates throughout the novel that Marlowe lives his life according to the basics of the chivalric code. Although the detective never discusses the exact nature of this code within the novel, he does reference it when he finds himself in danger of compromise, such as when he frankly tells the police that he will not betray his

client. Furthermore, Marlowe's comment in the same scene that his value as a detective lies in "[w]hat little guts and intelligence the Lord gave me and a willingness to get pushed around in order to protect a client" (*Sleep* 244) might also indicate that he believes his vocation holds religious significance—a possible foreshadowing of the sacred knighthood he will come to embrace by the novel's end. Finally, Marlowe's commitment to the defense and service of women is also apparent in his attempts to save Carmen Sternwood from the pornography scandal into which she has gotten herself. It also appears later, when he tells her that his refusal to sleep with her is a matter of "professional pride. I'm working for your father. . . He sort of trusts me not to pull any stunts" (322). Chandler, thus, reveals that Marlowe holds to the two basic tenets of chivalry—loyalty to the lord and service to ladies.

The novel makes the first important distinction between Marlowe and the typical knight in the pursuit of glory that would typically flow out of these two tenets. Marlowe does not care about recognition, as he makes clear when he states, "I didn't mind. . . what anybody called me" (324). However, Marlowe's adventures as a private detective still mirror the knightly quest in that both center around seeking justice or aid for troubled individuals. One could argue, of course, that Marlowe's "quests" are still much less glorious than those of Arthurian romance because of the decidedly un-romantic nature of his tasks, which include dealing with Sternwood's private and embarrassing issues with blackmailers, pornographers, gamblers, and gangsters who are preying on his daughters. While it is true that medieval romances often portray the knight-errant from an idealized

perspective, at least some historical knights' quests could have involved tasks comparable to "removing morbid growths from people's backs" (40), as General Sternwood characterizes Marlowe's job. Much of the work of actual knights involved mundane, trivial, or downright unsavory tasks in service to the interests of their lords. As historian Joyce E. Salisbury explains, "[T]he code of chivalry provided only a veneer of symbols and ceremonies that overlay the violence at the heart of 'those who fight'" ("Society" 55). Chandler's identifying the detective with the knight, therefore, begins the de-mythologizing of chivalry that the author will continue throughout the novel.

Despite the many similarities between Marlowe and medieval warriors, the detective is also highly critical of traditional knights. This criticism is obvious from the novel's first chapter. On seeing the Sternwoods' stained-glass depiction of a knight taking his time in freeing a naked, captive damsel, Marlowe says that "if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't seem to be really trying" (*Sleep* 10). This statement indicates that Marlowe, like Salisbury, sees knights as being willing to put their lusts above their duty to aid the helpless. This difference represents the first in a series of steps Marlowe takes toward an alternative conception of knighthood.

This evolution is at the heart of *The Big Sleep*'s narrative progression. His chivalric values and subtle critique of the stained-glass knight at the beginning of the novel aligns Marlowe's knightly persona with Sir Gawain from *The Green Knight*, who is the most consistently chivalrous knight in Arthur's court. Their similarities stem from the

fact that both men are the most uncompromising champions of justice in their worlds. In “The Name is Marlowe,” Paul F. Ferguson calls Marlowe “the only honorable man in his world” (229), and his adherence to his code throughout the trials of the first half of the novel bears out this high praise. Gawain, though not the only virtuous man among Arthur’s knights, is, according to the Pearl Poet’s *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, “one who all profit and prowess and perfect manners / comprised in his person” (58); the poet requires an entire stanza to describe Gawain’s five-fold virtues through his symbol—the pentangle. Additionally, both Gawain and Marlowe possess great verbal prowess. *The Big Sleep* abounds with Marlowe’s use of sharp wit—a weapon which Hill and his colleagues hold is “part of the arsenal of the hard-boiled dick” (17). Similarly, the people who encounter Gawain know the knight for his famous skill in crafting “the perfect expressions of polished converse” (Pearl Poet 58). Though Gawain’s rhetorical skills are not suited to the “wisecrack” like Marlowe’s, both rely on their words to navigate the perilous situations in which they find themselves.

Gawain’s perfection, however, makes him a target for the Green Knight and a suitable pawn in the game between Morgan le Fay and Arthur’s court. These characters will spend most of the poem putting Gawain through scrutinizing tests that stretch the knight to his moral limits and turn his greatest strengths against him. Marlowe, as Gawain’s modern equivalent, also undergoes intense moral testing and finds himself swept up into the shadowy dealings of Vivian, the pornographer Arthur Gwynn Geiger, and casino boss Eddie Mars. Chandler’s chief departure from the Pearl Poet, however,

lies in the fact that no antagonist seems to test Marlowe's character intentionally. Rather, the evil of his environment constantly exerts a corrupting pressure onto his code through the increasingly depraved situations it creates for him.

The pressure comes to a boiling point during the sexual temptations to which the Sternwood sisters subject him. Chandler presents one of Sternwood's daughters, Vivian, as an adaptation of a specifically Arthurian archetype, while the other, Carmen, is a combination of medieval and modern figures. This contrast between them reveals why Marlowe is more effective with handling Vivian's temptation than Carmen's. As Andrew Preston explains, Vivian's cunning and manipulative powers associate her with Hellowes and other enchantresses. These characters use their minds just as frequently as their bodies to achieve their goals and often command the services of men, such as in Morgan le Fay's apparent superiority to the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain*. The fact that Vivian acts as the mastermind behind the cover-up of Regan's murder (which includes her commanding at least the house's butler as a subordinate) particularly aligns her with Morgan's role as the secret source of the events of that romance. Finally, the name "Vivian" comes from the enchantress who seduces and defeats Merlin (Hill et al. 45). The name directly connects her to the Arthurian legend and frames her as a dangerous foe for Marlowe.

In keeping with these associations, Vivian attempts to seduce Marlowe primarily through creating an enticing, romantic situation when she asks him to drive to the beach as he takes her home from Mars's casino. This method is similar to that of the host's wife

in *Sir Gawain*, who takes advantage of her husband's absence to turn Gawain's bedroom into a sexually charged trap. Like Gawain, Marlowe is also able to talk his way out of her trap, but her shadow remains over the rest of the plot.

Carmen, on the other hand, is, as Preston again points out, more in line with "demons in the guise of women who constantly appear and attempt to tempt the Grail knights" (33). Rzepka also argues that "[t]he murderous, epileptic-like fits that overcome her when her sexual advances are rejected by Regan, Brody, and Marlowe himself, have all the hallmarks of demonic possession" (705). However, Chandler infuses this archetype with very contemporary concerns. Whether or not a demon literally drives Carmen to lust and murder, Rzepka convincingly argues that habitually "being nothing more than an object" for men has turned her into "little more than a walking, talking *Playboy* centerfold" (718) with no sense of meaning beyond the patriarchal cultural equation of sex appeal with intrinsic value. In Carmen, Chandler seems to be infusing a medieval figure with the emerging sexual culture of his time. Rather than representing a liberation of women, *The Big Sleep* suggests that a greater cultural emphasis on sexuality will only trap unstable women within the worst stereotypes of femininity. The fact that Carmen murders Regan and attempts to kill Marlowe further indicates that this cultural possession will not only harm women, but also have ripple effects of destruction throughout the family and society.

Therefore, Carmen ultimately proves more dangerous than Vivian because she represents not only a demoniac, but the modern "hollow woman." Her invasion of

Marlowe's apartment and attempt to pressure him into sleeping with her proves to be much more difficult for Marlowe to overcome than Vivian's cunning. Like Gawain, he knows that he must serve women, even those as unstable as Carmen. This is the reason Gawain is never able to be uncivil to his hostess, even while evading her attempts to use the chivalric code to bend him to her will. Marlowe, following this precedent, first tries to be chivalrous with Carmen, but she is fundamentally different than the hostess or her sister, Vivian. Carmen is a being who understands nothing but sexual desire and power; she neither knows nor uses chivalry. As she continues to expose her body to him and refuses to leave at his polite requests, Marlowe has a key revelation—"Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights" (*Sleep* 322). This situation, born from the contemporary world's sexual ethics rather than the system of courtly love in which knights live, does not allow Marlowe to "at all times be courteous." Instead, he must do something decidedly uncourteous to escape the situation with his integrity—"I said carefully: 'I'll give you three minutes to get dressed and out of here. If you're not out by then, I'll throw you out—by force. Just the way you are, naked. And I'll throw your clothes after you into the hall. Now—get started'" (326).

This threat works and, once she leaves, Marlowe explains, "I went back to the bed and looked down at it. The imprint of her head was still in the pillow, of her small corrupt body still on the sheets. I put my empty glass down and tore the bed to pieces savagely" (326). This reaction has often puzzled readers and led to a plethora of explanations, from a sudden explosion of repressed sexuality to an act of hatred toward women. Given the

chivalric themes of the novel, however, a more logical reading is that Marlowe explodes with anger because Carmen has forced him to violate his code. The anti-chivalrous world has finally broken him. Yet, by violating chivalric courtesy, Marlowe remained true to a greater moral imperative not inherent in chivalry—the refusal to take advantage of a psychologically sick girl.

Misunderstanding of this scene and others like it has allowed many critics to assert that Marlowe holds throughout the entirety of the novel to the exact chivalric code that medieval romances allegedly celebrate. Fontana, for example, holds that *The Big Sleep* reveals “the failure of romance as genre and of chivalry as personal code” (180). Medieval romances, however, had been exposing the complexities and failures of chivalry long before the twentieth century. Chrétien de Troyes, for example, presents conflicting views of knights in the dialog between the young Percival and his mother from *Le Conte du Graal*. His mother describes knights (which the boy mistakenly took for angels) as “the angels men complain of, who kill whatever they come upon” (Chrétien 386). Though the young man is enamored of the valiant knights, the wiser mother knows that they often give in to their darker tendencies. Chrétien also criticizes the effectiveness of chivalry by portraying the young Percival harming many people through his strict and literal adherence to the chivalric code. Percival comes to represent the worst of knighthood not through unchivalrous acts, but through following the code.

Chandler’s themes, thus, parallel Chrétien’s and other medieval writers’ concerns with the flaws in the chivalric code, but his greatest example of these flaws lies in the

hitman Canino, not Marlowe. In some ways, Canino is like Chrétien's nightmare version of knighthood—a knight who threatens the community instead of protecting it. For, just as Marlowe enters a *comitatus* relationship with Sternwood, scholars such as Fontana and Rzepka point out that “Canino is Mars's knight” (Fontana 185). What these scholars do not, perhaps, pay as much attention to is how closely Canino holds to chivalry. The hitman exists to carry out violent tasks on his lord's behalf, he gains glory for himself as being “tough like some guys think they are tough” (*Sleep* 340), and he is so loyal that Mars entrusts him with the care of his wife—the ultimate mark of honor for a loyal knight. Even though the novel portrays Canino as a model of knighthood, it ultimately shows him to be a vile murderer because his devotion is destitute of extra-chivalric moral boundaries—he often kills the innocent (like Harry Jones) through remaining loyal to Mars's interests. In many ways, he functions as Marlowe's dark shadow, just as the decidedly immoral version of Gawain that haunts the pages of Malory's work stands in stark contrast to the heroic version in *The Green Knight*. If Chandler posits the private detective as the positive modern equivalent of the knight, he also shows that American culture can corrupt that figure into the hitman.

The conflict between chivalry and the modern world, therefore, again comes to a head when Marlowe confronts Canino in a shoot-out as he frees Mona Mars from his clutches. The pivotal moment comes when Marlowe gets the drop on his foe: “He whirled at me. Perhaps it would have been nice to allow him another shot or two, just like a gentleman of the old school. But his gun was still up and I couldn't wait any longer.

Not long enough to be a gentleman of the old school. I shot him four times” (402). Although (as Hill et al. point out) “Marlowe has [by this point] already declined to ambush Canino in a rather gentlemanly fashion” (403), his actions do not conform to the highest standards of chivalry, as Mona will make clear when she questions whether Canino’s death was necessary. Chandler shows that Marlowe has now failed to be perfectly courageous, just as he failed to be courteous with Carmen. Once again, Chandler shows that Marlowe must actually go against his code in order to accomplish a higher goal—in this case, the destruction of his knightly shadow. As Mona also comes to realize, the death was necessary both in practicality—Canino would have killed Marlowe and many others, if left at large—and symbolically—as the events of the novel continue to push Marlowe to destroy the corruptible version of chivalry to which he has been holding.

Marlowe completes his transformation at the novel’s climax. Like the finale of *Sir Gawain*, Marlowe here faces a dramatic test that reveals his true nature. This use of testing is a particularly illustrative example of the novel’s modification of medieval ideas, as both texts are mainly concerned with testing, rather than the hero’s victory in combat or ability to rescue others.¹⁰ At the climax of the poem, Gawain takes what would appear to be a fatal blow from the Green Knight and proves himself true to his earlier promise to allow him such a stroke. The Knight, therefore, does not harm Gawain and congratulates

¹⁰ A distinction from other heroic tales that Hill and his collaborators seem to overlook (457).

him on his virtues. *The Big Sleep* ends with Marlowe testing Carmen through recreating the situation in which she had gunned down Regan earlier. Marlowe also receives an apparently fatal blow from her when she opens fire on him with a gun he had previously loaded with blanks. The novel, therefore, turns the ending of *Sir Gawain* on its head—the hero now tests the villain and Carmen’s reaction proves not her virtue, but her psychotic nature. The situation also pushes Marlowe to his final and most definitive breach of chivalry—he betrays Sternwood by helping Vivian cover up the truth about Regan’s murderer.

Given Marlowe’s similarity to Gawain, the fact that both texts end with their heroes believing in their own failure is particularly significant. After the Green Knight reveals that Gawain committed a minor compromise by taking his wife’s girdle, the hero laments, “Now I am faulty and false, who afraid have been ever / of treachery and troth-breach” (Pearl Poet 115). In the same way, Marlowe laments his compromise to cover up Carmen’s insanity and prevent “his dying, ineffectual ‘king’ from knowing the world his own heroic enterprise has engendered” (Fontana 185). Gawain’s condemnation of himself echoes through Marlowe’s lament at the end of his quest: “Me, I was part of the nastiness now. Far more a part of it than Rusty Regan was. But the old man didn’t have to be” (*Sleep* 454). Although these failures are of tragic proportions to the heroes, J. R. R. Tolkien’s thoughts on Gawain’s response illuminates the ways in which their reactions show their humanity: “how true to life, to a picture of a perhaps not very reflective man of honour, is this shame... in something considered rather shabby, whatever in solemn

conscience we may think of its real importance” (7). Gawain and Marlowe show true virtue in their agony over even a minor or necessary breach of their codes. Chandler gives Marlowe a greater virtue, however, in that he breaches his code for the sake of Sternwood, rather than concern for his own safety.

This final contrast between Gawain and Marlowe points toward the novel’s final theme—that the evil active in corrupting even sexuality, power, and loyalty cannot be defeated by the conflicted medieval concept of *secular* chivalry that the romances depict. To use Preston’s words, “Sticking to his code. . . necessitated loss. In this case, loss not of life, but of the vague, glimmering hope of knightly purity” (48). The best that even Gawain can do against the evil possessing urban America is to come close, but not quite, to passing the test. What Preston, perhaps, overlooks is the alternative type of knighthood that works like *Le Conte du Graal* and *Le Morte* offer as an alternative to the standard chivalric code. Marlowe’s development, following Percival’s, shows that knighthood must find its basis in something more spiritual and eternal if it is to become truly incorruptible—an idea that finds its greatest expression in the sacred knighthood of Sir Galahad.

The story of *The Big Sleep* is, ultimately, the story of Marlowe developing from a Gawain into a Galahad through his growing knowledge of the chivalric code’s deficiencies, his care for others (rather than glory), and his taking “upon himself the sins, the ‘nastiness,’ of this fallen world” (Rzepka 720). The sacrifice of the chivalric code allows him to become not a perfectly chivalrous knight but one who mirrors the

sacrificial savior as Galahad does in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. To put it another way, the novel chronicles how Marlowe comes to possess the qualities Chandler holds to be essential for a hard-boiled detective-knight in his seminal 1950 essay "The Simple Art of Murder":

But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. . . The story is his adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in. (991-92)

His exposure of the hidden truth that is America's corrupt underbelly, thus, allows Marlowe to become complete by moving beyond his old chivalric code in favor of a higher standard of honor. This new standard makes him fully fit to adventure out into the darkness of the mean streets to combat evil without quarter, and, at the same time, allows him to fully own his place within the deeply conflicted world of the twentieth century, which is torn between the demonic lust for control and self-satisfaction that lives in Carmen's eyes and the self-sacrifice that Marlowe now embodies. Chandler's third Marlowe novel, *The High Window*, blatantly announces Marlowe's new identity by

giving him his most famous epitaph—“the shop-soiled Galahad” (162). The true knight has arrived.

The Journey into Faërie: Elwin Ransom’s Martian Romance

Across the pond in England, C. S. Lewis produced fiction that displays a nearly identical conception of sacred knighthood. *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), the first volume of his science fiction trilogy, chronicles the making of such a hero through the development of its protagonist, Elwin Ransom, from a man decidedly *unfit* for adventure into a knightly figure who is capable of facing the challenges of his culture. Like Chandler, Lewis portrays this transformation occurring through the conflict between two moral worlds. In this case, these are the short-sighted, self-centered ethos of Earth and the Other, cosmic perspective of Mars. The novel portrays this conflict through the common medieval trope of the journey into Faërie and education by elves, connecting Ransom with Arthur himself.

Lewis initially portrays his protagonist as being antithetical to everything knightly or heroic. At the opening of the novel, the writer refuses even to name the character, simply referring to him by the decidedly non-noble designation of “the Pedestrian.” The first description of the character lacks even a hint of Chandler’s heroic qualities:

He was tall, but a little round-shouldered, about thirty-five to forty years of age, and dressed with that particular kind of shabbiness which marks a member of the

intelligentsia on a holiday. He might easily have been mistaken for a doctor or a schoolmaster at first sight, though he had not the man-of-the-world air of the one or the indefinable breeziness of the other. In fact, he was a philologist, and fellow of a Cambridge college. His name was Ransom. (*Silent Planet* 10)

A shabby man who most resembles a schoolmaster is the last person one would expect to be a good candidate for knighthood. Lewis highlights this fact even more by having Ransom out on holiday—the Victorian parody of the knightly quest. Unlike most Arthurian romances, the novel begins with the hero searching not for adventure but for a place to sleep for the night. He was not looking for any test or damsel to save, he was just an ordinary man trying to satisfy his own current needs. In other words, Ransom is simply living according to his world's preoccupation with its own concerns and physical needs, not in the least concerned with what lies beyond his own interests.

