

T. H. White:

A Critical Biography

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university, and it is entirely my own work. I agree to deposit this thesis in the University's open access institutional repository or allow the library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.

Summary

This thesis is a critical biography of the author T. H. White. My purpose is to define the influences on his work throughout his life and set him in the historical and cultural context of the period from the 1930s through the 1950s. I trace his evolution as an author, the figures that shaped his work and inspired him, and, in particular, his tendency as a writer to imitate the work and attitudes of various literary figures with whom he came in contact. My methodology is predominately archival and draws on the significant repository of White's papers, manuscripts, and other material lodged in the Harry Ransom Center, Texas, and at Queen's College, Cambridge. This is the first study to use these archives to such an extent in order to discuss White's oeuvre. My thesis is also unique in that it recognizes the importance of Ireland to the vast majority of the material published after 1939, when White chose to move there for the purpose of avoiding the Second World War. Ireland has hitherto been ignored as an influence on White's work, yet it largely determined the production of his most famous novel, *The Once and Future King*, along with most of the books published in the final two decades of his life. Arguably, although he published nothing while he lived there, his six years in Ireland were the author's most creatively productive period.

The first chapter investigates the author's engagement with concepts of England and pastoralism in the mid-1930s and situates White's early work within the literary trend for rural revival in that decade. The chapter focuses primarily on *England Have My Bones* (1935), as this text represents a turning point in the author's life: its moderate financial success encouraged him to leave his teaching position, and its critical reception introduced him to the author and critic David Garnett, who would become a close friend and mentor. This chapter also explores White's interest in the concept of the "gentleman" during this time, and – in direct relation to this – his meeting and correspondence with the poet Siegfried Sassoon in 1938.

The second chapter investigates the impact of the Second World War on *The Once and Future King* (1958); it uncovers the means by which this text changed from a whimsical story about childhood to an anti-war treatise with a strong political message. The chapter also analyzes White's interest in the work of Aldous Huxley, the author, and Julian Huxley, the biologist, and how their research on ants allowed White to conceptualize a biological rationale for humanity's tendency to wage war.

The third chapter continues to explore the changes that the Second World War brought to *The Once and Future King*, and, in particular, how White constructed an Irish identity in order to justify his absence from the War. The chapter then evaluates the influence of Ireland on the characters and content of the epic.

The fourth chapter goes into greater detail on the influence of White's sojourn in Ireland by studying the two books about the country that White began during his stay: *The Godstone and the Blackymor* (1959) and *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* (1947). White attempts to align his own work with various "Irish" genres of literature during his time in the country, and his extensive reading in Irish literature – clearly documented in the archives – indicates the motivations for his adoption of these two particular Irish identities.

The fifth chapter shows how White returns to children's literature with *Mistress Masham's Repose* (1946) and *The Master* (1957) as he moves into a post-war and post-atomic age. It investigates how White uses the genre of children's literature to examine dark and troubling concepts such as fascism, weapons of mass destruction, and authoritarian power. Once again the impact of Ireland is noted within this chapter, as both of these books were begun while White was still living in the country.

The sixth chapter traces White's creative decline in the final years of his life along with his growing financial success with the production of the musical *Camelot* (1960). It defines White's final literary identity, that of the literary antiquarian, and explores the non-fiction books on which he labored during his final productive years: *The Age of Scandal* (1950), *Scandalmonger* (1952), and *The Book of Beasts* (1954).

My thesis concludes that White's work was deeply affected and contextualized by his time in Ireland, and shaped by a succession of specific literary influences and mentors. In situating his oeuvre largely within the cradle of the Second World War, I suggest that he was neither creatively disengaged from his generation nor isolated by his relocation to neutral Ireland. Instead, I demonstrate the extent to which his texts engage, serially, intensively and across a range of genres, with the major themes of nation, war, empire and authoritarianism that dominate this period in British and Irish culture.

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I would like to thank my mother and my father for their ongoing support, both financial and emotional; their love has kept me afloat through the rocky waters of this thesis. Finally, I must offer my deepest thanks to Tony, who has been my partner through everything and who has kept me grounded through all the crises, tears, successes, and failures.

Introduction

“If I were the Dictator of the World,” the author T. H. White wrote in his diary in 1942, “I would only try to improve the human mind. I would aim at a really educated proletariat.”¹ He goes on to describe his own educational, totalitarian utopia: young children would be allowed to “run wild,” but from the age of ten would be sent to “school and university.”² Then, the citizens’ education would begin in earnest:

From 22–42, they would work four hours a day for the state, in farm, office or shop. Each individual would have a bedroom of his own, and in that bedroom there would be a kind of sound-proof telephone kiosk only large enough to hold one person in its arm chair. It would be fitted with a clock, which clocked the sitter in and out. [. . .] The library inspector would examine the clock every week to see that the sitter had been closeted for two hours a day. The library inspector would come round with the library van. It would be full of a standard library containing Everyman, Penguin and so forth. I would not withhold light literature like detective stories, but if the individual remained too long on Nat Gould, it would be within the inspector’s power to wean him from it. In the library there would also be scientific works. [. . .] I want him to grow a mind.³

After the age of 42, the individual “would be regarded as adult,” and only from that point would he “be allowed to be baptized, confirmed or legally married, or to sit his

¹ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 24 Feb. 1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, Harry Ransom Center Archive, University of Texas at Austin (Austin, Texas). Hereafter the Harry Ransom Center Archive will be referred to as HRC.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

examination as a member of parliament”⁴ Everyone would be given “a subsistence allowance sufficient to live upon.”⁵

White protested throughout his life about the innate corruption and moral depravity of mankind, yet he believed completely in the transformative and redemptive power of education, and, still more, of literature. He does not seem aware of the contradiction inherent in a dictatorship that compels humans to think independently, but this passage showcases his absolute and lifelong belief that fiction could uplift mankind and help humanity to achieve a decency that was not inbuilt. A few months before devising this totalitarian educational scheme, White reflects in his diary, “What Man has made is nearly always better than what he is. We dream of things better than what we are. [. . .] What we write and paint and build, and the music we make, is better than ourselves.”⁶ The description of White’s ideal education system encapsulates the three unifying preoccupations of his life: first, how he creates literature that is designed to shape its readers; second, how he allows contemporary literature and a community of writers to determine his own identity and his own values as an author; and, third, his deep political conservatism and his attraction to fascism.

By a critical biography of T. H. White I mean an examination of the author’s creative process – the method by which he wrote – using a close, critical reading of his major texts and a meticulous analysis of the archival evidence relating to his creative life. These combined analyses allow me to explore one author’s entire creative process and all the different aspects of his life, reading, friendships, and circumstances that had an impact on his work. The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to situate White within his literary context and to explore where he fits within the period of literature that

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 20 Nov. 1941.

stretched from the 1930s through the 1950s. In particular, this thesis investigates how England in the inter-war years and Ireland during the Second World War were major shaping influences on White's work, factors that scholarship on the author has hitherto ignored. The methodology of this thesis is determined by the extensive archival material available at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas and Queen's College Library in Cambridge, and I use these archives to draw fresh conclusions about White's influences. The major works examined in this analysis are *England Have My Bones* (1935), *The Once and Future King* (1958), *The Godstone and the Blackymor* (1959), *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* (1947), *Mistress Masham's Repose* (1946), *The Master* (1957), *The Age of Scandal* (1950), *The Scandalmonger* (1952), and *The Book of Beasts* (1954). This thesis is the first full examination of the author's major works to use his extensive unpublished material to such an extent. One defining factor throughout White's life that has emerged from these resources is the author's reliance on literary imitation. The tendency to model himself and his work on other authors is evident throughout White's life, and, indeed, nearly every new period of creativity was predicated on his admiration of a specific literary mentor. From Sassoon's autobiographical fiction in the 1930s; to the pacifist work of Aldous Huxley and the invertebrate biology of Dr. Julian Huxley in the 1940s; to the Medieval scholarship of Sir Sydney Cockerell, his longtime friend, in the 1950s; White's work is nearly always guided by people or the writing he admired. Through in-depth investigation of the archives and a close study of his letters, it becomes possible to determine how the author's biographical and literary context shaped the material that he produced. A thorough study of the interdependence of his biography and his literature alongside a close investigation of his archives will, I hope, serve as an invaluable tool for future scholarship on this author.

White was born in Mumbai on 29 May 1906, the son of two members of the Anglo-Indian administration.⁷ His father was Garrick White, a superintendent of the Indian police, and his mother was Constance Edith Southcote White, the daughter of a judge.⁸ He was sent to England at the age of five and would never return to India. He was educated at Cheltenham, a military preparatory school where he was deeply unhappy,⁹ and then went to Queen's College, Cambridge.¹⁰ For health reasons he spent a year in Italy during his tenure at university – he had been diagnosed with tuberculosis and the trip was recommended for his recovery and financed by his tutors at Cambridge (Warner 1967, 37–38). After leaving Cambridge, White taught as an assistant master for two years at St. David's school in Reigate, but was then forced to leave.¹¹ According to the recommendation letter provided by the head of school he was removed to “make room for another ‘games master.’”¹² After leaving St. David's, he became the head of English at Stowe school, where he taught from 1932 to 1936 (see Warner 1967, 57–84). In 1936 the financial success of his hunting and fishing memoir *England Have My Bones* (1936) convinced White that he could make a living from his writing and no longer needed to teach to support himself, and he moved to a gamekeeper's cottage near the school (D. Garnett 1968, 12). His experiences living in this cottage and learning to train

⁷ White's biography has been covered in detail by Sylvia Townsend Warner (Warner 1967) and the following chapters will include details about White's life when they are relevant, but a brief description of the author's major dates and the events of his life help situate the criticism that follows.

⁸ Certificate of baptism, “Terence Hanbury White,” folder 2, box 25, MS-4494, HRC.

⁹ For a first-hand description of White's time at Cheltenham and the treatment that he received there from other students and teachers see (T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 4 Feb. 1941, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC).

¹⁰ For a history of his early life, his time at school and the sexual and physical abuse that he received at Cheltenham, Sylvia Townsend Warner's biography *T. H. White* (1967) provides substantial background. Nevertheless, White's sexuality and its alleged origins, his problematic relationship with his mother and his sadism do not form any part of this study. These aspects of White's character evidently interested Warner (see Micir 2012), and she deals with them with tact, grace, and kindness, but her emphasis on them appears to have influenced the focus of much of the subsequent scholarship.

¹¹ G. H. Fisher-Rowe, letter To Whom it May Concern, 29 Jan. 1932, folder 1, box 23, MS-4494, HRC.

¹² *Ibid.*

hawks are chronicled in his book *The Goshawk* (1951). He spent the Second World War in Ireland; he arrived in February 1939¹³ and left in September 1945 (D. Garnett 1968, 207–209). After the War, he moved to the Channel Island of Alderney in 1947 to avoid paying taxes on the income he was expecting from his newest children’s novel, *Mistress Masham’s Repose* (1946), which had been selected for the American Book of the Month Club. It was thus expected to bring in approximately £15,000 (D. Garnett 1968, 7). He purchased a house at 3 Connaught Square¹⁴ and spent the remainder of his life in Alderney. White died in January 1964 on board a ship while returning from a lecture tour in the United States and was buried in Greece (*New York Times* 1964, 21).

White had three important lifelong literary relationships that shaped his thinking and his career, and, as these figures will be referred to throughout the chapters that follow, it is practical to introduce them in some detail here. The three men with whom White built his most important friendships were Leonard James Potts, David Garnett, and Sir Sydney Cockerell. Potts, the first of these great literary friends to enter White’s life, was the author’s tutor at Cambridge. The two men would remain in contact until Potts’s death on 31 August 1960, and White and Mary Potts would continue to correspond until the author’s death in 1964. In an interview with François Gallix, who collected and published the communications between the Potts family and White, Mary Potts remembered that the author and her late husband had a close, mentoring relationship for the duration of her marriage: “Potts was the wise old man to Tim,¹⁵ he measured his values alongside Potts’s values. He [White] felt that he [Potts] had great integrity and that he had the courage and strength of will to put into practice his

¹³ For White’s first diary entry on Ireland and a long list of his first impressions see (T. H. White, diary 1938–1939, 3 Mar. 1939, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC).

¹⁴ T. H. White, “Will of Realty,” 7 Feb. 1962, Registrar of Alderney.

¹⁵ Tim White was the author’s nickname at Cambridge. He was called after a line of pharmacies, “Timothy White Chemists” (Warner 1967, 34). His friends would call him Tim until the end of his life.

principles – he [White] admired this enormously. [. . .] He was Merlyn to Tim just as Tim wished to be Merlyn.”¹⁶ White was named godfather to the Potts’s son, William (Gallix 1984, 142). Potts also features as a character in some of White’s novels, particularly the detective story *Darkness at Pemberley* (1932), in which, according to Mary Potts, he was drawn as both the murder victim, Mr. Beedon, and the intrepid detective Buller.¹⁷ Potts provided literary advice to White, and was a great help regarding the component books of *The Once and Future King* (1958), *The Witch in the Wood* (1940) in particular.¹⁸

Perhaps the most important creative friendship of White’s life was his relationship with the author, critic, and member of the Bloomsbury circle, David Garnett. Garnett would publish two accounts of his relationship with White: the first appeared in 1968 in his preface to *The White/Garnett Letters* (1968) and the second in 1979 in *Great Friends* (1979). Garnett reviewed White’s book, *They Winter Abroad* (1932), for the *New Statesman and Nation*, of which he was the literary editor at the time, and White, flattered, wrote a letter to Garnett suggesting that the older author might come and lecture at Stowe (D. Garnett 1968, 9). Garnett declined the invitation and there was no further contact until January 1936 when White sent him a copy of *England Have My Bones* (1935) in the hopes of another favorable review (9). The two struck up a friendship that was perhaps the most authentic and important relationship of White’s life. Garnett’s biographer writes, “Their friendship was based on a good-humoured extended game of one-upmanship, each trying to trump the other with superior knowledge of obscure subjects” (Knights 2015, 297). In some ways, this may be accurate, but White felt deep admiration for his friend, and saw the older man as the superior in the relationship for many years. In an early letter, he refers to Garnett’s

¹⁶ Mary Potts, interview by François Gallix, Cambridge, 25 Oct. 1974, folder 4, box 23, MS-4494, HRC.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ For examples of the help that Potts provided, see the letters from White to his mentor on 19 July 1939, 21 August 1939, 8 November 1939 (Gallix 1982, 101–102, 105–108).

review of *England Have My Bones* as “the turning point in my life” (D. Garnett 1968, 12), and tells Garnett that the praise gave him “the biggest success I have ever made,” whether the book is financially successful or not (14). In fact, some of his early letters are filled with praise that is close to adulation. He writes to Garnett, “I have read and possess every book you ever wrote [. . .] and it means a great deal to me that you should even pretend to enjoy something of mine. I dont [sic] know any great writers, or indeed any important people at all” (11). Garnett was a prominent literary figure at the time: the son of Constance Garnett, an important translator of Russian novels, and Edward Garnett, a prominent writer, critic, and a friend and champion of many other authors such as John Galsworthy and D. H. Lawrence (Knights 2015, 6). David himself was a member of the Bloomsbury circle. The recent biography of Garnett, *Bloomsbury’s Outsider* (2015), mentions White, but it maintains that he was a peripheral figure in Garnett’s star-studded and eccentric literary circle. Indeed, the pair rarely met in person, and when they did, as Sylvia Townsend Warner observes, the contact nearly always resulted in animosity (Warner 1967, 143). Nevertheless, the two supported one another through several major crises: Garnett was with White in 1937 when Garnett learned that his father had died (Knights 2015, 300), the two were together in Mayo when the Second World War was declared;¹⁹ the last letter David’s first wife Rachel “Ray” Garnett wrote was to White (D. Garnett 1968, 62), and when White’s beloved dog Brownie died it was to Garnett that White wrote most openly of his profound and almost life-threatening grief (179–183).

The growth and failure of this relationship is covered in the chapters that follow, but it is perhaps relevant to reflect that Garnett, because he outlived White, has had the advantage of controlling the narrative of their friendship, and some of the bitterness of their final years can, perhaps, be detected in his accounts of the pair. In an illuminating,

¹⁹ White describes Garnett’s visit and the shared emotional distress caused by the declaration of war in (T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 1 Sept. 1939 and 21 Sept. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC).

but, perhaps, unjust phrase, Garnett concludes that by the 1960s, “Our friendship – with my usefulness – was drawing to a close” (D. Garnett 1979, 223). A different summation might be that as White, the younger of the two, grew older and began to imagine that he was the equal of his once-idolized friend, the dynamic of their interactions shifted, and they grew apart. Much of Garnett’s later writing about White contains an offhand dismissiveness. For example, of White’s many passionate hobbies, Garnett writes, “Tim flung himself into every new pursuit with enthusiasm and learned the theory of each with great rapidity. He then believed and made me believe he was a master of the subject. He could write so well and teach what he had just learned convincingly. It was a surprise to find he failed when it came to doing it himself” (218).

White was deeply attached to Ray Garnett, David’s first wife, whose marriage was only sporadically happy, and who died in the spring of 1940 from breast cancer.²⁰ Over a year after her death White writes in his diary,

Now that she has been dead for a year and a half, [. . .] I still think of her more than any other woman. She was a *wonderful* person: she was Bunny’s²¹ greatest claim to fame. She is as real to me now as if she were alive, and I think she will be till I die. I still puzzle about things she said, regret things that I said, and see her standing with bare feet on a bog, her skirts tucked up [. . .]. She is the only woman I have never condescended to. I have only four times in my life met my superiors – and three of them were men.²²

²⁰ Their conflict-worn but loving marriage and the impact that it had on Garnett’s literature is chronicled in (Knights 2015).

²¹ “Bunny” was the nickname by which Garnett was known throughout his life. He got it because of a rabbit skin cap he wore as a child, and it stuck to him until his death (Knights 2015, 8).

²² T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 26 Nov. 1941, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

Mary Potts recalled years later in an interview, “Garnett’s first wife was obviously a wonderful woman and Tim talked to us about her quite a lot and he obviously loved her very much.”²³ White does not appear to have ever warmed to Angelica Garnett, David’s second wife, with whom David had begun a relationship while Ray was ill (Knights 2015, 326). In spite of the adulation for the older man that he elsewhere expressed, White seems to have disliked some of Garnett’s writing, and to have been quite outspoken throughout his life about the lack of appeal that it had for him. Early in their friendship he tells Garnett, “I have kept my promise by reading *Lady Into Fox* [sic] again, and I still detest it. Since it was in the same book I did *the Man in the Zoo* [sic] also, and thought it better than I had: I almost liked it” (D. Garnett 1968, 23). Their friendship eventually ended in part because of White’s dislike of Garnett’s *Aspects of Love* (1955), a book based upon the relationship between David and Angelica (Knights 2015, 417). The end of their friendship and White’s reaction to *Aspects of Love* is discussed further in chapter six.

Sir Sydney Carlyle Cockerell was White’s third important friendship. Cockerell was the director of the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge from 1908 to 1937 so their time at Cambridge overlapped. However, White and Cockerell did not meet in person while they were both at the university, although White argued anonymously with the older man in the *Saturday Review* about a proposed extension to the museum.²⁴ The two men did not meet face-to-face until almost ten years later in August of 1938 when they were both visiting Siegfried Sassoon at his house in Heytesbury. When White met

²³ Mary Potts, interview by François Gallix, Cambridge, 25 Oct. 1974. folder 4, box 23, MS-4494, HRC.

²⁴ White’s first letter describes the proposed extension to the building, the history and architecture of the current building, and ends by labeling the proposal reminiscent of “the worst forms of Victorianism” (White 1929b, 241). Cockerell’s response points out that White is incorrect in nearly every objection raised regarding the architect, architecture, history and configuration of the extension, and, he concludes, “Your Cambridge Correspondent is imperfectly informed as to what has taken place, is taking place, and is likely to take place in Cambridge. Of the knowledge of architecture displayed I say nothing” (Cockerell 1929, 316). To this complete and thorough putdown White responds that Cockerell’s letter makes an “attempt to heckle [him] with technical terms” and “evades the issue” (White 1929c, 317).

Cockerell he wrote to Potts that he hoped that Cockerell was going “to collect me along with Rossetti and co” (referring to the paintings housed in the Fitzwilliam) and that “whenever he meets a genius he immediately takes down all their particulars and makes them turn out their pockets” (Gallix 1984, 90). Cockerell was a “scholar, curator and collector *par excellence*, friend and correspondent with most of the literate world of his day” (Linenthal 2007, 365); he had “a frequently attested genius for friendship” (Bell 2004), and he was an avid collector of Medieval manuscripts. His interests in the Italian Renaissance shaped several generations of manuscript collectors, and ultimately influenced Medieval scholarship in England and America (De Hamel 1987). It was Cockerell who suggested that White should translate a Medieval Bestiary and who provided the manuscript from which White worked for many years.²⁵ He remained a good correspondent of White until he died in 1962, and his warm, openhearted, and scholarly advice shaped a great deal of White’s work.

Understanding whom White admired throughout his life is critical to grasping his development. White defined himself as a writer by imitating different styles throughout his career, and the chapters that follow investigate how he molds not just his literature but also his persona to match other authors whom he respected at different periods in his life. Chapter one explores how White voices his social conservatism, his mistrust of the modern world and his dread of the approaching Second World War within what critic Jed Esty terms the “anthropological turn” in the literature of the 1930s (Esty 2004, 2). It pays particular attention to how White draws inspiration from Siegfried Sassoon’s *Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* (1929), Adrian Bell’s *Corduroy* (1930),²⁵ and other authors who were returning to pastoral and particularly “English” themes against the grain of an international Modernism and the world’s supposed degeneration. The chapter also shows how White implements these literary tropes within his own life and shapes his

²⁵ T. H. White, “Provenance of this translation,” no date, in diary 1949, folder 1, box 9, MS-4494, HRC.

public appearance in accordance with fictional ideals, such as the “gentleman” and the “sportsman,” that he simultaneously discusses in his creative work. The chapter ends with White’s many and varying descriptions of his encounter in the summer of 1938 with Siegfried Sassoon, and it discusses how this encounter serves as a culmination of his literary and personal ambitions. Also, as many of the subsequent chapters discuss White’s identification with Ireland and an Irish identity, *England Have My Bones*, which focuses on a nostalgic picture of England, provides a contrast point from which to appreciate White’s later concerns and preoccupations with belonging in Ireland.

The second chapter investigates White’s most famous publication, *The Once and Future King*, and, specifically, how it went from a playful narrative about childhood to an anti-war treatise intended to shape human history. The chapter focuses on White’s interactions with pacifist literature before and during the War, and it explores how his understanding of his proper place in the war effort, as an author and as a private citizen, was defined through reference to other authors. The chapter follows the philosophical evolution of *The Once and Future King* and traces some of its influences, particularly the impact of the novelist Aldous Huxley and the biologist Julian Huxley.

The third chapter investigates how the author’s six years in neutral Ireland and his interest in Irish history, literature, and language during the War also contributed to substantial changes to the antagonists of his epic. White constructed an Irish identity in the early years of the War in order to justify his detachment from the conflict, and the chapter explores the manner in which these attitudes manifested themselves in *The Once and Future King*.

The fourth chapter continues to explore White’s complex and changing relationship to Ireland and discusses the two books that White produced describing this country: *The Godstone and the Blackymor* and *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*. I suggest that these books represent two different sides of White’s relationship with Ireland: a

positive and idealistic portrait reminiscent of the tropes of the Irish Literary Revival with *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, and an attempt at a satirical comedy with *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*. I investigate the styles of literature that White imitates and suggest influences that can be observed both in his reading and in his personal interactions with various Irish authors. This chapter also deals with White's contribution to the Irish number of the journal *Horizon* in 1942, an issue which was meant to foster better understanding between neutral Ireland and an England at war with Germany. White's disgruntled response to the presentation and publication of his article, "Letter from a Goose Shooter" (1942), offers a possible explanation for the author's apparent change of heart regarding the country in which he spent so much time.

The sixth chapter investigates White's foray into children's literature with *Mistress Masham's Repose* and *The Master*, and it explores how White uses this genre to react to the issues of Empire, totalitarianism, and education in the wake of the Second World War. Both of these books examine the concept of authoritarian rule through the lens of children's stories and, once again, both had their genesis in White's experiences in Ireland. I also draw upon several unpublished essays from White's archives to discuss the themes of readership and education. The sixth chapter turns to the author's later, less-productive years, his fame, and the financial success that came with the adaptation of *The Once and Future King* into the Broadway musical *Camelot* (1960). It also speculates on his final "literary identity," this time of the literary historian or antiquarian, and explores how his final works of non-fiction – *The Age of Scandal*, *Scandalmonger*, and *The Book of Beasts* – reflect upon the concerns and literary tropes that interested him throughout his life.

As a full examination of White's literature would be broader than the present work would allow, I have selected the major works which appear to most clearly show

the author's attempts to explore specific styles, imitate certain contemporary literary communities, or express his unique world view. Some of White's books have therefore been left out of this analysis. These mostly include commercial ventures and early experiments in style: *Dead Mr. Nixon* (1931) and *Darkness at Pemberley* (1932), two forays into the popular genre of detective fiction, and *They Winter Abroad* (1932), *First Lesson* (1931), *Earth Stopped* (1934), and *Gone to Ground* (1935), the author's early attempts to evolve a satirical style for commenting on modern English society. Two notable works that I choose not to engage with are *Farewell Victoria* (1932) and *The Goshawk* (1951). *The Goshawk* is perhaps the most famous work of T. H. White after *The Once and Future King*. As Helen Macdonald's *H is for Hawk* (2014) has comprehensively assessed the state of White's mind alongside his lyrical prose and faulty falconry, it is unnecessary to devote an entire chapter to an in-depth analysis. *Farewell Victoria* (1932), a nostalgic look at lost Victorianism, is related in vignettes that describe one day in the life of a Victorian coachman, "Mundy," in the years 1858, 1875, 1879, 1901, 1914, and 1929. Deeply pessimistic, the book's style is experimental and might benefit from closer critical observation because it shows White writing in a style and genre that he never used again. The novel also explores issues of nostalgia, societal decline, and aristocracy that concern him elsewhere. However, as it is stylistically unique in White's oeuvre, it is more fitted to a shorter critical format, such as an article or chapter.

Since his social and emotional contexts often directly inform each of his novels, the following chapters open by situating him within his biographical context and include a brief publication history of the books to be discussed. This is useful particularly in the case of *The Once and Future King*, which has a complex and decades-long publication history, and which was deeply influenced by White's personal responses to the Second World War. While these diversions from direct critical engagement with the literary texts might not be necessary when discussing a more established author, they are

relevant here not only because White has been so infrequently studied, but also because the author consistently drew inspiration from his physical and emotional surroundings.

Several difficulties exist when compiling a work of this length and depth on T. H. White. These include not only the vastness of the author's personal archives, but also the relatively limited critical interaction with White's canon. The archives of the author's papers, drafts, and unfinished manuscripts; his library of books and their accompanying marginalia; and his diaries play a key role in the following chapters. White has archives housed at both the Harry Ransom Center (HRC) at the University of Texas at Austin and at the library of Queen's College, Cambridge. The papers at Cambridge remain uncatalogued, and those at the University of Texas retained uncatalogued portions until 2013, when the first searchable finding aid for the collection was released. Only a few scholars – Helen Macdonald and Kurth Sprague – have published criticism of any length using the archives, and while Sylvia Townsend Warner uses the materials in her biography, her lack of citation information (the material was not yet housed at either university when she had access to it) makes it difficult, at times, to trace and access the material to which she refers. The collections, while deeply valuable to the researcher, naturally pose some problems because of their hitherto unexplored expanse. Both archives are extensive, although the HRC is larger overall and contains more variety in the materials. The Cambridge archives consist of twenty-two volumes of diaries, which, for the most part, describe White's sexual fantasies about the young boy Sylvia Townsend Warner calls "Zed" in her biography. These were the only portion of his papers that the author made arrangements for in his will. He passed on these documents to Michael Howard, who worked at Jonathan Cape, and Howard placed them in the safekeeping of Queen's College, Cambridge (White 1963, 163).²⁶ All of White's other papers were purchased from his estate by the Harry Ransom Center. Recently the

²⁶ T. H. White, "Last Will and Testament", 23 Aug. 1963, Ecclesiastical Court of the Bailiwick of Guernsey, 163.

archive at Cambridge also purchased several items relating to *Mistress Masham's Repose* and White's time in Ireland. The archive in Austin is much larger and more varied. It includes diaries, journals of story ideas, and drafts of his published works that show the stories' progression from hand-written notes to copyedited galley proofs. It also contains over two hundred unpublished letters that White wrote and over two hundred that he received.²⁷ These letters include communications from prominent figures such as the poets Siegfried Sassoon and Walter de la Mare, the scientist Julian Huxley, and the mystery writer Dorothy L. Sayers. His library, also housed in Austin, contains 456 books, many with heavy marginalia, on such diverse topics as psychology, Ireland, animals (particularly birds of prey), history, science, and religion. The HRC archives also contain thousands of pages of material that has never been published including entire novels, short stories, plays, essays, and biographical sketches.

Of the seven full-length studies of White's work, only two deal with other texts than *The Once and Future King*. These are John K. Crane's *T. H. White* (1974) and Martin Kellman's *T. H. White and the Matter of Britain* (1988). Crane covers every book that White published in his lifetime, and his criticism also contains valuable summaries of each of the author's works; however, as useful as this may be, Crane tends to allow his own personal taste to color his analysis. For example, he dismisses *The Master* as "in every way one of White's poorest books" (Crane 1974, 168). Kellman's close textual analysis of books like *Mistress Masham's Repose* can be particularly insightful, and I refer to his work in several of the chapters that follow. Nevertheless, both Crane and Kellman lacked access to archival material that would have allowed them to expand their studies, and their reliance on incomplete information occasionally leads them into errors. One useful resource for scholars is François Gallix's bibliography of White's material, *T. H. White: An Annotated Bibliography* (1986). It is helpful in locating obscure articles and

²⁷ Many of these letters are recent acquisitions and large sections of them were uncatalogued prior to 2013.

was, prior to 2013, useful in describing a small portion of the unpublished work in the HRC archives. Unfortunately it does not refer to the White holdings at Cambridge, its descriptions of the HRC archives are incomplete, and its list of available White scholarship is now out of date.

One of the most thorough and scholarly examinations of *The Once and Future King* is Kurth Sprague's *T. H. White's Troubled Heart: Women in The Once and Future King* (2007). Sprague makes excellent use of the archives in this in-depth study of the women in T. H. White's personal life and in his most famous piece of fiction. Sprague draws on diaries, letters, and on Constance White's unfinished memoirs, and he even reproduces sections of these archival resources in his appendices. Sprague, like every other study on White published after the appearance of the Warner biography, places emphasis on White's sexuality and his self-professed sadism in discussing his literature. Warner's treatment of his sexuality has been given recognition for its sympathy and tact, and it was an aspect of the biography to which she gave considerable thought during its composition.²⁸ While White's sexuality may be relevant to aspects of his work, it has already received extensive critical attention from Warner, Sprague, Kellman, and others, and I have not chosen to focus on it in the chapters that follow.²⁹

Another study of *The Once and Future King* is Lewis J. Boyle's *T. H. White's Reinterpretation of Malory's Le Morte Darthur: An Analysis of Shifting Meaning and*

²⁸ White's sexuality and Warner's deep intimacy with his archives apparently affected her arrangements for her own archival legacy. The scholar Melanie Micir has described how Warner's attempt to portray White's sexuality in a balanced manner in the biography lead her to make arrangements regarding the archival material from her long romantic partnership and to take into consideration the future record of her own sexuality (see Micir 2012).

²⁹ However, it seems disingenuous to leave the assumptions about his sexuality unquestioned, given the blatant pedophilic fantasies and descriptions of sexual assault that can be found in the diaries housed at Cambridge. The archives contain no evidence of romantic relationships with adult men, but they do contain evidence of sexual interest in, and, indeed, sexual assault on children of both genders. There is no need to put a definitive label on White's sexuality for the purpose of this particular literary analysis. A study of White's sexual history is beyond the purview of this thesis; for commentary on his sexuality see Helen McDonald's *H is for Hawk* (McDonald 2014, 39–41) and Kurth Sprague's *T. H. White's Troubled Heart* (Sprague 2007, 3–4, 27–30, 33)

Unstable Language (2008). Boyle compares Malory's biographical experiences and the goals of his writing to those of White and suggests that they both were deeply pessimistic about the state of humanity (Boyle 2008, 39–41). Boyle, however, did not have access to the archives – if he had he would doubtless have been interested in White's copy of Malory, which is full of the author's marginalia. Elizabeth Brewer's *T. H. White's The Once and Future King* (1997) does an excellent job of clarifying the complex publication history of all of the component books of *The Once and Future King* and exploring how each of the books developed over time. She also considers the inherent tragedy of the text and White's use of Malory and other Medieval source material. However, once again, she did not have access to the archival material. She ignores the impact of Ireland and White's Irish reading. Indeed, all of the critical works which focus on *The Once and Future King* tend to ignore the fact that it was written in Ireland during the Second World War, and if they mention this aspect of the history of its composition it is usually only in passing.

White was deeply conservative throughout his life, and his politics shaped his writing, both the content that he produced and the critical reception of his work. As the opening quote of this introduction shows, White had a predilection for imagining idealized totalitarian regimes that could solve what he saw as the world's problems. Chief among these problems was humanity's failure to learn from its mistakes. Indeed, White viewed world history as cyclical.³⁰ While he held this view throughout his life, it was a theory that he fine-tuned during the Second World War while he was living in Ireland, and this theory may partially explain his curiosity about fascism. During that time, worldwide events played heavily on his mind, and White immersed himself in Irish

³⁰ Kellman draws evidence of this attitude from works published throughout White's life: *Farewell Victoria*, *The Once and Future King*, *The Goshawk*, *Scandalmonger*, and even the posthumously published *America at Last* (1965). Boyle uses this to discuss White's similarities to Sir Thomas Mallory and *Le Morte d'Arthur* (see Boyle 2008, 34 and Kellman 1988, 33).

history.³¹ From his reading, he began to develop a unique, unifying view of international events that shaped his opinions on the origins of the War and human violence generally.

In drafts of *The Once and Future King* from 1941, one can see White begin to build on these theories. He imagines a metaphorical “volcano somewhere in the east, perhaps in Germany or in Russia or even further off,” and that this volcano has “vomited its lava since before the story of Man.”³² This “volcano” spreads a ring of violence and war outward, and its output “rolls slowly across the face of Europe, always spreading outwards in concentric circles, until it is stemmed by the surrounding sea.”³³ White goes on:

The old things are pushed out. The lava at the seaside is a thousand years older than the lava at the crater’s lip. The old things are on the rims of Europe, and a person who is searching for living antiquities goes first to the outer circle, if he hopes to succeed. [. . .] The outset of our volcano is warlike, molten [. . .]. It drives the old before it by terror. All the important wars come from there: all the beautiful civilizations are smashed from there: all the ancient races, originally born there, are driven away from the place with slaughter, are hunted, harried, hounded away to the sea. And there, at the sea, they turn at bay for their last stand: races smarting from a thousand blows, defeated for a thousand years. [. . .] And they are at bay. They are between the devil and the deep grey sea. There is no place left to them for refuge, and there, on the rim, they must cling for life. How they hate the ones who have driven them out! With what contempt and fear and trustlessness they snarl at their tormentors, facing them at last with their

³¹ See chapter four.

³² T. H. White, “Book Two: The Queen of Air and Darkness Handwritten and Typed Manuscript,” no date, folder 6, box 13, MS-4494, HRC.

³³ *Ibid.*

backs to the sea-wall, desperate [. . .]. And here behind them tread the hungry generations, youthful, unsubtle, violent, burning from the volcano. They cry "To Hell or Connaught!", and Connaught is on the sea. As soon as America has been discovered, they even drive their quarry beyond the sea, evicting cotters from the western highlands and packing them into steamboats to sink or swim.³⁴

White appears to have developed this theory from his reading in Irish archaeological history and, particularly, from R. A. S. Macalister's *Ireland in Pre-Celtic Times* (1921) and *Ancient Ireland* (1935).³⁵ Yet he uses Irish history to explain what he perceives as a wider cyclical tendency that has defined Europe for centuries. With this theory of the volcano of violence, White begins to connect in his own mind the archaeological history of Ireland and the contemporary German Nazi threat to Europe: it is all part of the same unchangeable cycle. He writes, "The English of today will eventually join the Irish on the same rim, in the same slavery."³⁶

Kellman argues that White's perception of history as cyclical meant that for him "history is inevitable, outside human control, and [dwarfs] individual human importance" (Kellman 1988, 33). It is true that by describing war as a volcano, White implies that it is an amoral force of nature: no human choice has the possibility of stopping it. However, this argument overlooks the fact that in writing *The Once and*

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Macalister presents the hypothesis that the movement from stone to copper to bronze to iron tools in Ireland was precipitated by invasions of technologically advanced populations: "[T]his development of culture [was] the result of successive migrations, each tribe as it arrived bringing into the country its own contribution to civilisation" (Macalister 1921, 26). He argues that the "native traditions" (ie. Irish literary traditions) support this hypothesis and "describe a long succession of immigrations" (26) and he reads the occurrence in the literature of the Fir Bolg, the Tuatha Dé Danann, and "the children of Míl" as successive invaders, each militarily or culturally defeating the others (30). In *Ancient Ireland* he uses similar rhetoric to White, and he describes how in the stories "the Nemedians and the Fir Bolg [. . .] fled to certain islands and there in desperation 'dug themselves in,' in an all but literal application of the old saying 'Between the devil and the deep sea' " (Macalister 1935, 58). This analysis of Irish archaeology, while not as poetic as White's volcano metaphor, contains the seed of the idea that inspired White.

³⁶ T. H. White, "Book Two: The Queen of Air and Darkness Handwritten and Typed Manuscript," no date, folder 6, box 13, MS-4494, HRC.

Future King White was attempting to resolve the cyclical nature of human violence and war.³⁷ In this reading, Arthur, the totalitarian leader, seeks to impose peace, and while he eventually fails, White hints that a solution would be the dissolution of national boundaries, the end to any concept of individual nations, and the unification of the world under one ruler. In this way, once again, we return to White's argument for totalitarianism. White would maintain an interest in the concept of totalitarian regimes, if not in their reality, until the end of his life, and while the author mistrusted Hitler and detested his methods, he was drawn to the concept of a strong dictator both during the Second World War and long after it. In October 1940, he writes in his diary, "Hitler is in his own way trying to unite mankind into one nation. He is quite right in the aim. It is only the means (force, coercion [sic], cruelty, mendacity) which are deplorable."³⁸ Even as he contemplates returning to England to fight in the War in 1941, he laments, "I dont [sic] think that the English, if they win the war, will establish the right system of life: I think, indeed, that they will probably establish something less good than Hitler would have established."³⁹ Many years after the fall of the Third Reich, when the true nature of Hitler's plans for the world had been exposed to the public, White still reflects positively on the dictator's vision, but remarks regretfully that Hitler was an unfit vessel for establishing it.⁴⁰ Human nature, naturally corrupt, can be governed and improved through education and literature, but a solution, White suggests, may be the single benevolent ruler who might, through mandatory re-education, break the cycle of violence.

³⁷ See chapter two for how *The Once and Future King* becomes an anti-war text.

³⁸ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 20 Oct. 1940, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 25 Oct. 1941.

⁴⁰ T. H. White, diary volume 1, 16 Mar. 1957, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

The evolution of White's ideas, and particularly his conflicting views on fascism, will be explored in more detail in the chapters that follow. The next chapters will also trace his changing relationships with the three key figures introduced above – Potts, Garnett, and Cockerell – and their regular correspondence will serve to illustrate White's changing perspectives. His reading, his contacts, and his constant curiosity are all traced through the use of the archives, and these documents show how White designed his own image through his literature and fashioned communities and identities around himself. The author's conflicting political beliefs and the major impact that the global conflict of the Second World War had on his work are also investigated through the vast archival resources available in Austin and Cambridge. Ultimately, this thesis situates White in his time, explores the various communities that he imagined himself a part of throughout his life, and investigates the overall place and impact of his work. To begin, the following first chapter locates White within the literature of the 1930s, and, in particular, within a nostalgic and pastoral trend that was growing during that time. The writing discussed precipitated the beginnings of his literary relationships and facilitated his entry into a community of professional writers, and it also showcases the early foundations of his conservatism.

Chapter 1

Late Modernism, *England Have My Bones*, and Siegfried Sassoon

In March 1934, having published five novels,¹ White began to keep a diary that described the gentleman-farmer lifestyle he was attempting to cultivate at the time. He edited and then published the diary in 1936 as *England Have My Bones*,² a chronicle of his hunting, shooting, and recreational life. Throughout the diary, he imagines that the rural life he chooses to lead offers the chance to return to a sustainable, healthier, and happier world. Modern, urban humanity, he argues, is divorced from reality and on the verge of collapse, and a rural lifestyle offers him an alternative and a chance to step back into a more stable society. *England Have my Bones* is critical to the author's trajectory as a writer because it represents an explicit effort to identify with and participate in a particular mode of 1930s literature. It describes White's efforts to become a self-made gentleman³ and his own version of the archetypal character he had read about in the works of other authors. He imitates the life and narrative style of books such as A. G. Street's *Farmer's Glory* (1932), Adrian Bell's *Corduroy* (1930), and Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1929). Through allusion to these texts White establishes for himself a literary peer group and engages with what he understood to be key concerns of his generation. Crucially, he chooses not just to use the tropes of the period in his writing, but also to fashion his persona into an archetypal modern country squire.

¹ *Dead Mr. Nixon* (1931) with Ronald McNair Scott, *Darkness at Pemberley* (1932) and *Farewell Victoria* (1933) under the name T. H. White, and *They Winter Abroad* (1932) and *First Lesson* (1931) under the pseudonym James Aston.

² The title is drawn from Shakespeare's *King John*, Act 4, Scene 3: "Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones!" (Shakespeare 1988, 417).

³ The term "gentleman" is difficult to define, and Christine Berberich devotes nearly an entire chapter to an attempt to establish a definition and to trace the changing meaning of the word from the middle ages through the twentieth century (Berberich 2007, 3–14). For White the term appears to mean an Oxbridge educated, financially secure man of leisure who performs well at aristocratic pastimes like fishing, shooting, and hunting, and that is how I use the term in this chapter.

Upon its publication, the book gave White his first true financial success, and this influx of money allowed him to stop teaching and become a full-time writer. It can also be seen as laying ideological groundwork for other contemporary books like *The Goshawk* (published in 1951 but written in 1937) and *The Sword in the Stone* (1938). This chapter explores the intellectual world into which White imagined himself and White's place in a conservative, nostalgic, England-centered mode of '30s writing. It investigates the influence of specific works on his text and the concept of the gentleman both within the book and in his personal life. Finally, the chapter discusses the author's meeting with Siegfried Sassoon; for White this juncture was the endorsement of his own literary and ideological trajectory.

In March 1934 T. H. White had been the head of the English department at Stowe School in Buckinghamshire for two years. Working under the moderately liberal headmaster J. F. Roxburgh, White was later described by his students as an eccentric, enthusiastic, and exciting teacher. He was twenty-seven years old, and for the past three years had been developing his ideas about the type of man he wanted to be and the kind of life he wanted to live. The historian Noël Annan – a pupil at Stowe, who later became Provost of King's College, Cambridge and University College, London – would describe the young version of White as “slim, wasp-waisted, with red moustache” (Annan 1965, 99). This strong and physically healthy young man “was then in the midst of living out a fantasy to resurrect a Renaissance man who should be equally skilled in paunching a hare in the morning, stretching a canvas in the afternoon, landing an aircraft in the evening and writing poetry at night” (Annan 1965, 100). It was from this fantasy that White would construct his autobiographical book.

England Have My Bones has little order or structure: White's hobbies change with the seasons and the journal follows him through each new pursuit and enthusiasm. It

begins with a description of several weeks of fly-fishing for salmon in Scotland.⁴ White then turns to a long section in which he learns to fly an airplane and a shorter episode where he helps to birth a foal. In other segments, a neighboring farmer teaches him to plough a field, and he describes numerous parties where he and the farming community around him go shooting for rabbits, pheasants, and duck. The final section of the book is an account of a season of fox hunting, and the text concludes with an incident in which White crashes his Bentley at high speed into a farmhouse, temporarily blinding himself. Interspersed with the four major pursuits of fishing, flying, shooting, and hunting, White treats his audience to lectures on the proper identification of trees, the types of cloud and the weather they foretell, the different games that can be played with a dart board (and how to cheat), and the methods of catching and keeping grass snakes. White also completed a series of eight engravings to illustrate the diary, and these include images of a snake, a farmhouse, an airplane, a diagram of the different types of clouds and their levels in the sky, and a pub scene.⁵

The central interests of the text, however, are the concepts of England and Englishness. The exploration of England through rural representation was part of a larger trend in the writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, as Alexandra Harris notes, “By the late 1930s it looked to many observers as if a whole concerted project of national self-discovery was underway” (Harris 2010, 10). Jed Esty has defined this phenomenon of pastoralism in late modernist writing as the “anthropological turn” (Esty 2004, 2). As he defines it, this term refers to “the discursive process by which English intellectuals translated the end of empire into a resurgent

⁴ The fact that White chooses to begin his narrative about England in Scotland may have particular bearing on aspects of White’s future work, considering how extensively he uses Gaelic themes in *The Once and Future King*. This early use of Scotland is discussed further in chapter three in relation to White’s construction of his Arthurian epic.

⁵ The cover of the first edition also included some small drawings by White, indicating his high level of involvement in the presentation of the published text.

concept of national culture – one whose insular integrity seemed to mitigate some of modernism’s characteristic social agonies” (2). Esty argues that this movement was engendered in the contraction of the British Empire and the resultant failure of the narratives that had previously enabled it: “The fading significance of English universalism” lead to “the emergent significance of English particularism” (5). Furthermore, this “insular romance of wholeness” used “the language not of aesthetic decline but of cultural revival” (8). That is, this pastoral turn in late-modernist writing implied that there could be a restorative possibility within a return to the rural. Indeed, White’s work falls squarely within this “anthropological turn” that Esty defines. However, Esty’s argument is that this was a feature of the “high modernists” such as Woolf, Eliot, and Forster, and that writers of the so-called “Auden generation” – Greene, Waugh, Orwell, and Larkin, for example – “did not vest English culture itself with the kind of recuperative possibilities that one can see in the late modernist works” of earlier writers (8). Indeed, according to Esty, the writing of the Auden generation is more preoccupied with a “historical sense of pervasive national decline” (8). White’s work crosses these various boundaries: it fears and recognizes the possibilities of decline while trusting in the recuperative hope of ruralism. White knew and interacted with the group of young authors that has been credited with defining the ethos and significance of the literature of the 1930s. Nevertheless, in spite of this association with what would traditionally be termed the Auden generation, his writing in the 1930s certainly perceives the restorative benefits of returning to an English pastoralism. White’s intense conservatism relies on a belief that the past can be redemptive if it is approached with the correct degree of reverence and activism.

Five years before he began to compose *England Have My Bones*, six of his poems were included in *Cambridge Poetry 1929*, a book of student poems published by the Hogarth Press (Saltmarshe, Davenport, and Wright 1929, 65–72). Alongside White’s

poetry appeared work by Julian Bell, Richard Eberhart, William Empson, and John Lehmann (Saltmarshe, Davenport, and Wright 1929, 11–14, 28–32, 28–32, 44). In the author’s copy of this anthology, many of the poems are signed by their respective poets, indicating that White had at least a passing interaction with a community of Cambridge-educated writers.⁶

Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* (1973) dates the growth of interest in rural writing from the late nineteenth century when “rural Britain was subsidiary” (Williams 1973, 248). The decline in the economic and political significance of the countryside corresponded to an increase in its imaginative influence, and, he claims, “There is almost an inverse proportion, in the twentieth century, between the relative importance of the working rural economy and the cultural importance of rural ideas” (248). Furthermore, as Jed Esty points out, as the Empire diminished in the first few decades of the twentieth century, writers and intellectuals began to turn their focus inward onto the qualities of life that they believed to be distinctly “English” and, particularly, onto pastoralism and rural life (Esty 2004, 2). Williams mentions T. H. White’s fantasy writing as a part of this trend: “There was an extraordinary development of country-based fantasy, from Barrie and Kenneth Grahame through J. C. Powys and T. H. White” (258). Presumably this passage refers to *The Once and Future King*, but Williams makes the additional point that during this period “description of country places and people found its most successful mode in journals and memoirs” (254). Williams does not mention *England Have My Bones*, but his observation indicates that White, with this rural journal, was involving himself with a current enthusiasm for writing memoirs about the countryside and about a decaying, subsidiary lifestyle that was no longer real. Glen Cavaliero supports Williams’s hypotheses and writes, “The country was [. . .] associated with all that was desirable in the England that

⁶ See marginalia in (Saltmarshe, Davenport, and Wright 1929), HRC.

was being changed” by modernity (Cavaliero 1977, 6), and Cavaliero references White’s early non-fantasy work as a part of this particularly 1930s pastoral mode (38). Williams, Esty, Cavaliero, and others acknowledge that as the economic and social impact of the sporting farmer faded, his imaginative appeal grew, and they agree that White’s work serves as one example of this growth. Within *England Have My Bones*, White acknowledges that the aesthetic of the gentleman farmer is an imaginary ideal, and that the England he describes is “unreal” in the modern world because it is an England “of a leisured class” that is disappearing forever (White 1981 [1936], vi). He writes, “This sense of unreality, which affects every sporting writer in the post-war world, lies at the back of all efforts to return to harmony with the genuine countryman” (White 1981 [1936], vi). The true power of the leisured British upper class had decreased considerably by 1934, and therefore it became possible to idealize and reinvent their lifestyle and for the non-initiated, like White, to participate.⁷

Alexandra Harris agrees that many of the creative thinkers of the 1930s found themselves inspired by life in the English countryside and chose to reinvent traditional modes in a modern context. The interest was widespread, as Harris illustrates:

If a Domesday Book had been compiled in the late 1930s, recording the inhabitants of villages and outlying farms, it would include most of the major figures of English art and letters: the Woolfs at Rodmell, the Pipers at Fawley

⁷ The magnitude of this loss of power was extreme. As a group, the British aristocracy went from possessing “the overwhelming majority of the land of the British Isles” in 1870 (Cannadine 1990, 8), to being a largely either defunct or ceremonial in the 1970s. As David Cannadine writes, “The eclipse of the landed establishment amounts to nothing less than a long revolution” (704). Of the many causes for this decline, two of the most important were “the impact of First World War” and its military losses, and “the sales between 1910 and 1922, which amounted to a transfer of property on a scale rivaled in Britain [. . .] only by the Norman Conquest and the Dissolution of the Monasteries” (704). White would have lived through both of these monumental changes, and must, therefore, have felt the loss of prestige was occurring at an unprecedented pace. Likewise, the British Empire’s worldwide domination was faltering, and although “Britain in the 1920s and 1930s had very few doubts that she was still [. . .] a world power” (Porter 2004, 288), the economic hegemony and imperial control that had characterized the nineteenth century were noticeably failing (See Porter 2004, 251–287).

Bottom Farmhouse, the Betjemans under the white horse at Uffington, Gerald Lord Berners in nearby Faringdon, E. M. Forster in Abinger, Stanley Spencer in Cookham, Vita Sackville-West in Kent, Edith Olivier in Wilton, Cecil Beaton at Ashcombe, Evelyn Waugh at Stinchcombe. (Harris 2010, 169)

Harris writes that the pressing sense of instability that artists and thinkers experienced during the interwar years encouraged them to turn to tradition in an effort to rediscover a level of order and rootedness that had been lost in the modern world. The years between 1930 and 1940 constituted “a decade that began with the Great Depression and ended with air raids,” and, Harris argues, “The sense of imminent ending made many artists determined to include everything: to record what might be lost, and to enjoy as far as possible what the novelist Henry Green [. . .] called the ‘last look round’ ” (Harris 2010, 11). Even more than the declining rural economy that Williams observes, the extreme sense of anxiety at the prospect of a second world conflict pushed writers towards re-claiming the countryside. In addition, Harris suggests that the return to more traditional forms and themes was also a reaction to “the fiercely experimental ethos of high modernism” (Harris 2010, 11). The artists and writers of the 1930s began to question the modernist goals of breaking art’s historical and geographic ties that the preceding decades had embraced, and, Harris argues, “By the 1930s artists were wondering how to reconnect with the headily abandoned past. [. . .] Over the next few years the journey home would become, for many, a means of survival” (Harris 2010, 11). Artists, writers, architects, and photographers began this journey home by looking back to history, photographing Victorian objects, retiring to traditional village life, and evoking eighteenth-century designs in their architecture. *England Have My Bones* shows White’s particular journey back to a “home” of rural, farming England in which he never actually grew up. It was a home that he had read about, one that other writers had

imaginatively evoked for him. He thus uses their example to try to create an identity, and, at the same time, to cultivate a position for himself in the literary landscape of the 1930s.

White was aware of the contemporary preoccupation with the pastoral and of the particular turn in the 1930s towards regional, historical, and country themes and interests. He references his fellow rural writers, defines himself against them repeatedly in *England Have My Bones* and locates himself in this literary milieu. In the preface to the journal, White defines the rural England that his text describes. The England he evokes is “an England defined by negatives,” he writes, and also by literature: “My England is not that of the *Saturday Review*, nor is it authoritative, like that of the *Field*. It is not stately enough for *Country Life*, nor experienced enough to bear comparison with the works of A. G. Street or Adrian Bell. I hope it is not the kind of country that is inhabited by Mr. Beverley Nichols” (White 1981 [1936], vi). In this passage, White instructs his audience about how to consider his book in a context of both late nineteenth-century country writing and immediately contemporary 1930s work. *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* was a weekly publication that began in 1855 and ran until 1938. *The Field* is a country and sports magazine that began in 1853, and R. S. Surtees, the well-known sporting writer and novelist, was one of its founders. Like *The Saturday Review*, its publication began in the nineteenth century. *The Field* grew to become a respected magazine about country sports. *Country Life*, first issued in 1897, featured stories and pictures about the joys of living in the countryside, and it often depicted sumptuous houses and estates. After referencing these prewar texts, White then mentions three more recent works. A. G. Street, the author of *Farmer’s Glory* – which White repeatedly references in *England Have My Bones* – grew up as the son of a Wiltshire farm laborer, and his book, a memoir, paints a realistic but affectionate picture of agricultural life both before and after the First World War. Adrian Bell, the son of a

newspaper editor, learned to farm in rural Suffolk and wrote a series of three books about the experience, the first of which, *Corduroy* (1930), White mentions later in the text. Again, like Street's autobiographical account, Bell's book is a recent memoir about farming. These publications all explore different aspects of rural life – A. G. Street and Adrian Bell's memoirs discuss the technical aspects of farming, *The Field* looks at hunting and sport, and *Country Life* examines a more opulent side of rural life – but all were a part of the growing literary fabric which imagined life in the countryside of England. One can only speculate as to why White is so opposed to Beverley Nichols, whose book *Down the Garden Path* (1932) is a fictionalized account of Nichols's gardening experiences at his weekend cottage. Perhaps White did not wish to be accused of being a “dabbler,” lacking a true appreciation of the difficulties of rural life, as Nichols was essentially a wealthy Londoner who could afford to create artificial garden paradises both in London and in the country; he combined his provincial nostalgia with “urban high-living” (Harris 2010, 239). One of White's former students, quoted by Warner in her biography, remembered White's aversion to Nichols's nature writing: “When [White] sneered at [. . .] Beverley Nichols and sliced to ribbons a book like *Down the Garden Path* [sic], I sneered too – and naturally failed to take the point that his contempt was a covering for some uneasiness about a parallel that could have been pressed [. . .] between two latecomers to the non-urban scene” (Warner 1967, 65).⁸ Even though White declares his own work inferior to that of these other writers (except, of course, that of Nichols), he simultaneously announces his intention to join them and to write in the same tradition, and he therefore defines his genre for the audience. White designs *England Have My Bones* to engage with an established style of writing about

⁸ During the War, White would continue to think of himself in opposition to the work and opinions of Nichols. He writes to Garnett on 2 December 1941, “I have come to dread the kind of damage which might be done to my book [*The Once and Future King*] by people like Godfrey Wynn or Beverley Nicks [sic], if they chose to hint a slander at my private courage” (Garnett 1968, 103). He cited this as a reason for his attempts to leave Ireland and return to England to contribute to the war effort. For more on White's responses to the Second World War see chapter two.

rural life, a style that both reaches back to Victorianism and adheres to what was current and popular in 1934.

White is so concerned about his place in this modern pastoral tradition that he defines it a second time for the audience. This second set of references to his contemporaries, however, mentions additional texts and has a different tone and outcome. In this second passage on the topic, White writes,

Now that it seems obvious that this book is going to be published, I am sorry that it is superficial. I am doing nothing because it is my living, but only to amuse myself. Read it beside the good books about the good things, *Farmer's Glory*, *Corduroy*, *Morning Tide*, *Three Fevers*, *Cobbett* [sic], and it must be a mockery of the real England. It is a gentleman's book. Even if I learn to plough with horses, as I shall, I shall be ploughing for amusement. (White 1981 [1936], 273)

White had already referenced A. G. Street and Adrian Bell's memoirs in his preface, and here he inserts them again. *Morning Tide* (1931) by Neil Gunn is about fishing life in Scotland and describes the intense pain, hard work, and anxiety that the life required. *Three Fevers* (1932) by Leo Walmsley again recounts the story of a fishing village, this time in Yorkshire. The journalist and author William Cobbett (1763-1835), a favorite of White, is often referenced in *England Have My Bones*. Cobbett's *Rural Rides* (1830) documents early nineteenth-century rural life through the descriptions of Cobbett's journeys through the English Midlands and Southeast. Even though, once again, White claims that his work is inferior to that of these other authors and insists that he fails to capture the "real England" that they manage to portray, his references display his knowledge of the tradition and simultaneously set his own writing apart as something new. His audience is forced to notice that White's book is a combination of these

pursuits: rural commentary like Cobbett, fishing in Scotland like Gunn, nostalgic rusticity, and farming like Street and Bell. These are the lives that White imitates as he tries to build an identity for himself as an individual and as a writer, and although he claims that this non-professional imitation is a disadvantage, he also establishes that his amateurism makes him a kind of modern gentleman. All of the books White mentions here are about professionals who pursue the activities of fishing and farming as a livelihood, often facing possible financial ruin. White is removed from financial necessity and can undertake these activities as recreation.

Valentine Cunningham has observed that *England Have My Bones* has a preoccupation with violence, calling it a “crypto-fascist” text which, he claims, “elevates the killing of small creatures to the status of a *soi-disant* art” and “ends on a craving for violent endings” (Cunningham 1988, 189). Cunningham is correct in observing that White attempts to justify killing by imagining it as an art form, but the subject has more nuance than his analysis indicates. White feels guilt about ending the lives of animals, and after killing two salmon in Scotland, he describes his “qualms”: “Are fish really cold-blooded and more or less impervious to pain? [. . .] It is a bad thought that these lovely silver creatures are brought in, killed by an agony worse than toothache” (White 1936, 28). He considers abandoning fishing altogether, but decides that he enjoys it too much to stop and continues in spite of the guilt. Although he advocates hunting for foxes, he condemns strategies that make it impossible for a fox to escape through cleverness and luck: “I should like to see the digging up of foxes that have got to ground abolished. [. . .] [You] can afford to leave the grounded fox whose strategy has beaten you” (White 1936, 267). White resolves this inner conflict between guilt at an animal’s death and enjoyment of blood sports by developing an aesthetic justification for killing: sports, when practiced in a certain way, require and develop skills. These skills constitute artistic growth, and art, he argues, compensates for the death of the animal. He writes,

Killing is beginning to become clear to me. [. . .] Before, I had been puzzled at liking to kill things, because I am generally more humane than most people: certainly than the warmongers, the flogging magistrates, the snake killers, and most schoolmasters. I cannot remember when I last killed a fly, or a wasp, or a mouse. It is, as I discovered yesterday, a question of art. When it is difficult to kill the thing, when skill and achievement come into it, I find that the killing is worth while. You forget the dead salmon in the ecstasy of creation. (White 1936, 223)

If a kill does not require skill White claims to feel less pleasure and to find the action repulsive. In one passage he recalls his successes from the previous day, all “sitting” shots, or kills that occurred while the animals were stationary. He writes, “My duck, rabbit and hare yesterday not only gave me no pleasure, but also made me feel miserable for them. I felt that I had murdered a live thing” (220). In contrast to these, he says, “To-day’s pheasant, who was crossed off neatly, first barrel, on the wing, did not inspire any feelings of pity at all. It was not a living thing murdered, but a good shot” (220) Of course, the result for the pheasant was death, just as it was for the duck, rabbit, and hare. The difference between these two moments, White decides, is that “one is a concrete assassination of beauty, the other is a creation of beauty – the beautiful aim” (220). By developing his skills, White believes that he has created something aesthetically valuable that compensates for the necessary cruelty.

Cunningham elaborates on his exploration of White’s violence, and observes how the author extends this discussion to encompass worldwide destruction: “White crashes his Bentley and thinks of spinning aeroplanes: he would like his ‘to be a violent death.’ In fact, ‘the best thing’ for the suburbanized world he deplores might just be such an end, ‘a new war, in which, as quickly as possible, two-thirds of the population might be wiped

out' ” (Cunningham 1988, 189). Cunningham implies that White glorifies violence and worldwide collapse, but while the ending of *England Have My Bones* does embrace violence and endings, this attitude is not without nuance. Firstly, the desire for “violent endings” that Cunningham decries connects White with Siegfried Sassoon’s nostalgic narrative of the years leading up to the First World War: *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* (1929). Sassoon’s narrative is explored in much greater detail later in the chapter because it exerted great influence on White as he worked on his own nostalgic, autobiographical account of rural life, but it is useful to briefly consider Sassoon’s work here for the purpose of the discussion of violence. Christine Berberich notes that in *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man*, “what one first took for reminiscences of pastoral dreams can eventually be recognized as a social critique: the horrors of the Great War show the futility of the tranquil pre-war world the book seems to be celebrating, and it thus suggests the impossibility of its future” (Berberich 2007, 51). Berberich argues, “*Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* has a binary vision. On the one hand, we are shown peaceful, rural England, and such quintessential country pursuits as village cricket and foxhunting; on the other, we have Flanders and the trenches.” (Berberich 2007, 53-54). It is possible that White was attempting to create a similar binary vision within his own work: it celebrates the peaceful pastoral ideal of the present while always keeping one eye on the inevitable violence of the future. White predicts that a destructive end for the world is unavoidable, and the current peace is temporary, and so when he himself nearly comes to a violent end in the car crash, it serves as a portent of that future destruction. White’s narrative, unlike Sassoon’s, does not end in the trenches, but the sudden, violent car crash foreshadows the approaching World War.

Furthermore, for White, the end of the urban world presents the chance for a complete return to the rural. At one point White confronts the reader with a beautiful image of nature finally freed from humanity’s pollution:

The incredible swarm of the Wen,⁹ whose money-makers not only scramble over the surface of the nest in buses and on their feet, but also dive into it like maggots and pop up again at the exits of other tube stations [. . .]: all this swarm is impermanent beside the salmon. When London Bridge has tumbled down, and the sewers of the hive have ceased to pollute the waters, there will be salmon opposite the Imperial Chemicals building, but no Imperial Chemicals building opposite the salmon. (White 1936, 7)

This vision is optimistic, even utopian, and imagines the possibility of a return to clean and unblemished nature. If human infrastructure ends, the environment will have the chance to create a future without the self-destructive human race, and a world where nature is supreme might not be as horrible as the alternative: mechanized, desensitized, comfortable urban life. To White, the threat of the end of the world is not as cataclysmic as one might imagine. Rather, the problem is the mechanization of life, which, intending to make living easier, really means that people can live without skill, effort or enjoyment. He writes, “The curse of England is industry, as Cobbett realised. [. . .] We are mechanically introverted, unable to see the world about us, unable to cope with it with our hands, even unable to cope with ourselves” (193). The mechanical world has created a disconnection that not only makes people helpless but also diminishes their attachments to the world around them, and he attempts to bridge this artificial gap in experience with his method of living. White deplores the future world in which he imagines that “England is all a factory” (White 1936, 275). In this world, “the farms, too,

⁹ “The Great Wen” was a disparaging term for London that was coined by William Cobbett. In one example from *Rural Rides* (1830), he writes, “What is to be the fate of the great wen of all? The monster called [. . .] ‘the metropolis of the empire’ ” (Cobbett 2005, 43). A wen originally signified a type of skin cyst.

are milk factories, with two hands milking a hundred cows by machinery" (275).¹⁰ This is the true tragedy – a featureless and skill-less world created by humans for their own comfort, but which therefore denies them the true joy of overcoming struggle and conflict. In this new England, "we shall lose a texture of the countryside, a change of colour and interest. We shall lose rural employment. We shall lose the stubble for partridges, and the farmhouse of *Farmer's Glory*" (275). While White imagines apocalypse as an inevitability, he also envisions it as an opportunity. In this way, the desire for humanity's extinction that Cunningham draws upon must be seen, at least in part, as another manifestation of White's embrace of the pastoral.

Preoccupation with apocalypse and pessimism about humanity's future were common at the time; Samuel Hynes, Valentine Cunningham, Alexandra Harris, and Jed Esty all agree that the fear of a future war that would destroy civilization was the dominant concern of the 1930s. Cunningham writes, "Much of '30s experience and literature is undertaken in an atmosphere of danger, adventure, conflict, and violence programmed by the Great War" (Cunningham 1988, 44), and Hynes asserts that "by 1936, Doomsday had become a commonplace. The form that Doomsday would take was obviously a World War. By 1936, war was a part of ordinary consciousness; it thrust itself into the major literary works of the year" (Hynes 1976, 193). White, who published his exploration of rural life in this pivotal year, explores this concern by centering his book around a preoccupation with apocalypse, violence, danger, and death.

It is important to understand the context of White's discussion of violence and to recognize that White uses this exploration of cruelty to connect himself again to the movement that Harris calls "Romantic Modernism" and Esty labels the "anthropological

¹⁰ This idea appears to be a reference to A. G. Street's *Farmer's Glory* in which Street, struggling to keep his land viable after a crash in the price of corn, turns to milk production and cows. Street writes, "This new idea with regard to milk production was that a cow was a milk factory. If you fed her with the necessary ingredients to produce milk, in addition to a maintenance ration to keep her alive, there was apparently no limit to her capabilities" (Street [1932] 1983, 215). Street learns to his detriment that this is not actually good practice on a dairy farm.

turn.” Several of the writers in the rural tradition that White imitates place a strong emphasis on the violence inherent in rural life, and White draws explicitly on A. G. Street and Neil Gunn in an effort to substantiate and legitimate his theory on killing. In one example, White writes,

Street says somewhere that when he was a boy it was a delight to run down the rabbits which bolted when the corn was being cut, and to kill them with his hands. This, he says, may sound cruel. But of course not. It cannot be easy to run down a loose rabbit. To kill it is an achievement [. . .] an act over-balancing the death of a rabbit. (277)

White uses the work of Street as evidence to substantiate his own hypothesis that killing skillfully is an art form, and he strives to give his own cruelty a context in the rural tradition. In another passage, White writes, “Study, as they do, the humanity of killing a pig quickly, and the art of pig-sticking rises” (White 1936, 267). This sentence may be a reference to *Morning Tide* by Neil Gunn, mentioned elsewhere in *England Have my Bones*, in which Gunn discusses the qualities necessary in a good “pig sticker”: “Not many people could kill pigs. They pretended not to know the way. The knife went right into the throat and out the other side, and the blood ran down off the point of the blade for a long time while the pig kept squealing. [. . .] The knife had to find a vein, they said” (Gunn [1931] 1975, 11).¹¹ White claims that slaughtering pigs is one of the killing “arts,” and Gunn’s description demonstrates that skill must be combined with

¹¹ Gunn and White may both be referring to a pivotal passage in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1896) in which Jude and his young bride Arabella attempt to kill a pig after the official “pig-killer” fails to arrive on time (Hardy [1896] 1975, 86). When Jude acts with compassion and kills the pig quickly, Arabella’s more materialistic perspective recognizes that he has drastically reduced the quality of the meat by failing to properly drain the pig’s blood (87). Hardy describes Jude’s actions as “unworkmanlike” but “mercifully done” (88). Overall, Hardy’s pastoralism, which “both idealizes and records with graphic realism the country life he knew at first hand in Dorset,” likely contributed to the style that White, Gunn, Street, and others embrace (Page 2000, 297).

callousness in order for the action to be effective. Gunn's description of pig killing and Street's account of strangling rabbits show that farming life is unavoidably cruel, and that anyone who wants to embrace a cruelty-free rural life is not aware of necessity or reality. The context of White's discussion of violence is therefore a wider pattern within the pastoral writing of the 1930s. White suggests that in spite of the necessity of killing pests and pigs to protect farming interests, some humane and "sporting" standards are essential to moderate human violence. He expresses these standards in terms of "art", but ultimately they are methods of self-regulation to impose limits on his own violent impulses.

The final, violent events of *England Have My Bones* dwell on the question of whether ease or difficulty, comfort or danger is preferable. In the final pages of the diary White crashes his car at high speed. He describes the crash in detail:

There was, so quick as to be imperceptible, a jolt and leap: I began to break, but there was no time. Then, immediately, I was forced to rise in my seat. There was a noise of grinding and tearing metal, but much more noise in my own head as it struck the windscreen. An overwhelming flash of light, in a blow so cruel, so pitiless, as to make my inner man exclaim reproachfully. The canals of my throat and nose, inside my head, were full of warm black liquid. Silence and deflation.

The night was black. (White 1936, 303)

After the crash, White is blinded in one eye, but later regains his vision. Once recovered, he realizes that the experience has taught him the uselessness of trying to overcome death. He writes, "We plague ourselves with the future, which in the present is all imaginary: all unnecessary. The great man in his pride does not anticipate. Death is one of the things that do not repay anticipation" (305). In spite of his admonition, his book

retains its dual vision on the past and the future, and since White believes that the end of human society is inevitable – as inevitable as the individual’s eventual death – he would prefer that it happen quickly and violently. White claims that he can imagine no other alternative.

Peter Mandler has examined how nostalgic writing about rural England was different before and after the First World War. He writes that prior to the War “the nostalgic literature which is associated with ‘Englishness’ [. . .] is less concerned with solving present-day problems than with hymning a lost Eden, characterised by decent squires, honest craftsmanship and organic community” (Mandler 1997, 167). After the First World War, Mandler writes, “Popular countryside literature [. . .] was not interested in the rural idyll as portrayed in the romantic prewar literature. While appreciative of scenic beauty and its recreational potential, the mass audience was distinctly hostile to the traditional rural social fabric which was thought unpleasantly feudal and anachronistic” (173). In spite of the fact that White was writing after the First World War, hostility to the traditional rural social structure is not a part of his attitude, and indeed he strongly favors the “traditional rural social fabric,” longs to be a legitimate part of it, and imagines himself as a Scottish Laird. He jokes, “When I am the Laird of Craigenkillie, I propose to be a wicked laird. If not eating the children of my tenants [. . .], I shall hunt the tenants themselves across the moors, with black mastiffs” (White 1936, 24). White is not interested in solving the problems of the laboring classes, and he rarely mentions them. Once White observes a man in Scotland who has been deformed by the severity of his working conditions, “twisted into fantastic shapes by excessive labour,” and reflects on “how much happier than he I was, and for no known reason” (31). He briefly considers that communism might be an appropriate response to witnessing such a tragedy, but turns away from this idea because the concept is personally distasteful to him (31). In this brief passage, White dismisses the problem of social inequality in

England and does not address it again. Excited by the idea of generous squires, good old families, and a lost social order in which everyone knew their place, he corresponds to the tendencies that Mandler identifies as prewar preoccupations. In this way *England Have My Bones* references an earlier type of nostalgia, one that was far less liberal in its politics and that was not intended to bring about social change.

The desire to be a modern gentleman, a part of a nostalgically imagined upper class, is, indeed, a major concern of *England Have My Bones*. It is reflected not only in his idealization of hierarchical social structures but also in his embrace of traditionally aristocratic sports like hunting and shooting. In this regard, White's preoccupation with becoming a gentleman is yet another manifestation of Esty's "anthropological turn" that this chapter has already explored. As Christine Berberich notes, "*Gentleman* has come to be appropriated as a symbol for quintessential Englishness" (Berberich 2007, 12, emphasis hers). The "English gentleman" became a trope that was considered unique to its island of origin. Not only the component behaviors – hunting, fishing, etc. – but also the label itself represents a turning inwards towards the things that supposedly made England particular and unique. Furthermore, it was a concept that was rapidly becoming more democratized and accessible. Christine Berberich has described how, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the notion of the gentleman changed from a question of ancestry to a question of behavior: men could theoretically move themselves into a higher stratum of society through manners and comportment (9). Berberich uses the term "self-fashioned" to describe this attempt to become a gentleman through certain behaviors: "A self-fashioned (gentle)man knowingly models himself according to certain behavioral rules" (16). Berberich argues that the self-fashioned gentleman was a concept that authors were experimenting with in the interwar years. She explores how, in particular, Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of George Sherston* can be read as a study on the gentleman in the modern world, and "how a typical young English gentleman of his

time dealt with the horrors of war and their effects on his gentlemanly outlook on life" (12).

This interest in the social hierarchy of the rural world and the desire to become a gentlemanly country squire are two of the many elements of White's work that suggest a debt to another contemporary literary influence: Sassoon. Although White references almost two dozen authors as disparate as Chaucer, D. H. Lawrence, and Samuel Butler, one influence he nowhere acknowledges in the text is Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1929). In spite of this, the structural similarities as well as the subject matter of each book indicate that White drew inspiration from Sassoon, and archival evidence corroborates this supposition. In an undated letter from 1936 to his friend Ronald McNair Scott, with whom he had previously collaborated on the mystery novel *Dead Mr. Nixon* (1931), White wrote, "I have a book called England Have My Bones [sic] coming out next month [. . .]. It is a long serious journal, said to resemble Sassoon's Foxhunting Man [sic], and I expect you will hate it."¹² While this short note to Scott does not mention that White deliberately emulated Sassoon's work in *England Have my Bones*, it does show that White was aware of Sassoon, read him, and noticed the similarities to his own narrative.

Sassoon's work, both in prose and poetry, was of great importance to the myth of pre and post-First World War England, and he remains one of the major literary figures to have emerged from the conflict. His biographer Max Egremont asserts, "What makes him exceptional is that [. . .] he made a lasting version of history as well as a writer's world, reaching beyond literary achievement to a national myth" (Egremont 2006, xi). Egremont goes on to describe how, "more than anyone," Siegfried Sassoon created a vision of the First World War "through his poetry and prose, turning it into one of the most resonant myths of our times" (Egremont 2006, xi). Not only did Sassoon help to

¹² T. H. White, letter to Ronald McNair Scott, no date, folder 9, box 21, MS-4494, HRC.

create the collective conception of the War, but he also devised a vision of prewar Edwardian England. This vision, evoked in *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, is of a rustic, beautiful, peaceful country doomed to be destroyed by the violent upheaval of the First World War. Egremont notes that Sassoon would later call the book “an allegory of an ‘innocent’ generation being shown reality” (Egremont 2006, 295). *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*’s idyllic picture of rural hunting and cricketing life foregrounds this ill-fated innocence by telling the story of George Sherston, a semi-autobiographical proxy for Sassoon, and his journey from the cricket pitch and rural point-to-point races to the trenches of the First World War.

England Have My Bones and *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* have major structural similarities: both are first-person narratives about sport and recreation, both are semi-autobiographical and both focus on the activities of the sportsman persona and ignore the intellectual lives that their authors were living. While the farming, shooting, and rustic elements of *England Have My Bones* reflect Street and Bell, the hunting segments correspond to Sassoon’s more aristocratic view of rural pursuits. Sassoon and White both indulge in a nostalgic look at the past and at antiquated social hierarchies. Michael Thorpe describes *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* as a look back “to an ideal rustic life where everyone was in his place and was, moreover, happy with his place” (Thorpe 1966, 70). White also asserts that everyone who works within the rural system is happy with their position. He claims, “Probably the happiest person on a farm is the labourer, so long as he does his work well” (White 1936, 165). White insists that because the laborer does not own his land, he is free to work and collect a wage, but White ignores the instability of the laborer’s life just as, in a similar way, Sassoon idealizes his character Dixon’s position as a servant in the Sherston household.¹³ In *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, however, there is a subtle nuance to the depiction of the gentleman that is

¹³ For an analysis of how Dixon reinforces gentlemanly ideals and class distinctions for the young Sherston see Berberich (2007), 55–56.

not apparent in White's work, and in Sassoon's text "the horrors of the First World War" make Sherston "realize the limitations of his earlier existence as a country gentleman" (Berberich 2007, 66). Even the most idyllic childhood and youth cannot prepare the young man for the horrible realities of modern war.

Sassoon's book focuses on fox hunting and cricket, and White's book explores shooting, fishing, and darts, but their manner of discussing their chosen sports corresponds. Both sportsmen emphasize acquiring and tending the necessary equipment for each sport, almost fetishizing the material necessities for each activity. In the first few pages of *England Have My Bones*, White prepares for his fishing journey to Scotland. He writes a long list of his preparations, explaining that:

A set of brand new salmon lures, Bulldog and Kessler's Fancy, have been sharpened all over again with a carborundum; thereby making them rather blunter than they were before. A dozen wet-fly casts for trout have been tied in advance: silver march brown, skinnum, butcher. [. . .] Then every fly in the box has to be sharpened, and the eyes cleaned of gut in cases where they were bitten off in a crisis last season. The line has to be dried (it is bone dry already) and greased: the reel has to be taken to bits out of mere restlessness: and of course one has got to practice casts. (White 1936, 9)

White places emphasis on the physical objects, and part of his entertainment is derived from the anticipatory anxiety over the perfection of his equipment.¹⁴ Sassoon portrays this mixture of fuss and pleasure in a similar way in *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*. As Sassoon's alter ego, George Sherston, dresses for a cricket match, a significant proportion of the pre-game tension comes from preparing his pads. He says, "After Breakfast there was no time to be wasted. First of all I had to rummage about for the tin of 'Blanco,' which was nowhere to be found [. . .] unless I could find the tin quickly, there'd never be time for me to 'Blanco' my pads, for they took every so long to dry in the sun" (Sassoon 1972, 49). In both texts, concern over physical readiness is used to illustrate the participant's emotional involvement in the sport. Additionally, in these two passages, the authors use the official names of the products: "Blanco" in Sassoon and "Bulldog and Kessler's Fancy" in White. These names have more meaning for people who understand the sport. Those experienced in fishing for salmon, for example, would be able to visualize the lures White names. This lends a sense of exclusivity to those who can understand and allows specific readers a feeling of affinity and kinship with the author.