Worse still, Ransom's passiveness and lack of discernment leads to his being an easy victim for the villainous Weston and Devine, who kidnap him on their journey to Mars for the purpose of being a human sacrifice to its inhabitants. Even once he is on the spaceship, the danger does not inspire Ransom to resist his captors but to become their kitchen boy. This lack of resistance does not come from his inexperience with danger, however. Lewis notes on multiple occasions that Ransom served in WWI, but states that his experiences there exposed his cowardice, rather than creating bravery. Ransom lacks confidence in himself—"he rather underestimated than overestimated his own courage; the gap between boyhood's dreams and his actual experience of the War had been

startling, and his subsequent view of his own unheroic qualities had perhaps swung too far in the opposite direction” (38).

Additionally, as scholars like Corey Olsen point out, Ransom’s conception of alien worlds conforms completely to the fears and assumptions of his modern Western culture that sees anything that is other to itself as evil and terrifying. When he first learns that there are intelligent beings on the planet called “sorns,” for example, his cultural conditioning immediately fills the unknown word with horrific significance:

His mind, like so many minds of his generation, was richly furnished with bogies. He had read his H. G. Wells and others. His universe was peopled with horrors such as ancient and mediæval mythology could hardly rival. No insect-like, vermiculate or crustacean Abominable, no twitching feelers, rasping wings, slimy coils, curling tentacles, no monstrous union of superhuman intelligence and insatiable cruelty seemed to him anything but likely on an alien world. (*Silent Planet* 37)

The novel constantly reveals the ways in which Ransom’s assumptions and slavery to his earthly perspective put him at an extreme disadvantage for understanding and surviving life on a Mars that is actually paradisaical in comparison to Earth.

This Earth-centric conditioning, thus, controls Ransom just as much as his captors, even though he is less extreme than they. Ransom voices vehement disagreement with Weston’s colonial creed that humanity has the right to colonize other planets; his assumptions about the malevolent nature of alien beings is not inherently different from

Weston's assumption that they are inferior to humans. Lewis, thus, seems to go out of his way to show that Ransom is "as unlikely a character as the young rustic destined to become Red Cross Knight [from *The Faerie Queene*] ... to become an interplanetary redeemer" (Rovang 38) and that nothing short of an experience in which he must learn to navigate something wholly Other can change him into a man fit for an adventure in search of truth.

From its beginning, Arthurian romance has been full of these types of experiences. The story of Arthur is usually inseparably linked to the medieval concept of the interaction of the mundane, human world with a realm the people of the Middle Ages knew as "Faërie"—a fantastic place whose exact nature and character are notoriously difficult to define. Tolkien, who remains an authority on the subject, states in his seminal "On Fairy-stories" essay that direct definition or description "cannot be done. Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. It has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole" (114). This caveat may explain his rather circular description of Faërie as "the realm or state in which fairies have their being" (113), but his elaboration upon it is more helpful: "*Faërie* contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, Mortal men, when we are enchanted" (113). One may, therefore, say that the medieval conception of Faërie is an otherness that overtakes a particular place on the

earth. Arthurian romances usually posit this otherness within the forest or some geographically unspecified kingdom like Gorre from *Le Chevalier de la charrete*, into which knights often venture on their various quests.

The purpose of this otherworld in most romances is to test the heroes and perfect their characters. In *Le Chevalier de la charrete*, for example, Lancelot faces his greatest tests of strength, fidelity to his lady, and love while in pursuit of the kidnapped Guinevere in Gorre. It is also in this fantastic country that he achieves his greatest feats of physical prowess and courage. The hero of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* ventures out into the forest, stays at a Faërie castle, and gains deeper self-knowledge because of his experiences there. The various Faërie incidents in Malory's works and the Grail castle in the Holy Grail narratives serve the same function.

Lewis argues, however, that forests and far away kingdoms are not suitable backdrops for Faërie in literature that takes place in the post-industrial world. He discusses the geography of the Otherworld and its presence in Arthurian romance within his scholarly overview of the science fiction genre. He argues that sci-fi stories that are primarily concerned with journeys to fantastic worlds are essentially contemporary variants on the concept of visits to Faërie. The only difference between such a story and a medieval otherworldly adventure, on a level of genre, is the location in which the author places the otherness—instead of in the forest, science fiction stories place it on alien planets. Lewis states that this shift “is the result of increasing geographical knowledge. The less known the real world is, the more plausibly your marvels can be located near at

hand” (“On Science Fiction” 68). As long as the forest on the borders of the inhabited parts of Britain remained unknown, it was an ideal stage for a tale of Faërie. A writer living after the Industrial Revolution who wants to write such a story, however, will not be able to recreate the quality of those medieval tales within the same old forests. Lewis argues that contemporary authors must look to the final frontier—“It might have been predicted that stories of this kind would, sooner or later, have to leave Tellus altogether” (68). The writer takes this step himself in *Out of the Silent Planet* by making Mars (known to its fictional inhabitants as “Malacandra”) the locale for Ransom’s otherworldly journey.

The novel abounds with descriptions of Malacandra’s otherness that parallel the inexplicable qualities of Faërie in medieval literature. Ransom’s first good look at a Martian landscape leaves him utterly unable to make sense out of what he sees:

He gazed about him, and the very intensity of his desire to take in the new world at a glance defeated itself. He saw nothing but colours — colours that refused to form themselves into things. Moreover, he knew nothing yet well enough to see it: you cannot see things till you know roughly what they are. His first impression was of a bright, pale world — a watercolour world out of a child’s paint-box; a moment later he recognized the flat belt of light blue as a sheet of water, or of something like water, which came nearly to his feet. They were on the shore of a lake or river. (*Silent Planet* 43)

The place is so alien to him that, at first, he cannot even make sense of what he is seeing because it is categorically different from anything he has ever experienced in his world. This description is reminiscent of the description of the Faërie castle in *Sir Orfeo*, where the narrator states that no human being could fully comprehend its nature:

No man may tell nor think in thought
how rich the works that there were wrought;
indeed it seemed he [Orfeo] gazed with eyes
on the proud court of Paradise. (lines 373-76)

This incomprehensible nature of the otherworld continues throughout the rest of the novel. At every turn, Ransom meets a landscape or animal that he tries and fails to understand according to his own earthly frame of reference. As Olsen points out, “We can see how fixed he [Ransom] is on earthly standards. . . he’s trying to place it [one of the inhabitants] based on his earthly experience” (25:20-29). In every circumstance, however, Ransom fails to draw any meaningful parallels between the geography and peoples of Mars and those of earth. His every expectation for the world and its peoples (including, significantly, his expectation that the rational inhabitants will be either primitive or inhumanly intelligent and evil) turns out to be utterly mistaken. Eventually, he must accept that he is within a place wholly Other to his experience and become a student of the Martians.

Arthur, famously, also has many dealings with the medieval otherworld. Most romances and later collections like Malory’s portray the king as a kind of intermediary

figure who is capable of, if not bridging, at least facilitating diplomacy between the human and Faërie worlds. Texts like Layamon's *Brut* go even farther with this theme by portraying Arthur as a human raised in the otherworld by elves and owing many of his exceptional qualities to them—"So soon as he came on earth, elves took him. . . they gave him might to be the best of all knights; they gave him another thing, that he should be a rich king. . . they gave to him the prince virtues most good, so that he was most generous of all men alive. This the elves gave him, and thus the child thrived" (177-78). These elves, in other words, are responsible for making Arthur the hero he becomes.¹¹ Accordingly, the beings of Malacandra also play a key role in Ransom's development. Though all of the planet's species of rational creatures—including the poetic hrossa, the scientific séroni, and the artisan pfiltriggi—help to free him from his Earth-centric perspective, the eldila are his most important teachers and the beings that "play the part of the Arthurian elves to Ransom's Arthur" (Shogren 400).

The elves/fairies that lend their name to Faërie are almost as difficult to define as the world they inhabit, but both Lewis and Tolkien provide more concrete descriptions of these beings in their scholarship. *The Discarded Image*, Lewis's comprehensive guide to the medieval European worldview, calls these beings the "Longaevi" and explains that their significance to the medieval model of the cosmos lies in their introduction of

¹¹ It should also be noted that Lewis was very familiar with this text. He produced an article, "The Genesis of a Medieval Book," on it and wrote the introduction for editor G. L. Brook's *Selections from Layamon's Brut*.

ambiguity to it. Lewis states that “[t]hey are perhaps the only creatures to whom the Model does not assign, as it were, an official status” (*Image* 122). Within this ambiguity, however, he can note a few clear characteristics. Three of these are significant for discussion of the *eldila*. First, Lewis notes that the term “supernatural” is dangerous to apply to the *Longaevi* because “[t]heir life is, in one sense, *more* ‘natural’—stronger, more reckless, less inhibited, more triumphantly and impenitently passionate—than ours” (133). This concept concurs with Tolkien’s statement that the elves or fairies “are natural, far more natural than [humans]” (“Fairy-stories” 110). These beings experience physical reality much more fully than humans. Though they may first appear less tangible to us, fairy stories show that we are blind and deaf to reality compared to them. Second and related to this is the fact that the *Longaevi* have bodies that are so pure that they often seem incorporeal to humans. Lewis notes that medieval writers claimed that they “have bodies of elemental purity” (*Image* 122) and sometimes associated them with elemental spirits, particularly the “*Nymphae* or *Undinae*, of water, who are human in stature, and talk” (135). Finally, the otherness of these beings is often unnerving and frightening to humans. Lewis argues that this fear began in earnest in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when nearly anything in medieval cosmology that did not cleanly fit into the blanket categories of human, angel, or devil was brushed into the demonic category (137-38).

Lewis as novelist portrays the *eldila* sharing all of these elvish qualities that Lewis the scholar outlines. The *eldila*, like the *Longaevi*, are the most alien (from Ransom’s

human perspective) of all the beings on Malacandra, and Lewis leaves their exact nature as ambiguous as the medieval cosmologists do that of the Longaevi. For all practical purposes, the *eldila* appear to be spiritual beings, with the lesser ones functioning like angels and their leader, Oyarsa, acting as a divine Power who rules the planet under the one God. Yet, Lewis insists that the *eldila* are not ethereal; they have physical bodies. As one of the *séroni* explains to Ransom, “To us the *eldil* is a thin, half-real body that can go through walls and rocks: to himself he goes through them because he is solid and firm and they are like cloud” (*Silent Planet* 95). Lewis insists that these beings are more, not less, physical than the materials they interact with. This idea corresponds to the conception of Longaevi being more natural than humans and possessing elemental purity in their bodies (the connection to light and air is also very similar to the theory that the elves were elemental spirits).¹² Finally, the *eldila* inspire the same kind of fear and dread in Ransom that the Longaevi came to inspire. Ransom often wonders if the *eldila* are

¹² *Perelandra* highlights the connection between the *eldila* and the otherness of the fairies even further:

In quite a different mood we let our minds loose on the possibility of angels, ghosts, fairies, and the like. But the very moment we are compelled to recognise a creature in either class as *real* the distinction begins to get blurred: and when it is a creature like an *eldil* the distinction vanishes altogether. These things were not animals—to that extent one had to classify them with the second group; but they had some kind of material vehicle whose presence could (in principle) be scientifically verified. To that extent they belonged to the first group. The distinction between natural and supernatural, in fact, broke down; and when it had done so, one realised how great a comfort it had been—how it had eased the burden of intolerable strangeness which this universe imposes on us by dividing it into two halves and encouraging the mind never to think of both in the same context. (11)

some kind of “mumbo-jumbo” or ruling class on the planet, and, after he has heard the voice of one and is on his way to meet the master eldil, he begins to fear for what he will meet—“Those old terrestrial fears of some alien, cold, intelligence, superhuman in power, sub-human in cruelty, which had utterly faded from his mind among the *hrossa*, rose clamoring for readmission” (*Silent Planet* 86). Lewis here draws a parallel between the sixteenth-century assumption that all unknown beings must be demonic with the twentieth-century assumption that all alien life must be extraordinarily cruel and monstrous.¹³

Though Ransom makes great strides in overcoming his fear and abandoning his narrow, earthly perspective on the universe because of his exploration of this new world, it is his conversations with Oyarsa and Weston in the final chapters that complete his transformation. Oyarsa instructs Ransom on the true cosmic history of the solar system, revealing that evil eldila have corrupted Earth and created the fear of otherness with which Ransom has struggled for the entire novel. This brings Ransom the enlightenment he needs to fully break away from his innate, terrestrial-centered fears and assumptions. This freedom allows Ransom to serve as a bridge between the two worlds by acting as a translator between Oyarsa and Weston.

¹³ The opening of *Perelandra* further associates the eldila with the traditional fear of elves as demonic creatures through the terror which the narrator increasingly feels toward Ransom and his otherworldly associates. After a traumatic encounter with an eldil, the narrator, in his terror, directly connects it with a demon and Ransom with a sorcerer—“It was in my mind to shout out, ‘Leave your familiar alone, you . . . magician, and attend to Me’” (18).

No longer held back by Earthly assumptions, Ransom is able to understand Weston's evil for what it is. The conversation between them unmasks the damage that the earthly *eldila* have done to the human value system and brings into contempt the short-sightedness of the colonizing ambitions to which such a system gives rise. He, thus, reveals the fact that Weston's longwinded justifications for his actions have no meaning apart from his human-centric perspective. Weston, for example, states that "Your [the Martians'] tribal life with its stone-age weapons and bee-hive huts, its primitive coracles and elementary social structure, has nothing to compare with our civilization. . . Our right to supersede you is the right of the higher over the lower" (134). Ransom's translation exposes that this idea becomes bankrupt as soon as one tries to recontextualize it:

He says that, among you, *hnau* [rational beings] of one kindred all live together and the *hrossa* have spears like those we used a very long time ago and your huts are small and round and your boats small and light and like our old ones, and you have one ruler. He says it is different with us. He says we know much. . . Because of all this, he says it would not be the act of a bent *hnau* if our people killed all your people. (134-35)

Lewis, thus, demonstrates that Ransom is now capable of understanding the truth about the corruption that has poisoned the values and perspective of humans.

Ransom further serves as an intermediary by advising Oyarsa on the best course of action for dealing with the humans who have come to Malacandra and, most importantly, revealing to Oyarsa the things that Maleldil (Jesus) has done on Earth. With

these actions, Ransom fully embodies Arthur's role as a bridge between the human and Other worlds. By the novel's end, Ransom has even become brave enough to offer his own life to Oyarsa, if it is necessary to kill all the humans on Malacandra in order to preserve that world—the very thing of which he was originally so terrified.

Out of the Silent Planet, then, portrays Ransom's encounter with the conflict between the values of two worlds transforming him from a cowardly, bookish, mundane man into a courageous inter-terrestrial intercessor who is willing to lay down his own life for the sake of beings who are not human. This self-sacrifice is, of course, the defining action that reveals that he, like Marlowe, has evolved into an extraordinary, sacred knight who is now ready to embark on adventures for truth. Lewis, therefore, combines the Faërie romance with the space-travel story in order to reveal the illogical and selfish colonial mindset that was infecting Western culture between the World Wars.

Ransom's transformation suggests that only a hero who can bridge different worlds—who can be both common and extraordinary (to use Chandler's words)—can adventure out and bring back the truth that disarms the cultural corruption that would remake the universe in our own image. Both *The Big Sleep* and *Out of the Silent Planet*, therefore, depict the development of characters who, though morally good, are forced to move beyond their comfortable identities and perspectives in order to become heroes who embody a sacred knighthood built on self-sacrifice and compassion, rather than glory or self-preservation, and who are fully capable of facing the moral dangers of their worlds without becoming corrupted. Because these novels are the “origin stories” of these

knights, they end once their heroes achieve this transformation. Chandler and Lewis, however, were far from finished with their knights.

A NEW ROUND TABLE: LADIES, COMBAT, AND BROTHERHOOD IN *THE LADY*
IN THE LAKE AND PERELANDRA

Band of Brothers: *The Lady in the Lake* and Fellowship in World War II

The Big Sleep and *Out of the Silent Planet* take place and were written between the world wars and, therefore, become much more explosive as they grapple to find hope in the midst of the global conflict. Chandler's first novel showed the various manifestations of America's moral filth that came in the aftermath of the first war by bringing them into conflict with Philip Marlowe's chivalry. The result was Marlowe giving up his initial conception of chivalry and becoming a Galahad-like knight who is devoted to self-sacrifice and the bridging of different worlds. Lewis portrays essentially the same process with his protagonist. Ransom begins with the fundamentally Earth-centric view of the universe that many futurists and science fiction authors of the 1920s propagated, and his experiences in the otherworld of Malacandra expose him to an entirely different understanding of the universe. The novel chronicles the conflict between these two worldviews and climaxes with Ransom abandoning his original terror of the alien and embracing a self-sacrificing mediator position. Both novels, therefore, suggest that this kind of hero can arise out of the chaos of Modernity and may even be

instrumental in leading Western culture out of the darkness that the Great War left in its wake.

Then came World War II. This sequel made it clear that the darkness Chandler and Lewis saw in Western civilization would not be exorcised easily. The conflicted nature of Western culture would not allow it to go softly into oblivion but exploded into internal and external violence against increasing numbers of “others” that would continue to challenge and disfigure established standards for sexuality, identity, gender, unity, and justice. The global conflict would, again, force both authors to find meaning in writing about their knights, but, this time, the development is over. Both characters have reached maturity, and the time has come for battle.

The writers’ two 1943 novels, *The Lady in the Lake* and *Perelandra*, both portray combat myths that pit the Galahad figure against a manifestation of the shadow of Western civilization that animates the Nazis in an Edenic environment that functions as a microcosm of the world over which they fight. Both works also hold out hope for the future by showing the knight’s victory over the shadow creating a path forward for the West to become a new Round Table that truly embodies the ideas of brotherhood and unity, which it has always claimed (but with less than spectacular success). Chandler’s *The Lady in the Lake* portrays this combat through Marlowe’s journey to face a corrupted image of female empowerment and the vengeful Übermensch Lieutenant Degarmo in the seemingly paradisaical Puma Lake in the Californian Highlands. Once again, Chandler presents moral progress coming about through conflict, but, this time, the resolution

comes not through another transformation for Marlowe, but through the formation of a new Round Table of unlikely but worthy knights.