The fascination with the material objects associated with the sport and the careful inventory of the proper tools with which to perform the activity are also accompanied by a concern with the proper apparel to be worn. As Berberich notes, "The right clothes were important for acceptance in the ranks of country gentlemen. To keep up appearances, Sherston has his sporting clothes tailor-made in London, and he takes

¹⁴ The preoccupation with physical objects and, in particular, with Victorian craftsmanship, appears elsewhere in White's narrative, and it is perhaps another feature of the "anthropological turn." Elsewhere in the story he warmly praises the construction of a solid Victorian children's toy while decrying the cheap, mass-produced goods of his own day: "An old hobby-horse, turned up in an attic, will sometimes be so real that it is a piece of art, and clamors to be put on show in the hall downstairs. Not so the mass-produced Dobbin of to-day" (White 1936, v). The love of Victoriana was a common interest of many writers of the period, and as Harris notes, "Evelyn Waugh, John Betjeman, John Piper, Kenneth Clark, Edward Bawden and many others, all born in the first few years of the twentieth century, were in a position to be gradually, warily enchanted" with the Victorian period (Harris 2010, 87). White, born into this period, allows himself to be completely enthralled by the apparent fixity of the solid Victorian rocking horse, and recommends it as an antidote to a modernist lack of belonging.

up golf and smoking a pipe; he also has to have more than just one horse” (Berberich 2007, 59). Two aspects of dress are important: style and utility. Sherston, discussing an old pair of hunting boots, says,

Of all the pairs of hunting boots which I have ever owned, the Ashbridge pair remain vividly in my mind as a long way the worst. Judged by the critical standard which I have since acquired, their appearance was despicable. This was equalled by the difficulty of struggling into them, and the discomfort they caused while I wore them [. . .] it wasn't until I had surreptitiously compared them with other boots that I realized their shortcomings. (Sassoon 1972, 89)

Sherston's initial inexperience is juxtaposed with his later expertise through his ability to analyze a pair of boots. This passage is comparable to White's love-note to the “two-snooted bonnet”:

Among other lessons which I have learnt in Scotland, there is the fact that only one hat at present manufactured by the human race is of any use at all [. . .] the deer-stalker or two-snooted bonnet. If you fish in a blizzard for a fortnight, you learn that the back of your neck is more important than your forehead. If you fish in a cap you find that, after a certain pitch of misery has been passed, the cap gets turned back to front. It is better to have a wet face than a wet back. The two-snooted bonnet protects both quarters, besides having two admirable flaps with which it is possible to comfort the ears in a snowstorm. (White 1936, 43–44)

Again, White learns through experience the fitting way to dress for the sport. Sassoon and White emphasize not only the tools of fishing line, flies, and cricket pads, but also

the choice of clothing. In both cases the descriptions overtly serve as a manual for the reader who might want to adopt this particular pursuit, but also covertly provide a badge of rank for the narrator.

Both White and Sassoon focus almost single-mindedly on the sport or the activity that they describe and leave out major parts of their intellectual work and emotional experiences. Sassoon published his early poetry during the years he writes about in *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, and White worked as the head of English at Stowe and as a fiction author in 1934 and 1935. Neither of them give any attention to their artistic work. White mentions his writing only to dismiss it as unimportant and “loveless” in comparison with sport. He writes, “To love England properly it is not sufficient to pursue one’s sports in her [. . .]. You have got to work for her. I do work, a great deal, but in the loveless realms of literature and intelligence. [. . .] Perhaps I ought to be keeping a diary about the writing of novels, instead of devoting it to my unrealities” (White 1936, 274). In Sassoon the exclusion of creative pursuits is more subtle, partly because the creation of the character of George Sherston allows the author to distance himself from the story. White, however, makes explicit the stylistic decision to exclude his writing and draws attention to the limited nature of his narrative. Furthermore, he even denies any emotional attachment to writing and labels it a “loveless” occupation. Both Sassoon and White forswear their literary identities within the pages of books that serve to foster and uphold them. Indeed, White’s decision to omit his teaching career at Stowe completely from *England Have My Bones* is arguably another example of an implied gentlemanly lifestyle. The scholar D. A. L. Morgan quotes a law tract from 1862 to suggest that the definition of “gentleman” at the time was, “a man who has no occupation” (Morgan 1986, 27). White’s teaching career is therefore erased from the story, and the narrator of the account can be assumed to be either independently wealthy or living off of the proceeds of “loveless” writing.

The gentleman identity concerned White for many years before he wrote *England Have my Bones*. While this text was written in 1934 and 1935, White began to construct his ideas about being a gentleman as early as 1931. L. J. Potts, his former tutor at Cambridge, chastised White about his ambition to move up in the world, and White responded in a letter dated 2 February 1931, "I'm sorry that you can't be bothered with my convictions about gentility. It is an absorbing topic. The real gentleman is so easily defined [. . .] He must have been educated at Eton and Christchurch or Magdalen Oxford or Trinity Cambridge and he must have £10,000 a year. No other requirements" (Gallix 1984, 15). White goes on in the same letter to joke that he is deserting his serious work on poetry for the "game" of gentility and snobbery, "one of the best parlour games known to me" (15). The next letter that White sends to Potts again discusses White's efforts to be a gentleman and jokingly implies that White writes in order to fund the expensive "game" of gentility. White tells Potts that *Dead Mr. Nixon*, his first mystery novel, is about to be published, and, thanks to this money, he writes, "I may be able to afford to be a quasi-gentleman eventually after all" (16). He will be using the cash on his holidays from teaching. White tells Potts, "I'm going to Malvern to take a course in Advanced Equitation. This is all directed at gentility. I must try to get in parliament sooner or later, as that is quite one of the recognized short cuts" (16). Starting as early as 1931, therefore, White begins to project a gentleman persona into which he did not feel he was born. *England Have My Bones* can thus be read as a portrait of the gentleman author and a culmination of his private efforts towards acquiring this status.

The ultimate embodiment of the persona created with *England Have My Bones* was delayed until 1938, however, when White met Sassoon in person. This meeting between the two writers occurred in mid-August 1938, but apparently they had encountered one another previously because White's diary at the time records that he had "a standing invitation to visit [Sassoon]" at Heytesbury; however, there is no record

in the archives of how or when Sassoon extended this initial invitation.¹⁵ The August 1938 visit was short, ended in tragedy when one of White's hawks died of heart failure, and did not result in a long-term correspondence between Sassoon and White. However, this meeting occurred at one of the major turning points in White's life. He had just completed *The Sword in the Stone*, and it was on the verge of making him a substantial amount of money. Only about a month prior to his August trip to visit the Sassoons, he received a telephone call from America informing him that the American Book of the Month Club had selected *The Sword in the Stone*, if he was willing to make a few minor alterations. White recorded the event in his diary, writing that he was "faced with two paths, in the one of which I may remain a sort of philosopher without money, in the other of which I may lose philosophy and all occasion for it."¹⁶ He chose to make the alterations. Therefore, this visit occurred just as White received his first major financial windfall and at the moment he began to believe that he was able to sustain his lifestyle without a formal profession.

Along with these major tangible developments in his career, White saw the meeting with Sassoon as a culmination of his ambitions to be a gentleman and a writer, and the author mentions the meeting repeatedly both in his diary and in letters to friends.¹⁷ He wrote to David Garnett of the meeting, "You see, I am moving in *real* circles" (D. Garnett 1968, 31). It was also exciting and stimulating for White as a writer. Clearly star-struck with Sassoon, White recorded their conversations about the creative

¹⁵ T. H. White, diary 1938–1939, 18 Aug. 1938, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6 July 1938.

¹⁷ It is odd, considering the importance that the author himself placed on this meeting and the vast and lasting cultural impact of Sassoon's work that Sylvia Townsend Warner chooses to essentially dismiss the visit and subsequent correspondence in her biography of White. The only reference she makes to it is very brief and largely serves as a means of explaining White's friendship with Sir Sydney Cockerell, whom he met at Heytesbury. She does not choose to quote from the diary passages which describe Sassoon, although she quotes extensively from the diary elsewhere (see Warner 1967, 107).

process in meticulous detail. For example, after dinner on 19 August 1938, White recorded,

Siegfried spoke with vivacity and interest about his own poems, which he says come without conscious artifice. He sits straining to be still, writing with effort but not control for his unconscious to express itself. He would probably not quite agree to this [. . .] description, but I am confident that it is what happens.¹⁸

Sassoon lent White a proof copy of *The Old Century* (1938), the first volume in Sassoon's autobiography (a fact of which he shamelessly bragged to L. J. Potts: "Sassoon's new book will be good. A high-spot chapter is the revisit to a rectory of his holiday childhood, with the war-memorial lych-gate new" [Gallix 1984, 91]), and twenty-four hours later White had finished it. In his diary he wrote, "Finished reading *The Old Century* [sic], which Siegfried lent me last night. The bit about the re-visit to the Norfolk rectory is the best."¹⁹ For White this seemed an unparalleled creative opportunity. He was reading the autobiography of the author who had inspired his own autobiographical work only a few years earlier. The visit marked a moment when White could both believe in his own financial success and feel a part of the writing community that he had attempted to access with *England Have My Bones*. The moment would not last long, as the War soon cut both financial security and social connections short, but for about a week in August 1938, White felt that he was joining his ideal literary community.

The manner in which White discusses his meeting with Sassoon is intriguing. He wrote at least four different accounts of the meeting and each varies considerably not only in tone, but also in the details of how events occurred. In his letters to David

¹⁸ T. H. White, diary 1938–1939, 19 Aug. 1938, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 Aug. 1938.

Garnett, White presents the meeting as thrilling, even life-defining, but pure chance. However, his diaries imply a premeditated encounter, rather than an accidental meeting. He wrote to Garnett, "I have fallen on my feet at Heytesbury. Siegfried Sassoon (I came here quite by chance, forgetting his address) is most charming and important and beautiful, and the greatest living falconer is next door [. . .]. I have been invited to spend a night with Sir S. Cockerill [sic] (also a darling) in Kew on Thursday 25th" (D. Garnett 1968, 30). He invited Garnett to join him and "bask in Siegfried Sassoon" because, he says, "You wont [sic] again get another chance of bagging S. Sassoon and Major Allen (the falconer) in one village" (30–31). Failing to contain his enthusiasm, he goes on, commenting about "moving in *real* circles" and finishing the letter with "I find it is *very* nice to meet humane people" (31). White's tone is excited to the point of glee, and his self-interest and his desire to self-promote are clear.

White also sent an account of the meeting to L. J. Potts, but to Potts the situation comes across as more mundane, and White portrays the encounter as casual. He says, "I met [Sir Sydney Cockerell] at Sassoon's in Wiltshire and fell in love with him at once" (Gallix 1984, 90). This casual tone is different from the talk of "bagging" new acquaintances and "*real* circles," although surely Potts would have known that calling at "Sassoon's in Wiltshire" was not a commonplace experience for White. The author describes Sassoon in greater detail to Potts, but takes care not to sound over impressed: "He is a queer, good man. He looks 30. Is 52. A noble, red-indian face. Very nervous and a bit selfish" (91). He cuts off his own descriptions here, writing, "But enough, or too much" (91). In his description to Potts he keeps his enthusiasm in check and stops his descriptions before they become too effusive, and one might speculate that this was because the mentor had previously expressed disapproval of his young student's attempts to gain recognition as a gentleman.

Even in his private diary, White made edits to the text to make it look as if the meeting with Sassoon was more of a chance encounter than it actually was. The 1938–1939 diary consists of handwritten pages in pencil with typewritten copies taped or stapled over the handwritten diary entries. The typed copies appear to have been made at a later date, and it seems likely that White intended to publish the diary using these typed pages. In general, the typewritten copies are the same as the original diary beneath them, and when changes are apparent they are often small and merely grammatical. However, in the instance of this visit, White made major changes to the substance of the diary, leaving out sections describing Sassoon, changing the order of events, and adding observations. One of the major alterations is the description of his arrival at the writer’s home. For example, regarding the decision to stay near Heytesbury, the typed copy, which was written several years later, reads, “I thought I remembered that Siegfried Sassoon lived at Heytesbury, and he once asked me to visit him. So we went, wondering if it was the place.”²⁰ However, in the written diary, recorded at the time, there is no uncertainty. White wrote, “I happened to know that Siegfried Sassoon lived at Heytesbury, and to have a standing invitation to visit him there. So we went.”²¹ In the former, White implies that visiting Sassoon was a complete accident. However, in the latter, his original diary, he says that he knows Sassoon lives there and travels to the neighborhood with the intent to meet with him. The letter to Garnett, the letter to Potts, the original diary description, and the later, modified diary constitute four different accounts of the encounter and show how concerned White was with controlling the representation of his relationship with Sassoon. One conclusion is that, given time to reflect, White wanted to appear less impressed and eager than he was. This impression is sustained in a further change White makes regarding Hester

²⁰ Ibid., 18 Aug. 1938.

²¹ Ibid.

Sassoon, Siegfried Sassoon's wife. Originally when he describes her he writes merely, "Mrs. Sassoon is a charmer."²² In the typed version he later adds, "She is a fine, clever, kind woman who cheerfully devotes her life towards being a buffer between Siegfried and the world."²³ Again, it seems likely that this change contributes to White's implied closeness to the family. The typed version suggests that he is in a position to know about and comment on the family and their relationships to one another rather than just offer his personal first impressions of them.

In his original diary, his intense excitement over meeting this important fellow writer takes over his account. Discussions of Sassoon as a person fill several pages. A day after his arrival, White writes, "Lunched yesterday with Siegfried Sassoon. We sat down, Mrs. Sassoon, Siegfried, Sir Sydney Cockerell, Ralph [sic] Hodgson, myself. It was fascinating to be in this company [. . .]. All of them were charmers." Later in the day he continued the account and wrote, "This evening I dined at the Sassoons [sic]: a beautiful, noble evening, but I made myself come away at 11:30 for fear of exhausting such a crucial contact."²⁴ Again, we can see that he is thinking of his own social position: that he wants to solidify the relationship, but that he is afraid of intruding or being too overbearing. However calm he managed to appear in person, his diary betrays his excitement, and he continues with an even longer description of the poet:

He is a man of the future: I mean, he is living before his time [. . .]. A tall man of good physique and very quick nervous movements and speech, like a blood horse, he has the stoic face of the Red Indian. But it has noble and rapid expression. He gestures with his hands in the hopeless effort to divulge the

²² Ibid., 21 Aug. 1938.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 19 Aug. 1938.

vivacity of the feelings he is trying to put in words, and he does not for many hours after the first acquaintance actually meet your eyes. This is partly his shyness (it seems a silly word to use) and partly the patient approach of the falconer to the falcon. He does not want to meet people's eyes who are boring or distressing him, for fear that such people will be hurt by detecting in *his* eyes the boredom and distress which his vocal manner effectively conceals. [. . .] But when you are not hurting him, he will look you in the eyes.²⁵

Every encounter seems to breed more adulation and more extreme descriptions of Sassoon. Everything the poet does is recorded as an instance in his favor, a sign of his interest or merit until White's excitement borders on adulation. Even the lack of eye contact is not a defect, but a sign of Sassoon's deep and sensitive nature.

The end of the visit was sudden. After a few days with the Sassoons, White's hawk, Red, died of heart failure. White was devastated, writing, "She was a perfect creature – every feather perfect and her beautiful heart full of energy and determination and intelligence. It sounds mad to be so fond of a bird."²⁶ Major Allen, the hawking expert, assured him that it was not his fault, but White took the death personally, and the next entry does not appear until several weeks later. On 10th September 1938, White wrote, "It must be the tenth of September, and Europe ever again on the brink of war. I was so down-driven by Red's death that I left Wiltshire the next day, and loosed Black a week later."²⁷ On top of Red's death and the threat of war, White was worried about the sales of *The Sword in the Stone*. He tried to console himself with the good reviews that it was receiving: "David Garnett gave it his whole page in *The Statesman*,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 10 Sept. 1938.

²⁷ Ibid.

and Ralph Strauss put it at the head of his column in *The Sunday Times*.²⁸ Still, he was worried that sales would be low. He writes, “It would have sold, and should have sold, and still may do slowly: but Collins picked on the worst publishing month of the year, and this war scare is on, as I said.”²⁹ The moment of certainty was over, and the War had made him begin to question his own position. A conversation at Sassoon’s home had clearly festered in his mind. He records, “Hester Sassoon told me that Aldous Huxley had taken his family and run away to America. This affected me disagreeably [sic]. What to do in the war? Well, it doesn’t much matter. But one can’t entirely run away.”³⁰ The context and tone in which Hester made these remarks is not clear, but from White’s attitude and the term “run away” it is possible to conclude that she expressed displeasure at Huxley’s decision. White, who had previously been determined to run away as well, now began to question his choices. One literary ideal, Huxley, had been set against another, Sassoon. With initial English sales of *The Sword and the Stone* lower than he had hoped, his financial future was no longer quite as clear, and his literary place was no longer as assured as it had seemed at Heytesbury.

Still, the relationship between White and Sassoon remained cordial in the months after their initial meeting. During the Munich crisis, White asked Sassoon for advice about whether or not to enlist in the War. Sassoon wrote back on the 27th September 1938: “The only way to be helpful in this emergency is to remain as calm as a rock and to *keep still*.”³¹ White took his advice and remained uncommitted, a decision that would shape the rest of his life.³² After taking more time to develop the acquaintance, White appears to have become less afraid to pass judgment on Sassoon,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Siegfried Loraine Sassoon, letter to T. H. White, 27 Sept. 1938, folder 8, box 22, MS-4494, HRC.

³² See chapter two.

since his diary includes an entry describing a discussion with Sir Sydney Cockerell about Sassoon's supposed selfishness:

I revised my opinion of Siegfried last weekend, after talking to Sidney [sic] Cockerell about him. Sidney said: "Yes, he neurotic [sic]. You might call it selfish. But you must remember how terribly he was shot to pieces in the war, no man more heroically so, and make allowances for that. You dont [sic] understand." He was quite right. I read *The Infantry Officer* [sic] again yesterday, and was so moved that I sent him a copy of my new book (out last weekend – it is a dull thing called *Burke's Steerage* [sic]) not because I wanted him to read it, but as a tribute from my heart. It was a question of wanting to send a present.³³

Even though White asserts that he is critical of Sassoon, he is easily converted back to admiration. A few days later, Sassoon, in the style of a mentor, wrote White a letter about *Burke's Steerage* (1938) and *The Sword in the Stone* (1938). Sassoon's tone is kind, and, if his praise of White's style is measured, it gives the author thoughtful advice about improvement. Sassoon's letter begins,

Dear THW. What an exuberant cove – or card – you are! I have just read as far as p. 31,³⁴ and feel infectiously inclined to dash off a rollicking jollification of a letter, full of linguistic larkings. I think your high spirits in literary output are quite all right. And you are being absurd when you assert that you "can't write." But you are a difficult writer to prophesy about, because one can't know how much staying power you've got. *The Sword in the Stone* is a brilliant lark, with a lot of

³³ T. H. White, diary 1938–1939, 2 Dec. 1938, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

³⁴ Presumably Sassoon is here referring to *Burke's Steerage*, although it is not clear.

beauty in it and a lot of accurate observation and unpedantic knowledge. Your lively way of writing is natural to you. But I suggest that you need to be careful lest your fluency gets the better of you. At present one reads you at speed, carried along by your enjoyable gusto. It is great fun, and you can be brilliantly funny at times and richly facetious. I hope, however, some day, to read a book of yours which will compel me to read slowly. [. . .] It all depends on the tone of voice, of course. My prose is someone talking almost too deliberately – thinking aloud, as it were. You are young and voluble – and most of your recent work suits the style.³⁵

White was so delighted with this letter that he pasted it into his journal the day he received it. This letter, presumably a response to White sending Sassoon a copy of *Burke's Steerage* a few days earlier, shows that their relationship continued to be collaborative and creatively productive for White many months after the initial meeting. Additionally, nearly a year later, White was surprised and delighted to receive a book from Sassoon. On the 23rd of October 1939 he wrote in his diary, "Siegfried Sassoon sent me a present of Rhymed Ruminations [sic] today, one copy out of the 75 he has printed of it. It was a blessing which I cant [sic] write of ~~today~~, because for several hours I have feared I am going mad." He goes on to write about the War for a page and a half, first in prose and then in poetry, finally ending the entry with the note that the difficult day "has been better for Siegfried."³⁶ Clearly, therefore, the relationship between Sassoon and White was cordial, although it seems likely that the younger man placed more importance on it. However, after this point, the acquaintance appears to have been

³⁵ Siegfried Loraine Sassoon, letter to T. H. White, 1 Dec. 1938, in diary 1938-1939, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

³⁶ T. H. White, diary 1939-1941, 23 Oct. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

dropped and there is no further evidence of correspondence between them until 1951.³⁷ Perhaps the War made communication difficult, or perhaps White or Sassoon allowed the correspondence to fade. By that point, White was in Ireland and had moved on to a new passion and begun investigating a new identity: the Irish bard.³⁸

White would try on many different guises and identities during his literary career, but it appears that he never committed as deeply to any of them as he did to the identity of the sporting gentleman. *England Have My Bones* can be read as a culmination of this personal ambition and an attempt to turn the ideas from the books he was reading into a livable model. *England Have My Bones* has its failings as a text; White's digressions and preaching strain the reader's patience at times, but in many ways it succeeded at its goal. It embraces the modes and tropes of a generation of writers who were exploring rural concerns in the 1930s, but it does so in a way that makes the text and its ideas unique to White. Of all his early work it was, perhaps, his most personal story and his most revealing narrative.

When his fears of a second world conflict came to pass, White turned to another literary community to offer himself a physical and psychological refuge from the violence and danger of war. His work steps back from its investment in representing a personal ideal of Englishness, which is so pronounced in *England Have My Bones*, because his absence from the war effort came to require a different personal ideal and a separate literary community. The following three chapters explore the author's responses to the global conflict and investigate his decision to remain in neutral Ireland for the duration of the Second World War. The impact that his choice had on his writing,

³⁷ No further correspondence survives in the HRC until March 1951 when White writes to Sassoon regarding the inclusion of one of his poems in *The Goshawk* (1951). (See Siegfried Loraine Sassoon, letter to T. H. White, Mar. 1951, folder 8, box 22, MS-4494, HRC).

³⁸ This interest of White's is explored further in chapters three and four.

both fiction and non-fiction, has not hitherto been explored, and yet the author's time in Ireland was both emotionally fraught and creatively productive.

Chapter 2

A “duty to get away”: Pacifism, Neutral Ireland, and *The Once and Future King*

The Once and Future King, T. H. White’s most popular and acclaimed work of fiction, went through many drafts from the initial publication of *The Sword in the Stone* in 1938 to the epic’s final appearance in a single volume in 1958. The author continued to refine the text’s message throughout the two intervening decades and its variable nature displays White’s changing preoccupations and politics; it is therefore possible to prove that White developed the text’s now-prominent anti-war themes while living in neutral Ireland during the Second World War. This chapter explores how White arrived in Ireland, the reasoning behind his choice to flee the War, and the author’s interpretation of contemporary pacifism. It explores how two major alterations – the pacifist message and the exploration of contemporary biology – occurred over the course of the War and how White’s experiences and reading contributed to their development. The following two chapters use the complex drafting and publication history of *The Once and Future King* alongside White’s letters and journals to investigate the author’s prewar and wartime politics; critical speculation that he was a wartime spy (Wills 2007, 169–170); his life in Ireland; his extensive reading in Irish fiction, history, archaeology, and politics; and the impact of these factors on his epic. This chapter also examines his interest modern entomology and biology, his conviction that these theories could be mobilized to explain modern warfare, and his use of the work of Julian and Aldous Huxley. I will suggest that the author’s wartime convictions generated the work’s pacifist politics, and, likewise, that White’s scholarly enthusiasms as a non-combatant in neutral Ireland prompted his inclusion of such disparate fields as Irish mythology and ant biology. The following two chapters are an original reading of *The Once and Future*

King as previous scholarship has hitherto ignored the vast, critical importance of Ireland to White's epic.

The complex publication history of this text produced numerous published versions and drafts¹ that can be used to study the developing politics and political emphases of the work. White's Arthurian saga, which modern readers now encounter in a single volume, *The Once and Future King*, was not originally conceived of or published in this fashion.² *The Sword in the Stone* (1938) was the first book White wrote on King Arthur; it was not intended as the opening of a series, but its financial and critical success prompted Collins, the publisher, to offer White a contract for three additional books. Even *The Sword in the Stone* had two different versions published: in order for the novel to be considered for The Book of the Month Club in the United States, White had to alter several passages that were thought to be inappropriate for an American

¹ An attempt to enumerate them must include six published versions of the first three component books, one omnibus of four books, one posthumously published fifth book, and, in the HRC, at least two drafts or edited typescripts for each of the five component books. This gives a total of at least eighteen available versions of the texts. This count does not include extensive notes and character sketches that appear in White's diaries and notebooks.

² The publication history was long and complex. The following brief summary attempts to clarify it by providing the relevant dates. In June 1938 White heard from the American Book of the Month Club that they would select his text if he changed three chapters for the American audience. In August 1938 Collins published the original version of *The Sword in the Stone* in England, and Putnam published the altered version in America. In October 1939 Putnam published *The Witch in the Wood* in the United States, and in April 1940 Collins published an edited version of the same novel in England. The end of 1940 saw the publication of *The Ill-Made Knight* in New York by Putnam, and in early 1941 Collins published it in London. In the summer of 1941 White wrote *The Candle in the Wind* and *The Book of Merlyn*. In autumn of the same year White rewrote *The Witch in the Wood* and re-titled it *The Queen of Air and Darkness*. It was late 1941 when White submitted *The Candle in the Wind*, *The Book of Merlyn* and the three rewritten earlier volumes to Collins. In early 1942 Collins rejected White's manuscript, and White began acrimonious negotiations for an alternate publisher. It was not until 1958 that Collins published the first four books of the series as a single volume, *The Once and Future King*. In this version, the one with which most audiences are now familiar, segments from *The Book of Merlyn* were transposed into *The Sword in the Stone*. White's previous rewrites of *The Sword in the Stone*, *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, and *The Ill-Made Knight* were included, but the fifth book, aside from the passages included in *The Sword in the Stone*, was not published. Finally, in 1977, *The Book of Merlyn* was published in Austin, Texas by the University of Texas Press.

audience.³ The American version therefore contains several episodes that did not appear in the British version, but that later appeared in *The Once and Future King*. As *The Sword in the Stone* made its successful debut to the English and American markets in August 1938, White turned his attention to *The Witch in the Wood*, the second book in what was now to be a series. This second book gave White immense trouble and went through over four rewrites before and after its initial publication. Putnam published *The Witch in the Wood* in the United States in late 1939, and Collins published the British version in early 1940, but White continued to feel dissatisfied, and he attempted to rewrite it several times. It at last appeared in its final form in 1958, substantially altered and under the title *The Queen of Air and Darkness*. Likewise, *The Ill-Made Knight*, the third book in the series, which focused on the building of the round table, the Grail quest, and the relationship between Queen Guenever and Lancelot, appeared first in the United States in late 1940, and then in England in 1941. White found this third book less troublesome, and it went through fewer changes after its first publication. The final book in the series, *The Candle in the Wind*, White first conceived as a stage play, but later rewrote into the prose conclusion to the epic that appeared in 1958.

During the summer and early fall of 1941, White, spurred by the desire to write a book about war, redrafted *The Candle in the Wind* and composed a hitherto unplanned fifth book, *The Book of Merlyn*. At this time he also began a major redraft of *The Witch in the Wood*, changed its title to *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, and also made changes to *The Sword in the Stone* and *The Ill-Made Knight* that he believed helped them to match the message of his final two books. In late 1941 White sent *The Candle in the Wind*, *The Book of Merlyn* and the redrafts of the previous three books to Collins for proofing, and

³ White received the news of the Book of the Month Club's acceptance in June 1938. He describes the phone call with America that, he wrote, offered him "two paths, in the one of which I may remain a sort of philosopher without money, in the other of which I may lose philosophy and all occasion for it" (T. H. White, diary 1938-1939, 6 June 1938, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC). For a detailed description of the differences between the American and British editions of *The Sword in the Stone* see Elisabeth Brewer's *T. H. White's The Once and Future King* (1993), 33-40.

he simultaneously insisted that Collins republish the altered versions of the first three books in an omnibus with the final two. Collins, however, objected to the paper requirements for reprinting the three previously published books, and rejected much of the content of the fifth and final book, *The Book of Merlyn*. The wartime paper shortage was a major difficulty for the publishing industry and meant not only “a reduction in the total number of books published, but as a proportion of that total [. . .] a considerable drop in the number of novels published” (Mengham 2009, 26), and even in 1946 “publishers were reduced to 10 per cent of the paper they had used in 1939” (Edwards 2007, 82). White, however, refused to accept the paper shortage as an adequate excuse⁴ and objected to his publisher’s criticism of the fifth book. Collins and the author embarked on a hostile battle. In early 1942, after a long and acrimonious struggle between the two, Collins refused to publish White’s current version of *The Once and Future King*, and White left for the publishing house of Jonathan Cape.⁵ Although the modern reader encounters *The Once and Future King* as a cohesive single volume – sometimes with *The Book of Merlyn* appended to the original narrative (see White [1958, 1977] 2013) – it did not begin in that way, and the series’ components experienced constant review, revision, and expansion even after their publication. The book was modified by changing economics and the demands of popularity along with the author’s developing circumstances, politics, and personal interests.

⁴ In the second letter of his increasingly rude and combative discussion with Billy Collins about *The Once and Future King*, White writes, “I do not fully understand the paper shortage. If you had been intending to publish, say, ten other books besides, in a given period, could you not make up the paper by publishing only nine others? You publish much too much nonsense anyway, and it will do no harm to stem some of it in the interests of a good book. Or could you not use smaller print than your famous ‘FONTANA?’ Or print on thinner paper? Or both?” (T. H. White, letter to William “Billy” Collins, 8 Dec. 1941, in *Trouble With Collins*, folder 5, box 19, MS-4494, HRC). Collins responds to this criticism in a letter from 29 June 1942: “Practically every book we publish goes out of print all too quickly, and we could sell three to four times as many copies as we have paper to print, so it is a real problem when a book comes along, like yours, the length of four ordinary-sized novels” (William “Billy” Collins, letter to T. H. White, 29 June 1942, in *Trouble With Collins*, folder 5, box 19, MS-4494, HRC).

⁵ Warner describes the arrangements, and writes, “In the end, the two publishers arranged a partition. Collins kept the three Arthur volumes they had already issued and did not press for the final completion of the contract. Cape added White to their list of authors and published his subsequent books – but not the fourth and fifth Arthurs, which were felt unsuited to stand by themselves” (Warner 1967, 189).

In order to grasp the alterations that took place in the text between the charming childhood fantasy tale of 1938 and the unpublishable political treatise of 1942, it is necessary to examine White's changing relationship to worldwide events during this period. The Second World War profoundly affected White, and his reactions to the conflict were both emotional and inconsistent. From the first indications that another European war was imminent, White struggled to decide what his role ought to be in the conflict, and in his letters and journals he debated his options and their relative moral legitimacy. His initial instinct was to avoid the War by leaving England, and, knowing that this decision would expose him to criticism, in early 1938 he wrote, with the intention of publication, a justification of his proposed emigration. His 1938–1939 journal begins, "I must call this book an Explanation. It is an explanation to our suffering race, saying why I and some other loving men ran away from war – if we can accumulate enough money and if we can accumulate the courage to run away, before the war breaks out. [. . .] We shall be mocked as we run. [. . .] But it is our duty to get away; or at least I think so."⁶ Here White apparently espouses attitudes associated with political pacifism, and Sylvia Townsend Warner has interpreted this entry "in the nature of expostulations" and claims that it demonstrates White's "wishful socialism" (Warner 1967, 101); however, with his intense prewar political and social conservatism and his postwar mistrust of what he termed the "Fare-well State,"⁷ it is difficult to conceive of even "wishful" socialism as a part of White's outlook. Rather, the passage demonstrates

⁶ T. H. White, diary 1938–1939, 1 Apr. 1938, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC. White edited this entry. Originally the text used the singular first person pronoun: "I call this book an Explanation. It is an explanation to my suffering race saying why I ran away from war – if I can accumulate enough money to run away, before the war breaks out." By changing from the plural pronoun "we" and adding the reference to courage, White makes his decision a collective one, perhaps in an attempt to add legitimacy to his choice.

⁷ This was a favorite phrase of White's after the War. For examples see his letter to Mary Potts from 11 January 1953 (Gallix 1984, 225) or his review in the Times Literary Supplement of Winston Churchill's *The New World*, "Sir Winston's Elephant" (White 1956c). The phrase also appears repeatedly in his diaries after 1957 (for one example among many see T. H. White, diary, volume 2, 10 June 1957, T. H. White Papers, Queens College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge]).

premeditation in White's eventual departure for Ireland, early apprehension about his peers' reception of this decision, and an attempt to mitigate this reception through a piece of writing.

Nevertheless, six months after writing his "Explanation" he was persuaded to alter his resolution. When he visited the Sassoon household in late August 1938, White encountered in Siegfried Sassoon a much-admired literary hero and a symbol of anti-war literature. One diary entry from the visit reads, "Hester Sassoon told me that Aldous Huxley had taken his family and run away to America.⁸ This affected me disagreeably [sic]. What to do in the war? Well, it doesn't much matter. But one can't entirely run away."⁹ His reaction suggests that Hester expressed strong disapproval at Huxley's decision, and just two days later, White writes, "I have decided that, although I have enough money in the bank, it will be impossible to flee to America, like Aldous Huxley."¹⁰ In the margin he inserts a further comment: "Six months ago I said I would run away from war, if I could accumulate enough money to flee the country. Well, I have accumulated it, but cannot flee."¹¹ A straightforward conclusion is that the conversation with the Sassoons and the example of Huxley encouraged White to reconsider his own determination that it was his "duty to get away." One admired literary model was set in opposition to another, and it is no surprise that the conflict between their wartime philosophies affected White.

⁸ Aldous Huxley sailed for New York on 7 April 1937 and then toured across the United States to give lectures on pacifism (see Bedford [1973, 331-341] for a discussion of the family's motivations and preparations for departure). His choice to remain in America was widely discussed and condemned. For example, Harold Nicolson records in his diary that at a dinner on 2 Apr. 1940 he, the director of the film division of the Ministry of Information Kenneth Clark, the author Willie Maugham, Mrs. Winston Churchill, and the actor Leslie Howard discussed Huxley's emigration. He writes, "We all regret bitterly that people like Aldous Huxley, Auden and Isherwood should have absented themselves. They want me to write a *Spectator* article attacking them. That is all very well, but it would lose me the friendship of three people whom I much admire" (H. Nicolson 1967, 65).

⁹ T. H. White, diary 1938-1939, 10 Sept. 1938, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12 Sept. 1938.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

In the short term, this resolution to remain in England held, and a few weeks later, during the Munich crisis, White wrote to David Garnett, Siegfried Sassoon, Sir Sydney Cockerell, and others, asking them what he should do in the War, if they could think of any useful employment for him, or if he should enlist. His friends' replies insisted that enlisting would be wasteful and that more useful occupations, relevant to his talents, could be found. As quoted in chapter one, Sassoon responds on 27 September 1938, "The only way to be helpful in this emergency is to remain as calm as a rock and to *keep still*."¹² In this moment of crisis, the key members of White's literary circle all concurred that enlisting in the War would waste White's skills and that meaningful contributions could be made in ways that used his writing ability.

Once again, however, White vacillated. In spite of his letters declaring his decision to participate, White arrived in Ireland only a few months later with the intention of remaining outside of England to avoid the conflict. The opportunity to leave occurred when David Garnett and his wife Ray invited White to join them on a fishing vacation that was planned for February 1939. About a month before they were to leave, White wrote to David Garnett describing his preparations for departure and expressing his desire to escape the War: "If only I can get out of this doomed country before the crash, I shall be happy. Two years of worry on this subject have convinced me that I had better run for my life, and have a certain right to do so. I may just as well do this as shoot myself on the outbreak of hostilities. I dont [sic] like war, I dont [sic] want war, and I didnt [sic] start it" (D. Garnett 1968, 169-170). Sylvia Townsend Warner has represented White's decision to visit and subsequently remain in Ireland as coincidental and impulsive. She writes that on their fishing holiday,

¹² Siegfried Loraine Sassoon, letter to T. H. White, 27 Sept. 1938, folder 8, box 22, MS-4494, HRC.

White failed to get a fish. Mettled by this, he decided to stay on until he had caught a great many fish [. . .] and in the intervals of fishing he would finish *The Witch in the Wood*. He supposed it would be a matter of a fortnight or so. Ray Garnett walked across a couple of fields to a farmhouse. It was called Doolistown, the owners were called McDonagh, they would be pleased to take a lodger. (Warner 1967, 118)

However, both White's letter to David Garnett in January and his prior agonizing in his diary demonstrate that he was making a conscious decision to leave England in order to escape the oncoming conflict. White's pacifist philosophy, personal fear of war, deep patriotism, and fear of judgment remained at variance for the duration of the War and shaped his entire wartime experience along with *The Once and Future King*.

Although White's decisions in 1938 and 1939 appear inconsistent and self-contradictory, one element remains unchanged throughout: all of White's choices about the War place importance on the opinions of his literary community. Another consistent – although not entirely unchangeable – aspect in White's thinking is his belief that he can best contribute to the war effort through writing. Repeatedly in his letters and diary White insists that *The Once and Future King* takes precedence over active service and, indeed, that the book offers a more substantial contribution than any other work he could do. In one representative example, White writes to L. J. Potts on 21 August 1939, "Until I have the work completed I am afraid I shall be too busy to fight. It will be peculiar to have to tell the Examiners in Conscientious Objection that No, I am not a conscientious objector, but at the moment I am too busy, but I will come as soon as I can"

(Gallix 1984, 106).¹³ From the first, White expressed the belief that his writing would be his most substantial contribution to the war effort. Eighteen months before the declaration of war, White dug an air-raid shelter at his cottage in Stowe Ridings, and, meditating on the oncoming threat of war, he wrote, “The human brain can be unmade so quickly, and it takes so long to make a book out of the brain that I must [. . .] begin to write, in order that, when the whiff of murder comes stealing, something may be left behind.”¹⁴ Repeatedly and with increasing vehemence as the War worsened, White argued that his greatest deed for the good of humanity would be to remain outside of the conflict and complete *The Once and Future King*. He argued that he would not be helpful in any material sense to the war effort, but that his book was a means of creating civilization: “I myself at 33, consumptive and busy about the creation of civilisation instead of its defence, no longer feel any pressing necessity to help with it [the Second World War]. How can I help, in any way comparable with my ability to write about Arthur?”¹⁵ Although he would return to this question repeatedly and with varying levels of certainty throughout the War, he maintained his belief that his book would be his most substantial method of assisting.

The conviction that writing could qualify as a valuable contribution to the War was common in some literary circles. In the 1930s, Samuel Hynes argues, poets believed that rhetoric “could lead a nation to a cruel and stupid war [the First World War],” and also “might keep it out of the next one” (Hynes 1976, 24). They believed that “poetry might alter action in [. . .] a fundamental way” (24). This belief continued in some circles

¹³ Graham Greene made a similar response when called upon to serve early in the War. The Emergency Reserve interviewed Greene in the winter of 1939, and Greene describes in *Ways of Escape* how his announcement that he wanted to join the Infantry pleased the board to such an extent that, Greene writes, “I thought I could safely make a small request. I only needed a few more months to complete *The Power and the Glory*. Could my call-up be postponed for those few months?” (Greene 1982, 70). According to Greene, the board agreed to his request (70).

¹⁴ T. H. White, diary 1938–1939, 31 Mar. 1938, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

¹⁵ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 20 Oct. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

even as violence became more certain. A 1941 article in the journal *Horizon*, entitled “Why not War Writers?” insists, “The rôle of writers to-day, when every free nation and every free man and woman is threatened by the Nazi war-machine, is a matter of supreme importance” (Calder-Marshall et al. 1941, 236). It suggests, “Creative writers should be used to interpret the war world so that cultural unity is re-established and war effort emotionally co-ordinated” (238). However, in the current atmosphere, “writer after writer is called up, or seeing no possibility of using his special talents in the interest of his country, has volunteered for war service” (237). The solution that the article proposes is “the formation of an official group of war writers” (238). The article was signed by many prominent literary figures of the day: Arthur Calder-Marshall, Cyril Connolly, Bonamy Dobrée, Tom Harrisson, Arthur Koestler, Alun Lewis, George Orwell, and Stephen Spender (239).¹⁶ Graham Greene, although never an advocate of pacifism, also felt that writers could contribute in a unique fashion, and, while working at the Ministry of Information in the early years of the War, proposed “a scheme for official writers to the Forces, equivalent to the war artists” (Fiegel 2014, 27).¹⁷ In the late 1930s and during the early years of the War, White may have felt, therefore, that he was a part of a group of intellectuals taking a stand against warfare through literature. His colleagues’ replies to his letters during the Munich crisis confirmed that in that moment of crisis the key members of his small literary circle agreed that fighting in the War was unnecessary and that contributions could be made in other ways.