The setting of this novel is key to its Arthurian themes. Unlike all the other Marlowe novels, the plot of this one removes the detective from the city and places him in the forest community around Puma Lake, forcing him to work outside of his normal element. As Speir observes, “The scene of their investigation. . . takes on a symbolic dimension. . . the lush, paradisaical descriptions of the terrain, sends an echo of Eden through the story” (53). Marlowe immediately recognizes the contrast between the lowland city and the “high place” to which he is bound—“In fifteen miles the road climbed five thousand feet, but even then it was far from cool. Thirty miles of mountain driving brought me to the tall pines and a place called Bubbling Springs. It had a clapboard store and a gas pump, but it felt like paradise” (*Lady* 26). As in Paradise, the lake community also has guardians who prevent evil from entering. In the place of cherubim, Marlowe notes that the road over the dam “had an armed sentry at each end and one in the middle” (26). Like their Biblical predecessors, these sentries are a reminder of humanity’s fall; these dam guards are soldiers who are guarding a valuable war-time resource. Even their presence, however, does not disrupt the pristine nature of the place—“Beyond these details the war did not seem to have done anything much to Puma Lake” (26).

Chandler is, once again, following Arthurian literature in associating paradisaical qualities with lake areas. In many versions of the Arthur story, the particular lake over

which the famous Lady of the Lake presides has paradisaal and otherworldly qualities; objects that come from it have magical properties that can bring good or harm to the normal world, and time does not work there in the same way as in the mundane world. In *Le Morte D'Arthur*, for example, Arthur and Merlin travel to this otherworldly lake to receive the magic sword Excalibur from the Lady. The *Lancelot-Grail* cycle also portrays the lake area as a magical, abundant place to which the normal laws of time and space do not apply—"In the area where the Lake seemed to be broadest and deepest, the lady possessed several beautiful and splendid houses. Farther down in the valley flowed a stream teeming with fish. The whole estate was so hidden that no one could ever find it, for the apparent lake so masked it that it could not be seen" (12). The cycle portrays the Lady as Lancelot's foster mother, who raises the orphaned Lancelot in her protective realm. Somehow, time functions differently there, so that "[i]n . . . three years, he grew more than another boy would have grown in five" (12). These paradisaal echoes, accordingly, resurface in Puma Lake's apparent separation from the rest of the world and its guarded state.

Chandler, then, places most of the action of the plot in an environment that is almost supernaturally separate from the conflict that has engulfed the globe. As Marlowe continues to explore this Eden, however, he finds that the culture of violence and greed that created the war has managed to sink its claws into the Garden. As the novel's title implies, a version of the Lady also appears in Puma Lake. The author puts a rather morbid spin on her, however. As Marlowe searches for his client's wayward wife, Crystal

Kingsley, he makes a grisly discovery—“Languidly at the edge of this green and sunken shelf of wood something waved out from the darkness, hesitated, waved back again out of sight under the flooring. The something had looked far too much like a human arm” (38). This is, as Preston points out (26), a dark parody of the famous Excalibur scene from *Le Morte*—“So they rode tyll they com to a laake that was a fayre watir and brode. And in the myddis Arthur was ware of an arme clothed in whyght samyte, that helde a fayre swerde in that honde” (Malory 35). Whereas Malory’s Lady gives Arthur a magical sword, this arm will hand Marlowe a mystery that threatens the sanctity of this new Eden. The body that they pull from the lake appears to be that of Muriel Chess—a shady figure who, as Marlowe discovers, was really named “Mildred Haviland” and had managed to involve herself in multiple crimes before she had settled down at the lakefront with a new identity and husband.

The novel, then, becomes a tale of two ladies. The titular designation belongs to both of them, as we later learn that the body in the lake was not Mildred’s, but Crystal’s. The former murdered the latter and attempted to escape from her vengeful first husband, Lieutenant Degarmo, by assuming her victim’s identity. This pairing of virtuous and wicked women mirrors the tensions inherent in the Arthurian figure. For, as Graham Anderson points out, many medieval texts present contradictory versions of the Lady of the Lake—in some she is an obviously good and noble figure who aids Arthur and Lancelot, while, at other times, she is an evil enchantress who holds Lancelot and Merlin captive. In some texts, it is not “always clear whether Morgan le Fay is identical with or

separate from the Dame du Lac. The Lady of the Lake's relationship with Lancelot is usually presented as the role of foster-mother; she is sometimes apparently identical with Morgan le Fay, who keeps Lancelot captive for over a year of his adult life in the *Prose Lancelot*" (Anderson 93). In Chandler's novel, the innocent, wronged, and, ultimately, slain Crystal images the virtuous Lady, who is also wrongfully beheaded by the sinful and Adamic Sir Balin in *Le Morte*. Mildred, conversely, is Chandler's most obvious modernization of Morgan. The character is every bit as elusive, malevolent, self-centered, and crafty as the evil fairy is.

Though, like almost all Arthurian figures, Morgan le Fay's personality and role differ quite radically depending on the text one is reading, four major characteristics remain through most versions. First, Morgan is usually self-interested above all else. We have already touched on a text in which she imprisons Lancelot out of sheer lust for him, and *Le Morte* also contains an episode in which she attempts to kill Arthur and replace him with her paramour Sir Accolon in order to assume his power over Britain. Second, she is often portrayed as a trickster figure who constantly uses deception, seduction, and manipulation in order to test or corrupt Arthur and the Round Table. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for example, Morgan is pulling the strings of the Green Knight's test. Third, she displays an array of supernatural/Faërie powers, including shapeshifting. In *Sir Gawain*, she appears in the form of an ugly old woman that even Gawain (who is her nephew) does not recognize, and Malory recounts how she once eluded Arthur through the same power. As the king pursued her, "she shope hirself, horse and man, by

enchantement unto grete marbyll stonys” (92), and, thus, eluded his wrath. Finally, the complete cycles of the Arthurian saga depict Morgan attempting to murder her own husband, King Uriens. This black-widow nature is an inversion of the fidelity and goodness expected of a lady and, thus, threatens the social hierarchy by undermining the basic assumption upon which knightly devotion to ladies depends.

Mildred shares in all four of these qualities. Self-interest and preservation are the only motivations that she shows throughout the novel. She takes up or abandons relationships (with the corrupt doctor Almore and the simple lake man Bill Chess) and vocations (like nurse and housewife) as it suits her present interests, and she constantly treats people as disposable commodities—with her literal disposal of Crystal in the lake serving as her capstone. Mildred’s knack for misdirection in her murders of Crystal, Mrs. Almore, and Chris Lavery also marks her as an obvious trickster character, while her ability to manipulate men into covering her tracks for her shows that she is every bit as seductive and clever as Morgan. To use Marlowe’s words, “She got the men that way, she could make them jump through hoops” (193)—a characteristic that Sir Accolon would have known only too well.

Mildred’s ability to take on different identities, including those of her victims, on the other hand, reveals her shape-shifting abilities. She lives as Crystal for over a month before Marlowe exposes her and also masquerades as a completely fictional person, Mrs. Fallbrook, in order to sneak back into the scene of Lavery’s murder and retrieve the money that he had stolen from her. She embodies this part so completely that even the

hero does not initially realize that this woman is Mildred; he later admits to her that “at the time it [the disguise] had me going all right. . . I fell like a brick” (*Lady* 157). Lastly, this femme fatale correlates to her medieval counterpart by betraying and fleeing from her first husband, Lieutenant Degarmo. Though (as far as the reader knows) Mildred never attempted to kill Degarmo, she “made a small private hell for him” (197) within their marriage and tries to elude him throughout the novel.

Mildred also disrupts the social order of Western society; Chandler seems to expect his readers to feel horror when he reveals that the novel’s murders are the victims of a single, lethal woman. Just as Morgan le Fay subverts the medieval expectations of a lady of authority, Chandler uses Mildred’s depravity to show that, culturally speaking, she is a kind of unwoman. Just as medieval knights expected all courtesy in their social circle to flow out of their lady’s innate worthiness (*Allegory* 15), late Victorian concepts of feminine virtue and nurturing nature (though questioned following WWI) still held sway on the culture during the time of this novel. This is the reason behind Marlowe’s disgusted and harsh reaction upon learning from Mildred that she had lured her third victim, Chris Lavery, into a false sense of security by having sex with him before gunning him down—“You’re a cold-blooded little bitch if I ever saw one” (*Lady* 157).

WWII, however, was shaking these assumptions to their core as women began to take on more and more responsibility for running the national war machine while the men were off in battle. This shift in gender roles has become a fact so well documented that citing it again seems like a tiresome redundancy. Nevertheless, the growing independence

and cultural agency of women at the time is key for understanding this novel. While Chandler does not criticize the social progress that wartime industry has brought to women, he uses Crystal and Mildred as a kind of dyad of femininity to warn of the potential for self-destruction within this new agency. On the one hand, Chandler acknowledges that this new-found independence can free good women to create better lives for themselves apart from patriarchy, as Crystal's leaving her cheating husband symbolizes. The evil Mildred, however, is also completely self-reliant and self-determined in all of her actions, but they are monstrous and, ultimately, un-feminine. Instead of giving life, she destroys it; rather than bringing creativity into the world, she becomes a black hole that reduces everything around her into objects that either help or hinder her desires.

Crystal's death and replacement at the hands of her dark double, therefore, demonstrates that this new independence can potentially be subsumed into the same cycle of deception, selfishness, and violence that has consumed the Western world since the first war and has now launched it into another one. The novel suggests that, if Western femininity allows itself to be twisted into Mildred's image, it risks ceasing to be feminine at all. Therefore, though Chandler does not state it directly, the Arthurian hyperlinks that connect Crystal and Mildred to the duality of the original Lady(s) of the Lake imply that the West's conception of femininity, like that of Marlowe's chivalry, can only protect itself from this fate by achieving a transcendence that retains its core qualities, such as

nurture, endurance, authority, and knowledge of one's own body,¹⁴ while discarding those that are ultimately untenable, such as unyielding commitment to loveless husbands.

Mildred, accordingly, becomes the cause of the novel's combat, but she is not the main antagonist of the novel. That role goes to Degarmo, her husband. This man is another corrupt knight like Canino, but Chandler also makes him a representative of the kind of evil that the Nazis (who also had their Knights of the Iron Cross) embody. On the surface, Degarmo seems to be a model cop. In their first meeting, Degarmo questions why Marlowe is staking out a suspect's house, but he appears to be simply following police procedure, rather than attempting to give Marlowe trouble. Unlike many of the corrupt police officers that hinder Marlowe's investigations in this and other novels, Degarmo leaves him be, once the detective has explained himself. Throughout the novel, Degarmo continues to aid Marlowe in his quest and, thus, seems to be a potential comrade in the fight against evil.

However, Chandler emphasizes certain characteristics of Degarmo's that hold sinister connotations within the context of WWII. One of the few physical markers that

¹⁴ Chandler was rather outspoken regarding his high view of women, and his personal writings make it clear that he thought of these characteristics as positive components of the feminine gender identity. In a letter to Helga Greene, Chandler states, "I have never become cynical about them [women], never ceased to respect them, never for a moment failed to realise that they face hazards in life which a man does not face" (*Letters* 407). In another to Eddie Carter, he states, "For hundreds and hundreds of years, they [women] had to please men with their looks, their charm, etc. Inevitably, it must have left somewhere in their minds a deep intelligence about sex, because once that was all they had" (453).

Chandler brings attention to, for example, are his “eyes of metallic blue” (23). In and of itself, this detail is not likely to set off any alarms in the reader’s mind, but, as Degarmo’s true character comes to light, his blue eyes and the mood of mystery and romantic alienation that Marlowe later observes in him—“[he was] a big hard solemn man whose thoughts were deeply hidden” (193)—become eerily reminiscent of Hitler’s idealized *Übermensch*.

Degarmo’s character arc typologizes the basic ideology of the Nazis through his pursuing a violent solution to the moral corruption that Mildred represents and his desire to scapegoat another person to cover his sins. As Marlowe explains when he reveals that Degarmo murdered Mildred, the woman had made life a living hell for him, as Germans firmly believed the Allied Powers and the general degradation of their culture had done to them.¹⁵ Neither could seek a peaceful solution to their feelings of wrong, however. Under Hitler, Germany invaded Poland and began its quest for world domination, and Degarmo “was too much of a cop to let her [Mildred] get away with any more murders, but not enough of a cop to pull her in and let the whole story come out” (196). Instead, he takes his own bloody revenge on his ex-wife when he “stripped her and raked her body with scratches in the kind of sadistic hate a man like you might feel for a woman who had made a small private hell for him” (197). Finally, Degarmo’s attempting to find a victim

¹⁵ The fact that Chandler makes a liberated woman the embodiment of this corruption further connects Degarmo with the Nazis’ attempts to eradicate feminine empowerment through their strictly traditionalist view of femininity and exclusion of women from positions of political leadership.

on whom to pin the blame for the murder—first Marlowe and then Kingsley—mirrors the ways in which Hitler’s Germany made Jews bear the blame for their society’s failures. Chandler’s use of the character, therefore, establishes the seemingly idyllic Puma Lake as a microcosm where Marlowe and Degarmo can enact in miniature the great conflict in which the Western world is consumed. Their battle over this Californian Eden, then, becomes a prism that refracts the struggle between the Allied and Axis powers, romantic knightly combat, and, through Marlowe’s continued evocation of Galahad, the messianic battle with evil over the fate of the world.

However, Marlowe is not alone in his fight this time. While the detective usually fights his battles in single combat, *The Lady in the Lake* insists on the need for a fellowship of knights. In fact, Marlowe is always in the most danger in this novel when he is facing down evil without aid—such as when he confronts Crystal/Mildred alone and, subsequently, gets attacked from behind by Degarmo. Chandler’s surrounding Marlowe with a cast of misfit heroes throughout the text, in turn, suggests that the evil behind the war can only be overcome by a unified order of uncorrupted warriors. Though Marlowe, as the Galahad figure, remains the focus of the narrative, the tellingly named Puma Lake sheriff Jim Patton and the soldiers on the Dam are the Percival and Bors who support him.

Patton is the most significant of these other “knights,” even though he is, at first glance, one of the least obviously heroic of Chandler’s characters. Marlowe’s initial description of him establishes his lack of knightly qualities immediately—though Patton

carries multiple guns, “[h]e had large ears and friendly eyes and his jaws munched slowly and he looked as dangerous as a squirrel and much less nervous” (40). His laxity is also obvious from his re-election slogan—“KEEP JIM PATTON CONSTABLE. HE IS TOO OLD TO GO TO WORK” (42)—and his “nice big belly” (197). Despite these flaws, Marlowe instantly recognizes his value and notes that “I liked everything about him” (40). For Marlowe, being a fellow knight, recognizes Patton’s hidden value.

The sheriff’s apparent slothfulness and helplessness disguises his prowess with a pistol—as Degarmo learns when he mistakenly berates the sheriff and mockingly offers him an “honorable” draw. Patton feigns a Falstaffian declination—“I ain’t as fast as you anyways. I just don’t like to look yellow” (198). As soon as the villain puts his guard down, however, Patton reveals his true skill. Marlowe explains, “I didn’t see Patton move at all. The room throbbed with the roar of his frontier Colt. Degarmo’s arm shot straight out to one side and the heavy Smith and Wesson was torn out of his hand and thudded against the knotty pine wall behind him” (198). This fat squirrel obviously has a few surprises in him.

Even more importantly, Patton, like Marlowe, is an honorable man. When Marlowe tells him to let the armed Degarmo flee from the scene of their confrontation, Patton refuses, explaining, “Somebody might get hurt taking him. That wouldn’t be right. If it’s anybody, it’s got to be me” (198). Thus, though the sheriff at first seems useless in the face of a real enemy, he ultimately proves himself to be worthy of sharing the name of the real-life commanding general of the American forces. One could argue that, to a

lesser extent, the same quality of hidden or unrecognized nobility also resides in the dam sentries whom Degarmo makes the fatal mistake of roaring past during his getaway and who subsequently destroy him. The novel, thus, consistently shows that, in a world whose power and cultural structures have gone mad, one can expect to find salvation only with the marginalized and overlooked.

Once again, this idea simultaneously finds its basis in Arthurian tradition and attempts to move beyond it. Though individual knights, like Galahad, Gawain, and Lancelot, are the key characters of their individual quests, they all become equally important to narratives where Britain goes to war. When Arthur begins his famous march to Rome, the various versions of the story may include a glorious list of the individual knights, but the fellowship of the Round Table as a whole unit remains the text's center of gravity from Geoffrey's original to Malory. War is the great unifier of Arthurian legend that ties together all the stories and associations surrounding individual knights into the glory and power of a united fellowship. Chandler portrays Marlowe joining into such a fellowship at the climax of this novel. As Sean McCann observes, the novel's ending is an anomaly among the Marlowe novels because it ends not with the detective wandering off alone but having become "part of a fellowship of decent men" (141). War—against corruption, against abused empowerment, and, above all, against the violent vengeance of cowardice—has forged a Round Table once again.

The victory of Marlowe and these unlikely knights over Degarmo, therefore, reveals Chandler's ultimately optimistic view of WWII. Though the dualistic battle

between the elements of good and evil within Western culture have exploded into another literal world conflict, the writer suggests that this societal boiling point has made the corruptions of cultural progress that Mildred represents and the violent governmental regimes Degarmo embodies easier to recognize and resist. Conversely, the battle has also uncovered the hidden virtues of good but unrecognized men like Patton. The novel, thus, uses its reappropriated medieval elements to express Chandler's hopes that, as in the days of Arthur, the coming of war can lead to a new Round Table whose members are "disciplined, professional, and, though mutually reinforcing, each autonomous—the epitome of the fraternity that Chandler valued" (McCann 141).

Just as Arthur remains the central figure around which the Round Table forms, though, Marlowe's sacred knighthood that seeks the truth—about Mildred and Degarmo—even when it would be less costly to settle for believable lies remains the key to uniting this fellowship. He is the catalyst that ultimately brings the fellowship together and reveals its true enemy. Thus, the novel continues to affirm the importance of a figure who can know, outmaneuver, and identify corruption while also always remaining above it, though it teaches that he will always need a partner with a good shooting arm. The novel's final image of this band of brothers fishing up the body of the corrupt cop is, therefore, a powerful symbol of desperately needed hope that the goodness of knighthood will prevail over its perverted Nazi shadow.