The archives show that White sought and received encouragement from fellow writers on the validity of this path a second time. His diary records a conversation with

¹⁶ This attitude about the importance of literature in wartime may be particularly prominent in writers who, like White, sought to appeal to and educate a younger audience. Orwell, who publicly debated the moral impact of boys’ school stories early in the War, went on to publish *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949) after the War “in the assumption that they would influence adolescent minds” (Edwards 2007, 8).

¹⁷ Evelyn Waugh recorded Greene’s scheme in his diary on 28 May 1940, “Went to Ministry of Information where Graham Greene propounded a scheme for official writers to the Forces and himself wanted to become a Marine” (Waugh 1976, 470).

David and Ray Garnett that occurred in October 1938. White describes how he, Ray, and David

talked a great deal about the crisis which had just passed over Europe, and what we were to do about it. Ray [. . .] said that we must spend our time writing [. . .] She said almost anybody could be taught to stick bayonets into people, but it took much longer to teach the rules of grammar. So we decided that we would try to help with our pens, while there was time.¹⁸

In early 1939 the members of White's creative community seemed to agree that writing was the best way to participate in the war effort without sacrificing either their principles or their lives, and White may have drawn comfort from the knowledge that Garnett, although he was in his early twenties when the First World War began, had chosen to work first for the Friends Relief Mission in France – a Quaker pacifist organization which participated in no work “which might be construed as validating or supporting war” (Knights 2015, 95) – and later on the land as a conscientious objector (Partridge 2004). As his biographer notes, these activities allowed him to “contribute to the war effort without having to fight” (Knights 2015, 92). White could have read about Garnett's pacifism in the 1935 collection of essays *We Did Not Fight: 1914–18 Experiences of War Resisters*, which, in addition to Garnett's essay, also contained a poem contributed by Siegfried Sassoon and essays by Bertrand Russell and Julian Bell. The foreword, written by Canon H. R. L. Sheppard, asserted that all the contributors were united in their belief “that war must be abolished if civilization is to endure, and they believe that it is the duty of all honest and thoughtful men to resist war” (Sheppard, 1935, viii). In his own essay, Garnett asserted that he became a conscientious objector

¹⁸ T. H. White, diary 1938–1939, 9 Oct. 1938, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

after observing the horrors of war at Sommeilles and that “none of the issues mattered so much as stopping the appalling suffering” (Garnett 1935, 140). Doubtless his friend’s personal history added to White’s sense of ambivalence about fighting.

However, the consensus among literary figures shifted as the conflict drew nearer, and “shortly before the outbreak of war, British writers such as E. M. Forster, Leonard Woolf, David Garnett, and Storm Jameson all rejected their earlier pacifism and endorsed military action against Nazism” (Patterson 2012, 311). By 1940, even the most staunchly pacifist writers were experiencing the nightly danger of the London Blitz and many were actively serving on the home front as well.¹⁹ Owen Dudley Edwards notes that two prominent authors who wrote for children, Frank Richards²⁰ and George Orwell, experienced a similar attitude change: “In 1938, both Richards and Orwell were supporters of Munich. In 1940, they rallied to the cause of war” (Edwards 2007, 12). Another example, the author Rose Macaulay, was a staunch pacifist before the War and in 1937 composed a pamphlet entitled *Open Letter to a Non-Pacifist*;²¹ however, by September 1940, “aged fifty-nine, she was engaged in arduous manual labor” as a London ambulance driver (Feigel 2014, 59). Lara Feigel summarizes Macaulay’s

¹⁹ Alan Sinfield suggests that it is difficult for subsequent generations to comprehend the scale of destruction in the London Blitz (Sinfield 1997, 7). It seems likely that it was proportionally difficult for White, or anyone living outside of the situation at the time, to fully appreciate the chaos, fear, and disturbance caused by the nightly bombings, or to appreciate the emotional changes that this would stimulate in even the most staunch political pacifist. Authors in living in England at the time recognized this growing distance between those who experienced the bombings’ widespread destruction and those who did not. Elizabeth Bowen dramatizes the emotional gulf between those who experienced the Blitz and those who avoided it in her wartime short story “Sunday Afternoon,” which first appeared in 1941. Bowen’s character Henry visits Ireland from London and describes the neutral Irish country house with its “air of being secluded behind glass” (Bowen 1980, 616). Garnett may have been referring to this division in his and White’s wartime experiences when told his friend in early 1942 that White was “out of touch as the result of living in a neutral country” (D. Garnett 1968, 107).

²⁰ Frank Richards was one of the many pen names of the extremely prolific author, Charles Hamilton. He is best known as a writer of boys’ school stories and for his highly successful series about the character Billy Bunter and Greyfriars School (See Turner 2004).

²¹ Macaulay’s pamphlet urges, during wartime, peaceful mass resistance to war and other atrocities, and, during peacetime “the attempt to remove war’s causes” by encouraging “fairer economic distribution education in anti-nationalism and international understanding” (Macaulay 1937, 3, 5). She also joins the contemporary debate discussed later in the chapter by briefly referencing Aldous Huxley’s arguments in favor of pacifism (Macaulay 1937, 8).

position: “By working as an ambulance driver, Macaulay had discovered a way to be involved in the war effort, valiantly and stoically, while also rejecting war” by writing pacifist pamphlets and articles (Feigel 2014, 59).

In a similar fashion, the pacifist consensus of White’s personal friends began to fail when it was subjected to the pressures of the War. By 1941 Ray Garnett had died of breast cancer, David Garnett had been working in the Air Ministry since the start of the War, and one of their sons, Richard, had enlisted the Royal Air Force (Garnett 1968, 101). The War Office had requisitioned Sassoon’s beloved estate at Heytesbury to house refugees and, later, American troops.²² Alongside Ray, other deaths shattered White’s feelings of distance, safety, and relative peace. In his journal in January 1940 he mourns the death of the poet Humbert Wolfe: “It says on the wireless that Humbert Wolfe is dead. He was at work at the Ministry of Labour yesterday, and today he is cold. His long hair and vivid, refined face will look their best in death. Pamela Frankau will probably drink herself to death within the year. Humbert was a kind man.”²³ Wolfe, Frankau, and Sir Sydney Cockerell had visited White for a weekend in November 1938 where they had discussed war, courage, civilization, and accusations of cowardice during the First World War.²⁴ A little over a year after Wolfe died, on 1 April 1941, Garnett wrote to White, “Virginia Woolf committed suicide last Friday. [. . .] She was ill, felt she was going mad &

²² For a discussion of Sassoon’s “frantic reaction to the threat of being forced to leave his home and sanctuary” due to the requisitioning of Heytesbury see Robert Hemmings’s *Modern Nostalgia*, 83.

²³ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 5 January 1940, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC. Incidentally, Pamela Frankau, the prolific and acclaimed novelist, joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service, the voluntary women’s branch of the British Army, in February 1942 (Raymond 2004). If White knew this it doubtless added to his sense of guilt, but it is not clear that he ever became aware of Frankau’s involvement in the War. White’s prediction of her early death did not occur, and Frankau survived White by several years. She died in 1967 from breast cancer (Raymond 2004).

²⁴ Wolfe related the story of a friend of his in the First World War who attempted to join the army eight times, but was rejected because of medical problems. He was later accosted by a woman on the street and presented with a white feather, symbolizing cowardice. She said, “Young man, do you know that people your age are giving their lives across the channel, to save civilization?” and, pinning the feather to his jacket, Wolfe’s friend, who is not named, replied, “Young woman, do you know that I am the civilization they are giving their lives to save?” (T. H. White, diary 1938–1939, 26 Nov. 1938, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC). Considering White’s repeated protestations that he was creating civilization by writing an epic about King Arthur, it is understandable that this story appealed to him.

could not face it. [. . .] She wrote a few letters – went down to the river & her body has not been recovered – probably never will be as it is close to the sea” (D. Garnett 1968, 82). While none of these three deaths was attributable to the War, it must have been difficult to separate them from the ongoing emotional trauma. Lara Feigel argues that “for a generation of writers, Woolf’s suicide, coming as it did in the middle of the Blitz, brought home the relationship between the public atrocities of war and private suffering” (Feigel 2013, 136). As sincerely as White may have believed in the validity of writing for civilization in February 1939, by early 1942, the friends who had inspired his attitude had been contributing in other ways since the start of hostilities and were offering deep personal sacrifices to the war effort.

It appears that upon losing his models of pacifist literary conduct from his community in England, White was unwilling or unable to replace them from a Dublin-based coterie, and his literary community in Ireland seems to have been unaccountably restricted. He complains volubly at various points in the War about the limited and stifling society in Ireland. On 20 October 1939, less than a month after the start of the War, he describes in his diary,

To write, in this atmosphere, and especially to try to write anything of true feeling, is like being an engine with no petrol. Writers are forced to depend upon things which they draw from outside themselves – good books, good friends who think and feel with decency, encouragement of equal minds, stimulation from other intellects. In Ireland with petrol rationed and the most primitive system of commercial exchange in literature and no libraries, the fuel of good books is cut off. The friends are dear friends of decent heart, but they are nearly illiterate. Their conversation is of Mrs. Reilly’s gall stones. There is no intellectual stimulus to be obtained locally. In peace time this would be of little importance. One could

write friends to stay, obtain books from Mudie's,²⁵ exchange good letters with one's peers in England, and carve out a sound life of the mind. In war, with exchange dislocated, friends conscripted, letters spied on, journalism censored, wireless stuffed with lies, and ignorance all round one, the writer's life is that of the slaves set to make bricks without straw. [. . .] If I contrive to finish Arthur at all, I shall have used up all my self in giving self to him.²⁶

By December 1943 he was more venomous and complains in a letter to Mary Potts that in all of Ireland there is "nobody to talk to in words of more than one syllable" (Gallix 1984, 137). Considering the large number of Irish and English literary figures that White encountered during the War, this attitude is surprising. At various points during his time in Ireland he met Lord Dunsany,²⁷ Frank O'Connor,²⁸ and John Betjeman.²⁹ He corresponded regarding folklore with An Seabhad,³⁰ the pen name of the Irish-language

²⁵ Mudie's Circulating Library was founded in 1842. Even if he had been in England, White could not have obtained books from Mudie's in 1939, however, as the library had closed in 1937.

²⁶ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 20 Oct. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

²⁷ For further discussion of White's interactions with Lord Dunsany, see chapter four.

²⁸ White wrote to David Garnett on 16 May 1942, "Do you know anybody called Frank O'Connor? I have met and like him. He seems less madder [sic] than most living Irish writers. He is coming to stay next week end [sic]" (D. Garnett 1968, 115). There is no record in White's diary, however, of how this meeting may have gone and no evidence in the archives of any correspondence between O'Connor and White. White did, however, read O'Connor's *Bones of Contention and Other Stories* (1936).

²⁹ Betjeman describes White in a letter to Cyril Connolly about the 1942 issue of *Horizon*: "A nice man whom you have brought into my life – looks like Arthur Elton and talks like him" (Betjeman 1994, 300). Betjeman was responsible for requesting submissions for the January 1942 Irish number of the journal *Horizon*, and it seems likely that this is how he met White. White wrote the autobiographical "Letter from a Goose Shooter" for inclusion in the issue (see chapter four). The author's correspondence likewise mentions Betjeman. On 6 July 1942 White writes to Garnett urging his friend to come visit him in Ireland, and suggests, "Surely you could invent some reason for coming over here? There is that Betjeman fellow in Dublin, who claims to know you, and he arranges visits from Our Bev and others. Can't you say you ought to write an article on Irish affairs?" (D. Garnett 1968, 115–116). For more on Betjeman's involvement in organizing *Horizon's* Irish number see (Runchman, 2015).

³⁰ See An Seabhad [Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha], letter to T. H. White, 24 Jan. 1940, in diary 1939–1941, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

writer Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, and with Seán Ó Súilleabháin,³¹ archivist at the Irish Folklore Commission. In 1942 his work appeared alongside that of Patrick Kavanagh, M. J. MacManus, L. T. Murray, Kenneth Clark, Seán O’Faoláin, Frank O’Connor, Edward Sheehy, and Jack Yeats in the Irish number of the journal *Horizon*. In *Remembering How We Stood: Bohemian Dublin at the Mid-Century* (1975), John Ryan recalls that White was a frequent visitor in a bright and vibrant Dublin literary circle (Ryan 1975, 62). Logic would suggest that at least one of these connections might have developed into, if not a friendship, at least some form of fruitful literary exchange that could have mitigated White’s sense of loneliness and guilt throughout the War. However, aside from Betjeman, who would visit and interview White on Alderney in 1951,³² there is little evidence of any long-term interactions with these literary figures. Petrol rationing³³ and the needs of his beloved, aging dog Brownie kept him close to Trim after 1941, and his letters offer no indication of ongoing correspondence with these authors.³⁴

It has been suggested that White’s isolation during the War served to conceal his alleged covert activities. Clair Wills has pointed out that White’s writing and traveling during the War may have served to mask clandestine intelligence work for the British government. Wills speculates that since “on the outbreak of war he had volunteered his services to the Ministry of Information, it is quite likely that his several sojourns on the

³¹ See Seán Ó Súilleabháin, letter to T. H. White, 16 Feb. 1940, in diary 1939–1941, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

³² The interview, “Living in Alderney,” was broadcast by the B. B. C. West of England and Home Service on 14 December 1951. The interview was pre-recorded on 23 August 1951.

³³ Elizabeth Bowen, too, found that wartime petrol rationing created a sense of claustrophobia, especially in the countryside. Bowen traveled home in 1941 to her Cork estate at Bowenscourt and reflected on the isolating and stultifying effects of being without a functioning car. She wrote to Virginia Woolf on 5 January 1941, “Now *all* the petrol has stopped and we are immobilised, at least immobilised until we get new ideas about time. [. . .] I bought a bicycle a year ago but on it I can’t think [. . .]. The eight miles of road along under the mountains was very raw with wind and I disappointingly hated every mile, except for the pleasure of getting off at my aunt’s” (Bowen 1986, 217). Bowen chose to rent a flat in Dublin to remedy this isolation, but White never elected to do this.

³⁴ See chapter four for more information on White’s intellectual community in Ireland and their impact on *The Godstone and the Blackymor*.

uninhabited island of Inishkea [. . .] did have an undercover aspect” (Wills 2007, 169–170). It is true that White volunteered his services to the Ministry of Information at the start of the War, but his journals and letters from the time show that the Ministry did not accept his offer, and his apparently genuine guilt over his lack of involvement also undermines the suggestion that he was a spy.³⁵ White mentions the Ministry for the first time on 21 September 1939, writing: “I have volunteered vaguely for the Ministry of Information, with the mental reservation that I wont [sic] do anything till Arthur is over.”³⁶ It could be argued that he was concealing his involvement in covert activities, but this conclusion is hard to maintain in the face of the additional evidence of White’s diary. For example, he expressed what appears to be genuine frustration in a diary entry from 16 December 1941, where he lists his six failed attempts to join in the war effort as a “record of [his] war service”:

(1) As an author chosen by the American Book Club, I offered my services to the British Council, to lecture in America, a year before the war started. They were positively refused.³⁷

(2) On the day war broke out I offered them to the Ministry of Information through Sir Sydney Cockerell, who, I thought [. . .] might have had a pull. I was politely told to wait.

³⁵ Interviews with local residents Patrick Diveney and John Bligh conducted in Doolistown and Trim during the summer of 2015 reveal that White was stopped and questioned as a spy by the Local Defence Forces during the War; however, the incident is remembered as a practical joke that was played on White by a group of local young men. These men stopped White as he was returning from the pub late at night and released him shortly thereafter.

³⁶ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 21 Sept. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

³⁷ Humbert Wolfe wrote to the British Council on White’s behalf, and they replied on the 5th of December 1938. In their reply they explain, “The Council have not yet extended their activities to the United States, and cannot, therefore, find any means of using Mr. White’s services” (David Russell, letter to Humbert Wolfe, 5 Dec. 1938, folder 1, box 23, MS-4494, HRC).

(3) On the collapse of France I joined the Local Defence Force in Belmullet, but, after a couple of parades, I was politely asked, not to resign, but to absent myself from parade. They were afraid I was a Fifth Column.³⁸

(4) All this time I was writing a book about the non-fascist ideal (my Arthur book) for publishing which I shall certainly have my head chopped off, if Hitler wins the war.

(5) On finishing the book I immediately sent my papers to a man called Air Commodore Peake,³⁹ on Bunny Garnett's recommendation, for a commission in the R. A. F. Y. R. special duties branch. Peake, in this case I think almost impolitely, has not even deigned to reply, although I posted the application more than a month ago.

(6) There are no recruiting offices in Ireland, and I cannot get a visa [. . .] to visit a recruiting office in England [. . .] So now I cannot even win through to the latrine squad, as a private soldier with First Class Honours at Cambridge and his name in Who's Who.

~~This is freedom.~~⁴⁰

³⁸ In *British Spies and Irish Rebels* Paul McMahon argues that early in the War both the Irish and British governments considered the threat of German sympathy in Ireland to be real. McMahon states, "Ireland, unlike Britain, did possess a fifth column ready to assist a German invasion," and writes that "the raising of a Local Security Force" was "for the purpose of guarding against the 'danger of invasion' and 'subversive activities'" (McMahon 2008, 309). It is understandable, therefore, that White – a foreigner whose motives were continually suspected throughout the War – would be mistrusted. McMahon suggests, however, that the actual threat of fascist sympathy in Ireland was insignificant even in 1940 when the danger of German invasion was at its height (310).

³⁹ Air Commodore Harald Peake served as the first director of public relations for the R. A. F. and also acted as the Air Ministry representative on the War Artists' Advisory Committee. Peake left the Department of Public Relations in January 1942, which may account for his tardiness in answering White and his inability to find the author a position. For more on Harald Peake's life and service see Garry Campion's *The Good Fight: Battle of Britain Propaganda and the Few* (2009), and for more about Peake's work with artists (particularly the surrealist Paul Nash) see *London's Burning: Life, Death and Art in the Second World War* (1994) by Stansky and Abrahams.

⁴⁰ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 16 Dec. 1941, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

When one considers the severe, pervasive, and apparently genuine emotional trauma that White experienced due to not participating in the War, it is difficult to argue that he was involved in covert activities. Additionally, the inconsistency of his opinions about the War and Irish neutrality would have made him an unreliable spy.

As the War went on and his community joined in contributing, White felt himself divided from the war effort; his book became his sole method of engaging with the conflict and helping his country, and as a result the substance of the book underwent a transformation. On 14 November 1940, White rushed to his diary with an inspiration: “Pendragon can still be saved, and elevated into a superb success [. . .] His effort has been to abolish war, and war has abolished him.”⁴¹ It was the first time that White defined his book as an anti-war text. White had previously expressed the belief that his book would contribute to “civilisation,” and the volumes published before 1940 do contain Merlyn’s lessons against violence and his lectures to the Wart on Might versus Right.⁴² However, the identification of the text as an anti-war work, designed to discuss anti-war themes, represented a new revelation on White’s part. White began to view war as a separate problem to generalized violence and one that required a more complex societal solution. He began to expound on this idea to Garnett and Potts and to alter his book to reflect this inspiration. A few months later he wrote to David Garnett, “Can you tell me if anybody has written a famous book about war? [. . .] I want a book (not fiction, like Tolstoi [sic]) about why people fight and all the sidelights and statistics” (D. Garnett 1968, 80). In the same letter he tells his friend, “My Death of Arthur is going to end up as a treatise on war” (80). His new direction caused him to view even his

⁴¹ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 14 Nov. 1940, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

⁴² Interestingly, the concept of Might versus Right also appears in one of Siegfried Sassoon’s unpublished poems from the same period, “August 4th, 1939.” Sassoon’s final line “Where Might never proved its Right/Thought keeps one candle burning through the night” seems to echo the message of *The Sword in the Stone* (1938), which Sassoon had read in 1938 (Sassoon quoted in Hemmings 2008, 88). Whether or not Sassoon took inspiration from White’s message, this commonality speaks to the presence of this idea in the literature and thought of the time.

source text through an anti-war lens, and at the time he wrote to L. J. Potts, “The central theme of *Morte d’Arthur* [was] to find an antidote for war” (Gallix 1984, 117). This inspiration spurred him to write the fourth and fifth books, and by August 1941 he had produced the majority of *The Candle in the Wind* and *The Book of Merlyn*. It was, perhaps, not a coincidence that the War was progressing poorly for the allies in parallel with White’s new anti-war philosophy. The London Blitz ended in May, only three months before the completion of his drafts, and White’s resolve to remain neutral was weakening: he had begun to ask Garnett to seek useful work for him in England. The need for his book to justify his continued absence from the War was at its height. He wrote to Garnett, “The epic is really a book on war, and how to prevent it. Also it is a book on the next peace. I think I shall have to send presentation copies to Roosevelt, Churchill, Ghandi [sic] and Chiang-Kai-Shek [sic]. I would, if I thought there was the least hope that they would read it. Also Stalin. But I suppose they are illiterate” (D. Garnett 1968, 93). Admittedly, White’s tone is jocular, but even so it shows that he wished his work to be considered as a contribution to the fight for peace and that he believed that its message might impact the course of history.

As it became clear that he was unlikely to get any acceptable work in the War, his hopes for his book became more transparent, and he wrote to Garnett in an undated letter from September or October 1941: “I am hoping desperately that when you have read my last two books you will think that I have helped in the war effort almost as much as you have with the Air War. Or at any rate in the next peace effort” (D. Garnett 1968, 100). David Garnett worked in the Air Ministry during the War, so White may be referring to this work, but it seems more likely that he is referring to Garnett’s *War in the Air, September 1939 to May 1941* (1941), since he alludes to this book in the same letter. Garnett’s book describes the importance of the German and British air forces in the War, and it is unabashedly a work of propaganda. Garnett openly declares that “the

object of this book” is to make “the more optimistic majority realise that Victory in the air for the Democracies depends not only on pilots and Air Marshals but on their own efforts – that it lies in the power of every citizen to help bring about a victorious conclusion to the war in the air” (D. Garnett 1941, v-vi). In his letter in praise of the book White writes, “I have been able to detach one eye to read *The War in the Air* [sic] from beginning to end twice. It is a very good book and I feel humiliated that I should ever have complained about your writing it.” (D. Garnett 1968, 99). White compares the value of his own work and that of Garnett and laments, “While I was prosing away about some heroes [sic] who were mythical even in the Middle Ages, you have adroitly identified yourself with the living epic behind my back, curse or bless you” (D. Garnett 1968, 99). He identifies his own work on the Arthur saga with Garnett’s attempt to sway public opinion and inspire public action, and suggests that their goals are the same. Even in this letter, however, White still attempts to justify the pacifism and appeasement that he supported prior to the War. He writes to Garnett,

You don’t [sic] quite seem to have realised the main reason why we shall win this war, I mean the main strategic reason. It is that England has, in the last four hundred years, made one inspired subconscious guess. We have grasped the fact, without realising it, that the country which puts off its re-armament longest, while remaining just able to defend itself, is the country which wins. For the first

country to arm itself lays out its resources upon arms which have become out of date by the time that the laggard is beginning to spend. (D. Garnett 1968, 99)⁴³

White must have read *War in the Air* as both a vindication and an indictment of literature's function in war. It was a book that proclaimed that the written word could have an impact on the course of the War, but one that simultaneously emphasized the feats of marshal bravery and the personal sacrifices necessary for victory. As is evident from the letter quoted above, he sought desperately in Garnett's argument to find the underlying evidence that pacifism was still the correct choice. White, too, wanted to use writing to offer help and to inspire people to personal sacrifice for a cause, but his cause was finding "an antidote for War" (Gallix 1984, 117).

Although White decided to alter the three previously published volumes (*The Sword in the Stone*, *The Witch in the Wood*, and *The Ill-Made Knight*), and to make changes to the unpublished fourth volume (*The Candle in the Wind*), it is his fifth volume, *The Book of Merlyn*, that shows most plainly his anti-war intentions for his text. The various editions of the volumes reveal that the anti-war and anti-violence message was not an original part of the concept of the series, but rather appeared after the start of the War. The first edition of *The Sword in the Stone*, published in England in 1938, has no pacifist message attached to it, and, indeed, describes war and violence in a positive light through Arthur's childhood adventures. In one episode in particular, Arthur and his

⁴³ White was clearly inspired by Garnett's book to start making practical designs to assist the British "war machine" (D. Garnett 1968, 100). In the same letter as quoted above he writes, "Do you remember how I once nearly invented a revolving Lewis gun? Since reading and pondering over your book I have had several inspirations of the same or better sort. I can't write them in a letter" (100). Garnett later remembered that at this time, "Tim bombarded me with suggestions for winning the war" (D. Garnett 1979, 214). The designs that he hoped to show Garnett are described and illustrated at great length in his diary. He was clearly still thinking about it over a month later on 28 November 1941 when he sketched designs for "flying-boats capable of landing in the open sea, and none of them inferior in performance, on that account, to the land planes now in use" (T. H. White, diary 1941-1942, 28 Nov. 1941, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC). He believed that he was qualified to create this design because of his life-long observation of birds. The impact of White's military interests on his novel *The Master* is discussed further in chapter five.

foster-brother Kay go to war with the Anthropophagi – humanoid creatures drawn from Medieval literature – and succeed in exterminating them; the boys’ violence is celebrated (White 1938, 142).⁴⁴ The encounter with the Anthropophagi was deleted from the American edition of *The Sword in the Stone*, and White excluded it from every subsequent edition of his work,⁴⁵ but this episode serves to show that White’s text initially celebrated war and warlike behavior and the pacifist message was not a concept present in the original.

By 1941 White had rewritten all of the earlier installments in the series to fit his message, and he hoped this fifth book would be “the crown of the whole,” and would “[solve] the problem” of “War and how to stop it” (D. Garnett 1968, 86). The fifth book would make the anti-war message of the rest of the text explicit, and would demonstrate how all of Arthur’s previous projects – the round table, the invention of chivalry, the quest for the Grail, etc. – had been abortive efforts to quell human violence and prevent war. White described this revelation and how he intended to carry it out to Garnett:

You see, the Round Table was an anti-Hitler measure. It began by trying to control Might-as-Right in individuals, by harnessing it to worldly ends: then, in the Grail, it tried to harness it to spiritual ends: then, in Book 4, *The Candle in the Wind* [sic], it recognizes that Might-as-Right must be quashed altogether, instead of

⁴⁴ Elisabeth Brewer discusses the origins of White’s Anthropophagi in *T. H. White’s The Once and Future King* (1993). She argues that the episode “fits perfectly into the medieval ambiance,” and writes that she prefers it to the medieval Irish mythology with which White replaced it (Brewer 1993, 35). The violence of the episode and the “detailed information about the techniques of jousting and archery” that appeals to Brewer, however, did not correspond to White’s developing pacifist goals for his text (35). White himself mistrusted the episode, and writes to Garnett on 2 September 1938, “You were quite right about the Anthropophagi: I had always felt uncomfortable about them” (D. Garnett 1968, 32).

⁴⁵ It was replaced with an Irish-inspired encounter with the witch Morgan le Fay that includes a translation of the Old Irish epic poem *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (White 1958, 101–102). Although he provides no citation, White appears to have acquired his translation from *Ancient Irish Tales* (Cross and Slover 1936, 551–587). The copy in his library is heavily annotated only in the section of the text that describes this epic poem, and White’s translation follows the one included here nearly exactly (see T. H. White, marginalia in [Cross and Slover 1936, 572], HRC).

harnessed, and Arthur turns over to abstract justice – he invents “Law” [. . .] and is prepared to sacrifice both Lancelot & Guenever to the ideal. This works, so far as Might in the individual is concerned, but, no sooner has he got it settled like that, than Might in the congeries, collective Might, War, pops up behind him. All his life he was trying to dam a flood which broke out in new places. (86)

The Book of Merlyn was not published during his lifetime: his dispute with Collins meant that White gave up hope of publishing his final book, which remained in his archives until 1977. Therefore, White’s ideas remain unedited in this final installment, and the tone is often hectoring. As Warner laments, “It is difficult to read the fifth Arthur without exasperation. It could have been so good and it is so bad” (Warner 1967, 182). The final book opens with a weeping, emotionally vanquished Arthur on the eve of his final battle with his son, Mordred. As Arthur sits in deep despair and misery, he is visited by Merlyn who returns him to the badger’s den he visited as a child, and transforms the old king into various animals, just as Wart’s tutor did in *The Sword in the Stone*. Between transformations, the king has conversations on war and politics with his old friends the badger, the grass snake, Archimedes the owl, the king’s loyal hound, and Merlyn.

Another reason White sought active employment in the war was that after he completed his anti-war manuscript he feared that his lack of direct involvement would negatively affect the reception of the epic. In his diary he urges himself to think of the message that the book conveys: “The book itself, particularly in Book 2 Chapter 5 and Book 5 Chapter 18, is my reason for going back. If you write that, and believe it, you must back it up by going.”⁴⁶ Book 2, Chapter 5 must have changed after White wrote this, for as it stands the chapter has little or nothing to do with war, but Chapter 18 of *The Book of Merlyn* is poignant. It describes Arthur looking out over an idyllic England at

⁴⁶ White, diary 1939–1941, 24 Oct. 1941, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

night, and he finds "that he loved it – more than Guenever, more than Lancelot," and he thinks of "all the people who had accepted sacrifice" and chosen to go to war (White 1977, 109, 112). The chapter ends with the chorus of the patriotic hymn "Jerusalem" (114). If he produced that message but remained aloof in Ireland, he feared, the public would ridicule him for his supposed hypocrisy and cowardice, and it was his literary community in particular that made him feel the growing pressure to return home. He writes in his diary, "How can an Englishman survive this war, and England victorious, unless he himself was in it – particularly if he is a famous Englishman, as I will be? They, the English, would make life impossible for him."⁴⁷ He writes to Garnett on 2 December 1941, "I have written an epic about war, one of whose morals is that Hitler is the kind of chap one has to stop. I believe in my book, and, in order to give it a fair start in life, I must show that I am ready to practise what I preach. [. . .] I have come to dread the kind of damage which might be done to my book by people like Godfrey Wynn or Beverley Nicks [Beverley Nichols], if they chose to hint a slander at my private courage" (D. Garnett 1968, 10). His literary community contributed, therefore, both to his decision to remain outside the war and write, and his tentative decision at the end of 1941 to attempt to join the war effort.

The influence of the pacifist literary coterie to which White believed he was affiliated at the start of the War is explicit in *The Book of Merlyn*. In particular, White makes repeated references to the anti-war pamphlet *What Are You Going to Do About it?: The Case for Constructive Peace* (1936) by Aldous Huxley. White was an avid reader of this author's work before the War, and during the conflict his interest in the writings of the Huxley family remained pronounced. Throughout the 1930s White mentions several books by the brothers Julian and Aldous Huxley in his letters and diaries: in 1936 White noted that he was reading Aldous Huxley's *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (1932) (Gallix

⁴⁷ Ibid.

1984, 60); he mentions *Point Counter Point* (1928) in a letter to L. J. Potts (102), and cites its narrative style as something that he felt *The Witch in the Wood* should avoid;⁴⁸ White's 1935 edition of Julian Huxley's *Ants* remains in his library and is heavily annotated; and, as this chapter has previously explored, as the war approached, Aldous Huxley's decision to leave for America played a key role in White's indecision about departing for Ireland. Further, Sylvia Townsend Warner notes that White refers to his early novel, *They Winter Abroad* (1932), as "my Huxley novel" (Warner 1967, 59). With this understanding of White's reading history and interest in the family, it is not surprising that both Aldous and Julian Huxley's work influenced White's own arguments as he sought a literary community that would legitimate his decision to remain detached from the War.

Huxley's argument in *What Are You Going to Do About it?* takes the form of a series of imagined objections to pacifism, to which the author then presents his counter-arguments, and White's *The Book of Merlyn* reads as a dramatization and confirmation of Huxley's counter-arguments against war. The "first objection," Huxley tells us, "is that 'war is a law of nature,' " but although he agrees that "conflict is certainly common in the animal kingdom," he argues that this conflict is not the same as war. Huxley continues:

Conflict is between isolated individuals. "War" in the sense of conflict between armies exists among certain species of social insects. But it is significant that these insects do not make war on members of their own species, only on those of other species. [. . .] An animal can be bloodthirsty without being warlike [. . .] Conflicts between individual animals of the same

⁴⁸ White writes, "I am worried about this Point Counter Point criticism (which I interpret to mean: habit of switching from one place to another in the course of a chapter, with a line space between them). I can't seem to rectify it, and have a drowning man's hope that you could" (Gallix 1984, 102). Incidentally, White never managed to completely remove this feature of his second book, and *The Queen of Air and Darkness* still exhibits the tendency to transition from place to place.

species are common enough [. . .] But they do not make war. War is quite definitely not a “law of nature.” (Huxley 1936, 4)

White responds to Huxley’s argument in *The Book of Merlyn* and augments it by seeking a solution to warlike human behavior in the natural world. If we set the rhetoric from *The Book of Merlyn* alongside Huxley’s text, the concepts and even some phrases appear to be almost identical. Merlyn lectures Arthur:

What is War? War, I take it, may be defined as an aggressive use of might between collections of the same species. It must be between collections for otherwise it is mere assault and battery. An attack of one mad wolf upon a pack of wolves would not be war. And then again, it must be between members of the same species. Birds preying on locusts, cats preying on mice, or even tunny preying on herrings [. . .] none of these are true examples of war. (White 1977, 134)

Merlyn continues to ask Arthur which species make “true” war, and when Arthur does not answer says, “You were about to mention a few insects, man, various microbes or blood corpuscles [. . .] and then you would have been at a loss. The gross immorality of warfare is, as I mentioned before, an oddity in nature” (134). It could be argued that White drew this argument from Julian Huxley’s *Ants*, which contains a similar passage describing the species that make war, and, considering the extent to which White relied on *Ants* for the scientific aspects of *The Book of Merlyn*, this would be a logical conclusion (Huxley 1935, 85). However, other factors indicate that *What Are You Going to Do About it?* was formative for the message of *The Book of Merlyn*. Both authors draw a pacifist conclusion, while Julian Huxley draws no message or principle from his

scientific observation on war; additionally, *The Book of Merlyn* and *What Are You Going to Do About it?* share a structure. They both take the form of debates between pacifist and non-pacifist characters. It can be concluded that White's rhetoric not only borrows from Aldous Huxley, but the entire *Book of Merlyn* can be seen as a reflection on and a defense of Huxley's pacifist ideas.

Aside from his own personal interest in Huxley, White may have selected *What Are You Going to Do About it?* because it was central to the public debate about how writers and ordinary citizens should address the threat of the Second World War. Samuel Hynes identifies *What Are You Going to Do About it?* as the beginning of a print controversy on pacifism, which included authors Stephen Spender and Cecil Day-Lewis, each of whom published responses to Huxley in 1936. Hynes argues that the debate is important "not in the details of the argument, [. . .] but in the fact that it took place between these antagonists and in these terms. Here are two sides, polarized into hostile camps, one represented by a novelist, the other by two poets. All of them agree that [. . .] the future of western culture is at stake, and they all agree that something must be done" (Hynes 1976, 196). These writers were using their work to engage actively with what they believed to be the most important political question of their time. Day-Lewis's severe critique entitled *We are NOT going to do NOTHING: A reply to Aldous Huxley's "What are you going to do about it?"* derided Huxley's proposed theories: "This pamphlet puts forward a specious plea for what seems to me in fact a policy of final inactivity" (Day-Lewis 1997, 272). Day-Lewis claimed that Huxley's ideas offered "nothing more solid than a great, big, beautiful idealist bubble – lovely to look at, no doubt; charming to live in, perhaps: but with little reference to the real facts and inadequate protection against a four-engined bomber" (272). Huxley, Spender, Day-Lewis, and others were attempting to define the proper place for a creative individual in a modern global conflict, and they considered the issue so serious that Valentine

Cunningham describes Huxley's pamphlet as "one of the '30s' most persistently denigrated texts" (Cunningham 1988, 70). Likewise, Samuel Hynes felt that the Huxley controversy demonstrated "the way in which war had become a part of the general consciousness, including literary consciousness" (Hynes 1976, 196). David King Dunaway argues that part of the motivation for the Huxleys' departure for America in 1937 was the sudden and dramatic isolation occasioned by Aldous's outspoken pacifism, and particularly by the publication of *What Are You Going to Do About it?* After his pamphlet's reception Huxley felt himself "isolated from those he had mentored" and found himself "caricatured as woolly-headed in *The Times*" (Dunaway 1989, 29). The 1937 move to America was, in part, an attempt at finding a sympathetic audience: "In the United States, pacifism had not yet fallen from favor. [. . .] Isolationism and anti-interventionism were popular sentiments in the United States; why not mount a pacifist lecture tour[?]" (29). In *The Book of Merlyn*, White was building on a literary pacifist debate that would have been well known to his generation, using a text that justified his own position of distance from the war, and writing in a tradition recognizable to his literary contemporaries.

Aldous Huxley was not the only member of the Huxley family to influence *The Book of Merlyn*. White drew extensive information from Julian Huxley's famous scientific treatise *Ants* (1930)⁴⁹ for the episode in which Merlyn transforms King Arthur into an

⁴⁹ White chose his source well. Although biology has progressed extensively since 1930, Julian Huxley's work on ants is still highly respected, and his pioneering work on the different castes within an ant colony was still relevant enough to be referenced in the 1990 Pulitzer Prize-winning tome *The Ants* (Hölldobler and Wilson 1990, 310).

ant.⁵⁰ White's copy of *Ants* in the archives at the Harry Ransom Center is heavily annotated, particularly within the section on warfare. White adheres closely to his source text in matters of ant behavior, although he allows himself poetic license to elaborate when he imagines the alien experiences of a human trapped inside a tiny insect's body. White's reliance on Julian Huxley's scientific data is evident on several occasions. For example, Huxley writes, "When a worker has had a good meal, only a fraction of the partially digested food stored in the crop reaches the stomach and intestines, to be absorbed by the animal itself; most of it is distributed to other members of the colony" (Huxley 1935, 41). In White's version, when Arthur arrives in the colony his ant is assigned to the feeding squad, and White vividly visualizes the realities of an ants' experience. Arthur, unfamiliar with the biology, is initially confused:

He began filling himself with the sweet nectar like the others. At first it was delicious to him, so that he ate greedily, but in a few seconds it began to be unsatisfactory: he could not understand why. [. . .] [I]t was like eating a banquet of nothing, or like a dinner-party on the stage. In a way it was like a nightmare, under which you might continue to consume huge masses of putty without being able to stop. [. . .] He realized suddenly that what he was eating was not going into his stomach. Only a tiny portion of it had penetrated to his private self at the beginning, and now the main mass was being stored in a kind of upper stomach or crop, from which it could be removed. (White 1977, 55)

⁵⁰ In addition to the work of Julian Huxley, White's descriptions of his research also reference the work of Auguste Forel and Thomas Belt. While both of these scientists had a major impact on research on ants – both Forel and Belt are even now referenced extensively in *The Ants* (Hölldobler and Wilson 1990) – and Forel is quoted by Huxley in *Ants*, it is not clear that either of these authors had a major impact on *The Once and Future King*. White's interest in ants and his inclusion of them in this allegorical episode may also have been motivated by the work of H. G. Wells. His short story, "The Empire of the Ants" was published in 1905 and also uses ants to offer a biological comparison to human aggression. In a letter to his publisher Billy Collins about the publication of *The Once and Future King*, White suggests, "I will try to get either David Garnett or H. G. Wells or both of them to give us letters for use in advertising, after they have read the proofs" (T. H. White to William "Billy" Collins, 8 Dec. 1941, Trouble with Collins, folder 5, box 19, MS-4494, HRC).