The Green Lady of the Waves: *Perelandra* and Cosmic Combat

The similarities between *The Lady in the Lake* and *Perelandra* are even more prominent than those of *The Big Sleep* and *Out of the Silent Planet*. Though the space-travel and overtly spiritual nature of the story appears, on the surface, to be at complete odds with Chandler's detective thriller, Lewis's second Ransom novel shares its key structural elements. Both novels feature an Edenic setting, a Lady of the Lake figure, combat against an embodiment of the evil that spawned Nazism, and a glorious fellowship that comes out of the conflict. Both novels, thus, share a hope that sacred, self-giving knighthood will eventually slay the present source of evil.

Although the planet Ransom visited in the first novel, Malacandra, was a near-paradise in its relative lack of moral corruption, Lewis makes it abundantly clear that the titular world of *Perelandra* (known as Venus to Earth) is literally a second Eden. Ransom refers to it as "paradise" on multiple occasions, and even getting the smallest drop of one of its fruits is enough to send him into an experience of euphoria the likes of which the people of Earth cannot know—"It was like the discovery of a totally new *genus* of pleasures, something unheard of among men, out of all reckoning, beyond all covenant. For one draught of this on earth wars would be fought and nations betrayed. It could not be classified" (*Perelandra* 37). Ransom's later discovery of "a strange heraldically coloured tree loaded with yellow fruits and silver leaves" with "a small dragon covered

with scales of red gold” (40) around it and a sinless, humanoid couple who reign over the world confirm the identification with the Biblical Eden.

A plethora of critics, such as Rovang and David C. Downing, have explained the ways in which Genesis, the garden of the Hesperides, and even the islands of *The Faerie Queene* influence Lewis’s depiction of Perelandra. Comparatively few, if any, have noted its parallels to the Arthurian Faerie Lake. The planet’s aquatic nature—the whole world consists of floating islands—is reminiscent of the fact that the Lady’s kingdom is apparently within the lake (*Lancelot-Grail* 12). Additionally, Ransom’s experiences with the Great Dance at the end of the novel correspond to the realm’s non-earthly “other-time.” As Lancelot ages more than five years within the lake when only two have gone by in Earth, Ransom finds that the transcendent Great Dance took up a year’s time, though it felt as if it had only taken part of the morning. Perelandra, then, functions in the same way as Puma Lake does in *The Lady in the Lake*; it serves as an Edenic and magical place that, at first, seems to be untouched by and separate from the global war.

The novel’s aquatic setting is not the only element that it shares with Chandler’s work, though; *Perelandra* also prominently features a “Lady”—a title that Lewis designates with a capital letter, just as Arthurian texts do for the woman who bestows Excalibur. Tinidril, the “Green Lady” of the planet, is obviously an extraterrestrial Eve, but she also exhibits many shared characteristics with the Lady of the Lake. Aside from their watery kingdoms, both characters embody Nature and femininity. This characterization for the Lady of the Lake, while not strongly present in the medieval

texts, was the core of Charles Williams' portrayal of the character in his Arthurian poem cycle. As Lewis himself explains in his analysis of the poems, Williams' Lady "is an image of Nature. . . the 'mother of making' [who] is that energy which reproduces on earth a pattern derived from 'the third heaven', i.e. from the sphere of Venus" (*Williams* 285). In other words, Williams makes the Lady a kind of physical embodiment or realization of the Venus archetype/platonic idea. Lewis exports this interpretation into his portrayal of Tinidril.

In addition to the character's green skin tone overtly connecting her to the fertility of the planet, the writer states that the Green Lady (with her husband) is a "living Paradise" (*Perelandra* 178), thereby directly connecting her with the unfallen natural world. Lewis also gives Tinidril the same kind of imaging relationship with *Perelandra*/Venus (the Oyarsa, not the planet) that Williams portrays the Lady of the Lake having with the deity. Just as the Arthurian Lady is a kind of incarnation of Venus who performs the same kinds of works as her mistress in miniature on the earth, Tinidril's characteristics reflect the essential qualities of the Oyarsa of *Perelandra* that Ransom observes when he finally meets her at the novel's conclusion.¹⁶ Tinidril's skin color, for example, seems to correlate to *Perelandra*'s glowing "with a warm splendour, full of the suggestion of teeming vegetable life" (171). This association with life also

¹⁶ This association with the divine being and the essence of femininity is also consistent with Lewis's statement that Tinidril has "got to be in some ways like a Pagan goddess and in other ways like the Blessed Virgin" from a letter to Sister Ruth Penelope Lawson (*Letters* 496).

connects them with Lewis's conception of femininity, which is the cosmic essence of fertility and creativity that is always bearing fruit and eternally present in "life growing up" (184). Perelandra functions as the archetype of femininity, and Tinidril is an expression of her. Perelandra herself explains that she is the primal, creative force behind the beauty of their planet—"I rounded this ball when it first arose from Arbol. I spun the air about it and wove the roof. I built the Fixed Island and this, the holy mountain, as Maleldil [Christ] taught me. The beasts that sing and the beasts that fly and all that swims on my breast and all that creeps and tunnels within me down to the centre has been mine" (168). Tinidril, accordingly, images this creativity and authority on a smaller scale through her ruling these animals and her role in creating the race of rational beings who will populate the world.

The maternal role is particularly important to understanding the connection between Tinidril and the Lady of the Lake. Though motherhood is integral to both characters by nature of their relationship with Venus and their embodying femininity, both women, crucially, fulfill a lacking maternal role for the knights of their stories. As I have already discussed, the Lady of the Lake acts as Lancelot's foster mother after the death of his father in the *Lancelot-Grail* cycle, and, accordingly, Tinidril is not only "the Mother" of her people (57) but also becomes a replacement mother for Ransom. As their relationship develops, she increasingly comes to see Ransom not as a protector or social equal, but as an orphan in need of her guidance. Once she realizes that he is not the father of his world, for example, "[s]he knew now at last that she was not addressing an equal . .

. her manner to him was henceforward more gracious” (58). Accordingly, Lewis directly relates Ransom’s perception of this relationship when the interplanetary knight takes leave of her before his final battle—“As he stood looking down on her, what was most with him was an intense and orphaned longing that he might, if only for once, have seen the great Mother of his own race thus, in her innocence and splendour” (129). Consistently, this fostering is also an action which mirrors that of Venus, as Lewis shows that his knight goes through a recovery period after his battle “in which he was breast-fed by the planet Venus herself” (159).

Thus, both Lewis and Chandler use echoes of the Lady in the Lake in order to discuss the nature of femininity. Chandler uses the more traditional conception of the dualistic nature of the two Ladies with Crystal and Mildred to dramatize the danger of self-destruction within a corrupted femininity. Lewis, on the other hand, uses William’s more unorthodox portrayal of the character to show an idealized femininity that is in danger of corruption from an outside source. Though these purposes differ, both works seem to have needed the Lady of the Lake to highlight the centrality of the feminine to the fates of worlds. The writers’ conceptions of femininity and its key role to both the Western world and, indeed, to the cosmos itself seems to have required new versions of a character just as complex, mysterious, and nuanced as the concept that she communicates. The fact that both authors drew from the same Arthurian element, thus, points again to their Eliot-like need to use the fragments of symbols and plots that their ancestors left them to speak to their contemporaries.

Whereas Chandler portrays Mildred having a hand in creating the evil of Degarmo, Lewis shows evil as an alien threat to Tinidril that her knight must overcome. Like Chandler, however, Lewis uses his antagonist to portray on a small scale the process by which the evil of the Nazi ideology corrupts Western culture. His “Un-man” uses another Arthurian trope—the demoniac—to represent the ways in which Nazism relentlessly seeks to devour everything—femininity, science, and (most horribly) individuals—into itself.¹⁷ This villain comes into existence when Weston, the antagonist of the previous novel, becomes the host of a demon who then attempts to influence Tinidril into following the same path that Eve did.

While the demoniac is not an exclusively Arthurian element (it is obviously also Biblical), it features prominently in stories that are concerned with sacred knighthood. These are usually tempter figures, and, as I have explained previously, are usually women who try to seduce the male knights. Lewis alters this scheme by making the villain male, but this seems to be a consequence of the fact that the demon is attempting to corrupt Tinidril, rather than Ransom. This change could also be an influence from the much later Arthurian poet Edmund Spenser, whose work features demonic male characters, such as Orgoglio. The greatest link between this Un-man and these demoniacs lies in the fact that they are not to be defeated by driving them out or resisting their advances—the knight

¹⁷ Though Lewis never explicitly connects the Un-man to the Nazis, the combination of the novel’s opening clearly placing its events in the context of WWII and Ransom’s comments on the potentially literal nature of the Biblical command to fight demonic beings invites the reader to make these kinds of connections.

must destroy them completely. Thus, in the case of *Orgoglio*, Arthur “with Morteall steele him smot againe so sore, / That headlesse his unweldy bodie lay, / All wallowd in his owne fowle bloody gore” (Spenser 151). This emphasis on a lethal solution to demonic foes seems to be necessary to Lewis’s purposes because the villain both represents evil in the abstract and the ideology of the Nazi party.

The fact that the human being that the demon consumes, Weston, is the embodiment of Western progressive elitism further solidifies the connection to Nazism, which co-opted both science (in its theory of racial superiority and advances in technological warfare) and national pride to suit its purposes. This pragmatism is further evident in the Un-man’s using all of its strategies for corrupting Tinidril—rhetoric, logic, and narrative—only as means to an end. When Ransom and the Un-man are away from the Lady, the Un-man shows that it does not really care for those things, in and of themselves:

It showed plenty of subtlety and intelligence when talking to the Lady; but Ransom soon perceived that it regarded intelligence simply and solely as a weapon, which it had no more wish to employ in its off-duty hours than a soldier has to do bayonet practice when he is on leave. Thought was for it a device necessary to certain ends, but thought in itself did not interest it. It assumed reason as externally and inorganically as it had assumed Weston’s body. (110)

This portrayal, of course, communicates Lewis’s understanding of the devil as a being who ultimately hates all good—even practical skills. As Downing explains, “Lewis

embraced the Augustinian view that evil is not the opposite of good but rather the absence of good—just as darkness is not really the opposite of light but rather the absence of light” (88-89). The author, however, consistently clothes his portrayals of evil with the styles of his time. This is evident in works like *The Screwtape Letters*, which portrays demons as modern bureaucrats.¹⁸ This Un-man, accordingly, mirrors the ways in which Nazism follows the demonic through its assimilation of Western thought. As Lewis explains in a letter to his brother, Warnie, “the Nazis largely got into power by simply talking the old straight stuff about heroism in a country full of cynics” (*Letters* 346). The ideology used anything—heroism, Passion Plays, traditional gender roles, the theory of evolution—that proved useful for its propagandistic purposes, but it never valued these things for themselves. As soon as any value or cultural object ceased being useful to the Nazi agenda, they cast it aside like the Un-man casts aside his tools for persuasion.

One can even understand the name that Lewis gives this creature as being responsive to the corruptive nature of Nazism. Rather than giving us a villain who embodies the characteristics of the *Übermensch*, the novel presents Hitler’s ideology as leading to the creation of an “Un-man”—a human who has become a mere puppet for evil. The demon’s assimilating both Weston’s body and, later, his personality for use against Ransom mirrors how the Nazis devoured Nietzsche’s concept and made it serve

¹⁸ The fact that “Lewis originally conceptualized it [*The Screwtape Letters*] as a Ransom book” (Dickieson 98) is, perhaps, relevant to this point.

their propaganda. Ransom's final realization of what has become of Weston also captures Lewis's fears for the future of Western culture if Germany were to gain possession of it—"Ages ago it had been a Person: but the ruins of personality now survived in it only as weapons at the disposal of a furious self-exiled negation" (*Perelandra* 132). Though the Nazis claim to be bringing humanity to its next stage of evolution, *Perelandra* shows that their worldview is actually an existential threat to the very foundations of human identity and agency.

By making the Un-man's target the human agent of creativity and fertility, the novel further highlights Lewis's fears for the ultimate target of the evil behind Germany. The war is not only a physical struggle for dominance; if the Nazis prevail, their ideology will poison the very heart of creativity and thought in the Western world and, thereby, bring about the complete cultural darkening into imperialism and elitism that Lewis has already observed invading his society in *Out of the Silent Planet*.

The Nazis' concern with controlling the conception of femininity takes on a chilling significance in the context of this novel. Just as the Nazi ideology assimilated and twisted gender roles to fit its power structure, the Un-man attempts to corrupt Tinidril through manipulating every good quality that she possesses. It appeals to her nurturing nature by making her see Ransom as a child in need of correction (and, thus, disarms the force of his arguments), as the Nazis appealed to the women who became "Hitler mothers." It attempts to twist her wish to aid her husband and future children into a desire to do its will, as the Germans used nationalism to unify its citizens under their cause. It

even tries to pervert her creativity by using “[t]he turgid swell of indistinctly splendid images” of his fables regarding seemingly courageous and suffering heroines to plant the idea of sin into her consciousness. By the time the Un-man is done with its tales, Ransom realizes that “if her will was uncorrupted, half her imagination was already filled with bright, poisonous shapes” (114). This is, for Lewis the mythmaker, the most heinous of the Un-man’s perversions. It also reflects what is perhaps Nazism’s most terrifying appropriation—its twisting the imaginative capacity of Western culture to create meaning-making narratives into a factory for stories that affirm oppression. Lewis knew all too well that, beyond every other cultural good it had possessed, the grand narrative of the Third Reich and German superiority was the animating force behind “the terrible slavery of appetite and hate and economics and government” (114) of which the Nazi-rule has become the supreme representative.

For these reasons, Ransom cannot simply exile the Un-man from the planet—he must completely destroy it and, thus, cut off its consuming presence from the world forever. No exorcism will get the job done—the planet needs a knightlier solution. Like the Red Cross Knight in *The Faerie Queene*, Lewis’s hero must grapple with and destroy his enemy, as Rovang makes clear in his analysis of the various connections between the two characters. This need for violence also links the themes of the novel back to medieval concerns over the nature of the knight. Western societies considered those who fight to be essential for their health and continued existence, but the violence that these individuals had to carry out never co-habited comfortably with the Christian ethics of those

cultures.¹⁹ Additionally (as previous chapters have outlined), the knight always carried the potential to become like the destructive forces he fought.

Ransom's character displays Lewis's conception of how sacred knighthood can solve these problems. Just as the concept refuses to discard knighthood as an inherently sinful role, Lewis uses the positive elements of Western culture within Ransom's identity to show that the culture itself need not be killed with its corruptors. Ransom's constant quoting from the Western canon of literature—from Homer to Milton—during the final battle clearly establishes him as a child of his culture. Both the culture and knighthood need the same element in order to stay pure—a transcendent perspective and mission that can give it a higher purpose than itself. Ransom's experiences in Malacandra have given him a Heaven-centered perspective and a Solar language that allows him to serve as a bridge between worlds. He constantly synthesizes apparent opposites within his character—Heaven and Earth, Christian and Pagan ideas, power and humility—but he never assimilates them to serve his own ends, as his foe does. Rather, Ransom's defining action is his surrendering all his qualities to the service of the Good.

This surrendering is precisely the action that authors like Wolfram posit as the gateway through secular chivalry and into sacred knighthood; Parzival must surrender his own glory and interests to become the Grail knight that God has destined him to be.

¹⁹ For example, one of Christ's famous commands is as follows—"Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Matt. 5.39). How is one to follow this command, though, when one's society demands protection from plunderers and invaders?

Ransom takes the same step. Whereas the Un-man seeks to devour everything into itself, Ransom comes to accept that even his own name has a destiny beyond his control. "My name also is Ransom," the voice of Christ tells him (126), and Ransom chooses to give himself up to His role. Because of this surrender, the confrontation becomes more than simply a death-battle between two rational beings. It becomes transfigured into an archetypal combat myth wherein Ransom quite literally represents Jesus, love, and self-sacrifice in mortal combat against the Un-man, who embodies the devil, assimilation, and self-service. Like the confrontation between Marlowe's Round Table and Degarmo at Puma Lake, this battle on the remote world of Perelandra also represents in small scale Lewis's understanding of the nature of the conflict with Nazi Germany.

This archetypal nature of the battle, according to Lewis, allows Ransom to fully exert the violence needed to destroy the demon without incurring sin. Lewis explains this phenomenon as Ransom begins to gain his stride in the fight:

Then an experience that perhaps no good man can ever have in our world came over him—a torrent of perfectly unmixed and lawful hatred. The energy of hating, never before felt without some guilt, without some dim knowledge that he was failing fully to distinguish the sinner from the sin, rose into his arms and legs till he felt that they were pillars of burning blood. What was before him appeared no longer a creature of corrupted will. It was corruption itself to which will was attached only as an instrument. (132)

Because Ransom has full assurance of the evil of his opponent, he is able to recognize the righteousness of destroying him. This is, of course, a surety that could only come with full dedication to the cause of Christ. This dedication, however, is exactly what medieval writers claim for knights like Parzival and Galahad—they are “the servaunte[s] of Jesu Cryste” (Malory 606).

Ransom’s experience, then, is synonymous with the hope that these Arthurian writers held out to knights—that by following the guidance of Christ above any earthly lord one can be sure that the battles into which He leads one are just. The joy that Ransom subsequently experiences, accordingly, reflects the dream of guiltless participation in hate and violence that this sacred knighthood offered:

It is perhaps difficult to understand why this filled Ransom not with horror but with a kind of joy. The joy came from finding at last what hatred was made for. As a boy with an axe rejoices on finding a tree, or a boy with a box of coloured chalks rejoices on finding a pile of perfectly white paper, so he rejoiced in the perfect congruity between his emotion and its object. (132)

Lewis, then, continues to uphold sacred knighthood as a way out of the dialectic conflicts within a chivalric approach to violence.

The moral ambiguities of WWII, of course, gave Lewis just as pressing a reason to find some way out of the apparent sinfulness of violence as society’s needs gave his predecessors in the Middle Ages. In the writer’s eyes, the evil of the Nazis (like the Un-man) demands opposition, but he also knew how corruptive war could be. He, thus, holds

up this dedication to fighting only Christ's battles as a necessary step for everyone involved in the war efforts, if they are to remain morally pure. Without a dedication to Christ's leading, he knew that the Allies' military was doomed to fail. Without embodying Christ through following His lead, they cannot defeat evil. Lewis, therefore, emphasizes the desirability of this stance through Ransom's joy in the battle, which would appeal to many a soldier just as powerfully as to a pious medieval knight.

For those less high-minded, Lewis also follows the lead of medieval romances in portraying superhuman strength and durability as an outcome of sacred knighthood. Ransom's fighting on Christ's behalf endows him with power that surpasses that of his foe—"Bleeding and trembling with weariness as he was, he felt that nothing was beyond his power, and when he flung himself upon the living Death, the eternal Surd in the universal mathematic, he was astonished, and yet (on a deeper level) not astonished at all, at his own strength" (132). Thus, though only one of the combatants will prevail in the end, Lewis does not think that the outcome is in doubt.