Another aspect of ant behavior that White makes use of is the importance of smell in differentiating one colony of ants from another. Huxley concludes,

Smell is thus to the ant what national traditions are to us – the basis of patriotism; and this patriotism, again as with us, can override the ties of blood and force relatives to fight against each other. In both cases the same end is secured – the subordination of the individual unit to the social unit of which he, she or it happens to form a part: but the means are different. (Huxley 1935, 32)

White, already interested in the mechanisms that impel individuals into acts of war on behalf of the collective, makes use of Huxley's conclusion. He writes that it is fortunate the Merlyn "had remembered to give him [Arthur] the proper smell for this particular nest" (White 1977, 50). White continues, "If he had smelt of any other nest, they would have killed him at once. If Miss Edith Cavell had been an ant, they would have to write on her pedestal: SMELL IS NOT ENOUGH" (50).⁵¹ Edith Cavell, a British nurse in the First World War, was executed by German firing squad in 1915 after assisting British and French troops to escape German internment.⁵² The replacement of the original word "patriotism" in Cavell's famous quotation with "smell" shows the direct influence of Julian Huxley's scientific conclusions on White's thinking: smell is the determinant of nationalistic sentiment in ants.

⁵¹ White is referring to the Edith Cavell Memorial in St. Martin's Place, London, which was erected in 1920. The base of the statue reads, "EDITH CAVELL | BRUSSELS | DAWN | OCTOBER 12th | 1915 | PATRIOTISM IS NOT ENOUGH | I MUST HAVE NO HATRED OR | BITTERNESS FOR ANYONE."

⁵² In *Transnational Outrage: The Death and Commemoration of Edith Cavell* (2007), Katie Pickles argues that Edith Cavell's death was used throughout the First World War as material for British propaganda. She argues that Cavell's death "played directly into the hands of those responsible for creating official propaganda" (Pickles 2007, 61). Although the ants' episode can be read as a critique of wartime propaganda, it is not evident that White was aware of the extent to which the British propaganda machine used Cavell's death as "evidence" of German brutality during the First World War. His reference to her statue is humorous, but it does not appear to acknowledge the use of Cavell in propaganda.

White also includes a far more subtle reference in the episode that is apparently for the entertainment of close readers of Huxley's treatise. When he discusses the labor systems of the ant colony, Huxley describes the experiments of Lord Avebury,⁵³ who sought to prove "the delegation of different tasks to different individuals" within one colony of ants (Huxley 1935, 29). Avebury, after marking the colony's worker ants so that they were distinguishable from one another, observed that only three individuals visited the colony's food source – honey provided by the experimenter – and these three "thus acted as sole foragers and transport workers" (29). Avebury then removed and imprisoned one of the three workers and observed that a new worker was assigned to the task of foraging. He then imprisoned this second, newly assigned worker, and, once again, a third ant was assigned to the same duties. When Arthur enters the ant colony one of the first announcements that he "hears" with his antennae is the order, "Number 210397/WD to report to the syrup squad, in replacement of 333105/WD who has fallen off the nest" (White 1977, 50). Later we learn that another ant, 42436/WD, also "fell off the nest this morning while working with syrup squad" (53). The humorous implication is that Merlyn, the provider of the colony's syrup, is replicating Lord Avebury's experiments and has been removing, one by one, the ants that report for "syrup squad." The ants, not understanding the mysterious disappearances of their comrades, interpret it as "[falling] off the nest." Grasping this example of intertextuality is not necessary for comprehending the import of White's argument or for enjoying Arthur's sojourn with the ants, but it serves as a moment of clever humor for readers of both Huxley and White.

In *The Book of Merlyn* White uses Huxley's scientific theories of ant behavior as a

⁵³ John Lubbock, first Baron of Avebury (1834–1913), was a banker and Liberal Party MP who made significant contributions to both biology and archaeology during his lifetime. What an obituary described as Lubbock's "many-sided career as a man of science and a man of affairs" would have appealed to White's lifelong admiration of Renaissance men (Wheatley 1913, 242). See Ursula Lubbock Grant Duff's collection of essays *The Life-work of Lord Avebury (Sir John Lubbock) 1834-1913* (1924) for further descriptions of Lord Avebury's contributions to science.

means of portraying and critiquing a fascist state and to describe the psychological effects of war and propaganda on the individual.⁵⁴ Unlike the Wart's many enjoyable explorations as an animal in *The Sword in the Stone*, the King's experience in the ant colony is unsettling, threatening, and alien from the outset, and it descends into an increasingly dystopian nightmare. After his arrival Arthur's ant observes his surroundings with an increasing feeling of unrest, and he becomes aware of an odd sensation:

He became conscious of something which had been waiting for consciousness all the time: that there was a noise in his head which was articulate. It was either a noise or a complicated smell, and the easiest way for us to explain it is to say that it was a wireless broadcast. It came to him through his antennae, like music.

The music had a monotonous rhythm like a pulse, and the words which went with it were about June – moon – noon – spoon or Mammy – mammy – mammy or Ever – never or Blue – true – you. He liked them at first, especially the ones about Love – dove – above, until he found that they were not variable. As soon as they had finished once, they were begun again. After an hour or two of them, he was to feel that they would make him scream [. . .] There was a voice in his head also, during the pauses of the music, which seemed to be giving directions. (White 1977, 50)

⁵⁴ White was not the only English author to compare the fascist state to an ant colony. John Betjeman, said in a radio broadcast on 25 February 1943, "I do not believe we are fighting for the privilege of living in a highly developed community of ants. That is what the Nazis want. For me, at any rate, England stands for the Church of England, eccentric incumbents, oil-lit churches, Women's Institutes, modest village inns, arguments about cow parsley on the altar, the noise of mowing machines on Saturday afternoons, local newspapers, local auctions [. . .]. If it were some efficient ant heap which the glass-and-steel, flat-roof, straight-road boys want to make it, then how could we love it as we do?" (Betjeman 2006, 138–139).

Upon meeting another ant carrying ant corpses to a dumping ground (another eerie image), Arthur desires to put some questions to this other creature – “ ‘Do you like being a sexton?’ or ‘Are you a slave?’ or even ‘Are you happy?’ ” – but he finds that, as an ant, he does not have the ability to ask these questions (51). White writes,

In order to ask them, he would have had to put them into the ant language through his antennae: and he now discovered, with a helpless feeling, that there were no words for half the things he wanted to say. There were no words for happiness, for freedom, or for liking, nor were there any words for their opposites. [. . .] The nearest he could get to Right and Wrong, even, was Done or Not-Done. [. . .] There were only two qualifications in the language – Done and Not-Done – which applied to all questions of value. [. . .] Even the moons, mummies, doves etc. in the broadcasts were completely described when they were stated to be Done ones. (52–53)

Deeply disturbed by these observations, Arthur’s ant is put to work on “syrup squad” where he is forced to gorge himself and yet never feel full (55). The final part of this duty, Arthur discovers, is that he must expel his store of food into the mouths of the other ants: “[H]e must walk about like a living dumb-waiter at the convenience of the indoor workers. When they wanted a meal, they stopped him, he opened his mouth, and they fed from it. [. . .] Even his stomach was not his own” (57). Later, when Merlyn places a bridge between one nest of ants and another, King Arthur’s ants go to war against another species of ants,⁵⁵ and the ant “wireless” begins to carry propaganda: “The broadcasts changed [. . .]. Mammy – mammy – mammy gave place to Antland, Antland

⁵⁵ When White edited the ant episode for inclusion in *The Once and Future King* he altered this sentence so that the ants go to war against another colony of their own species (White 1958, 119). This more perfectly replicates Aldous and Julian Huxley’s definitions of war (i.e. aggregate aggression against one’s own species).

Over All, while the stream of orders were discontinued in favour of lectures about war, patriotism and the economic situation” (59). White portrays the ant colony as a dystopian nightmare in which there is an “absense of all privacy”: “others ate from his [Arthur’s] stomach while others sang in his brain” (62). The ants have no individual value or personality except in their capacity of serve the colony. They lack a personal life and are even deprived of freedom of thought. White’s analysis has some biological relevance: Deborah M. Gordon, a Stanford biologist working on the social systems within ant colonies, argues that White’s fantastical account nevertheless captures “the tension between ants as unique individuals, each with purpose and agency, and as identical, like cells in a tissue” (Gordon 2010, 63).

White’s references in the text make it clear that the portrayal of the ant colony is, first and foremost, an indictment of fascism,⁵⁶ and the society he describes represents Nazi Germany. When Arthur first enters the ant colony he sees a series of tunnels and “over the entrance to each tunnel, there was a notice which said: EVERYTHING NOT FORBIDDEN IS COMPULSORY BY NEW ORDER” (White 1977, 49). The term “New Order”⁵⁷ or in German *Neuordnung* was the system of political oppression that the Nazi party planned to impose on Europe following their military victories. Later in the episode White reintroduces the phrase a second time, thereby adding emphasis and reducing any ambiguity about the intended reference of the phrase. When one ant wishes to take over the colony of another ant, White describes, “In *Bothriomyrmex*, for instance, the ambitious founder of a New Order would invade a nest of *Tapinoma* and jump on the back of the older tyrant. There, concealed by the smell of her host, she

⁵⁶ This indictment is confused by the fact that White refers to the ants’ system as “communism” both in *The Book of Merlyn* and in the rewritten 1958 version of the story included in *The Once and Future King* (White 1958, 120). It is clear from the other references in the ant episode, however, that White conflated the two systems of government as he wrote.

⁵⁷ The OED’s definition of “new order” notes that this phrase is often used specifically “with reference to Hitler’s plan for the reconstitution of the states of Europe on the basis of a National-Socialist regime,” and all entries noted after 1940 make use of this sense of the word.

would slowly saw off the latter's head" (57).⁵⁸ Here White doubly evokes a connection to Nazism by portraying the forcible takeover of one ant's colony by another ant, mirroring the contemporary success of the Nazi initiative in Europe, and by utilizing the phrase "New Order" to refer to the ant's objective.⁵⁹ Other hints make the connection still more clear: Arthur's species of ant refers to itself as "a mighty race" with a "natural right to subjugate" the other species (61), and the ants' wartime ballad "Antland, Antland Over All" is a clear reference to the German national anthem "*Deutschlandlied*" which begins with the lyric "*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles.*" Using the ants, White adds an animal example of fascism to his Arthur stories and makes it deeply unpalatable to both the king and the tale's readers. The addition of a reference to a specific type of government was a new step for White's animal allegory. The fascist ants illustrate the ultimate fate of humanity under such a dictatorship – automated cruelty, lack of privacy, summary executions of any original thinkers. In a book that aimed to be an "anti-Hitler measure" this direct and explicit critique was necessary and appropriate (D. Garnett 1968, 86).

However, in spite of the clear references to Nazism and fascism, White's depiction of the ants is also an incisive critique of wartime culture in general, including wartime British culture. White's overarching argument in *The Book of Merlyn* – drawn, as has been shown, from Aldous Huxley – is that ants are one of the few other species besides

⁵⁸ Once again, this episode is clearly drawn from Julian Huxley. Indeed, it just avoids quoting him directly. Huxley writes, "In one remarkable case – *Bothriomyrmex*, temporarily parasitic on *Tapinoma* – the foreign queen approaches the host nest, and is then forcibly seized by the workers. Once in the nest, the workers often attack her, but she then leaps up onto the back of [. . .] the host queen, who is a good deal larger than she. Apparently, in those positions her foreign smell is masked by the local odour of patriotism, for she is then perfectly safe [. . .]. She spends more and more time on the back of the host queen, slowly but surely accomplishing her task of sawing her head off. By the time this is achieved she has herself acquired the nest-smell and is adopted" (Huxley 1935, 95).

⁵⁹ In the account of the ant colony that appears in *The Once and Future King*, White removed the words "BY NEW ORDER" from the notice above the tunnel. Perhaps he was concerned that the Nazi implications were unclear or that the phrase in this context made it appear that the fascist regime had been recently imposed on the ants, as opposed to being part of their nature. However, White retained the second reference to "New Order" in *The Sword in the Stone*, thereby indicating that the reference to Nazism in the episode was deliberate (White 1958, 118).

humanity that makes war, and, therefore, the ants can also be viewed as representing any human society at war. In his imagination, ants are, inherently, a perfect militia, and White describes them using military terms: the first ant Arthur encounters is described as “a tank” and then as “a knight-in-armor on an armored horse” (White 1977, 51). The qualities that the ants possess are the qualities necessary for a successful military: discipline requires the restriction of the individual’s ability to think critically; military success requires the control of language through the censorship of certain concepts and words; and the army necessitates deference to the will of a single, ultimate authority that must be obeyed without question. Within a modern military, as with the ants, individuals are forced into complete homogeneity and are identified by rank and number, and the ants, too, are known only by serial number.⁶⁰ Ultimately, Arthur (and, through him, the audience) discovers that the society that is able to create the perfect army is unbearable for the perfect ruler and is designed to destroy all creative minds. Indeed, this society believes Arthur to be “an insane ant” (53) and is only prevented from executing him by Merlyn’s intervention. Ultimately, therefore, the message of the ant episode is a condemnation of the effects of war on society. A nation at war necessarily restricts the thought of its members (good and bad become “Done” and “Not Done”) and is unbearable to those who desire to be free to think creatively.

White experienced this wartime constriction of the ability to think, and he recorded in his diary a series of sentiments surprisingly similar to Arthur’s in the ant colony. After the Munich crisis, White, disturbed to find that he had felt willing to kill for his country in a moment of high emotion, described his experience of living in a nation on the brink of war:

⁶⁰ During the Second World War both the military and the home services were assigned service numbers. Lara Feigel notes that Henry Yorke (who wrote under the name Henry Green) was proud of his low service number in the Auxiliary Fire Service as it signified his choice to volunteer prior to the start of the War (Feigel 2014, 39).

[I]n a state of war the individual drowns. During that week or year of torture which the German legislator inflicted upon so many millions, one felt that it was impossible to think. To think individually, to discriminate between right and wrong for oneself, became a physical effort like [breathing?] against an anaesthetic [sic]. The mind seemed to flounder and drown in the All-mind. The consciousness sank in the Unconscious. [. . .] One had to be one of the race.⁶¹

Arthur, too, feels in the warlike ant colony that his brain and his thoughts are not his own, and White's own experiences of a nation preparing for war can be seen to inform his descriptions of the militaristic ants. Likewise, the ant "wireless" serves to express White's intense frustration and disgust with wartime propaganda. The empty and monotonous "Mammy - mammy - mammy" and "Love - dove - above" songs that disturb and annoy Arthur in the anthill are drawn from White's personal observations of B.B.C. radio broadcasts. In early 1942 White describes in his diary what he saw as the inadequacies of wartime radio:

I have twice written down the titles of the songs and music played between eleven and twelve - which I believe is held to be an important hour - by the B.B.C. These were on Saturday nights (the most important date of the wireless week) during the progress of a world war which could conceivably make the human race extinct and probably will [. . .]. Here then, is what the human mind concerns itself with, during the critical hours of its destiny.

⁶¹ T. H. White, diary 1938-1939, 9 Oct. 1938, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC. Bertrand Russell records a similar experience of the mental pressure imposed by collective hysteria. He wrote that "the greatest difficulty" of being a member of the pacifist minority "was the purely psychological one of resisting mass suggestion, of which the force becomes terrific when the whole nation is in a state of violent collective excitement. As much effort was required to avoid sharing this excitement as would have been needed to stand out against the extreme of hunger or sexual passion, and there was the same feeling of going against instinct" (Russell 1935, 329). Considering the similarity in language and the fact that White had an interest in the topic, it seems possible that White read Russell's essay and drew inspiration from it.

A. List on 8.3.40

Good Morning, Sargent Major. (Typical to war.)

Moon for Sale. (Our sweet Romance was Just a Fairy Tale.)

Thanks Mr. Roosevelt. (Typical to war.)

Weep No More. (Lurv [sic]).

Eep Ipe. (Gibberish)⁶²

White continues in a similar vein and describes eleven more songs with humorous parenthetical asides. He then offers the following “analysis: 56% on Lurv [sic][,] 19% gibberish or Juvenile [,] 19% on war [,] 6% on silver linings etc.”⁶³ A second list of sixteen songs from 26 November 1941, labeled “B,” receives similarly sarcastic and dismissive comments, and the analysis concludes that it consists of “42% (approx) on Lurv [sic] [,] 28% without words [,] 14% Silver Linings [,] 14% war as it relates to Lurv [sic] (i.e. on seeing a bombed church you think of being married in it.) [,] 7% Juvenile.”⁶⁴ The excerpts from White’s diary suggest that the ant colony is meant to serve not only as an allegorical condemnation of the fascist state, but also as a critical look at the emotional and psychological effects of war. Arthur’s experiences of the monotonous, thought-drowning propaganda and his inability to think beyond the mental restrictions that his species’ needs place upon him are reflections of White’s own reactions during a national crisis.

The connection between *The Book of Merlyn* and the Huxleys continued after Collins refused *The Once and Future King* for publication. In spite of his publisher’s

⁶² T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 3 Jan. 1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC. White was far from the only author of the time who hated wartime radio broadcasts. Auden “told friends he detested wartime radio” and satirized its “impersonal, anonymous, inauthentic” voice in his longest poem, *The Age of Anxiety* (1947) (Mendelson 1999, 249).

⁶³ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 3 Jan. 1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

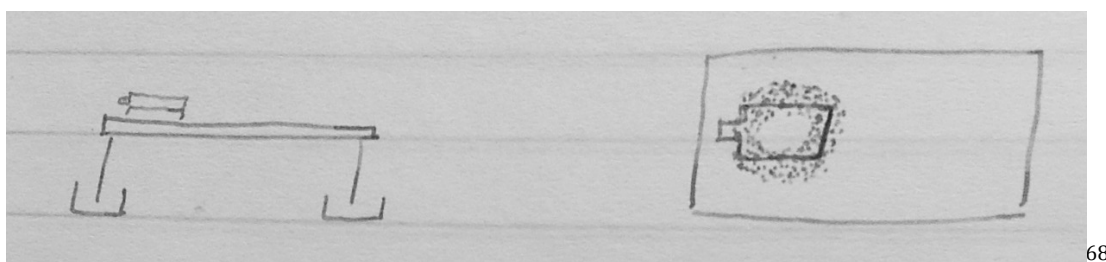
⁶⁴ Ibid.

rejection White retained his conviction that his text could benefit the Allies in the War. He converted his arguments into a pamphlet, "The Insolence of Man."⁶⁵ As Warner describes it, "He compressed its [*The Book of Merlyn's*] non-Arthurian contents into a tract for the times. The Insolence, Importance, Ferocity, Ingenuity, Problems and Future of Man were severally dealt with as though he were lecturing to a class. [. . .] There is no doubt that he was extremely earnest" (Warner 1967, 194). As part of his continuing investigation into the causes of war in mankind, White, always interested in animals and biology and evidently inspired by his reading in Julian Huxley's work, began to conduct experiments on Irish ant colonies. White believed that by observing all the animal communities that make war he could discover the commonalities between them, and he was confident that these common qualities would display the root cause of conflict. In his journal from 1941–1942, over 60 pages – just under one quarter of the total length of the diary – are devoted to notes, observations, and analyses of these ants and their behaviors under various stresses.⁶⁶ White first constructed two artificial colonies of ants on tables in his home at Doolistown; he put these colonies under plates of glass in order

⁶⁵ For several years White remained determined to present these ideas to the public in some form. After Collins refused to publish *The Book of Merlyn*, White transformed the arguments in the book into a more formal critical treatise on biology, politics, war, and humanity which he entitled "The Insolence of Man" (see T. H. White, "The Insolence of Man," folder 5, box 7, MS-4494, HRC). This text has never been published, but the draft remains in White's archives in the HRC. After it became clear that "The Insolence of Man" could not be published, White again reformulated his hypotheses into a play, "Ants." This play, too, remains in his archives and has been neither published nor produced. The set design is highly experimental and instructs that the stage must be made to appear to be a cross-section of a colony. The actors – dressed as ants – reach the various chambers of the colony using scaffolding. Like all of White's work on ants at the time, the play is ultimately concerned with "how to stop wars," a secret which only "Dr. Hamlet," a wise biologist ant, has discovered (T. H. White, "Ants," folder 8, box 1, MS-4494, HRC). Dr. Hamlet suggests that the ants look at humans to solve the puzzle of why ants fight wars. The majority of the race cannot see Dr. Hamlet's wisdom, however, and they continue with their attack on "Nest B" (T. H. White, "Ants," folder 8, box 1, MS-4494, HRC). Finally, in the end pages of his copy of *The New Treasury of War Poetry* (1943) White drafted an unpublished poem called "Boundaries" in which he again returned to the theme: "Man is an animal; there also are 275,000/Other live species of animal and/Only some dozen of them go to war/This dozen is of ants, termites and men,/All of whom make their claim to territory" (T. H. White, marginalia in [Clarke 1943, end pages], HRC). It seems that his obsession with this theory only ended after the termination of the War.

⁶⁶ The bulk of White's notes on ants in his 1941–1942 journal fall between 17 July 1942 and 21 August 1942. (See T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 17 July 1942 – 21 Aug. 1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.)

to observe their behavior within the nests as well as outside of them.⁶⁷ The following rudimentary sketch from White's journal shows, on the left, the ants' table with each of its legs placed in a dish of paraffin to prevent the captive ants from wandering, and, on the right, an aerial view of the ant colony, covered by a plate of glass.



In addition to these indoor colonies, White also observed wild ants that he found in the land surrounding Doolistown House. He conducted a series of experiments on these ants by attempting to transplant their nests nearer to one another. He then endeavored to determine if the ant colonies, now in close proximity, chose to attack their new neighbors. White believed that by observing the ants he could prove that the existence of territorial boundaries caused warfare. White states his hypotheses for these experiments in his diary:

1. That ants known to be belligerent did not tolerate new nests i.e. claimed territory
2. That ants known to be pacific did tolerate new nests i.e. did not claim territory

⁶⁷ White does not record the opinions of Lena and Paddy McDonagh, his Irish landlady and landlord, about having colonies of live ants in their home; however, he does draw a compelling portrait of the consternation and confusion of the locals regarding his outdoor experiments on ants in *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* (White 1947, 35). This portrayal is discussed further in chapter four.

⁶⁸ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 17 July 1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

3. That possession of communal property, whether portable or otherwise, had nothing to do with it.⁶⁹

White communicated with Julian Huxley in 1942, exchanging a series of letters with him in an effort to discover whether the acquisition of property or the formation of territorial boundaries was the “cause” of warlike behavior in ants. White drafted the note to Huxley in the end pages of his copy of *Ants*: “I am trying to write a book about the politics of animals [. . .]. The thesis of the book is that [. . .] the sooner we take ourselves down a peg, examine the politics of older animals, give our ingenuity a compulsory rest, abolish national property as such, and concentrate on letting our brains catch up with our fingers, the better it will be for all concerned.”⁷⁰ Huxley, while responding in a friendly and helpful tone, cautioned White not to draw conclusions too forcefully:

I never feel that one ought to try and press biological analogies to the limit. Biology is full of cases of structures or instincts which are clearly adaptive, being produced in one set of animals and not in another living under rather similar circumstances. What survives is what works, and accident plays a considerable part in determining the course of evolution.⁷¹

White’s more unorthodox theories about how the biology of ants and the biology of humans create the circumstances that lead to war in both species never saw the light of day, however, and “The Insolence of Man” remains unpublished. Nevertheless, White’s

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ T. H. White, marginalia in (Huxley 1935, end pages), HRC.

⁷¹ Sir Julian Sorrell Huxley, letter to T. H. White, 21 May 1942, folder 4, box 22, MS-4494, HRC.

correspondence with the Huxley family regarding the concepts that appeared in *The Book of Merlyn* confirms the supposition that White's arguments were intended to mirror those of Aldous, his predecessor in pacifist literature, and Julian, his predecessor in scientific literature.⁷²

The pacifist message of *The Once and Future King* developed because of White's experiences in neutral Ireland, and because of his desire to connect with a literary community that he believed shared the goal of writing for peace. His decision to leave England and remain in Ireland was fraught, and White felt he needed some justification for his actions. *The Book of Merlyn*, with its efforts to uncover the biological root of human violence, allowed him to rationalize his choice as part of a wider non-violence movement. Pacifism was not the only change that White's time in Ireland made to *The Once and Future King*, however, and the next chapter investigates how White's interest in Irish history and literature altered the epic's characters and settings.

⁷² Like many of his enthusiasms, White came to reject his earlier admiration of Julian Huxley. In an unsigned review of Huxley's *Kingdom of the Beasts* (1956) for the *Times Literary Supplement*, White castigates Huxley for suggesting that humanity is the pinnacle of evolutionary success. He accuses Huxley of attempting to "reerect the image of man on the altar" and laments that humanity is always "inventing [its] own standards of dominance" over the other animals (White 1956b). Huxley responded in a letter to the editor, "One cannot argue with an attitude, especially with one so curiously distorted and ill-tempered," and he reminded his readers that the book was merely a collection of nature photographs, supplemented with some scientific commentary: "Such deep subjects are outside the scope of my text, which [. . .] was written as a complement to Suschitzky's pictorial interpretation of our mammalian relatives" (Huxley 1956).

Chapter 3

“All Arthur’s enemies”: How Ireland Altered *The Once and Future King*

The second prominent change in *The Once and Future King* that resulted from White’s wartime experience was the author’s increased engagement with Irish characters, themes, and conflicts in the narrative. Although White originally chose Ireland as a refuge out of convenience, shortly after his arrival in the country in February 1939 he became absorbed in the study of Irish history, literature, and archaeology. He began to identify himself as an Irishman, to explore the possibility of converting to Catholicism,⁷³ and to study the Irish language – he wrote to Sir Sydney Cockerell on 12 August 1939 that he wished “to learn Irish well enough to write a book in it” (Meynell 1956, 68). His writing from the time reflects this shift in his interests: characters in *The Once and Future King* which had previously been of no explicit nationality became “Gaelic,” settings developed Irish features and architecture, segments of dialogue were rendered in Irish-language word order, and conflicts which had been ill-defined were now about Gaelic racial prejudices and historical grievances. The modifications wrought on the text were not merely cosmetic, but impacted the construction of the epic’s central conflict, and made the concept of Arthur’s round table, and, indeed, the character of Arthur, more nuanced and morally ambiguous. This chapter explores White’s reading and experiences in Ireland from 1939–1942 and uses the archives and drafts to investigate the changes that can be observed in his novel as a result.

Shortly after his arrival in Ireland on 22 February 1939, White began to claim status as an “Irishman” as a justification for remaining apart from direct involvement in

⁷³ In François Gallix interview of White’s longtime friend Mary Potts he asks her why White contemplated conversion to Catholicism. She replies, “Oh! to be Irish! Just to be a proper Irishman!” (Mary Potts, interview by François Gallix, Cambridge, 25 Oct. 1974, folder 4, box 23, MS-4494, HRC).

the war effort. From the outset, Ireland represented a neutral refuge from conflict to White. On 24 March 1939, a month after his arrival in Ireland, he wrote to L. J. Potts, “I am thinking of staying in Ireland for another month at any rate, for if you people rush into war as soon as you look like doing it, I may be able to skulk about under the shamrock until the first few bombardments are over” (Gallix 1984, 97). Although his tone is jocular, White makes the explicit statement that he intends to remain in Ireland to avoid participating in the Second World War. He wrote a similar letter to Ray Garnett several months later on 29 May 1939, and asserts his right to remain detached based on a sense of Irish identity:

Do you think I shall stay here forever? I have read two enormous histories of Ireland – one of them Father D’Alton in 8 volumes⁷⁴ – and begun to learn Irish. Now that I have my car I spend about 2 days a week pacing the hill of Tara, the rest of the time lying on the banks of the Boyne and talking politics. [. . .] The hand already strays towards the dynamite and the harp. I will write you a letter from the scaffold. [. . .] I am very happy with the Irish now, and they speak well of me. [. . .] By the way, will you tell Bunny that now I will not be able to help him with his propaganda in the next war? I have at last decided with O’Connell that bloodshed is wrong in any country in any circumstances,⁷⁵ and also I am too busy to attend to such matters. My job is to labour smally [sic] at increasing civilization, not to join in destroying it. So I am going to claim the immunity of the

⁷⁴ White is referring to E. A. D’Alton’s eight-volume *History of Ireland From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (D’Alton [1920]–1925).

⁷⁵ White may have found this information in D’Alton, who argues, “In France he [O’Connell] had seen the horrors of the Revolution; in Ireland the horrors of 1798; and during his whole life he abhorred both revolution and rebellion, as he did the shedding of blood” (D’Alton 1925, 5:121).

Irish bard, confirmed in A.D. 500 or so at the convention of Drum Cuit.⁷⁶ I am sorry about this, but I am also right about it. (D. Garnett 1968, 44–45)

Once again, White's tone is light and humorous, but he makes an even more assertive statement to Ray Garnett than he made to Potts: Ireland is a political refuge from the war, and he is entitled to claim it because he is Irish. He associates himself with the historically important locations of the Boyne (a central location for Irish mythology), the hill of Tara (the mythological seat of the high king of Ireland), and with the traditional Irish emblem of the harp. Further, he claims the authority of Daniel O'Connell – the Irish Statesman who used political activism rather than violence to secure Catholic emancipation in 1829 – to argue that even peripheral involvement in violence is wrong. In essence, White attempts to take refuge in a tradition of Irish pacifism that he himself has imagined. The authorities that White calls upon to defend his neutrality are an ancient group of poets and a pacifist statesman, a combination that reflects his desire to enact social change through literature. From these letters one may conclude that White's growing interest in Irish heritage and politics was not wholly disinterested. Both of these examples from White's letters are humorous, but White made similar statements privately and without the jocular tone. On 11 December 1939, after winning the first prize in a poetry competition open to winners of the New Verse Competition on Radio Éireann, he wrote: "So I am now the chief bard of Erin, and prouder of this than of

⁷⁶ E. A. D'Alton describes "the Convention of Druim Ceat" held in 590 A. D. (D'Alton [1920], 1:97). However, although D'Alton discusses at length the convention's debates about "the position and privileges of the bards" it is unclear how White interpreted these privileges as extending to immunity during wartime. Indeed, D'Alton makes it clear that Irish bards would have played a highly active part in war: "Dressed in his white robe, [. . .] he [the bard] followed his chief into every battle in which he was engaged. [. . .] He urged the timid, steadied the hesitating, applauded valour, put cowardice to shame; and the coward had less to fear of the foemen's weapons than of the biting satire of his bard" (1:99). Apparently White allowed himself creative license to interpret D'Alton's account of the convention for his friends. Doubtless D'Alton's description of the exalted position of the bards would have appealed to White, however. He may also have read about the political importance of the bards in Daniel Corkery's *The Hidden Ireland*, a copy of which remains in his library at the HRC (See Corkery 1925, 59–89). Corkery, however, while he does mention "St. Colmcille [. . .] plead[ing] for them [bards] at Drumceat" does not discuss the bards' military involvement or exemption (Corkery 1925, 71).

almost anything else I can think of.”⁷⁷ In this private journal, as in his earlier letters, White identifies as an Irish bard, and this private statement lends credence to his prior, humorous declarations: clearly he was being at least somewhat genuine in his belief that being an Irish poet authorized him to abstain from fighting in the war. He began to explore the Irish ancestry in his family tree. In late 1939 White insists, “My mother was an Englishwoman [. . .] and I was educated in England. But my father was Irish.”⁷⁸ He may have been more inclined to believe in his father’s connection to Ireland because he hoped that Irish heritage might enable him to claim Irish citizenship and that this would protect him from participation in the War. When he heard that Parliament had introduced conscription in April 1939, he wrote in his diary that one option was “to seek Irish citizenship through my father.”⁷⁹ However by 1942 White writes that he “learned by letter from my mother that my father was only half Irish,” and he had begun to doubt and distance himself from this tenuous genealogical link.⁸⁰ His changing attitudes towards Ireland after 1942 are discussed further in chapter four.

As White began to claim Irish ancestry, he became absorbed in the study of Irish language, history, and culture. As quoted above, he claimed to have read Edward Alfred D’Alton’s *History of Ireland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (1903–1910), and in the months after his arrival he engaged a tutor to teach him Irish. Like John Betjeman and several other English authors living in Ireland at this time, White began to sign his letters with the Irish version of his name: “Toirdhealbhadh Ó Gealagáin” (D. Garnett

⁷⁷ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 11 Dec. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC. The poem, “Sheskin,” describes the eponymous hunting lodge in Mayo in which White and David Garnett had learned of the declaration of war. In 1940 *The Dublin Magazine* published “Sheskin” and it would go on to publish thirteen more of the author’s poems over the course of the year (White 1940a). “Sheskin” was later collected in the anthology *Editor’s Choice: A Little Anthology of Poems Selected from the Dublin Magazine* (O’Sullivan 1944, 38). The anthology also included work by A. E. (George Russell), Joseph Campbell, Austin Clarke and Francis Ledwidge.

⁷⁸ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 19 Dec. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

⁷⁹ T. H. White, diary 1938–1939, 26 Apr. 1939, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

⁸⁰ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 8 Feb. 1942, folder 2, box 8, Box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

1968, 51),⁸¹ and he began to read about the history and archaeology of his adopted country. A list in his diary, drawn up after a shopping trip to the Dublin bookshop Hodges Figgis, contains almost a dozen titles and includes two books by R. A. S. Macalister (Macalister 1921, 1935),⁸² one title by William Gregory Wood-Martin (Wood-Martin 1895), *The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology* by Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville (Arbois de Jubainville 1903), Douglas Hyde's *The Story of Early Gaelic Literature* (Hyde 1922), and Thomas Mason's *The Islands of Ireland* (Mason 1938).⁸³ These men were important figures in the growing interest in Irish history and archaeology towards the turn of the twentieth century, and the breadth of genre in these non-fiction titles – from archaeology to mythology to personal travel narratives – displays White's earnest attempts to acquaint himself with the full range of modern research. From this list it is clear that White was exploring not only the fiction and poetry of writers like Yeats, Synge, and Joyce, but also the work of the archaeologists and folklorists who inspired the Literary Revival. He would later publish an account of his own explorations in Irish folklore, mythology, and archaeology as *The Godstone and the Blackymor* (discussed further in chapter four), but much of the research he did also found its way into *The Once and Future King*.

⁸¹ White may have found this translation of his name in *Sloinnte Gaedheal agus Gall: Irish Names and Surnames* (1922), a copy of which remains in his library, and which suggests “Ó Gealagáin” as one of five possible Irish translations for “White” (Woulfe 1922, 160). Alex Runchman suggests that Betjeman's use of Irish in his letters may can be read as a sign of his lack of sympathy for many aspects of Irish society: “Betjeman was nonetheless unsympathetic to much of the society he encountered. ‘I begin to hate Ireland,’ he complained to his friend John Piper on St Patrick's Day 1941, ‘and feel it is all playing at being a country.’ Meanwhile, his habit of signing letters ‘Sean O’Betjeman,’ on one hand an affectionate pretence at native identity, is, on the other, not far short of a sneer” (Runchman 2015, 88). While White's attitude to Ireland soured after early 1942, his use of his Irish name appears at this early point in his stay to be a playful but genuine tribute.

⁸² Although Macalister was highly respected and one of the first archaeologists to employ highly scientific methods of classification and stratification (see Ó Lúing, 2000), White appears to have preferred the work of Wood-Martin to Macalister. In an annotation in *Ireland in Pre-Celtic Times* he quips, “About 40% of Macalister's own work is cribbed from Wood-Martin” (T. H. White, marginalia in [Macalister 1911, 15], HRC).

⁸³ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 1 Apr. 1940, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494. The full list is also reproduced in chapter four.

White's reading in Irish history and politics and his self-identification as an Irish national shaped the politics, settings, characters and tone of *The Once and Future King* and introduced explicitly Irish elements into the text which were not present in early editions. The most substantial rewriting that White did over the course of the war was the transformation of *The Witch in the Wood* into *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, a redraft that caused White immense difficulty. White began reworking *The Witch in the Wood* as early as 1939, but the redraft that transformed it into *The Queen of Air and Darkness* occurred in 1941, after White had completed all the other elements of his epic including *The Book of Merlyn*. The critics Warner, Brewer, and Sprague have all speculated that White's trouble with this text arose because he fashioned the eponymous character of Morgause upon his own mother, and his dislike of her made the book and Morgause's character impossible for White to view with equanimity or impartiality. White himself agreed with this analysis, and he explained to Garnett, "Morgause is the villain of the piece. (I may mention that she is my mother.) This is why I have had such awful difficulty with her" (D. Garnett 1968, 87). Equally important and causing equal difficulty was the tone of the text, which White initially intended to be farcical, but which he later felt to be a mistake. One of the major changes White made to the text was to alter the tone, and, as he writes, "make it more dignified" (D. Garnett 1968, 87). On 14 September 1941, after one of White's final redrafts, he wrote to David Garnett's son, William Garnett, "What I have done to the Witch, to put it in one sentence, is to cut out the Evelyn Waugh" (D. Garnet 1968, 97). Waugh's pre-War "tone of bitter mockery that shut out conventional sentiment" (McCartney 2004, 78) did not suit the fantastical Mediaeval world that White was attempting to create, and White chose to remove the cutting humor that had made Morgause ridiculous. This serious, non-farcical rewriting, White decided, needed to include a great deal of Irish material. He wrote to Garnett that he intended to rewrite the text with "Morgause as a serious, darksome

witch [. . .] In the serious re-writing I was thinking of doing an immense amount of stuff about the gaelic [sic] blood – the feral, subtle, treacherous Pict” (D. Garnett 1968, 88), and he likewise writes to L. J. Potts, “I am thinking [. . .] of tearing [*The Witch in the Wood*] up wholly, and re-doing it with Morgause as straight witch, no farce, and lashings of celtic twilight [sic]” (Gallix 1984, 118).

The surviving redrafts of *The Witch in the Wood* feature long passages of descriptive Irish material and discussions of Irish politics, many of which White later removed. These redrafts show how extensively White began to insert these “lashings of celtic twilight [sic],” and the intensity with which he began to imagine that it was his job to create an accurate picture of the “Gaelic” character and landscape. In one sense in particular White places himself within the literary community of Celtic writers:

~~Do you understand the Gael? If so you are a Gael yourself, for nobody else has ever understood them.~~⁸⁴ The people who we have to visit have been misrepresented in a hundred ways by the writers who have tried to do them justice.⁸⁵

He dismisses in turn Sir Walter Scott who “thought of them as romantic, honourable figures, full of pride of race and usquebaugh [sic] and sweet simplicity” and Robert Louis Stevenson “who thinks of the Gael as a person who is always singing the Road to the Isles,” before turning to the literary depictions of Ireland:

⁸⁴ I have retained White’s deleted segments where they seem relevant or where they alter the meaning of the text, and I distinguish them as shown above with a strikethrough font; however, White also regularly made more minor, grammatical edits and deletions to his diaries, letters, notebooks, etc. These smaller changes have not been included, and instead the edited text is reproduced.

⁸⁵ T. H. White, “Book Two: The Queen of Air and Darkness Handwritten and Typed Manuscript,” folder 6, box 13, MS-4494, HRC.