Ransom only continues to become "an extension of God's incarnation in Jesus" (Rovang 45) as he nears the end of his battle with evil—a fact Lewis makes clear by having Ransom receive an incurable wound on his heel during the battle (an obvious reference to Messianic interpretations of the "Seed" passage from Genesis²⁰). His final and inevitable victory, thus, drives home the point that Ransom only triumphs because he

²⁰ "I will put enmity between you and the woman, / and between your offspring and hers; / he will strike your head, / and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3.15).

embodies Christ's victory and extends it to this circumstance. The novel, thus, suggests that the divinely inspired aspects of Western culture sacred knights represent can and will defeat the Nazis as long as these aspects remain submitted to God and do not sink back into corrupt systems like chivalry. The fact that his every-Western-man does indeed stay faithful reveals Lewis's optimism regarding their ability to rise to the task.²¹

The hope is, obviously, very similar to Chandler's. The only fundamental distinction between their visions seems to lie in Chandler's insisting on the need for a fellowship of righteous knights, while Lewis emphasizes the actions of Ransom, alone, as bringing about the destruction of evil. This distinction becomes less great when one takes into account, on the one hand, that Marlowe is the sole expositor of Degarmo and, on the other, that Lewis writes the novel, in part, to reveal that all humans have the potential to image Christ as Ransom does.²² Both novels, thereby, present the need for leadership and fellowship in the war effort, just as Arthurian literature portrays a mutually dependent

²¹ An acute thinker will, of course, find problems within this theology of violence. Tellingly, both the medieval texts and Lewis's novel present their sacred knights slaying demonic foes rather than human ones. This, though consistent with the types of enemies one would expect Jesus to lead a knight to oppose—"For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6.12)—does not provide a Biblical explanation for how or if Jesus would lead knights and soldiers to kill the human opponents they face outside of fiction. Lewis seems to acknowledge this difficulty when he states that Ransom's is an "experience that perhaps no good man can ever have in our world" (*Perelandra* 132). Although this issue is an important one, the focus of this study is on the concept of sacred knighthood as Lewis and Chandler present it. Discussion of the problems inherent in enacting it on which they remain silent is outside the scope of this present discussion.

²² I am indebted to Rovang for this point.

relationship between the king and his knights. In addition, *Perelandra* does not end with Ransom being alone. Rather, the final chapters portray his actions paving the way for the creativity and fertility of the planet's couple to create a glorious kingdom that will stretch over the planet and beyond. As Tor (the Adam to Tinidril's Eve) explains, "We will fill this world with our children. We will know this world to the centre . . . When the time is ripe for it and the ten thousand circlings are nearly at an end, we will tear the sky curtain and Deep Heaven shall become familiar to the eyes of our sons as the trees and the waves to ours" (*Perelandra* 181). Thus, though Ransom fights alone, the result of the victory is still a society that has been purged of evil and finds its basis in human bonds. Though the two authors probably had never heard of each other nor read the other's work at the time of writing these novels, both present essentially the same message of hope using many of the same central Arthurian elements.

THE FALL OF ARTHUR: *THE LONG GOODBYE* AND *THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH*
AS RETELLINGS OF THE DESTRUCTION OF CAMELOT

Vanishing Knights: *The Long Goodbye* and America's Farewell to Marlowe

The previous chapters have examined the ways in which the various Marlowe and Ransom novels have relied upon the idea of a meta-narrative combat myth. Each novel has dramatized the battle between two different versions of Western culture. Marlowe and Ransom represent the heroic, giving, inclusive version of Western culture, while characters like Canino, Degarmo, and the Un-man represent the corrosion of that culture into villainy, assimilation, and elitism. This narrative finds its source in Arthurian literature, in which Camelot—the exemplar of nobility, chivalry, and courtly love—implodes upon itself when its own values become twisted into pettiness, treason, and adultery.

In a particularly ironic instance of history mirroring art, the end of WWII did not create the optimistic circumstances to which Chandler and Lewis had looked forward in their wartime novels. Instead, the Allies' perhaps less-than-ethical method of ending the war brought about a cultural shift that mirrors the fall of the Round Table in the Arthur mythos. Following this tragic development, both Chandler and Lewis would adapt the

tragic finale of Camelot into their later novels *The Long Goodbye* and *That Hideous Strength* in order to express their perception of Western culture's rejection of knighthood and coming implosion.

As we have discussed already, Chandler created the character of the private investigator Philip Marlowe within his hard-boiled detective novels in order to demonstrate the vitality and necessity of a contemporary version of the sacred knight to combat and reverse the twisted forms of secular chivalry to which American society was in danger of losing itself. By the 1950s, however, Chandler would find that the knight was not a more but less common man than before he began his writing career and that the fundamental dualism within American culture had changed from that of chivalry versus moral corruption into chivalry versus moral expediency.

In the aftermath of WWII, Chandler perceived a massive cultural shift away from the comradeship which he had hoped the conflict would inspire. Instead, he perceived the culture quickly becoming one of self-interest, fear, and betrayal. The author would capture this vision of failure in his last great Marlowe novel—*The Long Goodbye* (1953). The novel indicts 1950s America for refusing the opportunity to become the new Camelot that the conflict of the war offered them and demonstrates that the only possible fate for the sacred knight in a world that has refused such a calling is imprisonment and isolation. Though critics are often silent on the Arthurian nature of this work, the text displays Chandler's continued engagement with his original source of inspiration—Thomas Malory.

This work has already established Chandler's original debt to Malory in his early detective fiction. As Chandler matured, however, he would distance himself from Malory's disillusioned perspective on the Arthur legend and draw from the more hopeful romances of authors like Chrétien de Troyes and the Pearl Poet in novels like *The Big Sleep* and *The Lady in the Lake*. The decidedly non-chivalrous end of WWII and the cultural shifts that followed in the 50s, however, would force Chandler to rethink his optimism regarding the rebirth of a Round Table fellowship in America and rediscover the relevance of Malory's work and perspective on society's rejection of the values of sacred knighthood. In order to continue writing about the knight within the context of Post-War America, therefore, Chandler would have to reconsider the relationship between his work and tales of chivalric adventure and, ultimately, return to the more pessimistic tone of his original source of inspiration—Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*.

Malory, contrary to common misconception, was not merely a compiler of idealistic, simple Arthurian stories. On the contrary, Malory made at least one significant revision to the established Arthurian master plot when he placed most of the knightly quests of romance *after* Arthur and the Round Table had conquered Rome. In all earlier versions, these stories took place in a transitional space between Arthur's establishment as king of the Britons and his triumphant victory as a world power (followed in rapid succession by his fall in battle against Mordred). By changing their placement, Malory imbues these stories with a new purpose—exploring what becomes of the knight and his fellowship after the great world war has been won. This was also the prospect of

Marlowe in the early 50s, following the end of WWII. In both cases, the situation proves tragically grim for knights. In this section of *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Malory transforms then common-place Arthurian romances into a prolonged deconstruction of knighthood that portrays the seeds of Camelot's destruction finally bearing fruit throughout the "heroic" tales of the Grail quest and Lancelot's love for Guinevere. This jaded perspective on peacetime is also present in *The Long Goodbye*, where Marlowe endures his own prolonged disillusionment with the society that had once seemed desperate for the values he embodied but which has now thrown him aside as a cultural dinosaur.

An exchange between Marlowe and police lieutenant Bernie Ohls—an old friend and once potential member of Marlowe's new Round Table—encapsulates the dualism between chivalry and Post-War America. In a rare moment of self-revelation, Marlowe waxes poetic about his identity and place within society: "I'm a romantic, Bernie. I hear voices crying in the night and I go see what's the matter. You don't make a dime that way. You got sense, you shut your windows and turn up more sound on the TV set" (*Goodbye* 651). This speech once again establishes Marlowe as a Galahad-figure—a perfect, selfless knight. The tired, pragmatic Ohls, however, is quick to challenge Marlowe's values: "You think you're cute but you're just stupid. You're a shadow on the wall" (652). The lieutenant is not the only one to hold such an opinion.

In stark contrast to the grudging respect that it used to inspire, everyone in 1950s Los Angeles agrees that Marlowe's idealism is idiotic, outdated, and dangerous. Whereas in the earlier novels the police, mobsters, and even femmes fatales usually treated

Marlowe with some degree of admiration, members of every class of hard-boiled society in *The Long Goodbye* treat the detective with superiority or outright contempt. The novel makes it clear that the days when the casino boss Eddie Mars addressed Marlowe by the respectful moniker of “soldier” in *The Big Sleep* are long over. The Post-War mobster, Mendy Menendez, now repeatedly demeans the detective by calling him “cheapie.”

The novel’s characters are not the only ones to find Marlowe to be of reduced stature in the work. Many critics find that Chandler’s over-indulgence in “sentimentality” leaves the text noticeably flawed. John Bayley, for example, holds that the fact “[t]hat overt sentimentality becomes all too visible in the last pair of completed novels—*The Long Goodbye* and *Playback*—is a charge that can hardly be denied” (xxi). Though Bayley sees this sentimentality as a lack of restraint on Chandler’s part, the general critical perception that Marlowe has “gone sentimental and become Christ-like” (Durham 101) is essential to the novel’s theme. Chandler makes this clear in a letter to his publisher, Bernice Baumgarten, regarding the novel, in which he explains that, in this novel, he wrote “about the people, about this strange corrupt world we live in, and how any man who tried to be honest looks in the end either sentimental or plain foolish” (315).²³ Readers like Bayley, thus, have fallen into Chandler’s trap.

²³ I am indebted to Jerry Speir’s work for drawing my attention to this letter and its significance for understanding Chandler’s presentation of Marlowe and society within the novel. Though he does not examine chivalry to the extent that I do, he analyzes many of the same key scenes (such as the exchange between Marlowe and Ohls) and characters that I do, and he was the one who alerted me to their importance.

Marlowe has not substantially changed from the earlier novels. His stern treatment of the sinister Eileen Wade that drives her to suicide shows that Marlowe is still as fiercely dedicated to eradicating the darkness as ever, while his care for his drunken friend Terry Lennox shows his continued willingness to sacrifice himself for others. In addition, just as in *The Big Sleep*, all of Marlowe's actions flow from his *comitatus* commitments (this time to Lennox), for which he endures substantial hardships without giving even the slightest indication of breaking. If anything, these trials are more severe than those in any previous adventure: unjust imprisonment and torture at the hands of the LA police, the greatest sexual temptation of his life through his association with Eileen (who turns out to be Lennox's former lover), and a brutal attempt on his life by Menendez. It appears, then, that readers like Bayley only reinforce Chandler's point—Marlowe's knightly character has not changed, but the cultural perception of it has. The knight can only come across as sentimental and stupid to Post-War America.

What prompted such a massive shift in perception? In describing the Post-War society in which Chandler found himself in the 50s, pulp fiction scholar Sean McCann provides an explanation: “Nearly overnight, the United States had come to seem to Chandler less a society riven by hierarchical class antagonism than one built on a shallow, comfort-driven, and market-oriented consensus (a ‘democracy of cupidity’ rather than ‘a democracy of fraternity,’ as Richard Hofstadter put it rather harshly at the time)” (173). In his earlier war novel, *The Lady in the Lake*, Chandler voiced his hope that WWII would cause the men of America to create a new Round Table built on

comitatus, just as that novel's conflict unites Marlowe, Patton, and the soldiers guarding Puma Lake Dam. This, as McCann argues, was the "democracy of fraternity" that would again make the knight not only a character of fiction but also a reality once again.

Chandler's dreams, however, apparently ended with the Allies dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. This means of victory (because the civilian casualties it required blurred the line between those who fight and everyone else) was antithetical to chivalry (let alone the ethics of sacred knighthood), and it set an important precedent for American culture. As many of the leaders explained afterwards, continuing to fight Japan until they surrendered would have taken too long and cost too many men in fighting. In Chandler's terms, the situation of the Pacific theater at the close of the conflict made "chivalry" seem stupid to US leaders, and their perspective would come to dominate and shape Post-War society. This shift seems to lie at the heart of Speir's observation that in *The Long Goodbye* "[t]he world, in fact, shows ample signs of having changed in such a way as to make romantic heroes obsolete" (76). With the efficiency of the atomic bomb to settle conflicts, who needs chivalry?²⁴

Thus, rather than the victorious return to chivalry that Chandler hoped would come through the war, the writer found the Post-War world more hostile to the knight

²⁴ Though Chandler never directly criticizes the dropping of the atomic bomb, he agrees with the English General Fuller's "disgust, both moral and practical and military, at so-called strategic bombing" (*Letters* 131) in a letter to Charles Morteon and states that the practice "morally put us right beside the man who ran Belsen and Dachau" (132). Given this stance and his concerns with the chivalric code, it seems logical to assume that he would have been uneasy about deploying atomic weapons.

than ever before. The West had slayed the dragon that was the Axis powers, but the cost of that victory seemed to be the very brotherhood the battle had initially forged. Harlan Potter, an extremely powerful newspaper tycoon, aptly explains the situation of most Post-War Americans to Marlowe:

Man has always been a venal animal. The growth of populations, the huge costs of wars, the incessant pressure of confiscatory taxation—all these things make him more and more venal. The average man is tired and scared, and a tired, scared man can't afford ideals. He has to buy food for his family. In our time we have seen a shocking decline in both public and private morals. You can't expect quality from people whose lives are a subjection to a lack of quality. (*Goodbye* 612)

In other words, now that the common enemy was vanquished, the moral taint and financial pressures of the victory left Americans with little reason to consider chivalric fellowship a realistic goal.

In the exhaustion of their success and in the aftermath of the moral expediency upon which their leadership had insisted, the only pragmatic social bonds for Americans were those of the mass market and financial co-dependence. These ties would eventually lead to the rise of the corporation—that enormously efficient and practical behemoth of production—as the cornerstone of society, rather than knightly brotherhood. Any other ties were simply too costly. The suffering that Marlowe experiences for his stubborn loyalty to his friend and his refusal to aid the police and Potter in making Lennox into

their sin-eater expresses Chandler's revulsion at the depth of America's unfaithfulness. Not only has the nation failed to fulfill its potential as a new Camelot, but its tactical prioritizing of self-preservation has also led the country to become a Darwinian nightmare where the bonds of brotherhood can be tossed aside at the first accusation—whether of murder or of questioning mainstream assumptions.

This increasingly dark cultural transformation drove Chandler back to the author who had originally inspired his contemporary knight. At first glance, the rejection of chivalry in the 1950s seems to have very little to do with Malory and his tales. The significance of Malory's historical context, however, reveals a deep kinship between the medieval author and the character of Philip Marlowe. Malory lived during the infamous War of the Roses²⁵—a time when “[e]very county [in England] was the scene of family feuds exploiting, and exploited by, the larger dynastic struggle [and when ‘c]rimes’ and criminal proceedings alike were often primarily moves in private war” (Lewis, “*Morte Darthur*” 105). The prevailing government of England would come to regard Malory's loyalties as dangerous and unpatriotic—a declaration that landed the man in prison,

²⁵ This dynastic struggle was fought between the Houses of Lancaster and York over the throne of England between 1455 and 1487. The conflict gains its name from the red and white roses that the respective houses used as their symbols. Eventually, the conflict allowed Richard III of York to assume rule. He is widely considered to be the most despotic and cruel king in English history. This conflict was so crucial to history that Renaissance playwright William Shakespeare would retell and immortalize it over the course of four plays: *Henry VI* Parts 1, 2, and 3, and *Richard III*.

apparently for life. This confinement, however, seems to be the result of a much larger cultural hostility towards the values that Malory represented.

This opposition, like the exchange between Marlowe and Ohls, finds expression in a debate over the significance of chivalric actions. The records we have of Malory, in stark contrast to the heroic tone of his work, present him as a barbaric remnant of a savage, uncivilized age. As Lewis explains in his article on *Le Morte D'Arthur*, "Malory appears to have been convicted of cattle-lifting, theft, extortion, sacrilegious robbery, attempted murder and rape" (104). This knowledge has led many scholars to simply write off the man as a "shadow on the wall" of England's honor who deserved his punishment, although he accidentally created one of the most enduring versions of Arthurian legend.

Lewis, however, offers a more rational explanation:

It is from the lawyers that we get Malory's life. . . The 'robberies' and 'extortions' may have been the acts of private war not only permitted but demanded by honor. 'Attempted murder' may have been knightly encounter. Rape need mean no more than abduction. . . Malory may have had equally good reasons for removing from an orgulous and discourteous husband, a local King Mark, some gentlewoman whom he loved *par amors*. (105)

In other words, because society would no longer tolerate the chivalrous actions of a knight like Malory (especially when the knight is loyal to the wrong claimant to the throne), it redefined his noble deeds as those of a common criminal. This redefinition

gave lawyers on the victorious side of the royal conflict the justification they needed to then persecute him.

From the vantage point of a prison cell, it became obvious to Malory that the end of the war would not bring a Round Table-like restoration of brotherhood among England's nobility, but an opportunistic regime that, if Lewis is correct, twisted his very deeds of chivalry into the pretenses that they used to condemn him. Malory's world, therefore, was just as hostile to his idea of chivalry as Marlowe finds America to be to his knighthood in *The Long Goodbye*. It is only within the context of the 1950s, therefore, that Marlowe truly becomes a contemporary version of Malory. The detective's notoriously elusive character arc within the novel is nothing short of his developing into a new Thomas Malory locked out from the very civilization for which he had fought throughout his life.

Understanding this character trajectory unlocks the novel's thematic unity. The winding trail of the plot (which takes Marlowe down more twists and turns through more pages than any of the other novels) is surprisingly consistent regarding three key themes. First, Marlowe's dedication to the Good, more than ever, alienates him from the goals and concerns of his society—his unwavering commitment to personal loyalty has become a hindrance to the mass-media agenda of peaceful, swift scapegoating. This is most apparent in the police brutality that Marlowe endures for Lennox's sake and the ways in which the representatives of the law routinely attempt to redefine his actions as crimes. Marlowe, ever loyal, describes his helping Lennox flee to Mexico as a deed of *comitatus*

that aided a good man in need: “Terry Lennox was my friend. I’ve got a reasonable amount of sentiment invested in him. Enough not to spoil it just because a cop says come through. You’ve got a case against him. . . [but t]he motive is old stuff, long neutralized, almost part of the deal. I don’t admire that kind of deal, but that’s the kind of guy he is—a little weak and very gentle. The rest of it means nothing” (*Goodbye* 452). Paralleling Lewis’s perspective on the lawyers’ accounts of Malory, the police consistently charge Marlowe’s loyalty as merely being an “accessory after the fact of murder [and of h]elping a suspect escape” (451). Marlowe, thus, discovers that the LA police and legal machine no longer tolerate personal loyalty and are incapable of seeing any obstruction to their rigid process as anything other than a crime.

Similarly, Chandler portrays Marlowe as no longer being able to play a meaningful role in achieving justice within this corrupt system. In sharp contrast to his working as an equal partner with the police in *The Lady in the Lake*, Marlowe simply becomes their bait to capture Menendez in this story. When the detective voices his displeasure at being forced into such a role, Ohls simply tells him, “Too bad for you, hero. . . I could hardly help laughing when you walked into your own parlor to take your beating. I got a rise out of that, kiddo. It was a dirty job and it had to be done dirty. . . You ain’t hurt bad, but we had to let them hurt you some” (710). The old cop’s sentiments make it clear that the police see their work not as an honorable calling but as a “job” that often requires them to be “dirty” and manipulative. Ohls’s acceptance of these conditions and the almost mechanical manner in which the police perform this operation

make it clear that the police, like the rest of society, value quick, efficient solutions over the sluggish and taxing moral high road. As corporate America discovered, this valuation of efficiency inevitably results in a loss of humanity within an organization. In the same way, Marlowe comes to realize that he is a cog in a law enforcement machine, rather than a member of a brotherhood.

Finally, the people to whom Marlowe commits his loyalty are ultimately unworthy of it. This fact is apparent, eventually, in Lennox's true character, but also in that of Eileen. When Marlowe first meets her, she inspires an awe in him that is incomparable to anything he has felt for other women. After giving a long catalogue of the different types of blondes, Marlowe explains that Eileen "was none of these, not even of that kind of world. She was unclassifiable, as remote and clear as mountain water, as elusive as its color" (491-92). The only meaningful comparison he can make is to "a fairy princess" (490)—her utter uniqueness, like that of Queen Morgan le Fay from the Arthur legend, demands such an otherworldly designation. Marlowe, in short, feels the kind of awe and love for Eileen that a knight should have for a high-ranking lady who is worthy of his service. With Eileen, thus, seeming to embody the characteristics of a worthy lady (a living example of that, as we have seen, has been absent throughout the past Marlowe novels), *The Long Goodbye* can introduce a new element of medieval romance that has been lacking in Chandler's earlier works—courtly love.

Though I have already discussed the basics of courtly love, it is important to understand its practical effects in order to appreciate Marlowe's relationship with Eileen.

The medieval historian Joseph Dahmus explains “that the nature of this love ran the gamut from the respect which a vassal might pay his Lady, the wife of his lord, to the carnal love which sought fulfillment” (224). The detective experiences this whole gamut of emotions for Eileen throughout the novel. Although he initially rejects her job offer, he eventually works diligently to find her husband for her and remains at her call to help with the husband’s drunken outbursts even after he had brought him home.

This is a marked change in Marlowe’s behavior with women. Though he had “served” other women in earlier novels (some of whom are of a much higher social class than he is), the actions had never come from an internal sense of awe for them.²⁶ Additionally, these other women had also sexually tempted Marlowe before, but the modern knight was able to resist their allures without much difficulty. Chandler makes it apparent that Marlowe’s attraction to Eileen is much more powerful. When she attempts to seduce the hero, Marlowe admits that “[t]his was murder. I was as erotic as a stallion. I was losing control. You don’t get that sort of invitation from that sort of woman very often anywhere” (*Goodbye* 594). His passion is so great that, once a distraction has enabled him to escape, he gets himself drunk in order to keep from returning to her. These romantic feelings and dilemmas are the very plot material on which medieval romance authors like Chrétien de Troyes relied.

²⁶ With the possible exception of Mona Mars in *The Big Sleep* (see Hill et al. 383, 457-59).

As we have seen, however, the fay ladies of knightly romances often proved to be treacherous and hostile to knights. In *Le Morte D'Arthur*, for example, Malory introduces Morgan as a positive character—she is Arthur's half-sister and the queen of a smaller kingdom in the realm. The writer eventually reveals her true, villainous nature when she attempts to murder both her husband and Arthur himself. Similarly, Eileen proves to be a false fairy. In addition to attempting to seduce the detective, she murdered both her own husband, Rodger Wade, and Lennox's wife, as Marlowe eventually uncovers. The only woman in Marlowe's world who seemed worthy of the title of Lady and the servitude due to it, thus, turns out to be the culprit he was chasing throughout the novel. Discovering Eileen's true nature is a bitter disappointment to Marlowe, but its significance is shallow compared to the revelation at the novel's conclusion.

The finale, in which Lennox (at this point having successfully faked his death for most of the novel) reveals himself to Marlowe after the detective forced him out of hiding, does not (in contrast to most detective stories) bring together all the details of the crime and reveal the true culprit. Chandler had already taken care of that chapters ago. Instead, it brings the novel's themes together to reveal the truth of Marlowe's situation. Lennox's willingness to become society's scapegoat (he has undergone plastic surgery and assumed a new identity) is like a slap in the face after Marlowe's constant efforts to reveal the real murderer. Lennox, like America as a whole, has become "a moral defeatist" (733) who will do anything to keep himself safe—no matter the cost to others.

The details of the conspiracy that Lennox reveals to have had with Menendez further highlights the extent to which Marlowe has been a pawn in his “friend’s” exit strategy. This revelation of character, in short, shows that the role Marlowe saw himself as playing throughout the novel and in every other novel—the knight errant who brings justice to the underdog—has become completely ineffectual. The titular farewell, therefore, is not that of Marlowe to Lennox—the hero blatantly refuses to give him that honor. Rather, it refers to America’s leaving Marlowe behind. Just as the developing corporate economy left countless “vanishing Americans” in its wake, the ideological shift from a chivalrous (or, at least, fraternal) emphasis to an obsession with peace at any cost (even that of identity, in Lennox’s case) simply does not have a place for the knight, except as a new kind of pawn.

Once again, this idea finds its ultimate source in Malory. If ever there was a historical “vanishing knight,” it was him. His country had discarded him as an anachronism that had no rightful position within its developing society beyond that of a cage. Within his prison cell, this displaced knight would reconsider chivalry and society from every possible angle the Arthurian legends would allow him and, in the story of the quest for the Holy Grail, portray the final place of a sacred knight in a corrupt world. The saga concludes with the most perfect knight, Sir Galahad, receiving his previously petitioned, miraculously painless death, after which “a grete multitude of angels bare hit [his soul] up to hevyn” (Malory 607) along with the Grail. The corrupt heroes, like Lancelot and Gawain, are left on earth and soon bring about the collapse of Arthur’s

kingdom. Malory's point is clear—there is no place for sacred knights in “this worlde unstable” (607).

The Long Goodbye laments the fact that Marlowe, like Percival, Galahad, and Malory himself, ultimately has no place in his society. He cannot, alas, go bodily into Paradise like his literary predecessors, so he must endure Malory's imprisonment. This incarceration is literally realized in the early chapters of the novel, but the ending reveals that, even after his physical release, the sentence continues in the total isolation that his knightly character creates between him and every other person and in his continuing loss of agency in law enforcement. In this way, Marlowe's final line—“I never saw any of them again—except the cops. No way has yet been invented to say goodbye to them” (*Goodbye* 734)—is just as much a cry for help as Malory's closing plea that his reader “PRAYE FOR ME WHYLE I AM ON LYVE, THAT GOD SENDE ME GOOD DELYVERAUNCE. . . SYR THOMAS MALEORÉ, KNYGHT, AS JESU HELPE HYM FOR HYS GRETE MYGHT, AS HE IS THE SERVAUNT OF JESU BOTHE DAY AND NYGHT” (726). By infusing the old knight's voice into Marlowe's and overlaying the detective's story on top of his life, *The Long Goodbye* creates one of the most moving lamentations for the vanishing of the knight from America's consciousness.

Like Lewis, Chandler understood, however, that knighthood was not ultimately a concept that society can toss aside without imploding—“it offers the only possible escape from a world divided between wolves who do not understand, and sheep who cannot defend, the things which make life desirable” (Lewis, “Chivalry” 16). Chandler feared

that America had forgotten this fact and was becoming, as Potter envisioned, a nation of fearful sheep like Lennox striving for survival and personal peace at any cost while men like Ohls become wolves through serving these desires, no matter how violent “peace-keeping” becomes. Chandler knew such a group could not long remain a powerful nation.

Logres and Britain: *That Hideous Strength* as the Battle for England’s Soul

Out of all the Ransom novels, *That Hideous Strength* (1945) is the most obviously Arthurian. In this final chapter of the trilogy, Ransom receives the title of Pendragon, takes on the name “Fisher-King,” and presides over a new Round Table that hosts the awakened Merlin. Accordingly, a plethora of scholars has examined the ways in which the novel reflects Arthurian literature.²⁷ Some, like Benjamin Shogren, have focused on the ways in which the plot mirrors that of the Grail quests, while others, including Joe McClatchey and Rovang, have elucidated the ways Lewis adapts the themes and symbols of *The Faerie Queene* within the novel. Though most of these scholars discuss Lewis’s presentation of the dichotomy between Logres and Britain, most do not give it primacy in their analyses. This section, thus, focuses on how the conflict between the two identities reveals Lewis’s perspective on the cultural decline in the Post-War West and how the

²⁷ David A. Branson gives a good overview of these elements in his “Arthurian Elements in *That Hideous Strength*.”

novel employs the themes of the Fall of the Round Table within the plot to voice his fears regarding his culture's rejection of knighthood in favor of a horrifying techno-dystopia.

As many critics have noted, this third entry in the trilogy marks Ransom's final stage of development—he has gone from squire to knight in the last two novels; now he has taken his place as king. The title he inherits is the traditional “Pendragon” role of Uther and his son. This designates Ransom as the direct heir of Arthur's kingdom—the seventy-ninth from the fabled king, in fact (*Strength* 367). Like Arthur, he is tasked with saving the island-nation, and Ransom's ultimate foe will also be an domestic one, mirroring how Arthur's final war is a civil one.

On the other hand, Ransom also becomes a new Fisher King.²⁸ This is (almost painfully) obvious from his taking the name “Fisher-King” from his “married sister in India, a Mrs. Fisher-King. . . [who] has just died and left him a large fortune on condition that he took the name” (112). This idea seizes on the incurable wound that Ransom received on Perelandra, making it parallel the way in which the Fisher King suffers from a supernatural wound that he received in war. Accordingly, the scene in which Jane Studdock meets Ransom in the novel clearly parallels the nearly archetypal first meeting of Percival and the Fisher King from the Grail quest. It has the essential trappings, including the “throne room” (140), fire (139), and mysterious, lounging king—“On a sofa

²⁸ Shogren provides an excellent examination of the ways in which Ransom does so, and my analysis is indebted to his.

before her, with one foot bandaged as if he had a wound, lay what appeared to be a boy, twenty years old” (139).

This combination of roles also manifests in Ransom’s physical description. Once again, the character unites many different and even contrary elements within his character. As Jane discovers, no one impression of him seems to be completely correct:

Of course he was not a boy—how could she have thought so? The fresh skin on his forehead and cheeks and, above all, on his hands, had suggested the idea. But no boy could have so full a beard. And no boy could be so strong. She had expected to see an invalid. Now it was manifest that the grip of those hands would be inescapable, and imagination suggested that those arms and shoulders could support the whole house. (139)

In addition to combining Arthur and the Fisher King, therefore, Ransom also manages to combine youth and age along with strength and weakness within himself. The plethora of juxtapositions in his character may very well render him, as Shogren argues, “an icon of both the Masculine and Feminine and therefore an iconographic representation of all who inhabit the genders relationally as joyful citizens of the Great Dance” (410). However, Shogren’s conclusion does not fully explain the reason for Ransom’s success at synthesizing these figures. For Lewis emphasizes that Ransom and his company have created in miniature something neither Arthur nor the Fisher King ever did—unite the chivalrous with the sacred.

Ransom's mansion at St. Anne's functions both as a new Camelot—in its housing the Round Table that develops around him—and, as Shogren points out, a contemporary Grail Castle. The place both houses the last remnant of the glorious order of Arthur and “embodies the Grail Castle's peculiar combination of hiddenness, hospitality, and mystery” through its being undiscoverable by the N.I.C.E. and its hosting of the otherworldly eldila (Shogren 407). St. Anne's is, thus, a place which combines the power of Earthly authority with the ability to bridge both the Other and Heavenly realms with the earth—a goal which, according to Cecil Dimble (an uncorrupt academic who has joined this company), Arthur never truly accomplished. The scholar's explanation to Jane reveals this point:

[Arthur was] a man of the old British line, but also a Christian and a fully-trained general with Roman technique, trying to pull this whole society together and almost succeeding. There'd be jealousy from his own British family, and the Romanised section—the Launcelots and Lionels—would look down on the Britons. . . And always that under-tow, that tug back to Druidism. (*Strength* 29)

The medieval king almost created a synthesis of the Christian faith, warrior-ethic, and the Otherworld, but, as earlier chapters have shown, attempting to do so through the adoption of chivalry is predestined to failure because of the contradictions inherent in the code.

At the same time, Arthurian legends do not show the holy Fisher King doing much better than his secular contemporary. One must admit that the lord of the Grail Castle failed to bring his holy order into any meaningful alliance with Camelot. By

remaining isolated and unknown, the order of the Grail declines to interact with and, thereby, exert its positive influence upon the culture of Camelot. This hermitic attitude allows Camelot to remain trapped within its destructive tendencies because the Grail knights have declined to expose the Round Table to the sacred knighthood that could deliver them. Instead, the Order remains cloistered in the Waste Land and relies on a hoped-for successor to the Fisher King to spread sacred knighthood and the blessings of the Grail to the rest of the nation.

Lewis positions Ransom as this hoped-for successor who synthesizes the glory and power of Arthur with the mystery and holiness of the Fisher King. The contemporary knight-king realizes Arthur's dream of unity by hosting both believers and agnostics (from all social classes) at his Round Table while also remaining submitted to God and His mysterious ways, as evidenced by his continuing association with the eldila and the mystical Merlin. Why does Ransom succeed where Arthur and the Fisher King failed? The answer lies in his applying the synthesis of knighthood and religious devotion within sacred knighthood to the entire social structure of Camelot. This creates two important distinctions between St. Anne's and Camelot in the characteristics of the monarch and his Round Table.

As in Arthur's Camelot, Ransom is the central, unifying authority around which the Round Table forms. He has removed two of the most problematic elements of Arthur's character, though. First, Arthur, though dedicated to the ways of God, never succeeded in becoming the kind of continuation of the Incarnation that the Fisher King

(with his wound and possession of the Grail²⁹) was. Arthur's multiple moral failures (including his incest with Morgan) evidence that he did not fully submit himself to the way of Christ. Ransom, in contrast, has done so, as *Perelandra* chronicled. This submission prevents him from following in Arthur's self-destructive tendencies and ensures that he will father no Mordred. Second, Ransom is a bachelor, which ensures that there is no Lady at his Round Table and, therefore, no courtly love. Although lacking a Guinevere figure necessitates the absence of a Lancelot, the chastity of St. Anne's king also spares them from the fracturing that the adultery creates in Arthur's kingdom. Just as sacred knighthood allows for a way out of the contradictory nature of chivalry, the novel also indicates that it creates more effective kings.

Ransom's possession of these qualities also further solidifies his identity as a contemporary version of the Galahad character. The man's heritage mirrors that of Galahad through the fact that Ransom is, as Shogren argues, the heir and synthesis of both the warrior-king Malacandra and the sacred mother Perelandra, just as Galahad is the son of the chivalrous Lancelot and pious Elaine.³⁰ As the other novels in the trilogy relate, Ransom's time on both of their worlds formed his character, and he would not have become the man he is in this novel without the wisdom he learned from them both.

²⁹ I am indebted to Craig Nakashian for pointing this out to me during a lecture.

³⁰ It is also worth noting that, as Shogren argues (408), it is possible to understand the portrayal of Malacandra and Perelandra at the end of *Perelandra* as possessing Grail-like imagery. Malacandra holding "something like a spear" while "the hands of the other were open, with the palms towards him" (171) may correlate to the Lance of Longinus and Holy Grail of the Fisher King's castle.

As the previous chapters have shown, Ransom also bridges the corruption of his earthly culture and the sacred Truth that has never completely left it.³¹ Ransom moves beyond the distortions of Western culture while bringing all of the good within it into submission to his Heavenly calling, just as Galahad transforms the knightly profession into a quest for Christ. Finally, the fact that, in many versions of the story, this knight of the Round Table takes over the role of Fisher King himself, further indicates that Galahad is a model for Lewis's character who is now both Grail king and Pendragon. In this final novel, then, Ransom has reached the end of the trajectory on which Lewis started him in *Out of the Silent Planet*. His storyline now parallels the last movement of Galahad's by having him move on from the role of knight to take on that of king.

The reception of Ransom's character, both within the novel and in scholarship, has not been unanimously positive, however. Like the reactions to Marlowe's idealism in *The Long Goodbye*, Ransom's character receives scorn from both obvious enemies like Devine, who characterizes him as privileged killer—"The murderer [of Weston] is a respectable Cambridge don with weak eyes, a game leg, and a fair beard" (*Strength* 39)—and MacPhee, a member of Ransom's own Round Table, who constantly returns to the fact that Ransom "has always been a man of what you might call an imaginative turn" (187) and may be hallucinating his encounters with the eldila. Characters both inclined

³¹ As evidenced, in part, by the continued knowledge of the eldila within mythology (*Perelandra* 172-73).

and disinclined to like Ransom seem to share a lingering distrust in his apparent goodness.

This goodness also creates some tensions in critical reception of the novel. Ronda Chervin captures one aspect of the tension by stating that “in *That Hideous Strength* we find Ransom has become not so much a hero as a confirmed saint” (3). Downing agrees with this sentiment—“After returning from Perelandra, though, Ransom has reached a level of spiritual refinement that Lewis would never presume to have attained. Consequently, Lewis’s sensibilities seem to be partially associated with a number of characters in *That Hideous Strength* but not strongly tied to any one of them” (118). The change in Ransom that these scholars describe in polite terms is essentially the same as the criticism leveled at Marlowe for having “gone sentimental and become Christ-like” (Durham 101). Some scholars would even like to suggest that other characters in the novel are more “heroic” than he because of their more dynamic arcs (Chervin 3). Ransom’s almost flawless goodness seems off-putting to characters and readers alike, just as Marlowe’s does.