Their Irish branch – for we are doomed to visit a part which was colonized from Ireland – has been represented by the earlier plays of Yeats as being addicted to making poetical speeches of the utmost insincerity, while dressed in flowing robes, about an unpronounceable hero of their own mythology. Other great Irishmen like Synge are inclined to stress the poetry of their ordinary conversation to such an extent that none of them ever asks for a bottle of potheen [sic] without mentioning that it is to be found in the South-South-West corner of the cupboard. Then there is the Celtic Twilight, discovered in the middle of the nineteenth century, out of which there looms a land of saints and scholars, at present represented by the government of Mr. de Valera, which has established a reputation for ferocity, vanity and lack of principle seldom challenged in the civilized world. What a hotch-potch [sic] it is, and quite impossible to describe unless you are of the ancient blood yourself.⁸⁶

White becomes the self-appointed voice of “the Gael” in this redraft, asserting by inference that he is “of the ancient blood” and is more able to represent them than anyone else in the community.

In 1941 White completely reconceptualized the setting of the Orkney Islands in *The Queen of Air and Darkness* from its original in *The Witch in the Wood*, and the changes served to make the atmosphere more Irish. In *The Witch in the Wood* the setting of the Orkney Islands showed little or no difference to the Medieval setting of Sir Ector’s castle in *The Sword in the Stone*. In contrast, in *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, the opening image that White presents to the audience is a distinctly Irish edifice: “There was a round tower with a weather-cock on it. The weather-cock was a carrion crow, with an arrow in its beak to point to the wind” (White 1958, 203). The architectural

⁸⁶ T. H. White, “Book Two: The Queen of Air and Darkness Handwritten and Typed Manuscript,” folder 6, box 13, MS-4494, HRC.

feature of the round tower – recognizable across the Irish countryside – has been a symbol for Ireland for many centuries, and although there is one existing example on the Orkney island of Egilsay, the round tower is associated with the early Irish Church. White would have been aware, at least at second hand, of the link between round towers and Ireland and the long-standing archaeological debate about their use. R. A. S. Macalister summarizes the arguments surrounding these structures in *Ireland in Pre-Celtic Times*, and several of the other archaeological and historical texts that White encountered likewise touch on this controversy.⁸⁷ The crow is also a significant and decidedly “Gaelic” symbol of malevolence. White would have read in *The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology*, “When the gods appear unto men, the form they assume is often that of birds. [. . .] [T]he birds that announce the presence of the Fomorians, the gods of Death and Night, [. . .] are crows or ravens” (Arbois de Jubainville 1903, 110).⁸⁸ By making the first image of the location a specifically Irish construction topped by what White regarded as a malevolent Celtic symbol, White signals the Gaelic intent of the narrative, and places his fictional version of Orkney in a historical Irish context.

White’s Orkney characters changed as drastically as his settings. In *The Witch in the Wood* the young children of Morgause – Gareth, Gaheris, Gawain, and Agravaine – speak in a standard English idiom. White wrote that this original version made them

⁸⁷ White’s reading would have left him well apprised of the existence and content of this debate even if he never encountered it in the original sources. Macalister, whom White read, summarizes the theories of Sir Thomas Molyneux’s *A Discourse Concerning the Danish Mounts, Forts and Towers in Ireland* (1725), Henry O’Brien’s *Round Towers of Ireland, or the Mysteries of Freemasonry, of Sabaism, and of Budhism* (1834), and George Petrie’s *Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland* (1845) (Macalister 1921, 3, 8, 9). An extensive description of the theories on Irish round towers also appears in D’Alton’s *History of Ireland* (D’Alton [1920] 1:209–213). W. G. Wood-Martin briefly praises the work of George Petrie on round towers (Wood-Martin 1895, 64), and Thomas H. Mason writes, “Much nonsense has been written about the round towers of Ireland, some writers even suggesting that they are of pagan origin and have a phallic significance” (Mason 1938, 29).

⁸⁸ White would have also found a similar passage on Lady Wilde’s *Ancient Cures, Charms and Usages of Ireland*, which remains in his library at the Harry Ransom Center. Wilde writes of ravens, “When a raven is seen hovering round a cottage, evil is near” (Wilde 1890, 61). An annotation of “bestiaries” in the margins indicates that White read the passage and likely considered it when translating his own *Bestiary* (T. H. White, marginalia in [Wilde 1890, 61], HRC).

speak “like children at an English prep. school” (Garnett 1968, 97). In the process of rewriting, White changed their language, and in *The Queen of Air and Darkness* the speech patterns of the Orkney children mimic Irish-language word order. When White first introduces the characters he writes, “They were whispering in Gaelic. Or rather, they were whispering in a strange mixture of Gaelic and of the Old Language of chivalry [. . .]. They had little English” (White 1958, 204). White renders the children’s dialogue in Irish-language word order to convey the foreign quality of his characters. For example, when telling the story of how Uther, Arthur’s father, raped their grandmother, Igraine, Gawain says, “There was a beautiful grandmother at us called Igraine” (204). The phrase “a beautiful grandmother at us” mimics the Irish-language structure of using the particle *ag*, literally translated “at,” to convey ownership. Other features in the children’s speech also draw upon traditional Irish-language storytelling practices. In several Irish-language epics – one example is the *Táin Bó Cúlaighe* – the storyteller uses long strings of descriptive adjectives to convey emphasis, and White imitates this in Gawaine’s story. Gawaine says, “They saddled their prancing, fire-eyed, swift-footed, symmetrical, large-lipped, small-headed, vehement steeds” (205). This description is similar to the descriptive, alliterative runs in the *Táin* and other *Rúraíocht*, or Ulster Cycle, texts (see O’Rahilly 1976, ll. 2279ff.).

Kurth Sprague mentions this stylistic linguistic choice on White’s part, but he appears to misinterpret the significance of the boys’ verbal patterns. While he recognizes that “the ‘Gaelic’ idiom that the boys use in *Queen* is more Irish than Scottish” he fails to acknowledge that White presents a literal translation of the boys’ Irish-language story, and Sprague writes that their language is “reminiscent really of the fabricated Kiltartan brogue employed by Lady Gregory, J. M. Synge, and others” (Sprague 2007, 69). This similarity between “Kiltartanese,” as Lady Gregory termed it, and White’s literally translated Irish reflects the fact that Lady Gregory and J. M. Synge

observed and transcribed Irish-language word order in the English of the rural districts where they lived and worked. Kiltartan, however, was always meant to represent a dialect of English. White, however, explicitly tells us that during this storytelling episode, the boys “were whispering in Gaelic.” This initial misreading leads Sprague to believe that White makes an error when he later provides Gawaine’s English with a “braid Scots” accent in *The Candle in the Wind*, and he claims that “the inconsistency of his dialect between *Queen* and *Candle*” is “one of the anomalies of *TOAFK* that White himself was unaware of” (69). However, when one realizes that in *The Queen of Air and Darkness* Gawain is speaking in Gaelic and in *The Candle in the Wind* he is speaking in accented English, the “anomaly” becomes straightforward. White even explains Gawain’s accent: “He was the only one of the Orkney clan who had refused to learn English correctly and spoke in a Northern accent – almost an assumed one” (White 1958, 426). White intended his Irish-language word order and storytelling stylization to set the characters of the young boys in the tower apart from the young King Arthur, and also from their older, more Anglicized selves.

Another significant change to the text made the epic’s antagonists, the forces that oppose Arthur and his vision, almost uniformly “Gaelic.” White’s notebooks show that this change represents a deliberate choice to create a unified antagonist for Arthur. In one of his undated notebooks White writes, “[The Gaels] were always waiting and scheming to stab some of their accumulated conquerors in the back, as their descendants still wait in Ireland.” He continues, “Almost all Arthur’s enemies, throughout his life, were of Gaelic stock – were these Old Ones taking their subtle chances of revenge.”⁸⁹ From this short note, it is evident that White set out to build an epic with its antagonists rooted in the ethnic group he termed the “Gaels.”

⁸⁹ T. H. White, Notebook 3, folder 11, box 7, MS-4494, HRC.

It could be argued that these “Gael” are mostly from the Orkney Islands and are therefore Scottish and not connected to White’s stay in Ireland. Significantly, however, White not only uses explicitly Irish references in the novel, but also conflates the Scottish and the Irish in his diary. On 3 May 1939 he wrote some remarks about a character from *Le Morte d’Arthur*, and notes, “Anguish, variously mentioned by Malory as of Scotland and of Ireland.”⁹⁰ White found this inconsistency in his source text confusing, and he resolved the problem by deciding, “Ireland may have been the original Scotland.”⁹¹ From this statement, it seems clear that White equated the two places as he wrote, so that the characters from Orkney are, at least to some extent, Irish in his mind. This statement that Ireland is “the original Scotland” is particularly interesting considering that White prominently included Scotland in *England Have My Bones*, a book in which White sought to build for himself the identity of an English gentleman. This early focus on Scotland might suggest that White was somehow concerned with a pan-Celtic identity throughout his life, and that the use of the Irish material in *The Once and Future King* was therefore not a new inclusion but a concern traceable from as early as *England Have My Bones*. However, although in the earlier work he professes himself in love with the Scottish countryside, White seems to use the location not as a meaningful argument or concern but more as a colorful backdrop for his own sportsman fantasies. He includes Scotland without considering the deeper history or significance of this particular location. It seems likely that it is only through recalling his experiences in

⁹⁰ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 3 May 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

⁹¹ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 3 May 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC. Several of the sources of Irish history and archaeology that White was drawing on at the time would have agreed with this conclusion. Wood-Martin mentions that the early Irish were called “Scoti” (Wood-Martin 1895, 95), and D’Alton writes, “Whoever will read the history of these islands during the first centuries of the Christian era will note that Ireland was the country of the Scots; that colonies of these Scots passed from Ireland to Caledonia, where they settled; [. . .] that it was Ireland alone which was called Scotia; and that if sometimes Caledonia was called Scotia, it was always called Scotia Minor, to distinguish it from Ireland, which was Scotia simply, or Scotia Major” (D’Alton [1920], 1:22)

Scotland later, through his growing sympathy with Ireland, that White saw the significance of the close historical relationship between Scotland and Ireland.

After coming to the conclusion that “all Arthur’s enemies” were Gaelic, White made an effort to retrospectively transform some of the antagonists from *The Sword in the Stone* into Gaelic characters. For example, the character Sir Bruse Saunce Pité, the first true antagonist introduced in the narrative, is initially presumed to be of Norman or French origins. The audience is introduced to Sir Bruce when Sir Grummure Grummursum, a knight and a friend of Arthur’s foster father, describes how he “found a chap called Sir Bruce Saunce Pité choppin’ off a maiden’s head in Weedon Bushes, ran him to Mixbury Plantation in the Bicester, where he doubled back, and lost him in Wicken Wood” (White 1958, 4). In this passage, Sir Bruce Saunce Pité is used as a playful reference to Malory,⁹² and plays into White’s ongoing joke that ties Anglo-Norman knights to Victorian sporting culture: Grummursum’s use of foxhunting language and the dialectic dropping of his “g” humorously evokes and gently satirizes a rural, hunting upper-class. In Malory’s time “Bruce” was not a Scottish surname. The name is of Norman origins, and it can be traced from Brix in northern France (Barrow 1965, 29). *Pité* is an Old French word meaning sorrow, sadness, or grief, and from it we get the modern English word, “pity” (OED Online 2018, “pity”). Bruce Saunce Pité is thus an Anglo-Norman name. However, in *The Queen of Air and Darkness* White labels this character Gaelic, rewriting his own story in order to make his own first villain fit with the epic’s new themes. Merlyn uses the violent Sir Bruce to prompt Arthur’s thinking about Might versus Right, and Merlyn urges Arthur, “Suppose we think about your Gaelic

⁹² The name of the figure in Malory spelled differently – Sir Breuse Saunce Pité. He appears as a recurring villain in *Le Mort d’Arthur*, and Malory describes him as “the most mischievous knight living” – a passage that White marks in the margin of his copy of *Le Mort d’Arthur* (HRC Archive, White, marginalia in [Malory, 1899, 239]) – and a great “foe unto all errant knights” (Malory 1899, 301). He often appears in scenes such as the one White describes above: attacking or harassing beautiful maidens until a better knight challenges him, at which point he almost invariably flees. Malory does not give him any Celtic or Gaelic origins.

friend, Sir Bruce Sans Pitié [sic]" (White 1958, 214). Merlyn even connects this villainous character directly to Ireland: Sir Bruce is in league with with "Lot and Nentres and Uriens and all that Gaelic crew, fighting against you for the Kingdom. [. . .] They have rebelled, although you are their feudal sovereign, simply because the throne is insecure. England's difficulty, we used to say, is Ireland's opportunity"⁹³ (215). This alteration of the character does not come from Malory as Malory's Sir Breuse is never an ally of Mordred and Agravaine, or the other Gaelic characters, and, indeed, in Book 10, Chapter 25 of *Le Mort d'Arthur* Sir Breuce jousts with and overcomes both Mordred and Agravaine in a violent duel.

After his time in Ireland, White chose to use Gaelic antagonists throughout *The Once and Future King*, and in the final epic all of the sources of the round table's destruction are caused by Gaelic characters. In a letter to L. J. Potts dated 28 June 1939, White defined "the three tragic themes" of *The Once and Future King* as, "1 The Cornwall Feud, existing ever since Arthur's father killed Gawaine's grandfather, 2 The Nemesis of Incest [. . .] and 3 The Guenever-Lancelot romance" (Brewer 1993, 49). All three of these tragic events, which lead to the destruction of Utopia, come about through the actions of Gaelic characters. The event that provokes the "Cornwall Feud" is the rape of Igraine, the mother of Morgause, by Uther Pendragon, and the resulting conception of Arthur from that rape. While Uther's actions lie at the root of Morgause's resentment of Arthur, it is her deliberate perpetuation of the resentment in the minds of her sons – Gawaine, Gareth, Gaheris, Agravaine, and Mordred – that creates a "feud" between the Orkney clan and the English king. White makes the responsibility for the feud's perpetuation clear by relating the story of the feud to the audience through Morgause's children, and telling us

⁹³ This Republican adage is attributed to Daniel O'Connell, the Irish statesman (Speake 2015), but it seems possible that White is making reference to events immediately relevant to the politics of the Second World War. The phrase was used in the IRA propaganda from that time. For example, "on 28 October 1939 the first issue of a sporadic run of War News [the IRA's clandestine, mimeographed newspaper] appealed to the Irish people: 'England's Difficulty – Ireland's Opportunity has ever been the watchword of the Gael'" (Dwyre 2009, 31).

“it was their mother’s favourite story, on the rare occasions when she troubled to tell them one, and they had learned it by heart” (White 1958, 206). While Uther committed a crime, it is the unwillingness of Morgause – a Gaelic character – to relinquish her grudge that fosters her sons’ negativity and establishes a feud.

It is possible that White was inspired to add the Gaelic feud by E. A. D’Alton’s imaginative interpretation of the youth of Brian Boru. D’Alton vividly imagines how “the young prince must have imbibed from his earliest years a history of these foreigners [the Danes]” (D’Alton [1920] 1:127). Like the Orkney children, D’Alton’s Brian Boru also receives his inherited hatred from stories. D’Alton recounts that Boru must have heard “how the poor man’s cattle had been carried off, how his children had been swept away into slavery, and how these pagans [. . .] loved to heap indignities on his Church [. . .] As he listened to the harper’s song, if his cheeks glowed with pride at the recital of his kinsmen’s deeds, his heart also melted with pity as he heard the mournful song of the captive held in Danish bonds [. . .]. [H]e must have longed to be at the head of his gallant clansmen” (1:127–128). The supposition that White found the seed of the Orkney clan’s feud in his Irish research is strengthened by the fact that the feud was not included in the initial published versions of *The Witch in the Wood*, but was added after White had arrived in Ireland and begun his extensive course of reading.

Even Arthur’s incest with his half-sister Morgause and the subsequent birth of Mordred is attributable to a Gaelic character’s twisted, self-interested use of explicitly Gaelic magic. When Morgause sleeps with Arthur, it is implied that she does so through the use of a piece of Gaelic magic, the spancel, which White describes using the Irish word *piseog*, meaning superstition (White 1958, 295). The spancel is “a tape of human skin, cut from the silhouette of [a] dead man” and to use it, White explains, it must be tied around the object of one’s desire while he is asleep (295–296). White appears to have found his inspiration for the spancel in Lady Wilde’s *Ancient Cures, Charms and*

Usages of Ireland, which is still in his library. The margin next to the passage on “Love charms” is annotated, “The Spancel,”⁹⁴ and in this marked section, Wilde describes a love charm that she calls “the dead strip”: “Girls have been known to [. . .] exhume a corpse that had been nine days buried, and tear down a strip of the skin from head to foot; this they manage to tie round the leg or arm of the man they love while he sleeps, taking care to remove it before his waking” (Wilde 1890, 32). As Morgause thinks about Arthur – “about his strength, charm, innocence and generosity” – and plans to travel to Camelot, White depicts her “drawing the Spancel through her fingers” (White 1958, 296). The actual moment when Arthur sees his half-sister for the first time, just before he sleeps with her, she is “folding up a tape” (301). The implication is that Morgause uses the Irish magic of the spancel on Arthur, to force him to have sex with her and conceive Mordred. In this way, White suggests that a Gaelic character and Irish magic cause the tragic theme of incest.

Finally, it is Agravaine and Mordred who use the adultery of Lancelot and Guenever as political tool in their attempt to overthrow Arthur. Lancelot and Guenever sustain their affair for decades before it becomes a threat to Arthur’s society, and White makes it clear that Arthur tacitly allows their romance to continue: “He was hoping to weather the trouble by refusing to become conscious of it. Unconsciously, of course, he knew perfectly well that they were sleeping together – knew, too, unconsciously, that if he were to ask his wife, she would admit it” (White 1958, 379). When the Gaelic characters look for a way to destroy Arthur and avenge the Cornwall feud, “the earlier wrongs of their family [. . .] the long-gone feud of Gael and Gall,” Agravaine and Mordred force Arthur’s hand, using his own theory of justice to compel him to prosecute his wife for adultery and start a war with his best friend (White 1958, 512).

⁹⁴ T. H. White, marginalia in (Wilde 1890, 32) MS-4494, HRC.

In fact, the destructive characteristics of Agravaine, Mordred, and, to a lesser extent, Gawaine – violence, unhealthy family loyalty, impulsiveness – are all attributable, at least in part, to their educator, the Irish character of St. Toirdealbhach. A humorous figure, St. Toirdealbhach stands in the role of Merlyn to the young Orkney children: an older, unmarried hermit, he is their sole instructor, and the only figure who attempts to guide and shape their young minds. White tells his audience that St. Toirdealbhach is an Irish saint, “one of the Irish Saints who lived in the beehive cells of the outer islands” (White 1958, 226), and like Merlyn, St. Toirdealbhach serves as a stand-in for the author. Toirdealbhach – a slight misspelling of Toirdhealbhach – is the name “Terence” in the Irish language, and White occasionally signed his letters with this name while he was attempting to learn Irish (see D. Garnett 1968, 51; Gallix 1984, 126). St. Toirdealbhach is a comedic figure – he is a “saint,” but he is a hard-drinking, lecherous, and violent one who regularly commits heresies: “He was feeling a new heresy coming over him [. . .], and it had something to do with the celibacy of the clergy. He had one already about the shape of his tonsure, and the usual one about the date of Easter” (White 1958, 230). Indeed, Toirdealbhach’s heretical behaviors are consistent with the heresies ascribed to the monks of the early Irish Church. White would have found these described in E. A. D’Alton’s *History of Ireland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*.⁹⁵ To Arthur, Merlyn preaches the lesson that might does not make right, that the strongest are not entitled to tyrannize, and that war is morally wrong. He strives to instill these ideas in his pupil, who thereby grows to be a thoughtful ruler. St. Toirdealbhach serves as Merlyn’s foil; his teachings are the opposite, and he observes to his young charges, “Isn’t war the grand thing? [. . .] There did be fine wars in Old Ireland,

⁹⁵ Indeed, White would have found the discussion of these heresies difficult to miss as D’Alton is at great pains to prove that the monks’ style of tonsure and their calculation of the date of Easter did not indicate a lack of unity with Rome in the early Irish Church (see D’Alton [1920], 1:73, 1:76, 1:84–88). D’Alton also mentions marriage in the early Church although he denies that these men were ordained and insists that they were exclusively lay abbots (1:176, 1:185).

but it would be about a bull or something, and every man had his heart in it from the start” (White 1958, 229).⁹⁶ Spurred on by Toirdealbhach’s rhetoric, Gawaine asserts, that he will never get tired of wars, “after all, it is a gentleman’s occupation” (229).⁹⁷ The boys’ formal education consists of oral tales from the Irish manuscript tradition and Irish folklore, and the stories that the saint relates are universally violent, gory, and full of cruelty. The first story he tells is of “King Conor Mac Nessa,” and by way of introduction Toirdealbhach explains, “The ancient heroes were after making themselves bullets out of the brains of their adversaries – which they would roll between the palms of their hands in little pieces, and leave them to dry in the sun” (227).⁹⁸ In battle, King Conor gets one of these balls stuck in his temple, “half in, half out” and he is advised by doctors not to fight or become over excited again “for fear that his brains would burst” (228). The king, however, does not heed the warning and runs out to fight a raging storm and dies. St. Toirdealbhach gives the young boys who grow up to oppose the round table an Irish education that teaches the glorification of war and an acceptance and enjoyment of brutal violence. In the next scene, the boys are shown abusing donkeys for pleasure: “The idea which the children had was to hurt the

⁹⁶ A reference to the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* or “The Cattle-Raid of Cooley,” a group of stories in the Irish manuscript tradition that describes a war between Ulster and Connaught over the bull *Finnbhennach*. White would have encountered this story in nearly all of his historical and archaeological reading. A summary and partial translation is included in Hyde’s *The Story of Early Gaelic Literature* (Hyde 1922, 70–81). White could also have acquired a translation from *Ancient Irish Tales*, which remains in his library at the HRC and which contains translations of much of the Ulster Cycle (see Cross and Slover 1936, 127–354).

⁹⁷ This violent streak in St. Toirdealbhach could be read as a reference to the historical St. Columba who, E. A. D’Alton writes, “Was largely, if not entirely, responsible for the battle of Cuildevne (or Cuil-Dreimhne) (561), and for the bloodshed which it entailed” and who was therefore exiled from Ireland to the island of Iona (D’Alton [1920], 1:63).

⁹⁸ White seems to have taken this reference from W. G. Wood-Martin’s *Pagan Ireland*. Wood-Martin quotes G. L. Gomme’s *Ethnology of Folk-lore*, “An Irish warrior, when he killed his enemy, broke his skull, extracted his brains, mixed up the mass well, and working the compound into a ball, he carefully dried it in the sun, and afterwards produced it as a trophy of former valor and a presage of future history” (G. L. Gomme’s *Ethnology of Folk-lore* quoted in Wood-Martin 1895, 103). Although it is possible that White found this information in Gomme’s original text, it is not currently in his library, is not referenced in his diary, and it is therefore not clear that he had access to it. Since White explicitly refers to Wood-Martin’s text in his diary, it appears more likely that White acquired this reference at second hand.

donkeys. Nobody had told them that it was cruel to hurt them” (231). Unlike Arthur, these boys have not received an education in peace and justice, and as a result they become violent and disruptive later in life.

In the three areas that determine the failure of the round table and Arthur’s ideal society it is the Gaelic characters that incite disaster. After White moved to Ireland, he appears to have seized the opportunity to make a unified antagonist for Arthur, and he even went to the length of rewriting earlier characters to make them Gaelic. Making Arthur’s enemies “Gaels” makes the conflict of the story more complex and adds a layer of modern politics and ambiguity to the story.

This rewriting also makes Arthur’s ethics dubious in the final version of *The Once and Future King*. In *The Queen of Air and Darkness* Arthur goes to war with King Lot and the Gaelic federation in order to secure the throne, and Merlyn tries to instill in Arthur and Kay the values of nonviolence, arguing that King Lot is in the wrong because he initiated the fighting and there is never a good reason to start a war. Kay disagrees with Merlyn and insists, “There might be a king who had discovered a new way of life for human beings – you know, something which would be good for them. It might even be the only way of saving them from destruction. Well, if the human beings were too wicked or too stupid to accept his way, he might have to force it on them, in their own interests, by the sword” (White 1958, 255). Merlyn, furious and trembling with outrage, replies,

There was just such a man when I was young – an Austrian who invented a new way of life and convinced himself that he was the chap to make it work. He tried to impose his reformation by the sword, and plunged the civilized world into misery and chaos. But the thing which this fellow had over-looked, my friend, was that he had a predecessor in the reformation business called Jesus Christ.

[. . .] But the odd thing is that Jesus did not turn the disciples into storm troopers, burn down the Temple of Jerusalem, and fix the blame on Pontius Pilate. On the contrary, he made it clear that the business of the philosopher was to make ideas *available*, and *not* to impose them on people. (256)

Merlyn, usually White's mouthpiece in matters of politics and education, is not given the last word, however, and the wise man's judgment is called into question. Kay, "pale but obstinate" replies, "Arthur is fighting the present war [. . .] to impose his ideas on King Lot" (256). White introduces substantial moral doubt by comparing his protagonist to Hitler, and this complexity is facilitated by the inclusion of Irish politics and Irish characters in the narrative.

In the final version of *The Once and Future King* the questionable nature of Arthur's project is introduced once again when the Gaelic characters are given a level of redemption through the death of Gawaine. Near the conclusion of *The Once and Future King*, Gawaine is given by far the most moving and significant death scene in the epic. Dying, he sends Lancelot a letter to apologize for exacerbating the conflict and to forgive his friend and rival for the mortal wound he received at Lancelot's hand. White describes Gawaine's final letter with a sympathy and pathos unequalled in *The Once and Future King*:

Gawain had hardly been the sort of person you thought of as a writer. Indeed it would have seemed more natural if he had been illiterate, like most of the others. Yet here, instead of the spiky Gothic then in use, was the lovely old Gaelic minuscule, as neat and round and small as when he had learned it from some ancient saint in dim Dunlothian. He had written so unfrequently [sic] since, that the art had retained its beauty. [. . .] He had carried this innocent precision, these

dainty demoded cusps, through misery and passion and old age. It was as if a bright boy had stepped out of the black armour: a small boy with a drop on the end of his nose, his feet bare with blue toes. (White 1958, 617)

The audience is asked to remember that this fearsome leader of the Gaelic clan was once an innocent young boy with an open mind that absorbed the lessons of St. Toirdealbhach. Gawaine's education was distinct from that of the society that has tried to absorb and assimilate him. Lancelot, too overcome with emotion to read the entirety of the letter, tells Bors, "He urges me to come with speed, to help the King against his brother: his last relation. Gawaine loved his family, Bors, and in the end he was left with none. Yet he wrote to forgive me. He even said that it was his own fault. God knows, he was a right good brother" (618). Gawaine's first loyalty was to his family, and in that faithfulness Gawaine has been genuine and uncompromising throughout the text. After Lancelot leaves to follow Gawaine's instructions and ride to Arthur's aid against Mordred, the knight Bors takes up the letter and tries to make it out,

He [Bors] tilted it in the failing light, admiring the zed-like g, the curly b, and the curved t, like the blade of a plough. [. . .] He turned it about, observing the brown signature. He spelled out the conclusion, making speaking movements with his mouth. [. . .] "Gawaine of Orkney." He spelled the name out twice, and tapped his teeth. Gawaine. "I suppose," he said aloud, doubtfully, "they would have pronounced it Cuchullain in the North. You can't tell with ancient languages." (618)

In his final word about the character most synonymous with the Gaelic tradition, White compares Gawaine to Cú Chulainn, the famous, formidable Irish warrior described in the

epic, *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. In Gawaine's dying moments White portrays him as a hero representative of a different culture, one whose ancient values and clan-based society are diametrically opposed to the modern education of Arthur. Gawaine's loyalties, based around his family, are no less valid or noble for not conforming to those of Arthur and Lancelot. The implication is that Gawaine would be considered heroic and honorable when viewed from the perspective of his own culture. When the audience is confronted with the image of a young and helpless boy stepping out from the armor, they are forced to wonder if Gawaine has been confined and alone in this foreign society and oppressed by these foreign values. Supremely different and unassimilated, he has struggled to remain committed to the heroic ideals that he was brought up to revere. The reader is forced to wonder if it is Arthur who is at fault for attempting to overcome, control, and absorb the society that Gawaine represents.

In the final version of *The Once and Future King*, White writes several of the "Gaels" as sympathetic characters and allows the audience to momentarily identify with their nationalist cause; he allows Kay's comparison of Arthur to Hitler, and he shows his protagonist committing acts that other characters perceive as war crimes. The moral ambiguity in Arthur's decisions renders him a more believable and identifiable character. His choices as he attempts to create a just and peaceful society are imperfect, and his efforts are doomed to fail due to the inherently flawed nature of humanity. This complexity prevents White's wartime retelling of the Arthur story from reading as pro-British propaganda and encourages a complexity of interpretation that allows the story to be timeless.

The Once and Future King was a book that changed dramatically because of White's choice to live in neutral Ireland during the Second World War. His attempts to justify his absence from the conflict and to join in what he perceived as a widespread and public debate about pacifism altered the purpose and message of the book. In the

author's mind the book could only justify his decision to remain aloof by offering a viable solution to the problem of war, and White hoped that he had found this solution in the work of Aldous Huxley on pacifism and Dr. Julian Huxley on ants. He threw himself into discovering what qualities humans shared with ants and denounced their supposedly militaristic society in *The Book of Merlyn*. His changes were meant to make the book the solution to human violence. Likewise, Ireland had another influence on the epic. As he tried to justify his stay to himself and his friends, he absorbed the culture, history, and literature of his country of refuge. This extensive reading found its way into his epic and changed the settings, characters, and antagonists of the texts to reflect the Gaelic interests in which White had immersed himself. Sequestered in the neutral country but oppressed by a constant awareness of worldwide events, White was more productive and inspired than he would ever be again.

Chapter 4

White's Changing Views of Ireland: *The Godstone and the Blackymor* and *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*

As the two preceding chapters demonstrated, the Second World War caused White intense emotional distress; guilt, fear, boredom, and patriotism alternated in his mind throughout the War. All of these emotions were entangled with his feelings about his host country, and therefore the author's relationship with Ireland was as complex and varying as his relationship with the conflict. White wrote two autobiographical books describing his six years living and traveling in Ireland – *The Godstone and the Blackymor* (1959) and *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* (1947). Although they were published over a decade apart, White composed the majority of both of them between 1939 and 1944.¹ In spite of the similarity in the circumstances and the location of their composition, these two publications could not portray more disparate interpretations of Ireland, the Irish, and the experiences of an Englishman residing in Ireland during the Second World War.

As chapter three explored, White constructed an Irish identity in the early years of the War in order to justify his detachment from the conflict, and this growing interest in Irish issues influenced substantial changes in *The Once and Future King*. Early in the War, Ireland was for White what Clair Wills describes as “the old colonial fantasy: Ireland as the only country in Europe where the world of make-believe and enchantment was still possible” (Wills 2007, 176).² This romantic engagement with mythology and folklore gave rise to the autobiographical travel narrative, *The Godstone*

¹ The first diary entry that is about Inishkea, the central theme of *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, is on 14 December 1939 (T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 14 Dec. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC). White wrote to David Garnett on 14 September 1944 “I have finished the book about the Holy Ghost at Doolistown,” but noted that he was uncertain about some aspects of the story (D. Garnett 1968, 152).

² Wills is speaking specifically of Henry Green's wartime novel *Loving* (1945) in this quote.

and the Blackymor. In this text, which was written between 1939 and 1941 but only published in 1959, White molds his style and material to conform with the style of the Irish Literary Revival. This chapter explores how he uses historical, archaeological, and literary texts to portray himself as a member a movement he admired, and it examines the structure of White's own work in comparison to that of writers of the Revival community. The chapter also briefly examines White's article in the journal *Horizon*, which was published towards the end of his composition of *The Godstone and the Blackymor* and which showcases the same concerns, styles, and influences as the longer work.

It should be noted that less than three years after beginning his intense research and involvement in the Revival, White's Irish sympathies had vanished. The bulk of his second semi-autobiographical book on Ireland, *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*, was written in the summer and autumn of 1943, and in it he rejects all of the Revivalist interests – the Irish language, folklore, archaeology, and mythology – that he embraced in the years between 1939 and 1941.³ Instead, he presents a narrative that uses satirical humor and caricature to portray his experiences. This chapter examines these two different Irish texts and the perspectives they offer on White's time in Ireland. In these years White follows his precedent of adopting and discarding literary styles, but within a significantly condensed time frame: he adopts, within a period of four years, two opposing personae while living in the same location, surrounded by similar literary and personal circles. These dissimilar books depict White's changing relationship to Ireland and demonstrate his literary interests and personal contacts during a period of great change and trauma.

In his first three years in Ireland, White divided his time between the farmhouse

³ Martin Kellman has claimed that *The Godstone and the Blackymor* was written simultaneously with *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* (Kellman 1988, 219). However the archival evidence, to which Kellman did not have access, suggests that they were written several years apart.

of Paddy and Lena McDonagh in Doolistown – near Trim, County Meath – and various hotels and hunting lodges, particularly Sheskin Lodge, on the Erris peninsula in County Mayo. Aside from these two locations and his occasional trips to Dublin, White, it appears, did not explore much of Ireland,⁴ and after 1941, even his visits to Mayo virtually ceased;⁵ after that time he spent the remainder of his six years in the area around Trim. Several factors probably contributed to the difficulty and discomfort of travel. The rationing of fuel meant that White's car – brought from England on the ferry in late May 1939⁶ – was no longer useful. White initially recorded the lack of petrol as an annoyance and a necessary concession to the War; however, he soon found the restriction to his movement more upsetting and claimed that it made writing more difficult.⁷ Doubtless another significant factor in White's restricted travel was Ireland's wartime mistrust of foreign travelers. In his diary, White records being questioned by a local fisherman about his origins while staying on the island of Inishkea, County Mayo.⁸ He acknowledges that the question was understandable: "It was, indeed, within the bounds of possibility that I might have been a German spy."⁹ After a time, the suspicion

⁴ He did spend a short time in Wicklow. On 14 April 1942 White notes that he and the McDonaghs took a ten-day trip to Bray, which he spent "climbing hills, bathing in the sea, keeping on the water wagon, and making miserable attempts to decide what I ought to do about the war" (T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 14 Apr. 1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC).

⁵ White likely made at least one additional journey, probably in 1944, but he makes no mention of it in his letters or diaries, and he later claimed that it was merely a practical trip that was only undertaken to train the dog Quince for David Garnett (T. H. White, diary 1945–1948, 13 Oct. 1945, folder 3, box 8, MS-4494, HRC).

⁶ T. H. White, diary 1938–1939, 25 May 1939, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

⁷ On 27 September 1939, less than a month after the start of the War, White records petrol rationing in his diary for the first time, along with the increased rate of taxation. He remarks, "At present it is only the small annoyances that touch me: petrol rationing, or stealing 3/8 of my income" (T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 27 Sept. 1939, folder 1, box 27 MS-4494, HRC). By 20 October, a month later, he felt that "In Ireland, with petrol rationed [. . .] the fuel of good books is cut off" and getting intellectual stimulation as an author was nearly impossible (T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 20 Oct. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC).

⁸ White consistently misspells the name of the island "Inniskea" both in *The Godstone and the Blackymor* and in his diaries. The modern spelling is "Inishkea." I have maintained White's original spelling when quoting him directly, but I have elected to use the modern spelling in all other contexts.

⁹ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 19 Dec. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

came to hamper his movements in the West. He complained to David Garnett:

Things are slightly troublesome personally, because I am always being reported to the police as a spy, but they can't make out whether I am a German or an English one, which confuses the issue. I get fits of depression about it, but not much. The boring part about it is that it hampers my movements. I can't, for instance, go out to my beloved Inniskea, because it would be thought I was re-fuelling a submarine etc. (D. Garnett 1968, 73)

Perhaps because of the locals' suspicion, he chose to remain in Meath after 1941.¹⁰ He remained there in spite of finding the company stultifying and complaining to Garnett, "I have not exchanged one word of more than one syllable (such as 'plough,' 'hoe,' 'steer,' 'cow' etc) with one person since 1939" (D. Garnett 1968, 134). White's growing dislike for Ireland after 1942 can be seen in his letters – the climate, he explains to Mary Potts, "is why all Irishmen are forced to be drunkards, and why they murder each other when drunk" (White 1986, 137). It also appears in his diaries: he writes on 4 May 1942, "The Irish really are a foul race, and that's all there is to be said about it,"¹¹ and it manifests in *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*. This may be explained by the trauma of wartime – as was explored in chapter two, several of White's friends and acquaintances died suddenly during the war¹² – by the trouble and frustration with getting his Arthurian

¹⁰ An anecdotal story collected from Patrick Diviney, the current owner of the land once occupied by the McDonaghs, suggests that even in Meath White was placed under duress. Local oral history records that a member of the Local Defence Forces named Barney McLaughlin waylaid White by the road on a dark night as a practical joke and staged a false arrest, accusing White of spying. Apparently this "arrest" was done in a spirit of fun, and had no malice or suspicion behind it, but for a man as frightened of IRA retribution (see Warner 1967, 173) as White it must have been distressing.

¹¹ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 4 May 1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

¹² In a letter to L. J. Potts on 28 December 1943, White told his mentor that he was sorry that Potts had lost a friend in the War. White goes on, "Nearly all the people I valued when I was teaching at Stowe have also been. It is what happens in wars, they say" (Gallix 1984, 141).

epic published, by boredom and the inability to travel, by the accumulated annoyances of living in close proximity with the McDonaghs, or by other factors. Whatever the reasons for his changing feelings, White based his two books about Ireland on the two locations he knew best: Meath for *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* and Mayo for *The Godstone and the Blackymor*.¹³ He drew from personal experience, and, although he never mentions the Second World War, it influenced both of the texts and appears at the edges of certain scenes.

The Godstone and the Blackymor is an autobiographical account of the author's experiences visiting the Erris peninsula and the Inishkea islands in County Mayo. The text is structured as a series of non-chronological vignettes that include folklore, local ghost stories and songs, and White's original poetry. Much of the book is concerned with White's archaeological project in search of the artifact known to the author as the "naomhóg" or, translated to English by White, the eponymous "godstone."¹⁴ The majority of the events in the book were originally composed in White's journal and most fall within the years 1939 and 1941, although no indication of the dates is given in the published text. In over two hundred pages, these unconnected episodes depict an Englishman's life traveling, fishing, and shooting in the West of Ireland, and the text

¹³ While little or no overlap in the stories is visible, one character appears both in *The Godstone and the Blackymor* and *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*: White's Meath landlady Lena McDonagh is in both under the pseudonym "Mrs. O'Callaghan." In *The Godstone and The Blackymor*, however, White depicts her in a far more positive light as "fervent, loving, tall, thin, humble" as she climbs Croagh Patrick with the author (White 1959, 192). As the second half of this chapter explores, she appears much less favorably in *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*.

¹⁴ The second portion of the title – "the Blackymor" – is drawn from an encounter with a black man he calls "Mr. Montgomery-Majoribanks" that White describes in the book. In the text he meets the Nigerian "witch-doctor" and brings him to a local cottage to offer massage to two elderly and arthritic Irish locals (White 1959, 44-45). White's portrait of this man is highly racist and the language and descriptions are abhorrent to a modern reader, but this vignette, like most of *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, is autobiographical. Mr. Montgomery-Majoribanks is a portrait of a man called Lewis Lascalls, whom White met and briefly befriended in Mayo in June 1941. Lascalls, described as a naturopath, was later arrested in Belfast in 1943 for performing illegal abortions and was convicted and sentenced to hard labour (see *The Irish Times*, 4 August 1943, " 'Naturopath' Sentenced in Belfast"). White saved the series of newspaper clippings that reported on Lascalls's arrest and conviction in his diary.

seeks to display the author's supposed expertise in Irish history, language, and mythology.