All this, however, only serves to further the connection between Ransom and Galahad. Post-medieval reception of Galahad has often been less glowing than that of characters like Lancelot and Gawain because of a perceived stagnation in his invariable moral performance. Alan Lupack, for example, explains that “[t]here are, in fact, relatively few novels in which Galahad is the central character because he is usually conceived of as too perfect to have the human flaws that make a narrative compelling”

(82). This reaction can, in part, be explained by the shift that the two world wars caused in Western culture. After circumstances of the war led the apparently righteous Allied Forces to use the atomic bomb on civilians, culture at large seemed to scorn or distrust any person who seemed to embody the heroic ideas that the war propaganda had revived. This mistrust may have contributed to the West's shift in imaginative taste from Galahad to more flawed protagonists. Lewis, like Chandler, uses this change in taste to his favor, however. The writer employs the cultural aversion to his Galahad figure to display the ways in which the West's aversion to moral goodness is allowing them to slip into the hands of the darkness.

Ransom's character decisively pushes all of the characters onto one of two paths. Most dislike or fear the goodness he represents and, though not endorsers of the evil of the N.I.C.E., find themselves in the Institute's clutches while trying to remain neutral. The arc of Mark Studdock illustrates this principle. His overriding interest in himself and his advancement in "inner circles" prevents him from initially perceiving their horrific intentions for the world. He does eventually come to see the horrors within the dungeons of the N.I.C.E. and meet its abominable head, but his fear of the ramifications that joining Ransom's Company will have for his "whole future career" (*Strength* 220) lead him to reject Dimble's offer to join the company at St. Anne's. This decision results in the evil organization sinking their claws deeper into Mark.

Conversely, his wife, Jane, goes from avoiding meeting Ransom because of her fear of losing control over herself and getting "taken in" by something to becoming

infatuated by and loyal to Ransom's goodness. The fact that Ransom's Round Table is only "four men, some women, and a bear" (289) while the N.I.C.E. "holds all this Earth in its fist to squeeze as it wishes" (291) shows that the case of Mark is far more common. This devotion, thus, provides a standard of worthiness that, though distinct from that of chivalry, is perhaps even more exacting.

These responses are also central to the way in which Ransom's Round Table alters the original's inclusion of only the worthiest of warriors. As the introduction of this study explains, chivalry demanded that knights prove their worthiness by adherence to the code and acts of prowess. At first glance, the fact that the group that forms around the current Pendragon lacks even a single expert soldier seems to abandon this key aspect of its predecessor altogether. Instead of fighters, the company consists predominantly of scholars, housewives, and common laborers. Ransom's stricter adherence to Christian principles ensures that the criteria for worthiness is quite different from that of chivalry. After all, this group of misfits is certainly more in keeping with St. Paul's statement that "God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are" (1 Cor. 1.28). However, though they do not use chivalry as their measure, each member proves their worthiness through their loyalty to Christ³² and by accepting the anonymity that comes with rejecting the popular recognition and power that the N.I.C.E. offers to its followers.

³² MacPhee, of course, is agnostic, but his loyalty to Ransom (despite his doubts in him) seems to make up for this because Ransom is Christ's representative.

This standard of worthiness further strengthens the company against the collapse that Arthur's Round Table faced. The replacing of a glory-obsessed nobility with humble, common people creates an environment more conducive to actual fellowship and mutual love among its members than the original court. Its lack of cultural prominence eliminates the things Arthur could not ultimately control—ambitions for power and factions. St. Anne's aversion to publicity also allows it to operate more effectively and mystically than the honor-currency system allowed. Whereas the famous court of Camelot proved relatively easy for enemies like Mordred to infiltrate, the N.I.C.E. cannot even discover the location of St. Anne's. This hiddenness is not a simple repeat of the Grail Order's isolation, however. St. Anne's inhabitants (with a few exceptions) continue their day jobs and, thus, exert a positive influence on the world that subtly checks that of the N.I.C.E.

The main conflict of the novel comes from the ideological clash between Ransom's sacred Round Table at St. Anne's and the despotic order of the N.I.C.E. Imitating Spenser's penchant for providing positive and negative doubles within *The Faerie Queene*, Lewis makes it clear that the Institute is a nightmare version of Ransom's Round Table. Their conflict is Lewis's primary example of the continuing cultural dialectic that he had hoped the victory over the Nazis could resolve. Though, as this study has shown, the previous Ransom books displayed a conflict between two distinct versions of Western culture, *That Hideous Strength* uses the metaphor of Logres and Britain

(which originates in Charles Williams' *Arthuriad*) to explain Lewis's conception of this struggle. To repeat a quote used in this study's introduction,

something we may call Britain is always haunted by something we may call Logres. Haven't you noticed that we are two countries? After every Arthur, a Mordred; behind every Milton, a Cromwell: a nation of poets, a nation of shopkeepers; the home of Sidney—and of Cecil Rhodes. Is it any wonder they call us hypocrites? But what they mistake for hypocrisy is really the struggle between Logres and Britain. (*Strength* 367)

Logres, then, constitutes all that is heroic, creative, and pure in English culture, as Arthur, Milton, and Sidney exemplify. Its inverse—villainy, authoritarianism, and greed—shows itself in the persons of Mordred, Cromwell, and Rhodes, the most prominent specimens of what Lewis calls "Britain."

These pairings, like contrasting symbolic characters in *The Faerie Queene* or a morality play, reveal the overriding qualities of the two cultural identities and the ways in which each vice is a corrupt version of a virtue. Algernon Sidney is an example of a man dedicated to liberty and the pursuit of peace, while Rhodes is a politician committed to imperialism and the hunt for profit. Milton's undeterrable drive to create beautiful art and his ambition to supersede all other poets for the greater glory of God correlates to Cromwell's authoritarian lust for power and his use of Puritanical religion as a means of elevating himself. Most crucially for our purposes, Arthur's ability to defend against

invasion and his persistent drive for order finds its antithesis in his son's talent for political destabilization and capacity for unleashing chaos on the world.

If Ransom stands in the place of Arthur as the epitome of Logres in the novel, what is the antithesis of this new Pendragon? Dimble positions Mordred as the inverse of Arthur in his explanation of the Logres/Britain dichotomy, but David A. Branson argues that "it does not appear that they [the villains of *That Hideous Strength*] are themselves particularly Arthurian in nature. No Mordred. . . [seems] to be in evidence" (20). Although no single character directly mirrors Mordred, Lewis portrays the N.I.C.E. and the cultural decline to which it gives rise as a symbol of the same chivalric self-destruction that Mordred represents.

Though many scholars, such as Rovang, have examined the ways in which St. Anne's and the N.I.C.E. illustrate the Logres/Britain relationship, few have discussed how the N.I.C.E., as the epitome of Britain, embodies a dark inversion of Ransom's Round Table in ways that correlate to Mordred's main characteristics. First, Mordred is, famously, the result of an incestuous union between Arthur and his sister in most versions of the myth. Thus, the downfall of the Round Table comes from within, as Williams explains—"the fate of the Round Table comes into the world almost before the Table has been established. . . the seed of its destroyer lies in the womb of Morgause while she watches the ceremonies" (*Figure 270*). In the same way, the N.I.C.E. is born from corruptions of the same characteristics that Ransom possesses. Writers like Malory also portray Mordred as a dark mirror of Arthur. Where Arthur depends on loyalty, Mordred

works through betrayal. Arthur builds his Round Table around chivalry, and Mordred exploits the contradictions in the code to send it into civil war. In the same way, the British N.I.C.E. is a perversion of the ideas of Ransom's Logres.

Just as Ransom is the king around whom the company at St. Anne's forms, the N.I.C.E. revolves around a single head who wields absolute power over his followers. In a dark parody of monarchy, however, this leader is a literal decapitated head which the institute is keeping alive. Like Ransom, the head "lives" in chastity and, thus, has done away with Courtly Love as a source of conflict.³³ Most chillingly, this head, like Ransom, bridges the human and otherworlds through submission to a spiritual power. The power behind the head, however, is demonic rather than divine; the head is a mere mouthpiece by which the evil eldila give orders to its subordinates like Wither and Frost.

The head's spirituality flows into a theology that animates the institute by parodying that of St. Anne's. The N.I.C.E. perverts Ransom's dedication to the Kingdom of Heaven by their commitment to creating their own king and kingdom through a horrifying technological advancement that will make, according to the N.I.C.E. theologian Straik, "the first sketch of the real God. It is a man—or a being made by man—who will finally ascend the throne of the universe. And rule forever" (176) with the "power to give eternal reward and eternal punishment" (176) through the same

³³ One of its followers even indicates that the N.I.C.E. will eventually eliminate sexuality as a factor in human relationships altogether—"There will never be peace and order and discipline so long as there is sex. When man has thrown it away, then he will become finally governable" (170).

zombie-making science. The head, too, values and rewards loyalty to it and these spiritual beings and bases admission to its inner “Round Table” on the candidate’s dedication. The head even values the bond between husband and wife and, like Ransom, tries to get Mark and Jane to reconcile—but only because keeping them both under its control suits its own ends. The head, then, is an inversion of everything Ransom is. Lewis makes it clear, though, that Ransom did not father this monster. That fault, rather, lies with the Post-War culture of England that shares many of the hero’s values but also rejects his transcendent versions of them.

The novel further infuses its bureaucratic Mordred with twisted connections to St. Anne’s social structure, therefore, in order to expose the author’s anxieties about the ease by which the trajectory of Western culture after WWII can be stirred by dark hands into self-implosion. The Fall of the Round Table becomes one of the controlling narratives of *That Hideous Strength*. Mordred brings about the collapse of the kingdom by exploiting the contradictions within its own values. He exposes the sham of courtly love by forcing Arthur to finally confront the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere, and he then manipulates the code of chivalry to create a fractioning within the Round Table around Lancelot and Gawain. In the chaos, he then makes his own bid for the throne.

Lewis portrays this basic plotline repeating itself as the N.I.C.E. threatens to destroy England and the world through manipulating the Post-War West’s values of science, subjectivism, and technological progressivism. Through the mouth of Curry, Lewis shows that the N.I.C.E. has gained many fervent supporters simply by claiming the

allegiance of anyone who supports science—“The N.I.C.E. marks the beginning of a new era—the *really* scientific era. Up to now everything has been haphazard. This is going to put science itself on a scientific basis” (36). In the same way, Lewis makes it clear that the institute also corrupts the modern obsession with the philosophy of subjectivism—“The physical sciences, good and innocent in themselves, had already, even in Ransom’s own time, begun to be warped, had been subtly manoeuvred in a certain direction. Despair of objective truth had been increasingly insinuated into the scientists; indifference to it, and a concentration upon mere power, had been the result” (200). They also get their unanimous government support and funding through the popular belief in technological progress as humanity’s means of saving itself.

This fact is clear from Lewis’s first introduction of the institute as “the first-fruit of that constructive fusion between the state and the laboratory on which so many thoughtful people base their hopes of a better world. It was to be free from almost all the tiresome restraints—’red tape’ was the word its supporters used—which have hitherto hampered research in this country” (21). In short, the N.I.C.E. twists the dreams of the entire Western world, which had become infatuated with the power of technology and numbed into moral subjectivism with the close of the war, into “a real chance for fallen Man to shake off that limitation of his powers which mercy had imposed upon him as a protection from the full results of his fall. If this succeeded, hell would be at last incarnate” (200-01). Just as Mordred brought the Round Table to ruin by feigning to be in

the service of chivalry and the king, the institute cloaks itself in the values of the Post-War world to bring about the destruction of that very world.

The resolution of the conflict between Ransom and the N.I.C.E. is also similar to the end of the Arthur legend. The evil of Mordred and the N.I.C.E. meets its demise in a final battle with the forces of Logres, while the king figures must leave the damaged world left in the wake. Just as Mordred's schemes fall back on his own head, the N.I.C.E.'s desire to find the awakened Merlin and make him one of their own backfires horribly, as the wizard become the vessel of the righteous eldila and the divine retribution that they bring upon the head and its followers.

Although Ransom does not fall in that same violence, as Arthur did, he still must depart from the world after the institute is no more. Directly paralleling both Arthur's departure for Avalon and Galahad's accession to Heaven, Ransom must leave this world behind and return to Venus in order to receive healing for his wound. Lewis, thus, also parallels Malory's sentiment that sacred knights cannot remain in the physical world. Ransom asks, "[W]hat else is there to do? I have not grown a day or an hour older since I came back from Perelandra. There is no natural death to look forward to. The wound will only be healed in the world where it was got" (366). The perfect knight, thus, has no place in the current world; his hope is found only in a better country.

Like both of his medieval predecessors, then, Ransom leaves an evil conquered but also a world still in need of sacred knights. The novel's final image of Mark and Jane

reuniting to create the next Pendragon,³⁴ therefore, presents one example of a couple who, though initially touched by the key marks of the corruption of their culture, have chosen to follow in Ransom's footsteps and find the essence of sacred knighthood within themselves. The ending, therefore, offers hope that they, along with the remaining company at St. Anne's, will continue Ransom's Order. It is not certain, though, that the rest of the culture will follow. As Dimble says, "Britain has lost a battle, but she will rise again" (368).

Lewis, then, once again paints a picture very similar to that of Chandler. In these Post-War novels, both writers use elements from the Grail quest and the dissipation of the Round Table to communicate their understanding of the internal battle for identity within Western culture. Both authors, following the trajectory of Camelot's heroic rise from chaos and its fall back into chaos, portray the decline of Western culture into corruption and evil following its almost-realized redemption in WWII. They both also show, following Malory, that a truly perfect knight has no place in the contemporary world; he must either ascend into heaven like Ransom or fall into obscurity like Marlowe.

Both novels, thus, function as cautionary tales warning that the Fall of the Round Table is not merely an irrelevant fable but a pattern that Western culture could unwittingly follow at any moment. Reflecting the cyclical nature of the Arthur legend, these conclusions leave the world in a similar state to that of the start of the first novels—

³⁴ As Shogren argues.

with evil on the loose in society, requiring a Galahad to restore order. This time, however, the authors impress the impossibility of neutrality on the reader. To reject Galahad is to welcome Mordred. The tragic ending of *The Long Goodbye* and the hopeful one of *That Hideous Strength* both show the reader what is at stake in the struggle between these two archetypes of identity—will the Western world continue to fall into consumerism, compliancy, and demonic schemes or will it finally become the beacon of creativity, endurance, and divine knighthood to which it has always aspired?

CONCLUSION: “MY NAME ALSO IS RANSOM”

The Figure of Galahad

The importance of the Arthurian myth to the plots, characters, and themes of these novels need not, at this point, receive further elaboration. The shared Arthurian narrative within the works of both authors is obvious, but the different interpretations that they bring to the narrative within their respective novels need further exploration. This conclusion, therefore, examines Marlowe and Ransom as two distinct understandings of the same Arthurian figure—Galahad the sacred knight. Just as different medieval authors told the same stories of Arthur with vastly different understandings of his character and significance, Chandler and Lewis emphasize different aspects of Galahad in their respective protagonists and use the character’s messianic echoes to different effects. While Marlowe embodies the alienation of Galahad, Ransom reflects his embodying the role and presence of Jesus within his society.

The figure of Galahad, though absent from the earliest versions of the Arthur legend, became a character of central importance in later works like the *Lancelot-Grail* cycle and *Le Morte D’Arthur*. Galahad’s development begins with Chrétien’s unfinished *La Conte du Graal*, wherein the poet introduces the Holy Grail into the Arthurian

universe and creates the character of Percival to be the sacred knight. This original hero, however, would eventually split in two—Galahad became the name of the successful Grail knight, while Percival became the name of a lesser knight in later versions.³⁵ With the new name came a new backstory—the Fisher King and providence orchestrate circumstances to create this destined Grail knight through the sexual union of Elaine, the king's daughter, and Lancelot. When the boy comes of age, his arrival at Camelot precipitates a vision of the Holy Grail to Arthur and his court which incites the quest for it. Out of the many knights who set out, only Galahad proves to be undeniably worthy of obtaining it. The knight never returns to Camelot, however. After having succeeded the Fisher King as the new king of the Grail Castle, he either chooses to die while still young in order to be with God or ascends into Heaven, depending on the version.

In later Arthurian myth, therefore, Galahad serves two main functions. First, he embodies the union of knighthood and holiness. As the son of Lancelot, the most accomplished and noble of all chivalrous knights, and Elaine, a Grail maiden, he is heir both to the knightly identity of his father and the sacred order of his mother. In his adulthood, Galahad becomes a bridge between the Round Table, the chivalry of which has led to Lancelot's adultery with Guinevere, and the holy devotion that animates the Grail Castle but also cuts it off from the outside world.

³⁵ The exact development of these characters is a topic much more complex than this overview has space to discuss. Identifying the Percival/Parzival of Chrétien and Wolfram as the prototypical version of the Galahad figure is, to my knowledge, not a controversial move, though other views exist (see Williams, *Figure 244-74*).

Galahad, thus, represents a crucially important renovation to knighthood that took place in the later Middle Ages. By that point, adopting chivalry had proved to be a step toward creating the kind of knight which society needs—the powerful and humble warrior who fights for the good of his people. In many ways, however, the code had also failed to accomplish its purpose. As Chrétien, Wolfram, Malory, and many other medieval writers showed, the internal contradictions within chivalry (not to mention its conflicts with Christian ethics) actually caused significant harm to society. Vassals betraying their kings and private and civil wars erupting from marital infidelity had become commonplace and contributed to major national crises like the War of the Roses. These upheavals, in turn, would inspire various artistic representations, the most dramatic and lasting of which is the portrayal of Lancelot’s undeniably chivalric relationship with Guinevere also constituting an inescapably unchivalrous betrayal of his lord—a contradiction that ultimately destroys Arthur’s kingdom as the Round Table implodes into civil war. So much for chivalry protecting the community from the knights.

Galahad, however, offers a way out of this nightmare that does not involve the repudiation of knighthood as a concept. By making Jesus the lord to whom he pledges *comitatus*, Galahad becomes the person whom chivalry was supposed to produce—a warrior who is both unrivaled in power and utterly trustworthy with it. Though he does not disparage chivalry outright, his unshakable adherence to Christian moral principles leads him to break many of its tenets. Whereas chivalry tells him that a great knight must be the lover of a married lady, Galahad remains as celibate as a monk. Instead of seeking

the glory that is the social currency of those who fight, he goes out only in search of the Holy Grail.