As he was writing the diary entries and collecting the folklore that would eventually form the bulk of *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, White was immersing himself in history and scholarship about Ireland and in the work of the members of the Irish Literary Revival. From the manuscript annotations that appear in the pages of many of the remaining books in White's library, it is clear that he read many of them with intense and focused attention. For example, the first 250 pages of his copy of *The History of the County of Mayo* (1908) are full of White's questions, summaries, and observations, and White pays particular attention to the saints and monastic settlements of the region.¹⁵ His letters and diaries, which repeatedly reference works of Irish history, fiction, and anthropology, offer further insight into his reading material. As was explored in chapter two, on 29 May 1939, only about three months after his arrival in Ireland, White wrote to Ray Garnett that he was reading Father E. A. D'Alton's *History of Ireland From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (1910), and that he was learning the Irish language (D. Garnett 1968, 44). On 6 August 1939, he also recorded in his diary that he was reading "Dean Butler's History of Trim."¹⁶ This led him to "an illumination on the early 14th century," which, he writes, he suddenly sees "was the flower of human culture."¹⁷ The sentiment which reinterpreted the "dark ages" as a high point of human culture, was utilized in works of the Revival; as Garrigan Mattar explains, "In the pages of his *History of Ireland: Heroic Period*, [Standish] O'Grady suggested that the dark ages

¹⁵ See T. H. White, marginalia in (Knox 1908), MS-4494, HRC.

¹⁶ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 6 Aug. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

¹⁷ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 6 Aug. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC. The interpretation of the "dark ages" as a period of intellectual flowering was a central theme of Helen Waddell's influential study of Medieval Latin lyrics, *The Wandering Scholars* (1926). Waddell's work was a best-seller when it was published, and while the archives contain no direct evidence that White read Waddell, the similarity of several of their hypotheses makes it appear likely that White had either read her work or encountered it secondhand.

of Ireland were actually its golden age” (Garrigan Mattar 2004, 16). White may or may not have absorbed this theory from the same source as prior Revivalists or from the Revivalists themselves, but his statement makes clear that he embraced a similar ethos. On 12 August 1939 White records that he has begun Froude’s *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (1872–1874). Froude’s attitude to Ireland in this text was that “throughout their history the native Irish had repeatedly proved themselves to be quite incapable of self-government,” but that the English government, although justified in their attempts to absorb Ireland into the United Kingdom, had failed through “repeated misconduct,” greed, and corruption (Brady 2014, 262, 265).¹⁸ White’s reception of this text shows his growing sympathy for the Irish: he dislikes Froude’s “grieved voice” regarding the supposedly “savage” state of the Irish prior to the English arrival,¹⁹ and he suggests that Froude misses an important and noble feature of Irish society. He writes, “One of the most peculiar, ancient, and deep-seated of the traits in Irish character” is the lack of a concept of private property.²⁰ White suggests that Froude’s bias prevents him from seeing this ancient and beautiful trait of the Irish, and betrays his own growing tendency to romanticism.

¹⁸ Froude’s relationship to Ireland, a country which “features in his work more centrally than in that of any other Victorian intellectual,” is similar to White’s, at least as regards the two writers’ intense creative engagement with the country and their conflicting attitudes towards it (Brady 2014, 74). Brady writes of Froude, “Ireland was to serve a crucial organizing function in his entire world-view. Throughout his career this conceptualization of Ireland was to be at once intensely energising and profoundly ambiguous,” and this could easily be said of White’s years in the country as well (75).

¹⁹ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 12 Aug. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

²⁰ Ibid.

It is clear from the archives that this was not a passing phase but that White's intensive reading and intellectual immersion lasted for several years. In his diary on 1 April 1940 he recorded a shopping list to Hodges Figgis, a Dublin bookstore:²¹

I went to Dublin and bought:

Ireland in Pre-Celtic Times – Macalister

Ancient Ireland – Macalister

The Way That I Went – Praeger

Pagan Ireland – Wood Martin

Irish Mythological Cycle – de Joubainville

2 volumes of proceedings R. S. of A. of Ireland.

Early Gaelic Literature – Hyde

Volume of Antiquarian Handbook Series on W. islands.

Islands of Ireland – Mason

History of Co. Mayo – Knox.

And the invaluable Catalogue of Books on Ireland compiled by Mr. Figgis of Hodges, Figgis²²

Chapter two explored portions of this list in respect to *The Once and Future King*, but the original, stated purpose of these purchases was to inform and add scholarly validation to White's research into the Inishkea *naomhóg*.

²¹ The following list of books is partially quoted in chapter two in order to illustrate White's enchantment with Irish history and literature and to explore some of the sources behind the Irish material in *The Once and Future King*. The quotation is repeated here for the ease of the readers and because many of these books were also instrumental in shaping the ideas of Irish archaeology and folklore that White explores in *The Godstone and the Blackymor*. This chapter argues that he used these books differently for his autobiographical book than he did for his fictional books on Arthur.

²² T. H. White, diary 1939-1941, 1 Apr. 1940, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

Many of the authors that White mentions in this list either inspired or drew inspiration from the Revival, and thus it is clear that White was exposed to at least some of the Revivalist concepts and tropes that he explores in *The Godstone and the Blackymor* from original sources. R. A. S. Macalister, archaeologist and author of *Ireland in Pre-Celtic Times* (1921) and *Ancient Ireland* (1935), was close friends with Douglas Hyde and Éamon de Valera and “had a strong interest in the Gaelic revival” (Richardson 2009). These two books serve as overviews of Irish archaeological history as it was understood at the time, and, as we have seen in the previous two chapters, White uses both these texts when he portrays the Gaelic characters in *The Once and Future King*. William Gregory Wood-Martin is another figure who served as an inspiration for some of the authors of the Revival, and “some poems of W. B. Yeats in the late 1880s were inspired by the legends that Yeats had read in the *History of Sligo*” by Wood-Martin (Beaumont 2009). Foster calls Wood-Martin’s *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland: A Handbook of Irish Pre-Christian Traditions* (1902) “a book in which history, folklore, and legendary fiction intermarry,” a description that might also be applied to the varied and multi-subject nature of *The Godstone and the Blackymor* and the work of other Revival authors – J. M. Synge and Douglas Hyde, for example (Foster 1987, 220).²³ Henri d’Arbois de Joubainville was the second editor of the journal *Revue Celtique*, which featured a scholarly, scientific, and anthropological analysis of the folktales of Ireland. The work of this folklorist inspired and informed the work of several Revivalist authors including Synge and Yeats (Garrigan Mattar 2004, 27), and Douglas Hyde refers to Joubainville in his famous speech “The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland” (see Hyde 1904, 135). The collection of Hyde’s folklore that White’s list mentions, *The Story of Early Gaelic Literature* (1905), was one of the works of the Revival that bridged the gap between

²³ While White does not mention purchasing *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland* in this list, a copy of it is present in his library at the HRC. It even contains brief marginalia to indicate that White read it (T. H. White, marginalia in [Wood-Martin 1902, 2:124–125] MS-4494, HRC).

scholarly folklore collection and literary ambition. In this text Hyde translates portions of various Old Irish myths and sagas and offers his own commentary. Mason's travel narrative *The Islands of Ireland* (1936) may have had a particular impact on White's work; its episodic tales of visits to various Irish islands mirror *The Godstone and the Blackymor*. In his manuscript annotations in the margins of Mason's work, White compares Mason's experiences to his own journeys on the Inishkeas.²⁴

Outside of the above list, White read other works in the Revival tradition during his early months in Ireland. For example, he must have read Yeats's *The Wanderings of Oisín* as he includes a reference to it in the text of *The Godstone and the Blackymor*: "So far as I could remember the wonderful rendering of this legend by W. B. Yeats, she took him to three islands" (White 1959, 105). White refers to Yeats several times in his 1939–1941 diary. In one entry he expresses concern that he is relying too heavily on Yeats for information about Irish mythology and concludes that he needs to find further sources: "I must find out whether scholars have connected the Fenian cycle with Mayo. I must find out all there is to know about the Fenian cycle, instead of simply reading Yeats. I must discover what reliable books have been written about the early history of Ireland."²⁵ Presumably the list of books from Hodges Figgis, which appears in the diary in the month following this concern, is an attempt to acquire alternate, scholarly resources to factually support his already-growing interest in the Revival. White also speculates, when planning the construction of *The Godstone and the Blackymor* on 7 January 1940, "perhaps it would be possible to reproduce the whole or part of Yeat's [sic] Wanderings of Oisín [sic]."²⁶ Clearly he believed Yeats's poem crucial to understanding the message of his own book, and he was drawing inspiration from

²⁴ See T. H. White, marginalia in (Mason 1938, 19), MS-4494, HRC.

²⁵ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 26 Feb. 1940, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7 Jan. 1940.

Yeats's reinventions of Irish mythology for his own mythologizing of the Irish west. Additionally, White makes a note in his diary reminding himself, "Get my copy of *The Golden Bough* [sic] over from England as soon as I can."²⁷ *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (1890) by Sir James George Frazer had a substantial impact on the literature and thought of the Revival, particularly on Yeats and his work. It is clear from the archives and the text, therefore, that White read heavily in the works not only of the Revivalists, but also in the texts that inspired and informed them.

White's stated goal for this ambitious course of reading was to contextualize his own creative endeavors on the material that would become his autobiographical narrative of the west of Ireland. After the list of books, he instructs himself to compile "a digest of information relating to the western islands, from these, when I have time."²⁸ The western islands about which he is most particularly eager to gain knowledge were the Inishkea islands. These two islands – Inishkea North and Inishkea South – are located off the coast of the Mullet peninsula in Mayo. The residents of both islands were evacuated in the 1930s following a deadly storm in 1927. White first visited the northern island in December of 1939 to shoot geese, and he found the solitude inspirational, writing in his diary,

When I was in this place my mind was filled with lucid prose, simple and worth writing. I treasured it up, already arranged and ready for paper: but now I cannot put it down. There, belief in God was natural and observation of the world absorbing. All has gone, in a few hours, coming back to Bedlam. If I had written on Inniskea, I could not have written mannered prose, or written anything for

²⁷ Ibid., 15 Feb. 1940.

²⁸ Ibid., 1 Apr. 1940.

effect. It is miserable to sit with the wreckage of that world about me, trying to salvage a few pieces of it.²⁹

His interest in the islands and their folklore forms the central subject of *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, and his methods for conceptualizing and representing the near-spiritual creative experience he had on Inishkea are drawn from the Irish scholars, historians and authors whose work he so arduously sought out.

White may have been drawn to the literature of the Revival because it appeared to offer him a well-explored path to a sense of belonging within an Irish identity. G. J. Watson writes of Yeats that the poet “did not feel English, despite the traditional Unionism of his class, and further felt that his membership of that class cut him off from the majority of his fellow countrymen” (Watson 1994, 89). Yeats, Watson argues, turned towards the ancient mythology of Ireland as a means of creating an Irish literary identity that he could feel comfortable inhabiting. Gregory Castle draws attention to the fact that many members of the Irish Literary Revival must have felt some level of isolation from the native Irish community that their writing described, arguing that Anglo-Irish figures like those central to the Revival “began to feel isolated and marginalized” by the end of the nineteenth century (Castle 2001, 8). He writes, “Revivalists like Yeats and Synge were burdened by questions of political and cultural authenticity” (8) and felt a “sense of being both inside and outside culture” (9). During the Second World War, White doubtless experienced a similar type of isolation. His avoidance of the War left him cut off from both an English wartime camaraderie and from the native Irish who suspected him of spying and mistrusted his motives. As chapter two explored, during this time White sought for Irish origins in his family tree, learned the Irish language, and contemplated conversion to Catholicism, and these

²⁹ Ibid., 19 Dec. 1939.

actions were, at least in part, a response to the trauma and isolation of the Second World War. In emulating Yeats's example and the examples of other Revivalists in his writing, White, too, was seeking "to assert a sense of identity with an uncompromised 'Irishness' " (Watson 1994, 89). In imitating its styles, White uses the narrative of the Revival to enable a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Another contributing factor to White's interest in joining the community of Irish writers and, particularly, the community of the Revival, was an encounter with author and Anglo-Irish baron Lord Dunsany (1878-1957) that occurred about six months after White's arrival in Ireland. Although Dunsany, largely a fantasy writer, is not often considered to be at the core of the Irish Literary Revival, he communicated with W. B. Yeats and James Stephens, was good friends with George Russell (AE), donated funds to the Abbey Theatre, and Yeats briefly selected Lord Dunsany as his protégé after the death of J. M. Synge (Maume, 2009). In his introduction to *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany*, Yeats wrote that he wished that Dunsany "could bring his imagination into the old Irish legendary world instead of those magic lands of his with their vague Eastern air" but he nevertheless placed Dunsany's "tender, pathetic, haughty fantasies among books by Lady Gregory, by AE, by Dr Douglas Hyde, by John Synge, and by myself" (Yeats 2013, 28, 29). While he may have been a more peripheral figure than Synge, Yeats, Gregory, or Russell, Dunsany was nevertheless involved in the movement.

White met with Lord Dunsany in August 1939 at the Dunsany family seat in County Meath. The description of Dunsany which appears in White's diary bears a striking resemblance to his description a year earlier of Siegfried Sassoon, and it is clear that White felt a similar affinity and magnetism towards both men. Like Sassoon, Dunsany would doubtless have appealed to White both as a member of the rural gentry

class with which White was so enamored and also as a literary and intellectual figure.³⁰ In his long description of Dunsany, the first observation that White makes is a dual comment on his peerage and his literary efforts. White records:

Lunched at Dunsany Castle today. Dunsany is the senior baron in the Irish peerage – he must be somewhere between the 15th and the 20th since the creation,³¹ which took place five hundred years ago this year. It is very much to his credit that he has tried to be a genius. He could easily have sat back in his luxuries and been a common peer but he has the greatness to want to ~~de~~ excel.³²

A powerful, wealthy, upper-class man who wrote for pleasure rather than as a profession, Dunsany represented many of White's personal aspirations. Unlike his description of Sassoon, however, White is not so impressed with Dunsany as an author and criticizes his writing:

One of his books, *The Charwoman's Shadow* [sic], would be perfect, if it were not for the language in which it is written. The plot, taste, morality and imagination of it are right, but the language is too mannered. As usual, he believes the language to be the best part. He is a decent, amusing, interested, selfish, vain, enlightened fellow. He is not a genius. He thinks he is. He makes his wife copy out in longhand any novel he writes, so that there may be two copies in existence of each of his works before he trusts it to the post. Then a typewriting bureau in

³⁰ White was not the only English author living in Ireland at the time to become interested in the Anglo-Irish gentry. John Betjeman developed a similar fascination with the "impoverished Anglo-Irish squires" and did a radio broadcast on "Cooke of Cookesborough," one such figure (Runchman 2015, 93).

³¹ White is within the correct time frame for Dunsany's lineage: Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett was the eighteenth Baron of Dunsany.

³² T. H. White, diary 1939-1941, 15 Aug. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

England makes four copies, and posterity is safe. Why am I writing sarcastically about him? He must be easily the most enlightened peer in the kingdom, and he was polite to me.³³

White himself draws comparisons between his encounter with Dunsany and his encounter with Sassoon, and he writes, "I liked him very much. His wife is charming, the usual buffer, like Siegfried's."³⁴ Again, in a similar manner to his description of Sassoon, White goes on to discuss Dunsany's physical appearance and to compare it to his own:

He is a fine figure of a man, taller than I am, but my beard is the more curious. He has the decency to be rude and self-centered when he wants to, and the politeness to be amusing. It is only his taste in poetry which is cheap. He has not read Hopkins or Joyce, admires AE, does not think much of Yeats.³⁵

In both the description of Sassoon and the description of Dunsany, White compares himself physically and intellectually to another author, and chooses for his own work a genre and a subject matter that mirrors that of the author with whom he aligns himself. It is not clear how this first meeting with Lord Dunsany occurred, but after the visit Dunsany wrote to White, saying of *The Sword in the Stone*, "The more I read it, the more I like it."³⁶ It seems likely that the two authors met again on at least two more occasions,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ T. H. White, diary 1939-1941, 15 Aug. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC. White continues in the same vein: "[Dunsany] has an exaggerated opinion of the 'music' of his own prose – a thing which he ought to want to flee like poison. In fact, I should call him a mind of considerable original value which has been mal-educated along that extraordinary line of early 20th century criticism which felt quite happy when it had defined 'poetry' as 'love expressed through rhythm' or some such clap-trap. It is a pity he was not encouraged simply to say what he thought, as he thinks enthusiastically and with originality."

³⁶ Lord Dunsany, letter to T. H. White, no date, in diary 1939-1941, 15 Aug. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

for White includes brief quotes from Dunsany in his diary from time to time.³⁷ Never again, however, does he include such a long and detailed description as the one he writes after their first meeting. It seems possible that White drew inspiration from Dunsany's travel narrative *My Ireland* (1937), and the first edition remains in his library, but the similarities may be due to their common genre and their common influences.³⁸

Perhaps their different feelings about the Second World War made friendship between White and Dunsany difficult. Patrick Maume argues that Irish neutrality "deeply offended Dunsany [. . .], and his comments [on the War] took on a sharp edge" (Maume 2013, 66). Maume writes, "At times, Dunsany described the war as if it were a revival of the age of chivalry, with RAF pilots as knights doing battle against mechanical Nazi dragons" (67). As White was using similar metaphors in *The Once and Future King* to argue against aggression and war, this might have created some intellectual conflict between the two writers. After January 1940, several months after the start of the War, there is no mention of further interactions or contact between them.

In a display of the impact of his reading and, possibly, of his meeting with Dunsany, *The Godstone and the Blackymor* emulates and exploits many themes from the Irish Revival. As with his earlier autobiographical narrative, *England Have My Bones* (1936), White participates in a literary genre or period by engaging in the activities associated with the community (in this case, folklore collection, study of the Irish language, travel to the west coast, etc.), by showing knowledge of key authors and ideas, and by using the tropes of the chosen genre in his own text. Indeed, following the work

³⁷ For example, on 7 October 1939 he quotes a "funny story by Lord Dunsany" about the "Queen of Romania," and on 13 January 1940 he records another: "Lord Dunsany: 'That old Daimler was a splendid old car. It was eighteen years old, and simply riddled with bullets'" (T. H. White, diary 1939-1941, 7 Oct. 1939 and 13 Jan. 1940, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC).

³⁸ The books do bear striking similarities, however. Dunsany's *My Ireland*, like *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, contains lyrical descriptions of the countryside of Meath (Dunsany 1937, 11), includes reports of shooting expeditions and tips for killing birds more successfully (167), and discusses local myths and folklore (19-26).

of Jed Esty, one could argue that this turn towards the Irish Revival after his interest in the English “anthropological turn” (explored in chapter one) might represent a different method of participating in a similar trend. Esty has suggested that the “Anglocentric revivalism” of the 1930s borrowed from the earlier Irish Revival movement (Esty 2004, 14). White, by turning away from the restorative possibilities of pastoral England to the protective opportunity of neutral Ireland, was nevertheless still participating in the same late-modernist interest in cultural particularism. This chapter explores how the structure of White’s book is similar to that of certain important works of the Revival, and how elements of the Revivalist style feature in *The Godstone and the Blackymor*. It also examines how the body of the text represents White as a mediator between foreign and Irish cultures, thus supporting and validating White’s goal of assimilation.

The structure of *The Godstone and the Blackymor* – a personal travel narrative of a journey to an island in the west of Ireland that is heavy with folklore collected from local inhabitants – would have been familiar to any reader of the non-fiction of the early Revival. J. W. Foster describes the structuring of Yeats’s *The Celtic Twilight* (1893): “Yeats gives us what he has heard (folk testimonies and traditions), what he has seen (firsthand experiences and visions), and what he thinks (commentary and speculation). The anecdotal testimonies to visions and experiences of the world of fairies and benign ghosts shade into the impersonal testaments of traditional beliefs, customs and narratives” (Foster 1987, 236). Yeats’s narrative combined personal impressions with records of stories and events from the west. Nearly fifteen years later, in 1907, J. M. Synge published *The Aran Islands*, which contained folk stories and traditions told to him on Inis Meáin, his own experiences of island life, and some commentary and speculation on the lives of the native islanders. White, writing almost a quarter of a century after Synge, makes use of this same pattern by structuring his narrative around personal experiences of the west. *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, like the earlier

examples, alternates between personal stories of everyday life and folklore collected from local residents. White also includes his experiences of “supernatural” phenomena. Like Synge, he travels to an island (Inishkea) to acquire the authentic experience of the west. In addition to the central folk story of the *naomhóg*, or the “godstone,” White includes several other folk stories, often citing the names of their sources in the community.³⁹ Using folklore collection in travel writing to establish authorial legitimacy is not unique to the Revival, but it becomes clear from White’s use of other tropes common to this movement that he is engaging in imitation. John Crane in his overview of White’s oeuvre dismisses *The Godstone and the Blackymor* as an inferior effort on the grounds that it is not unified or coherent (Crane 1974, 175); however, I suggest that he fails to recognize that the lack of unity in *The Godstone and the Blackymor* represents a stylistic choice indicative of the genre White implements in the text, and its unifying theme is, therefore, Ireland.

In addition to the structural framework of White’s novel, his style is also reminiscent of Revival texts. The first chapter of this autobiographical travel narrative begins with a lyrical description of the landscape around the hunting lodge, “Fraoch.”⁴⁰ White’s opening page introduces us to his scene with an emblematic Irish animal, the salmon, and the description engages Romantic imagery – the fish leap “from the low, warm, crystal water” like “interplanetary rockets” (White 1959, 7). Perhaps his descriptions of the abundance of Irish nature combined with his metaphorical mechanizing of living beings (salmon becoming interplanetary rockets) recall Yeats’s “Sailing to Byzantium” in which the speaker imagines the wealth of Irish animal life

³⁹ In spite of this apparent attempt at scientific credibility, White’s work is far from professional ethnography and never notices anything like motif or tale type, which some Irish folklorists began to employ as early as the 1920s (Foster 1987, 220). Like Yeats, and in spite of his protestations of unbiased research elsewhere in *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, White was not “allowing his scientific bent to dominate his literary sensibilities” (219).

⁴⁰ Fraoch is based on Sheskin lodge near Belmullet, County Mayo. White first rented the lodge in the autumn of 1939 and he was staying there when he learned of the outbreak of the War. Although the building is now derelict, parts of the lodge could still be seen in the Spring of 2016.

(“the salmon falls, the mackerel-crowded seas”) and then dreams of being fashioned into an ornate mechanical bird (Yeats 1992, 239). Like Yeats’s aging speaker, White finds the abundance inaccessible – visible, beyond reach: he and his fellow fishermen bask “in a cloud of midges” and cannot catch the fish that they know are there (White 1959, 7).

After describing the pastoral location and the traditional lodge, White moves on to authenticating the landscape as specifically Irish by reciting the history of the various sites around him. Fraoch, White tells us, is located in “an ancient landscape, which had few contacts with modern history” (White 1959, 10). White names the various myths and historical events that he believes add layers of meaning to the landscape around the lodge, writing, “I liked to think that Slieve Fyagh, on which the lodge stood, was the place where Aillilbannda King of Conaught had fallen in the sixth century at the battle of Cuilconaire” (White 1959, 11). White even quotes the Book of Leinster, a medieval Irish manuscript believed to have been compiled in 1160 AD and one of the most important sources of Irish mythology. He makes himself legitimate by recourse to a respected Old Irish text. Residing in a hunting lodge, which has upper-class connotations because only the wealthy could afford to indulge in pastimes like hunting and shooting, also connects White to an Anglo-Irish elite. This, combined with a traditional Irish name, “Fraoch,” meaning “heather,” references aspects of the Literary Revival, its largely upper-middle class Anglo-Irish membership, and its dedication to “genuine” Irish culture and the Irish language. The name of the lodge may also be another reference to Yeats and his poem “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” as both “Innisfree” and “Fraoch” derive from the Irish word for heather, and both texts describe a beautiful, peaceful, isolated location in the Irish countryside. Through the references to the Irish language, Yeats, and ancient Irish history, White expresses his familiarity with the landscape and connects himself with a literary tradition, perhaps in an effort to justify his own presence.

Even the focus of most of the narrative on an island in the west – Inishkea, in this case – is a Revivalist trope. As John Wilson Foster writes, “The western island, real and mythical, and one’s attitude to the western island, mattered greatly in the whole cultural as well as literary renaissance” (Foster 1977, 261). The island was a place of escape from the modern world, and a place where the poets, playwrights, and thinkers who visited could imagine that an earlier period of history still held sway. They were locations that were “living sources of inspiration that could be used to reinvent the island of Ireland itself” (O’Sullivan 2008, 176). White’s stated experience of the islands is in keeping with this tradition. After returning from South Inishkea for the first time, White writes that his mind was “filled with lucid prose” and that on the island “belief in God was natural.”⁴¹ He felt separated from the modern world at war: “When I went, the german [sic] battleship was besieged in the River Plate and I was excited to know whether there would be a battle. By the time I came out I did not care whether there had been a battle or not.”⁴² He calls his time there a “spiritual experience.”⁴³ It was a place where he felt a connection with an unseen world; a place of literary imagination; and one where he felt connected to an Irish heritage: he writes that there he thought “deep racial thoughts” (White 1942, 37). The archaeological history of islands also rendered them important to the Revival: “The ruins and remains on the islands provided a sense of continuity with an unconquered Celtic Ireland” (Foster 1977, 264). White’s fascination with the *naomhóg* stone and his attempts to delve into the archaeology, folklore, and history of the Inishkeas are consistent with the movement as a whole. Even the manner in which he describes his arrival and departure from these islands is typical of other narratives. Foster writes, “It was often difficult to get on and off the islands, and

⁴¹ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 19 Dec. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC. White later publishes a modified version of this entry in “Letter from a Goose Shooter” (see White 1942).

⁴² T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 19 Dec. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

the hardship involved in this as well as in simply existing on the islands, gave to a trip there the desired flavour of a pilgrimage” (Foster 1977, 265). White describes in his diary, “The people in the curragh had been afraid to leave me, because this was a bad coast.”⁴⁴ The central theme of *The Godstone and the Blackymor* is centered around a geographical location that held great significance for writers in the Irish renaissance.

White also includes the Irish language at several points in *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, and this may be because lacking a command of Irish could be perceived as a liability for an author during the Revival period.⁴⁵ The charge of inauthenticity “was leveled against Yeats [. . .], whose lack of Irish was often pointed out as evidence of his inability to say anything meaningful about Irish folklore” (Castle 2001, 6). In 1939, White was studying Irish with the local schoolmaster in Trim.⁴⁶ After about a year with these lessons he felt confident enough to draw conclusions about the Irish-language etymology of local place names,⁴⁷ and he even collected folklore by asking Mayo school children to interview their monolingual grandparents through Irish.⁴⁸ In Irish *naomhóg* means a small boat: a curragh or coracle (Ó Dónaill 1977, “*naomhóg*”). White was apparently unaware of this meaning and in his diary swiftly began inventing his own translations by bisecting the word into similar-sounding but etymologically different Irish words: *neamh-óg*, *niamh-óg*. This mistranslation led him into many blind alleys and odd assumptions, including that Inishkea must represent *Tír na n-Óg* – the Land of the Young – from Irish legend. This is another example of White attempting to connect

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ White felt sensitive about how others would perceive his abilities in Irish. As is discussed further later in the chapter, in 1942 White expressed humiliation and outrage when *Horizon* printed an article of his (“Letter from a Goose Shooter”) that included misprints of the Irish words. White feared that readers would believe that he could not spell (T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 8 Feb. 1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC).

⁴⁶ T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 25 June 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1 Feb. 1940.

⁴⁸ See, for example, (Anonymous, “An Naomhóg,” in diary 1939–1941, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC).

his own lived experiences and his own autobiography with the myths and legends that appear in the literature of Yeats and the other Revivalists. He refers to the Irish language throughout the published text of *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, and he takes pains to display his confidence in the language for his readers. Early in the narrative he recounts a conversation with “a drunk sea-fisherman from the islands”: “ ‘Conas ta tu? [sic]’ ‘Ta me go mait, go raibh mile mait agat [sic].’ ‘How are you?’ He wanted to know. ‘I’m doing fine, thank you very much’ ” (White 1959, 42). White shows his audience that he is able to carry on a basic conversation, and even asserts that he is able to deceive the fisherman into believing that he is not English (42). In his analysis of Irish place names, White also implies that the Irish language can contain deeper meanings which are inaccessible to an English-speaking audience. For example, he writes, “Termoncarragh was one of the characteristic lakes of Erris. It stood towards the root of the peninsula called Kilmore, as Termon Kilmore stood at the tip of it. ‘Tearmann’ meant a sanctuary, a place of security, a shelter” (176–177). By using the Irish he shows how an “insider” can acquire greater significance from the names and can better understand the supposed true nature of the location. White suggests that he can discover more of Irish history and uncover the authentic landscape because he has the skills that an outsider would lack.

In 1942, years before the publication of *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, White published a piece for the journal *Horizon* that is, in substance, an excerpt from the final version of the full autobiographical text. It is useful to examine this article because it not only bears witness to White’s preoccupations at the time that he was composing *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, but also because the article’s publication may partially explain White’s deliberate rejection of the Revival literature that, within this issue of *Horizon*, he invokes. His article is entitled “Letter from a Goose Shooter,” and it recounts his first time on the Inniskea islands and his subsequent interest in and research about the *naomhóg*. The issue was a specifically Irish number, and it was published with the

intention of fostering wartime friendship and cooperation between England and Ireland.⁴⁹ Alex Runchman has noticed that the style of the pieces within this issue of *Horizon* fall along national lines. That is, the English authors continue to describe Ireland through a perspective tinged with lyrical, romantic overtones, while the pieces by Irish authors embrace a more contemporary, post-Revival, realist tradition. Runchman writes, “Many purportedly sympathetic English commentators had [difficulty] in trying to understand an only recently independent Irish culture from their own Anglocentric perspectives. This is nowhere more apparent than in the intersection, within the pages of *Horizon*, of a newly emergent Irish realist tradition with an English propensity for continuing to perceive of Ireland romantically (except in political matters)” (Runchman 2015, 89). Runchman refers, at least in part, to White’s article’s depiction of Ireland as a idealized, pastoral refuge.

The article mirrors *The Godstone and the Blackymor* in its concerns and preoccupations. It would be repetitious to belabor the Revivalist details, but, in brief, within the article White describes supernatural encounters with Irish mythological creatures, he shows himself embracing the rituals of Catholicism, he finds the landscape revitalizing and full of literary inspiration, he includes original poetry, and he associates the place with paganism and pre-Christian beliefs. One “supernatural” occurrence, he claims to believe, was “the Banshee of the geese, crying the souls which I was to slay that sunrise” (White 1942, 30-31, 34). When frightened in the darkness, he relies on the symbols of Catholicism and believes “the beads in his pocket” will protect him from supernatural forces (31), and when he goes to sleep, he writes, “I put the beads over my head, to wear them like a necklace which would not need holding, and slept in their

⁴⁹ This is yet another example of a literary community in the Second World War which viewed writing as a means to bolster the war effort. See chapter two for more on White’s desire to write to promote peace, and his disillusionment with this goal as the War continued. A fuller discussion of the politics surrounding this issue of *Horizon*, particularly with reference to John Betjeman, can be found in Alex Runchman’s “English perceptions of Irish culture, 1941–3: John Betjeman, *Horizon* and *The Bell*” (2015, 87–98).

protection” (36). He reveres the island as a source of pure literary inspiration – he is astonished by the “fountain of feeling about eternal things” (27) that the island inspires and after he leaves is distressed at the loss of “all the deep racial thoughts I had felt there” (37). He also sees it as a last remnant of primitive beliefs, and he imagines that he feels the presence of “the old God of the island, venerated until the last generation” (27). His language, too, is oddly flowery and overblown in places. For example, White’s story opens with him standing on a beach at twilight, and, he writes, “They in the currach gave me a farewell as they went” (27).⁵⁰ The word choices of “they in the currach” and “gave me a farewell” give the sentence an oddly archaic sound. Perhaps White is attempting to mimic Irish-language word order. All of these features of Revivalist literature are present in *The Godstone and the Blackymor* in a diluted form, but in the article they appear so blatant that they are impossible to miss, and the reader feels uncomfortable to be confronted by such obvious imitation.

When the publication appeared in print, White noted it in his diary: “My article about Inniskea – the ‘Letter from a Goose Shooter’ – has been printed by Cyril Connolly in a publication called Horizon.”⁵¹ In the preceding entries of his diary it is clear that White’s interests had already moved away from his enchantment with the west of Ireland; his travel to Mayo and Inishkea had, essentially, ceased; and he was no longer keeping notes for a future book on the topic. When he read the issue in February, he expressed deep frustration with the way his work was printed, and a deep sense of humiliation at the way he felt his own article represented him. White writes,

⁵⁰ The entire first passage is drawn directly from White’s diary (T. H. White, diary 1939–1941, 19 Dec. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC). This might indicate that White was adopting this somewhat stilted and stylized form even in his more private writing, but it seems more likely that he intended the entry for publication even as he was writing it. White designed most of his diaries for publication, and he even occasionally inserts notes into the opening pages or the margins to direct future readers, editors, and publishers (See, for example, T. H. White, diary volume 1, no date, opening pages, Queen’s College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge]).

⁵¹ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 8 Feb. 1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

He [Connolly] has mis-printed all the few Irish words I used and has misrepresented me (against my own definite instructions) as claiming that my father was an Irishman. (Since writing the letter originally, I had learned from my mother that my father was only half Irish.) Also Connolly, again directly against my expressed wish has left out half my new footnote on the naomhóg (the best half) and has omitted the accent on the word itself. These are just the sort of things which will madden serious Irish readers, although this issue of *Horizon* is supposed to be a hand of friendship extended to Ireland. Also they will make my own position intolerable. The carping Dublin critic will say something like this: “Who the devil is this seanín or rather this counter-jumping Anglo-Norman flyboy⁵² who claims to be of Irish descent and to use the language but cannot spell it?” I had, in the copy I sent to Connolly, most carefully omitted the claim to Irish blood and made it clear in the omitted part of the footnote that I was an Anglo-Norman. Also, in the little Irish that I used, I had been careful in the spelling.⁵³

In short, White felt deep embarrassment over the claims and the interests that he had embraced not six months previously. His distress partially lies in the fact that he desires to be viewed as one of the “serious Irish readers” who is bothered by spelling errors in the Irish language and by interlopers misrepresenting Irish culture, and now he feels excluded by their imagined disdain for his article. White seems to have become conscious of a contemporary Irish writing community that was post-Revival and that had embraced a more realist style, and in this diary entry he expresses the desire for his

⁵² Connolly defines this term in the opening “Comment” of the issue of *Horizon*, and White may have felt stung that it appeared to apply to him. Connolly writes, “ ‘Flyboy’ (as the English expatriates of military age are called [in Ireland])” (Connolly 1942, 9).

⁵³ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 8 Feb. 1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

article to gain the respect and approval from this critical community. Within the issue of *Horizon*, several of these contemporary Irish writers express their philosophies for constructing a new style of national literature. Frank O'Connor, who contributed the evocatively titled "The Future of Irish Literature" to *Horizon*, praises Patrick Kavanagh for capturing "the emptiness and horror of Irish life," and he insists that one of the things that "must happen if Irish literature is to survive the war" is that "we must have done with romanticism for the next twenty years or so and let satire have its way. Not necessarily a cruel satire [. . .] but certainly satire" (O'Connor 1942, 63). Perhaps encountering this critical analysis alongside the other starkly realist and pessimistic work of the Irish writers in the *Horizon* issue – the first thirty lines of Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* were published in it as well⁵⁴ – made White feel how dated his representation of Ireland was, and perhaps *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* began as an attempt to "let satire have its way."

After this reaction to the *Horizon* article in the diaries White never returns to a discussion of the *naomhóg* and never details any further trips to Mayo or the Inishkea Islands,⁵⁵ and he also seems to have given up any idea of publishing an account of his experiences in the west for over a decade. Perhaps these feelings of humiliation and exclusion discouraged White from publishing the book that he had imagined, and, in large part, already composed. He also may have been disappointed that his work on the *naomhóg* offered little or no conclusive proof about the nature of the stone and that his

⁵⁴ The issue of *Horizon* was, in fact, banned in Ireland due to the inclusion of this section of Kavanagh's poem (Wills 2007, 309). Although, as Clair Wills notes, the ban was likely because of obscenity rather than radical politics, "the poem's political message was far more dangerous. It asked what was the difference between life above or below ground for the rural poor" (309). The poem shows how the rural community's "hunger for sexual love is strangled by a life-denying theology embedded in an implacable social system" (Swan 2013, 51) and also "evoked actual starvation and the depopulation of the Irish landscape" in the Second World War (Wills 2007, 254). This poem about rural poverty, sexual repression, and misery sits uneasily beside White's dreamy prose about the idyllic, picturesque life in the Mayo countryside.

⁵⁵ Apparently he made at least one further trip to Mayo. He later insists that he took David Garnett's dog there to train it (T. H. White, Diary 1945–1948, 13 Oct. 1945, folder 3, box 8, MS-4494, HRC). At the time, however, he did not record any impressions of the countryside, or, indeed, discuss the journey at all.

original conviction that the stone represented a pagan idol – “the heathen god” as he wrote for *Horizon* – was misguided and naïve (White 1942, 29). Whatever the reason for its abandonment, White did not return to the text until 1958. By that time he had fallen out of contact with most of his Irish connections,⁵⁶ and he needed money.⁵⁷ *The Goshawk*, which appeared in 1951 and which was also drawn from his earlier diaries, had been well received. By 1958 White had virtually stopped writing⁵⁸ and a revival of earlier drafts was a means of appearing productive and making an income, so he returned to the subject matter and made some small changes to the material – mostly to the arrangement of and the commentary on the stories. The *Horizon* article and his embarrassment over it may offer some explanation regarding the late publication date of the final autobiography.

Ultimately, *The Godstone and the Blackymor* – both in style and content – is about assimilation and belonging. Within the text of the work, White constructs a series of scenarios in which Irish society requires an outside force – the educated Englishman – to navigate the modern world. In these scenes, White serves as a cultural mediator and makes his foreign intrusion into Irish society an asset to the community. In this way, White legitimates his position within the story. An early scene involves White, who is staying at a hotel in Belmullet, Mayo, coming downstairs to find a black Nigerian man at the breakfast table. Even the educated schoolmistress is frightened and confounded by

⁵⁶ The last surviving letter from Lena McDonagh is dated 24 July 1947, and Sylvia Townsend Warner recounts that in 1947 “a copy of the American edition [of *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*] had somehow got to Trim and [. . .] Lena McDonagh learned what her dirty, drinking Mr. White had said about her husband and her religion. There were no more letters” (Warner 1967, 241). Presumably this negative reaction would have been felt by many of the friends White had made in Ireland. One exception to this loss of contact was John Betjeman, but, as Runchman has shown in his analysis of the author’s contribution to *Horizon* and his other work at the time, he also adopted a more romantic vision of Ireland during his time there.

⁵⁷ On 4 March 1958 he records spending over a thousand pounds on camera equipment, and he remarks that he must settle down and write several books to compensate for the expense. Several paragraphs later in the same entry he notes that he is now making good progress on *The Godstone and the Blackymor*. (T. H. White, diary volume 7, 4 Mar. 1958, Queen’s College Library, Cambridge University, [Cambridge]).