If one took seriously the words of authorities like Andreas Capellanus, Galahad's characteristics would not create expectations of greatness. Without the motivations of serving an earthly lord or earning a lady's love, how can a knight expect to become accomplished? It would seem more probable that a knight like Galahad would end up being too heavenly to have any use on earth. However, the son of Lancelot proves himself again and again to be an unmatched warrior who can defeat even the best of the realm in jousting—one of the most public methods of achieving glory. Despite this immense power, however, he remains lowly and humble, like his Lord. The character, therefore, demonstrates that, in order for a knight to be truly great, he must become “the servaunte of Jesu Cryste” (Malory 606), rather than of an earthly code, lord, or lady. Only then, the poets suggest, will those who fight finally be able to escape from the hellscape to which divided loyalties, pride, and lust lead.

The fact that Galahad cannot ultimately return to Camelot after he achieves the Grail, however, shows that the Arthurian writers ultimately knew that the odds of such a person coming to exist outside of fiction were infinitesimal at best and that, if he did, the knight would not be welcome as a central member of society. This recognition, though, does not render the sacred knight's story a wistful daydream. They, like Lewis, recognize that the idea of sacred knighthood “is ‘escapism’ in a sense never dreamed of by those who use that word; it offers the only possible escape from a world divided between

wolves who do not understand, and sheep who cannot defend, the things which make life desirable” (“Chivalry” 16). Though the ideal that Galahad represents “may or may not be practicable [,]. . . it is certainly practical; practical as the fact that men in the desert must find water or die” (13-14). Even if sacred knighthood is impossible to achieve, Arthurian texts insist that giving up on the attempt can only continue the cycle of destruction that chivalry began. Even sandy water is preferable to death.

The second function of Galahad’s story is to link the grand Arthurian epic with the even grander Biblical narrative. Both the *Lancelot-Grail* cycle and the *Morte* make the quest for the Holy Grail a kind of continuation of the story of the Gospel. By portraying Galahad and Arthur as the prophesied beneficiaries of events set into motion by Biblical figures like Joseph of Arimathea and Solomon, the texts perform their own medieval version of Eliot’s “mythological method” by creating continuity between the Biblical past and their present. As in *The Waste Land*, the Grail Knight is the key figure who bridges the two worlds through the achievement of the Holy Grail. By finally proving himself worthy of discovering the Grail and healing the Fisher King, the knight brings the heroic story of Arthur into the divine story of Jesus and, thus, brings the hope of redemption into the tragic story of Camelot.

The Grail itself is of central importance to this theme. As the vessel that Christ used to initiate Communion, the cup is a symbol of God’s power to sanctify and transfigure the material world. Galahad can bear this object because his sacred knighthood has made him a kind of living Grail. He offers his earthly identity as a knight

to God who, in turn, transforms and consecrates it into conformity with the Image of Christ, in a similar manner to the way He transforms the ordinary bread and wine which the Grail serves into the Body and Blood of the Savior. Galahad, then, shows that knights, when transfigured by the light of God, can become extensions of Christ Himself and his redemptive power. This process is evident in the ways in which texts like Malory's portray Galahad doing specifically messianic actions: confronting and defeating demons, healing the sick, and bringing life back into the waste land.

Post-medieval Arthurian authors tend to focus on one of these aspects of Galahad's character or put their own spin on the ways in which he embodies sacred knighthood. The interpretations of Tennyson, Eliot, and Charles Williams are the most relevant for understanding those of Chandler and Lewis. Tennyson had the least use for Galahad of these three; according to Pratt, the poet holds that "the grail is another escape from one's proper role in this world" (319). Therefore, Galahad and his sacred knighthood do not represent true perfection, as far as Tennyson is concerned. Eliot, as I have touched on before, takes the opposite path by affirming the necessity of Galahad's ability to save the Waste Land through his ability to bring the holy and the earthly worlds together. The poet also adds his own touch to the character by linking him to the successful modernist poet who achieves the same affect through his art. Charles Williams does something distinct from either of these within his Arthurian poems. In his cycle, Galahad is "the child of grace in flesh" (*Taliessin* 80)—not only a symbolic representation of Christ, but a figure analogous to Him in that both are, in part,

embodiments of grace and appearances of the new humanity (Lewis, *Williams* 350) before the time of cosmic revival that the Scriptures prophesy. Williams, thus, makes Galahad even more of a Christ stand-in/representative to Arthur's kingdom than any of the medieval texts do.

Chandler and Lewis, in turn, present their own versions of Galahad which are consistent with their respective beliefs about Western society. Though the development of both Marlowe and Ransom follow the broad strokes of Galahad's story, Chandler and Lewis present distinct versions of this story that reveal their differing understandings of the Arthurian material and its significance for the modern world. Chandler, though not cynical in the sense of viewing sacred knighthood as a hopelessly unattainable goal, is finally pessimistic about society's willingness to accept such a person and receive the salvation he offers. Lewis, on the other hand, while not denying that such a person must eventually leave the fallen world, clearly focuses on the power of a sacred knight to bring transfiguration to that same world through creating his own successor and leaving a pocket of Paradise behind him.

Marlowe: Galahad as Tragic Outsider

Marlowe's character arc corresponds to Wolfram's depiction of Parzival (an earlier precursor to the Galahad character) beginning as a naïve, chivalrous knight and maturing into the great sacred knight who achieves the Grail. As the first chapter of this

study shows, *The Big Sleep* presents Marlowe going through this same transformation. Like the inexperienced Parzival (who constantly does more harm than good through his strict adherence to chivalry), Marlowe initially believes that adhering to the code will allow him to rise above his corrupt environment. The moral complexities of the plot, however, force him to break this code for moral goods that exceed it, just as Parzival must give up on being chivalrous to become holy. Then, *The Lady in the Lake* portrays Marlowe's sacred knighthood as a beacon for moral revival and brotherhood within the darkness of WWII, just as Wolfram's successors, such as Malory, portray Galahad's coming as a challenging invitation to spiritual reformation within the Round Table. Chandler knew, however, that the Round Table ultimately rejects this opportunity and, thereby, shatters. Thus, *The Long Goodbye* connects American culture's rejection of the morality that Marlowe represents to Galahad's final inability to return to Camelot and save it from implosion.

Chandler, therefore, is most concerned with the first function of Galahad in Arthurian legend—his providing a way out of the disasters arising from chivalry. Close examination of the novels reveals that Chandler most emphatically did *not* (as some have supposed) reject the knight as a concept. Novels like *The Big Sleep* show the flaws within the chivalric code, but Marlowe's moving beyond it does not make him any less of a knightly figure in subsequent novels. Rather, Marlowe is even more loyal, courageous, and virtuous within *The Long Goodbye* than when Chandler first introduced him (as Chapter Three argues). Just as Galahad's counter-cultural approach to knighthood makes

him more glorious than all others, Marlowe's unshakeable adherence to his moral principles proves to be more effective in achieving justice for Roger Wade and Sylvia Lennox than the cynical pragmatism of the police, the press, and the mob.

Chandler, then, does not present moving beyond corrupt codes of ethics into moral absolutes as being impossible. Marlowe's journey out of chivalry, like that of Wolfram's Parzival, is painful, but it ultimately takes him to the heart of knighthood, not in another direction. In this way, Chandler is just as much of a romantic as Marlowe claims to be—both truly believe that the synthesis of power and righteousness that Galahad embodies can be achieved. Chandler's pessimism lies in his portraying American society's rejection of such a person being nearly inevitable. Though Marlowe almost managed to form a fellowship of other sacred knights in *The Lady in the Lake*, *The Long Goodbye* makes it clear that such a hope was passing, at best. There are no other Grail knights to help this Galahad—and, even when he thinks he finds one in Lennox, the man ultimately betrays him. Marlowe's greatness is the very thing that makes him utterly alone.

Chandler's "shop-soiled Galahad," therefore, is ultimately a tragic figure. Though the writer does not find the Galahad archetype to be either unrealizable or useless for earthly good, he sees no other outcome of the clash between his perfection and the corruption of his world than the knight's alienation from society. This outcome is supremely ironic because the Galahad figure is the only one capable of bringing justice and life back into the decaying culture. Without the higher moral influence of someone

like Marlowe, the pragmatic codes of law and order, like chivalry, will only continue to erode and distance themselves from the real Good. By banishing Marlowe and the ideal that he represents, Chandler suggests, America is setting itself up for a repetition of the Fall of Camelot or a slower, whimpering end.³⁶ Understood through an Arthurian lens, the novels use Marlowe to portray a Galahad passing all of the tests and becoming able to heal the Waste Land, only to find that the land does not want to be healed. Chandler, thus, uses the story of Marlowe to recontextualize Galahad's inability to continue on in the world he is supposed to save in order to indict America for turning its back on the moral idealism he believes to be its only hope of political and cultural restoration.

Ransom: Galahad as Camelot's Redeemer

Lewis's modern Galahad, on the other hand, is much more concerned with bridging the Biblical narrative and the modern world than with the knight's place in society. *Out of the Silent Planet* initiates Ransom into the order of sacred knighthood, which he enters mostly by serving as an intermediary between the people of Earth and Malacandra—both by translating for Weston and Oyarsa and by informing the planetary power of the events of the Gospel narrative itself. *Perelandra* completes Ransom's transition into this role by portraying him bringing the story of Jesus into a new world

³⁶ Scholars have long noted Eliot's influence on *The Long Goodbye*. This may further explain the echoes of Galahad and *The Waste Land* that I identify.

through his own actions and self in ways analogous to Galahad's embodying of the Gospel in the Arthurian narratives. Finally, Ransom's storyline in *That Hideous Strength* mirrors the conclusion of Galahad's. Just as Galahad becomes the new king of the Grail Castle and then ascends into Heaven, Lewis portrays Ransom as becoming a new Fisher King who saves England from spiritual desolation and then returns back into the Heavens.

The overriding function of the Ransom character, therefore, is to continuously connect the events of the novels to the Biblical narrative through serving as a channel for Christ's presence and redemptive role. This is a continuation of Galahad's function for the Arthurian myth, as Lewis makes more overt by giving Ransom the specific trappings of Galahad in *That Hideous Strength*. It has become a commonplace observation that this third Ransom novel betrays the mark of Williams' influence, but Lewis's sacred knight figure has some important distinctions from Williams'. Whereas Williams' *Arthurian* presents Galahad's birth and rearing as being divinely orchestrated to produce a sacred knight, Ransom begins his journey as a cowardly, ordinary man. Lewis sees Galahad's role as something one must grow into, rather than a fact of one's birth.

Lewis makes this process of becoming a sacred knight the central theme of *Perelandra*. While Ransom had already begun to function in this capacity in *Out of the Silent Planet*, it is in the second novel that he goes on his knightly quest to protect the innocent and do battle with evil. As Chapter Two argues, Ransom's confrontation with the Un-man allows him to become the ideal possessor of the power and righteousness that

marks the sacred knight, but, as Rovang points out, the novel also reveals that Ransom is only able to achieve this because he consciously submits himself to God as a vessel for “an extension of Jesus’s incarnation” (45). Though the thought of fighting with the demon brings back Ransom’s old cowardly instincts, the voice of Christ telling him, “It is not for nothing that you are named Ransom. . . My name also is Ransom” (*Perelandra* 125-26), allows him to see the truth. Succeeding in his quest requires him to become Jesus’s avatar in this new world and, thus, embody the story of the Gospel over again by crushing the satanic Un-man and delivering this other humanity from sin. It is Ransom’s destiny, though it is one he can refuse. Lewis, thus, avoids the flatter aspects of Galahad’s perfection in some medieval texts and in Williams’ poetry by portraying the struggle involved in making this choice and emphasizing the heroism of accepting the role.

Lewis posits this Gospel as the ultimate end to which sacred knighthood will deliver society. For, to Lewis’s mind, Jesus will not simply be a means of achieving society’s needed knightly qualities. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis states that Christ “will cure it [whatever problem one may need Him to] all right: but He will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if once you call Him in, He will give you the full treatment” (107). Consistently, Lewis’s science fiction novels portray the Galahad figure as more than a mere solution to society’s ills. He is the very gateway by which the story of the Gospel invades the contemporary world.

Nevertheless, Lewis knows, as Chandler does, that Galahad cannot continue to live in a world that rejects him. Thus, Lewis, too, creates a retelling of Galahad’s

ascension at the end of *That Hideous Strength* when Ransom returns to Perelandra. The writer's emphasis is not on the departure itself, however (he never actually describes the event), but on what Ransom leaves behind on Earth. As Shogren explains, throughout the novel, "Ransom plays a crucial role in rehabilitating Jane's relationship with Mark and encouraging her toward a fruitful marriage bed, which she achieves in the book's last passage" (409). Though Merlin had stated earlier that the couple was supposed to produce a child who would banish evil from England and that they had missed the opportunity for conceiving this person, the novel's ending implies that the child of this final, fruitful union "is to be Ransom's heir as the next Pendragon" (Shogren 409). By ensuring the birth of this successor and helping to destroy the N.I.C.E., Ransom leaves the world a better place than it had been. Logres has again broken into Britain because of him. These positive elements of his story are analogous to the ways in which Percival and Bors deliver Galahad's final message to Lancelot and, in some sense, carry on his legacy in the order of sacred knighthood.

Lewis's modern version of Galahad, then, is fundamentally tied to his beliefs regarding what it means to image Christ. As Ransom realizes, because God has become human, "through them [humans] henceforward He would save and suffer" (*Perelandra* 123). In the Ransom trilogy, Galahad serves as an archetype for those who become Christ's vessels for His redemptive work. Though the corrupt world they inhabit will inevitably reject them and force them to leave it, Lewis shows that they never depart without having transformed that world, even if that change only constitutes a little pocket

of Logres within Britain. The writer's interpretation of the character, thus, reflects his ultimate optimism regarding the modern world. Though the threat of a collapse is present, Lewis's connections between the stories of Galahad and Ransom suggest that a sacred knight capable of saving society can arise any time an ordinary person offers themselves as the site of another incarnation of Christ. This hope mitigates the tragedy of Galahad's departure and offers hope that a potentially unlimited number of his companions can stem England's pull toward corruption.

“He is the Hero. He is Everything”: The Messianic Roles of Marlowe and Ransom

By this point, it is obvious that Marlowe and Ransom, by nature of being interpretations of the Galahad character, are also heir to the messianic echoes that medieval writers infused within him. Though this characteristic is less obvious in Marlowe than in Ransom, scholars have consistently drawn connections between the detective and Jesus. Though this Biblical influence may have come solely through the medium of the Arthurian material,³⁷ its presence is no less visible. Rzepka, for example, notes that Marlowe takes “upon himself the sins, the ‘nastiness,’ of this fallen world” (720) at the conclusion of *The Big Sleep*. Durham, additionally, complains that, in *The*

³⁷ Though Chandler almost joined the Catholic Church in his later life, there is no evidence that he explicitly professed Christianity or consciously engaged with its ideas.

Long Goodbye, Marlowe has “gone sentimental and become Christ-like” (101). As this analysis has shown, such detractors may have been more correct than they realized.

By emphasizing Marlowe’s alienation from those whom he could save, Chandler paints a poignant picture of a savior who “came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (John 1.11-12). The writer’s focus, thus, is on the hero whose righteousness makes him suffer and cuts him off from society—an idea that cannot escape comparison with the Biblical Man of Sorrows. If the Marlowe novels impart any action-oriented prerogative to the reader, therefore, it is to turn from their wickedness and welcome the idealistic knight back into societal leadership, like St. Peter pleads with his people to accept their Messiah on the day of Pentecost.

On the other hand, Lewis, as a devout follower of Jesus, is more concerned with exploring how the Messiah’s influence can create a “little Christ” out of even an ordinary philologist. He is keenly aware of the pathos involved with this process; *Perelandra* movingly presents the burden of being “still a man and yet to be forced up into the metaphysical world, to enact what philosophy only thinks” (125). Ultimately, though, Lewis does not share Chandler’s emphasis on the tragedy of becoming Christ-like. Though Ransom undoubtedly pays a high price to become an extension of Christ’s incarnation (such as the physical suffering he endures in his battle with the Un-man and his incurable wound and his experiencing alienation and separation from Earthly society), the novels ultimately present the ability to join in His redemptive work to be worth it. What’s more, Ransom actually makes a positive difference in his culture through the

ways he has improved the lives of the people of his Round Table and saved England from the N.I.C.E. The practical purpose of these novels, then, is to encourage the reader to consider joining Ransom in allowing his/herself to become conduits of Christ's redeeming life and, thus, create rivers in the Waste Land.

Therefore, Lewis and Chandler's shared Arthurian vision, though pervasive, does not quite extend to their final conclusions. Both are keenly interested in the ways in which the medieval conception of sacred knighthood as embodied by Galahad is still relevant and even vital to contemporary society, and both reject the assertion that its characteristics are impossible for a modern person to achieve. Chandler ultimately reveals a somewhat romantic perspective on the knight by emphasizing his solitude and uniqueness and by urging his contemporaries to accept his influence. This focus on society's rejection of Marlowe rather than on its prerogative to become like him filters out the triumph from his messianic characterization and emphasizes Marlowe's identity as a suffering servant. Lewis, instead, is much more hopeful because he emphasizes that anyone can become a new Galahad through becoming a vessel of the presence of Jesus. His novels, thus, celebrate the fact that the whole earth is full of potential Galahads who can share in Christ's victory.

Both writers are still united in their wrestling with a dream that many have and continue to give up on, however. Both refuse to abandon the old Arthurian hope of a savior both powerful enough to right the wrongs of the world and good enough to refuse to create new ones. Neither are starry-eyed sentimentalists; they both, like Mark

Studdock, know “what happened when the Straight met the Crooked. . . It was, in a more emphatic sense than he had yet understood, a *cross*” (*Strength* 333). Chandler and Lewis are well aware that any contemporary Galahad will face nearly impossible challenges on every level—psychological, social, political, and religious—but they stubbornly deny the cynicism that would posit these obstacles as reasons to abandon the quest.

Chandler and Lewis refuse to let the knight fade into the pages of medieval manuscripts because they know that Western society still needs him in order to break the deadlock between Allies and Nazis, sheep and wolves, and Logres and Britain. Both also knew all too well that there is no middle ground in this conflict. One is either moving toward the Good or sliding away from it. Though they draw different conclusions, Chandler and Lewis force us to seriously consider the necessity and possibility of uniting power and righteousness, achieving the Holy Grail, bringing justice to the mean streets, and reaching the supposedly unreachable star.

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MLA 8th edition

This thesis was typed by Hollis C. Thompson