⁵⁸ See chapter six for some possible explanations as to why his productivity declined.

the black man's presence. White writes, "There, at the snow-white linen tablecloth, vis-à-vis with Miss Keily, who sat spellbound, like a rabbit confronting a rattlesnake, at teatime in Eire, in the parish nearest to America, there sat and jauntily conversed a coal-black cannibal" (White 1959, 28). Miss Keily, elsewhere portrayed as well-educated, is timid "like a rabbit" in the face of racial differences and "about to faint" from fear (30). However, White – although he has several racist diatribes that make a modern audience recoil – presents himself as able to completely understand the black, "primitive," Nigerian outsider. This "witch doctor," known as Mr. Montgomery-Majoribanks, White tells us, accepts White "as an intellectual equal" and White is able to see how the outsider could benefit the community of Belmullet (37). White brings Mr. Montgomery-Majoribanks, who is "an enthusiastic masseur" to the bedsides of two aging, rheumatic locals, "to treat their aching joints" (36). A true mediator, he must carefully explain the situation to the Irish and to the Nigerian in order to bring it off successfully. The Nigerian knows little about native Irish society and wealth: "Will they keep to a diet?" He asks White of his patients. "No, of course not." White answers, "They can't afford to have diets. They have to eat what they have" (40–41). White, utilizing what he presents as his English cosmopolitanism, is able to conduct a successful, mutually beneficial meditation that contributes to the good of Irish society. Even by being different White finds a means of belonging. He draws for his audience a series of scenarios in which he is a hero because he is the outsider. In this way, even in moments where he is not a part of the native Irish society he presents himself in a legitimate and useful role.

As has been demonstrated, in this text White engages with many of the major tropes of the Irish Literary Revival in an attempt at belonging. His reading, his meeting with Lord Dunsany, and the emotional trauma of the War all appear to have contributed to the author's decision to focus on this new style of writing. In a way, it is a similar stylistic choice as that found in *England Have My Bones*: the autobiographical narrative

displays a nostalgic turn towards the particularities of a specific culture or country. Further, the motive of the text again appears to be an attempt to assimilate into a society to which the author hoped to belong.

In *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* White abandons any attempt at embracing Irish ancestry or assimilating into Irish society, and he turns to a satirical allegory on the futility of modern Irish life. Perhaps he was attempting to follow the exhortation of Frank O'Connor in *Horizon* to "let satire have its way" (O'Connor 1942, 63). In this text, published in 1947, White abandons the glorification of Irish traditions. His story is a satire that mercilessly lampoons the Irish inhabitants of Doolistown, who showed him hospitality for six years. The story of *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* has three main characters: Mr. White, who is an Englishman,⁵⁹ and his two Irish hosts, Mrs. O'Callaghan and Mikey O'Callaghan. In the first chapter of the book, the kitchen of their farmhouse, "Burkestown," is visited by a strange presence that comes down the chimney. Mrs. O'Callaghan, a devout Catholic, proclaims it the Archangel Michael. Mr. White, an atheist, is skeptical until he beholds the strange being which "[hangs] against the dark background of the range in a nimbus of its own light, looking straight between [Mr. White's] eyes, with awful splendor" (White 1947, 16). The creature tells them "that there [is] going to be a second Flood, and that the people at Burkestown [are] to build an Ark" (31). Mr. White makes a "slight mental adjustment [. . .] on the subject of God" (36), and begins constructing an ark the next day by deciding to "turn the hay barn upside down" (40). Although all three of the residents of Burkestown are present at the enunciation, Mikey and Mrs. O'Callaghan prove to be no help at all as "neither of them [care] for thinking about the future or about the things which might need to be

⁵⁹ The character and the author are, of course, distinct from one another and one cannot automatically assume parity in their ideas or attitudes; nevertheless, the author was clearly drawing deliberate parallels between himself and the character of Mr. White. Any reader who knew anything about the author would immediately recognize how closely they resemble each other in interests, appearance, name, and nationality. To attempt to maintain clarity, I use "Mr. White" to refer to the character and "White" to refer to the author in the pages that follow.

done" (119). Indeed, they cause problems for Mr. White at every turn, foiling his plans, refusing to follow his directions, and eventually denying that a flood will happen at all. Eventually, the rivers and fields around Burkestown begin to flood, Mr. White hurries the collected animals into the ark, and he, Mikey, and Mrs. O'Callaghan get aboard. Unfortunately, as the crew of the ark hurtles down the river towards Dublin and the Irish Sea, Mr. White realizes that he has not taken bridges or other obstacles into account and that he cannot steer the ark. The boat crashes, drowning the trapped animals. Mr. White, Mikey, and Mrs. O'Callaghan barely manage to escape into floating barrels. As the three main characters float through Dublin, cold and seasick, the Irish army, thinking them an invasion force, opens fire. The book ends with Mr. White, Mikey, and Mrs. O'Callaghan picked up in the Irish Sea. Mr. White admits that the O'Callaghans were right all along: there will be no second Noah's Flood, and above the trio shines a perfect rainbow.

The Elephant and the Kangaroo was written in 1943, after White had become disillusioned with Ireland. On 5 September 1943 he told David Garnett about the book, informing him, "I have got about 30,000 words done, and still going strong" (D. Garnett 1968, 129). The inspiration and execution of the first draft of the book happened quickly, within about two months. His previous letter to Garnett, dated 6 July 1943, makes no mention of any new project. Indeed, White facetiously remarks that he is toying with the idea of ceasing to write altogether: "Next year I hope to stop being a writer and earn my living by growing Iceberg lettuce for the Dublin market" (126). In July his current project was "a novel about Richard II which [he was] cribbing rather cleverly out of the D. N. B." (126). It is clear from this letter that White must have written a large portion of the first draft of *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* between 6 July and 5 September 1943. In his letter from September, White describes how the idea came to him: "One day Mrs. McDonagh was explaining the nature of the Trinity to me, and I

thought: I wonder what you really would do if the Holy Ghost suddenly put its head down the chimney?" (129). As mentioned previously, White rented rooms from the McDonaghs in Doolistown House, Boardsmill parish, County Meath, which is located about ten kilometers from Trim.⁶⁰ Not a modest house by the standards of the time, it had two large front rooms equipped with marble fireplaces. The house stands no more than a hundred yards from the banks of the Boyne, which, at the time, regularly flooded the surrounding fields. White was at first concerned about writing so openly of his Irish hosts. He wrote in a letter to Garnett, "It was worrying, at first, to write about real people, even in imaginary circumstances, because I was afraid of hurting feelings" (129). In the end, he overestimated the control that he would have over the distribution of his book and solved his worry by deciding, "I will see to it that no copy is mentioned or comes within ten miles of here. For that matter, I think I'll refuse to have it sold in Ireland at all" (129).

Possibly White's interactions with his colleagues in the Dublin literary scene turned him away from the dated, westward-looking, Revival traditions and towards a more contemporary, satirical approach. By 1943, he had made contacts in the literary and artistic circles of Dublin. As previously discussed, his contribution to *Horizon* brought him into contact with the writing of Seán O'Faoláin, Patrick Kavanagh, and Frank O'Connor, and he wrote to David Garnett that he had met Frank O'Connor in person at around this time (D. Garnett 1968, 115). There is evidence that White read more of O'Connor's work. In the end notes of his copy of *Bones of Contention and Other Stories* (1936), White writes that O'Connor "must be one of the best and fairest Irishmen writing on Irish themes" but decries the "genuine contempt for human life" that he sees in O'Connor's story "Tears-Idle Tears," which deals with the subject of murder

⁶⁰ The house is now derelict, although the barn that White imagined his characters transforming into an ark was still standing in the summer of 2015.

(O'Connor 1936, 97–116).⁶¹ Additionally, a copy of O'Faoláin's *An Irish Journey* (1941) is still in White's library. In this travel narrative O'Faoláin openly critiques the idealized portrait of the West: "There is no use in pretending about the west. It is magic, but it is also frightening. You, reader, may know it well from happy summers spent fishing in its lakes [. . .]. Connaught is not just scenery. Ireland is more than a floating raft on a holiday sea. Half Connemara is uneconomic" (O'Faoláin 1941, 155). When White encountered the work of O'Connor and O'Faoláin, it may have made him question his own style of representing Ireland.

John Ryan, the Dublin artist and man of letters, mentions White in his memoir *Remembering How We Stood* (1975), and records that he was a member of these Dublin literary circles. He recalls that White regularly visited the sculptor and author Desmond MacNamara. Ryan writes,

Mac cherished the company of writers, musicians, poets, artists, or, lacking these avocations, the bizarre, the unorthodox or the innocent visionary. He could (and did) hold lengthy conversations on every imaginable topic with an unending stream of visitors, comprising loafers, itinerants, even celebrities. I remember T. H. White, whose book, *The Once and Future King*, became the musical *Camelot*, as a frequent caller. (Ryan 1975, 62)

The scholar Lawrence William White describes MacNamara as "the linchpin of a vast circle that included [John] Ryan, Anthony Cronin, J. P. Donleavy, Gainor Crist, Ernest Gebler, Brendan Behan, Dan O'Herlihy, Alan Simpson, Carolyn Swift, E. J. Moeran, Erwin Schrödinger, the British wartime expatriate pacifist writer T. H. White, and many others. Hovering near the circumference were Patrick Kavanagh and Brian O'Nolan" (L. White

⁶¹ T. H. White, marginalia in (O'Connor 1936, end pages), MS-4494, HRC.

2015). White, moving in these circles, must have become aware of the trends in Irish literature which rejected, satirized, and questioned the assumptions and tropes of the Literary Revival, including the efforts of Brian O’Nolan who wrote under the pseudonyms of Flann O’Brien and Myles na gCopaleen.⁶² Indeed, from a superficial viewpoint, much of *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* could be compared to O’Brien’s satire. Maureen Waters argues that in *An Béal Bocht*, a parody of Irish language autobiographies and satirical examination of life in the Irish Gaeltacht, “most of the elements associated with the nineteenth century figure of Paddy reappear with a vengeance,” and this could equally be said of White’s portrait of Mikey in the story of the flood (Waters 1984, 125). For O’Brien, though, the “quarrel was with those who sentimentalized the life of the Gaeltacht” and who romanticized the extreme poverty and misery of those western districts (125), and, as James M. Cahalan points out, “The Gaelic Leaguers from Dublin [. . .] bear the brunt of the author’s satiric attack on Irish poverty” (Cahalan 1988, 244). The object of the satire is not primarily the impoverished community, but instead the anthropologists, historians, and folklorists who see only what they wish to and who use the people’s pain and misery to create pleasing narratives for books. This criticism could easily have applied to White and his work collecting folklore in the Gaeltacht area of Mayo only a few years earlier. Although it seems probable that he drew some inspiration from O’Brien’s work, White’s satire has a far heavier hand and less affection, and his target is very often the impoverished, downtrodden, and uneducated Irish locals.

It could be argued that White acknowledges a debt to O’Connor, O’Faoláin, and O’Brien within *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*. He references one of the many

⁶² Reportedly, White did not have a high opinion of Myles na gCopaleen’s satire. John Ryan recalls a conversation with White comparing the columns of Patrick Campbell and Myles in *The Irish Times*. Ryan writes, “I remember T. H. White once giving it as his opinion that Campbell was the better of the two” (Ryan 1975, 28). It is perhaps significant that Campbell was a member of the aristocracy and carried the title of Baron Glenavy, a fact that appealed to White throughout his life.

pseudonyms of O'Brien ("Myles na gCopaleen") alongside several characters from Joyce's *Ulysses* and the names of other contemporary Irish authors – including O'Connor and O'Faoláin – in the penultimate chapter of *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*:

There were the barmaids copper and gold, there the O'Madden Burke leaning upon his umbrella, there Fr. Conmee in tolerance of invincible ignorance and the Rev. Mr. Love in hope of preferment, there Blazes Boylan the proponent, Mulligan the medical and gentle Leopold the Sheeny with his shirt askew, not to mention Frank O'Connor in his black sombrero and Mr. Seán O'Faoláin in his spectacles and Myles of the Little Horses and McBirney only forty paces from the flood.
(White 1947, 243)

White thus makes his familiarity with the contemporary Dublin literary world explicit, but simultaneously distances himself and his own work from them. The context is mocking: these men stand among the farcical crowd waiting to bombard the sinking ark with artillery fire, out of fear that it is an invasion force.

As he was writing *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* White made it clear in letters to his friends that he had changed his style of thinking from only a few years earlier when he envisioned his involvement in the Irish Literary Revival and read extensively in Irish history. He wrote to David Garnett on 15 September 1943, as he was finishing the first draft of *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*,

We know that it is not fashionable nowadays to admire Somerville & Ross, or George Birmingham, because all Irish people are now known to live lives of simple dignity, on shark oil, in the Arran Islands. But Doolistown is not on an

island, and we can obtain no shark oil. Our life is *exactly* like the Irish R. M. or one of Birmingham's farces, only more so. (Garnet 1968, 132)

He refuses the images of rural Ireland painted by Synge and other members of the Revival, but does not explicitly turn towards the satire of O'Brien. Instead he claims a new interest in another Anglo-Irish tradition. In this letter White refers to Edith Somerville, Violet Martin (who wrote under the name "Martin Ross"), and James Owen Hannay ("George A. Birmingham"). All Anglo-Irish Protestants, these three writers were productive during the years of the Irish Literary Revival, but, although they knew and corresponded with members of the Revival, their creative work maintained an intellectual and literary distance. The writing of Somerville and Ross was set in the west at the turn of the twentieth century and included highly stylized and often stereotyped Irish characters aimed at comedy. Indeed, Maureen Waters argues that much of the comedy in their stories is predicated on the fact that "Irish and Anglo-Irish cultures are wholly antithetical" and unable to come to an understanding (Waters 1984, 15). In another element which may have appealed to White, their work often prominently featured fox hunting and other aristocratic sports, and it emphasized class differences and prejudices in rural Ireland. While it appears that White was aware of the work of contemporary satirists, like O'Brien and Kavanagh, he claimed to draw inspiration for *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* from an older, more aristocratic tradition.

The Elephant and the Kangaroo is about distinctness, Englishness, and anti-assimilation. Rather than trying to mediate differences, as the narrator does in *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* highlights and exploits the differences between the English and Irish characters. Although Mr. White tries to mediate disagreements and misunderstandings, he always fails. There is an insuperable chasm of miscommunication between him and the natives of the island on which he

lives. For example, Mr. White, who is interested in amateur biology, performs experiments that the local Irish appear incapable of understanding. In one investigation he uses bottles of diluted red ink to observe the various species of ants that he encounters on the Irish bogs. White writes, "Most ants objected to daylight, but, as they saw a different spectrum from Mr. White's, they had little objection to red light" (White 1947, 35). The native Irish, however, frustrate Mr. White's observations and "the bottles of red ink, invariably stolen as soon as he had gone away, were a source of wonder round Burkestown. [. . .] Some gave them to their cattle as a specific against contagious abortion; and some drank them themselves, as a cure for rheumatism, hemorrhoids, or the itch" (35). Recognizing the problem and making an effort to remedy the misunderstanding, Mr. White puts a "good dose" of tartar emetic – a medicine used to induce vomiting – in the bottles (35). Mr. White assumes that the resulting sickness will prevent future theft, but even in this most basic belief about human nature, Mr. White misunderstands the people that surround him: "Alas, this only had an opposite effect. It made his unwanted patients so violently sick that they, impressed by the magnitude of their vomits, testified all the more vehemently to the potency of the charm" (35).⁶³ Mr. White encounters a misunderstanding between scientific consensus and the local Irish community, attempts to act as an intermediary in some way but fails and causes still more confusion. The barrier between the English character and the Irish community that surrounds him makes communication on even the most basic level impossible. Every Irish character in the novel is engaged in a long-term misunderstanding with the

⁶³ This incident was based on a real experience that White had in July 1942. While he was conducting experiments on ants (see chapter two), he arrived one day to find the bottle of red ink had been removed. Furious, he writes in his diary, "Wherever I go in this bloody country, in village or town, I am pursued by hundreds of pairs of lurking, over-reaching, ignorant, calculating, crafty, cannibal eyes – the Zulus are far more civilized than the Irish – and evidently I had been seen to place the bottle. It was gone. [. . .] Nothing is more certain than that in one of our neighboring hovels some dirty Paddy now crouches with a bottle of red ink, waiting for it to turn into a crock of gold, or to cure him of rheumatism, [. . .] or to procure abortion, or, if all else fails, to prove a valuable passport to the good graces of the Devil, if his Houly-Mary-Mother-av-God happens to let him down" (T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 7 July 1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC).

English visitor, and no matter how honest Mr. White is, his word is mistrusted or misunderstood. White writes,

It did not matter how much [Mr. White] told the truth round Burkestown, because nobody in the locality believed it. Indeed, Mr. White's truthfulness had the curious effect of making the aborigines consider that he was the most cunning liar they had ever met. Unaccustomed to hearing the truth in any form, they were baffled by his veracity.⁶⁴ (32)

When effective communication is permitted to occur in the narrative, it only serves to display the insuperable chasm between Mr. White and the Irish characters who surround him. Early in the story Mr. White appears to communicate with Pat Geraghty, a laborer on the O'Callaghans' farm, who is described as the only local Irishman who is a "good workman who [takes] pains with his work," close to "the style of an English laborer" (White 1947, 28). In the town of Burkestown this interest in his work qualifies him as "a maniac" (27). Even though Geraghty is nearly "English" in his work ethic, Mr. White still has to "carefully [manage]" his communication with him, and Mr. White has invented a complex system of reverse psychology to get Geraghty to understand and do what he instructs. If he wants Geraghty to do something, Mr. White insists that it cannot be done. For example, when convincing Geraghty to help him build the ark, Mr. White says, "I thought you might be able to help – but then I thought it would be too difficult for you." Geraghty responds, "Is it me build an Ark? I could build that, and more to it" (40). This might initially seem like an effective mediation between an English

⁶⁴ White makes similar observations about the supposed lack of Irish truthfulness in his private writing. In the end pages of Frank O'Connor's *Bones of Contention and Other Stories* (1936), White writes, "Another typical Irish characteristic is this fatal indifference to attainable truth, the cheap preference for dialectic, argument, the 'debater's point' etc. [. . .] Nobody cares what the truth which provoked the argument may be. They only care for the theatricals. I cant [sic] imagine an Irishman doing research" (T. H. White, marginalia in [O'Connor 1936, end pages], MS-4494, HRC).

character and an Irish character, because for a while it does produce results. However, White makes it clear it is only because of the “English” nature of Geraghty’s work ethic that communication is possible, and even here Mr. White has to carefully arrange his words in order to inspire Geraghty. Yet even with Geraghty, Mr. White’s communication eventually falls apart and they no longer interact effectively. Geraghty, the narrator informs us, refuses “to give his employer credit for being altruistic, affectionate, simple, truthful,” and he therefore becomes convinced that “his master was obviously cheating him somehow or other” and that “the Ark was being built *in order to make a fool of him*” (133, emphasis White’s). Geraghty is “sworn to be revenged” for this imagined wrong (134). He attempts to kill Mr. White, yet even after this attempt on his life, Mr. White fails to correctly interpret the situation. He does not realize that Pat has attempted to shoot him through the parlor window, and, opening the front door, finds Pat with a gun in the garden. Mr. White, seeing that the gun has misfired, invites Pat in for a drink and promises “to clean the gun himself” (142).

The lack of effective communication between Mr. White and the Irish interferes with the construction of the ark. Mr. White and Mrs. O’Callaghan function on two such different logical plains that they find it impossible to work together. At several points in the story Mr. White attempts to explain the danger of the flood to Mrs. O’Callaghan, but each time he fails:

“If,” said [Mr. White], “there is not going to be a Flood, why did the Archangel say there was?”

“Perhaps she made a mistake.”

“How can an Archangel make a mistake? An Archangel is God’s messenger, isn’t It? And God is omnipotent and omniscient and all the other things you tell me about, twice a week. If It is omniscient, how can It make a mistake?”

“But, Mr. White, we know that *everybody* makes mistakes, sometimes.”

“What does omniscient mean?” he asked, with deadly calm. (White 1947, 125)

Mrs. O’Callaghan claims not to be able to remember the definition of “omniscient” and continues to deny the likelihood of a second Noah’s Flood. This miscommunication – with the community, with Pat Geraghty, with Mrs. O’Callaghan – demonstrates to the reader that there exists an insuperable barrier between the English and the Irish. Unlike *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, where White is described as contributing to, understanding, and embracing the Irish community, here Mr. White is constantly at odds with his surroundings. He fails to accomplish anything, and as hard as he tries to civilize his neighbors, he cannot contribute in a real or long-term way because he does not comprehend the society’s rules. In this way, White dramatically withdraws himself from the Irish role that he adopted in *The Godstone and the Blackymor*.

In *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*, White’s portrayal of Irish characters becomes comprehensively negative. He describes his Doolistown host Paddy McDonagh under the pseudonym “Mikey O’Callaghan,” and represents him as an extreme version of a negative Irish stereotype: “Half-witted and obstinate and self-satisfied” (White 1947, 22).⁶⁵ Mikey is timid, “terrified of almost everything on the farm: of the bull, the horses, the bees, and even of the turkeys” (21). Mr. White is always angry at him, and White writes, “This was partly because of [Mikey’s] timidity, partly because of his laziness, and partly because he was physically-speaking a kind of Neanderthal idiot” (21). By

⁶⁵ Archival evidence suggests that White drew this portrait from his host. In the notebook in which White drafted *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* he miswrites the name of his Irish male character: “For instance Paddy Mikey could not wind up his watch, or tell the time by the minute hand, or recognise photographs” (T. H. White, Notebook 6, no date, folder 1, box 12, MS-4494, HRC). This mistake appears to strongly imply that White was envisioning a portrait of Paddy as he worked. Further, White writes the above description of “Mikey” virtually word-for-word in a letter to Mary Potts which refers to Paddy, his host (Gallix 1982, 136).

suggesting that Mikey is a “Neanderthal idiot,” White implies that Mikey is below the English character on an evolutionary scale. He imagines Mikey as a missing link between apes and civilized humans.⁶⁶ As White describes Mikey, the Irish character has no skills whatsoever: “Although he was supposed to be a farmer, Mikey could not plough, sow, or work horses [. . .]. Mikey could not wind up his watch, or tell the time by the minute hand, or recognize photographs – he used to hold them upside down. [. . .] He did not know his age, nor his own second name” (21). The incompetence ascribed to Mikey is so extreme as to challenge the readers’ ability to suspend their disbelief. Mikey cannot support himself or his family, and he does not even know who or where he is. This caricature, however, seems to be drawn from British stereotypes of the Irish as gullible, fond of drinking, ignorant, and indolent, and the conclusions appear to mirror aspects of British ruling-class justifications for imperial policies. These supposedly racial traits reinforced the interpretation that the Irish were unable to govern themselves. Mikey’s laziness and his fear make him incapable of running the farm, and Mr. White is forced, for Mikey’s own good and for the good of the land, to take control.

Perhaps White believed that this caricature of Mikey followed the tradition of Somerville and Ross, whom he mentioned in his letters at the time. Somerville and Ross’s use of stereotypes in their writing is often complex and occasionally problematic. It seems to be this humorous use of stereotype and situational comedy in their writing that White seeks to emulate in *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*. However, although “Somerville and Ross’s use of stage types like the tipsy servant, the half-sir or the bumbling official [. . .] derived from a colonial rhetoric that defined Irishness to support

⁶⁶ The critic L. P. Curtis, in tracing the development of Victorian caricatures of Irish political agitators, notes, “Paddy began to resemble increasingly the chimpanzee, the orangutan, and, finally, the gorilla. The transformation of peasant Paddy into an ape-man or simonized Caliban was completed by the 1860s and 1870s” (Curtis 1997, 2). Curtis comments that these stereotypes had political motivations and implications and that turning the typical image of an Irish peasant into “a ferocious hybrid of man and ape” was a way of “justifying harsh measures against the agents of aggressive nationalism” and simultaneously “dismissing the political aspirations underlying those acts” (xi).

and argue methods of policing in the 'sister colony' " (Stevens 2007, 131), James M. Cahalan argues that their stories "exemplify the Ascendancy laughing at itself instead of at the peasantry" (Cahalan 1988, 67). Furthermore, many of the Irish characters in *Some Experiences of an Irish RM* (1899) engage in a humorous and self-conscious act of masking. Stevens writes that in the world of Somerville and Ross, "being Irish can be a highly self-conscious performance depending on who is watching and what one wants to gain" (Stevens 2007, 5-6). In this way the two authors subvert the types and caricatures that they employ: they are masks, used by the Irish characters to restore some balance of power to themselves. *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* lacks this nuance. While the Englishman in White's story is eventually shown to be ineffective and incorrect, this outcome serves to enforce the stereotypes, rather than undermine them. Mr. White is shown to be mistaken, but only in the particular context of the second Noah's Flood, and the general superiority of his methods, intellect, and character are therefore upheld. The conclusion of White's work appears to reaffirm that Mikey and the other Irish characters are as stupid and inept as they appear; they are never merely playing for effect or for advantage.

White also makes the underlying prejudice and racism of his character more explicit in one specific scene. In this scene, Mr. White tells Mrs. O'Callaghan that "there [are] three things which everybody ought to know about themselves": blood type, "the peculiarities of their fingerprints," and their cephalic index (White 1947, 138). While this statement is humorous in tone – Mr. White gives no reasons for the importance of knowing these three random facts, and they can have little or no impact on Mrs. O'Callaghan's rural life – the mention of the cephalic index indicates an underlying bigotry in Mr. White's relationship to his hosts. As the scene proceeds Mr. White uses calipers to measure his own index and the indexes of the two O'Callaghans, and he finds his number to be vastly different from theirs. White writes, "Mikey's index proved to be

sixty, Mrs. O'Callaghan's sixty-two" (138); Mr. White's own number is near eighty (139). In the pseudoscience of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, certain anthropologists believed that races could be delineated through the use of skull sizes, and these sizes were compared using cephalic indexes;⁶⁷ the Irish O'Callaghans and the English Mr. White, these numbers imply, are racially different, and the difference in their races has biological and scientific significance.

White would have found accounts of these "scientific" theories in several of the texts on Irish history that he mentions purchasing from Hodges Figgis on 1 April 1940. In R. A. S. Macalister's *Ireland in Pre-Celtic Times* (1921), Macalister describes,

Head-shape is measured by means of a figure called the *cephalic-index*. This figure expresses the breadth of the head (measured by a pair of calipers between the prominent points above the ears) as a percentage of the length (measured from a point just above the upper end of the nose to the most prominent point at the back of the head) [. . .] [A] low index, therefore, implies a long, narrow skull, and a high index a short, round skull. (Macalister 1921, 31–32)

W. G. Wood-Martin in *Pagan Ireland* also describes the theory that "distinct races" can be "classed and identified by the configuration of their crania" (Wood-Martin 1895, 21). Wood-Martin writes, "The form of skull attributed to the primitive inhabitants of Ireland is distinguished by great length from the front to the back of the head, and comparative narrowness of the skull; hence the type is by scientists styled dolicho-cephalic, or long-

⁶⁷ Developed by Anders Adolf Retzius, "the cephalic index became one of the standard gauges used by ethnologists and craniometrists around the world. [. . .] The application of calipers and measuring tapes to skulls after the early 1840s gave many scientists of man a new sense of confidence in the precision of their methods, even though craniologists could not effectively distinguish between male and female skulls in practice. [. . .] The old equation between size of cranial cavity or brain and intelligence thus lived on in the best craniometrical circles" (Curtis 1997, 11).

headed" (22). White was clearly interested in Wood-Martin's analysis, and his copy of *Pagan Ireland* includes the marginal notes, "1st immigrants dolicho-cephalic. Are Esquimaux dolicho-cephalic?" and "2nd immigrants brach-cephalic [sic] of 2 classes (a) 'Celts' (b) 'Norsemen.'" ⁶⁸ Wood-Martin, however, is more circumspect in his conclusions than Macalister. He cautions that an antiquarian may "be biased by his own imagination regarding some preconceived theory," and he writes, "Classification of crania into distinct types, and then making that type the badge of a race, is a theory of doubtful value" (23). White's marginalia makes note of Wood-Martin's hesitancy, and he adds in the margin "objection to science of skulls;" he still labels it a "science," however, in spite of Wood-Martin's objections. ⁶⁹

In spite of their dubious certainty, these techniques, which had little or no basis in true science, allowed generations of researchers and politicians with a colonial agenda to argue that "race" could be quantified; that it determined intelligence, ability, and temperament; and that these racial differences justified the subjugation of people all over the globe. Mr. White names this technique as one of the most important things one can know about oneself, and he classifies it alongside authentic scientific facts like blood types and unique finger prints. The inclusion of this technique thus explicitly incorporates colonial theories about the inferior nature of the Irish which elsewhere in the text are only implied. Mr. White espouses the beliefs and methods of a British imperialist, and the text even implies that he believes that he possesses an inherent intellectual superiority to his Irish counterparts. The author's presentation of this scene in the text is problematic as well. White does not contradict the faulty science of his main character or the conclusions that Mr. White draws.

⁶⁸ T. H. White, marginalia in (Wood-Martin 1895, 21-22), MS-4494, HRC.

⁶⁹ T. H. White, marginalia in (Wood-Martin 1895, 23), MS-4494, HRC.

Mikey represents an Irish “type” who is indolent and ignorant, and his wife, Mrs. O’Callaghan, represents the superstitious, fanatical Irish Catholic. Mr. White, the rational atheist attempts to “cure” Mrs. O’Callaghan of her Catholic religious convictions and has “a religious argument with [her] about once a month, in which he explain[s] to her with frightful patience that there [is] no God at all” (White 1947, 13). In spite of this, he makes no headway: “He was always finding out new things that she believed in, such as that angels really flew about on wings or that Jesus Christ really had a beard and a visible halo suspended over his head. He explained to her how big an angel’s sternum would have to be, to hold the wing muscles” (14). Mrs. O’Callaghan does not only believe in religious iconography, however, but also in folk superstitions:

fortunetellers, patent medicines, not meeting weasels or redheaded women or magpies on a journey, never lighting three cigarettes with one match, never having three candles in one room, killing cocks if they crowed at the wrong time, and, indeed, about seven thousand other superstitions, both religious and secular, which provided a continuum in which to lead her life. (55)

Her religious and superstitious beliefs impact Mrs. O’Callaghan’s life and make it difficult for her to go about her business. She keeps the kitchen “in a submarine gloom” even on sunny days, and refuses to open the shutters “because she said that if the sun shone on the kitchen range it would put the fire out” (59). This contrast between the

sensible, rational Englishman and the emotional, superstitious Irish woman is, again, a stereotype that was used to justify or rationalize English colonial policy in Ireland.⁷⁰

In contrast with these two stereotypical Irish caricatures, Mr. White is represented as an ideal of Englishness, and embodies many of the positive stereotypes that English imperialists used to classify themselves. The English stereotypes of the Irish defined Ireland in terms antithetical to how the imperial power wished to define and imagine itself. This is evident in White's portrait of Mr. White: the English character is the exact opposite of his neighbors in Ireland. He is rational and scientific, and White describes him as "generally pursuing some theory or other, often dealing with archaeology or biology or history" (White 1947, 33). As we have seen, he conducts experiments on ants, and he also attempts to educate the Irish locals in scientific theory: he writes "a little booklet for Mrs. O'Callaghan, in which he [. . .] explained about Darwin and the amoebae in words of one syllable" (13). Additionally, Mr. White is "confiding, and he nearly always told the truth" (32). White contrasts this with the Irish characters who are "unaccustomed to hearing the truth in any form" (32). The emphasis on honesty is yet another example of an ideal English stereotype contrasted with a flawed Irish stereotype. Declan Kiberd writes, "If John Bull was industrious and reliable, Paddy was held to be indolent and contrary; if the former was mature and rational, the latter must be unstable and emotional; if the English were adult and manly, the Irish must be childish and feminine" (Kiberd 1996, 30). Mr. White is shown with all of the positive characteristics Kiberd delineates, and even the local Irish accept his superiority and acknowledge that he is better at organization than they are. Mrs. O'Callaghan describes

⁷⁰ It is possible that Mrs. O'Callaghan and Mr. White are meant to recall Hibernia and John Bull, the personified figures of Ireland and England, who were often portrayed together as a married couple in cartoons and caricatures. They are the only two characters in White's novel who are referred to using the courtesy titles of "Mr." and "Mrs.," which connects them to each other thematically. Further, White was aware of the tendency to imagine Ireland as a female and England as her male counterpart. He writes in his diary, "It is a Fatherland in England, a logical patriarchy where everything is ruled by the masculine law of logic. Erin is the motherland. In her only is the law female, illogical, deep, far-reaching, incomprehensible. England has always been a bitter husband to Erin" (T. H. White, diary 1939-1941, 15 Dec. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC).

Mr. White as “always the practical Englishman,” and she is delighted when, after the arrival of the angel, he takes “control of the situation, as he generally did” (White 1947, 12). Indeed, before they even begin to build the ark, the audience is told, “[Mikey] and Mrs. O’Callaghan had come to regard the affair as Mr. White’s” (58). The author puts into the Irish characters’ own mouths the sentiments that justify Mr. White in his superior and controlling approach. They require Mr. White to take over the project, and allow him to do so without hesitation. All of the “English” qualities that Mr. White apparently possesses in abundance would make him ideally suited to save the day, take command, and be the hero. All of the qualities that Mikey and Mrs. O’Callaghan have, including their apparent adoration of Mr. White, make them seem ideal candidates to be ruled, controlled, and instructed. Mr. White’s rationalism, his scientific method, and his trust in the evidence of his own eyes would appear to make him the perfect representative of the divine messenger who has been sent down their chimney, and yet, in the end, White subverts this expectation.

In the end, it is the Irish tendency towards laziness, superstition, and dishonesty that saves the day and prevents ultimate destruction, and it is Mr. White’s rationality and industry that nearly doom the small family to poverty and failure. Throughout his attempts to build the ark, Mr. White has an ongoing argument with Mrs. O’Callaghan about selling Mikey’s farm in order to raise money for constructing and provisioning the ark. He argues, “It won’t be any good to us afterward [. . .], and if we did find it again, it would be ours anyway, whether we had sold it or not, because there would be nobody else to claim it” (White 1947, 100). Mrs. O’Callaghan does not listen to Mr. White’s rational arguments, and relies on emotional reasoning and false logic. The farm has sentimental value to the family, she argues, because Mikey “had it from his Anty [sic]” (124). Against the rational evidence of her own eyes and ears as well as the Catholic religious conviction in the infallibility of God, she argues that the flood might

not come: “But, Mr. White, you have to consider that it’s what the farm be’s Mikey’s *living*. [. . .] Perhaps [. . .] it won’t be swept away” (155). This apparent irrationality infuriates White, but in the end Mrs. O’Callaghan is right to be skeptical. There is no second Noah’s Flood, and the ark that Mr. White has constructed sinks not five miles away from its point of embarkation. The trapped animals die: “The pigs, the cow, the goat, the mountain of chestnut muscle called Nancy, all were doomed” (199). Mr. White acknowledges that through his efforts to help and govern he has doomed the family. White writes,

Mrs. O’Callaghan had lived for twenty-three years in a fairly comfortable farmhouse, and she had paid £120 in installments on its Dutch barn. He had turned her barn upside down, filled it with the pick of the farm stock and all the implements, taken her away in it from the home in which she had lived all her married life, conveyed her a distance of five miles [. . .] and had finally submerged the whole contrivance in the turbulent waters of the Slane. (214)

Therefore, in spite of the text’s anti-Irish racism, the imperialist attitudes it espouses, and the problematic relationships depicted between Mr. White and the Irish characters, the ultimate outcome subverts this apparently colonial attitude. The Irish, it seems, even with their supposed faults, would have governed and sustained themselves better through the worldwide crisis of the imagined flood without authoritarian English intervention. Left alone, they would have ignored the issue, but would have survived and flourished in their own imperfect manner. Nevertheless, this subversion is still problematic: the story’s resolution reaffirms the stereotypes that the narrative elsewhere endorses, and, the story concludes, the Irish are, in fact, as lazy and superstitious as Mr. White elsewhere implies.

This final political subversion seems to strongly suggest influences from contemporary politics. At the time White was writing, the sense that Ireland required English leadership to survive the Second World War was not uncommon (Dwyre 2009, 25–31). White does not choose to state the time period in which the story occurs, but evidence suggests that it is set during the War. At one point Mr. White mentions that there are “battleships” out on the sea (White 1947, 57), and he listens to the wireless, which “roar[s] out its usual list of atrocities” and describes “the fall of empires” and “bloodshed” (140). It would have been clear to the book’s initial audience in 1947 that echoes of the recent conflict registered in the background. In spite of the fact that the fiction makes no direct reference to it, the influence that the War had on White’s state of mind as he wrote was immense, and it would be impossible to suppose that it could be absent from the text.⁷¹ Viewed in the context of the Second World War, the politics of the text become more significant. White’s racist portrait of the Irish, their incompetency, their inability to rule and govern and their reluctance to prepare in the face of the oncoming worldwide disaster takes on the character of allegory. Mr. White, the English character, is forced by circumstances to take over from the Irish and save humanity, usurping the control of the homestead for the benefit of the world and for his own safety. John Crane felt that *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* was a one of White’s failed efforts because it contained “very little thematic core;” however, Crane declines to explore the thematic importance of the England/Ireland relationship and the relevance of White’s political allegory (Crane 1974, 141). Mr. White’s attitude can be likened to British and American frustration with Irish neutrality during the War. This frustration exposed itself in anti-Irish rhetoric that described “an embattled Britain being forced to take measures against its irresponsible and treacherous neighbour” (Wills 2008, 384).

⁷¹ White consistently believed that the War could mean “the end of civilisation” (T. H. White, diary 1939-1941, 27 Sept. 1939, folder 1, box 27, MS-4494, HRC). See chapter two for more on White’s varying emotional reactions to the Second World War and on his several attempts to participate after 1941. By 1943, however, he had abandoned all of his earlier attempts to leave Ireland and join the war effort.

Early in the War, Churchill made the argument that an Allied invasion of Ireland and a seizure of Irish ports might be necessary to ensure British security,⁷² and even after VE Day public opinion was still “against an Irish neutrality which was portrayed as tantamount to support for Germany” (391). In the end, humanity is not saved by Mr. White’s English efficiency. As Mr. White admits late in the story, “Do you know, Mrs. O’Callaghan, that everything I have said or done has been wrong, and everything you have said or done has been right? [. . .] It was you who refused to sell the farm, so that we shall have something to support us when the flood goes down; and it was you who denied that the Archangel was sent by the Holy Ghost” (White 1947, 230). Mr. White’s takeover of the farm is the cause of the disastrous sinking of the ark, and the Irish policy of ignoring their supposed danger would have produced better results for all the inhabitants of Burkestown.

White’s time in Ireland was perhaps both the most creatively productive and the most emotionally harrowing of his life. He produced his most enduring work, *The Once and Future King* along with *Mistress Masham’s Repose*, *The Godstone and the Blackymor*, and *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*. *The Master* was also first drafted in Ireland, and White made significant inroads on his translation of *The Bestiary: a Book of Beasts* and collected many of the extracts that later appeared in *The Age of Scandal* and *The Scandalmonger*. At the same time, he also suffered horribly over the War and was isolated from his friends and community in England. The two semi-autobiographical books White wrote about his experiences offer, therefore, an interesting subject of inquiry, and display how he chose to represent himself across these prolific and painful years. The two diametrically opposed attitudes towards Ireland that White evinces in *The Godstone and the Blackymor* and *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* are, perhaps, partially explained by their publication dates. *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* was

⁷² For a full discussion of the debate see T. Ryle Dwyer’s *Behind the Green Curtain* (2009), pages 25-31.

written and published at a time when the emotional and intellectual impact of the War on White was most intense. His feelings of guilt, rejection, and isolation when his attempts to join the War failed in 1942 may have elicited his growing dislike of the Irish community. The publication of *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* caused great personal pain to Lena and Paddy McDonagh, and they stopped corresponding with White after its publication in 1947 (Warner 1967, 241).⁷³ White never apologized to his long-time hosts and friends, but perhaps he hoped that his second book on the subject, which painted Lena in a far more flattering light in its penultimate chapter, would serve as an apology. In 1959, living on the channel island of Alderney, White was removed from the circumstances that sparked his original disgust. He could return to and edit his earlier diaries and notebooks with equanimity, and, perhaps, with a regret that allowed him to express his initial love of Ireland in a published form. *The Godstone and the Blackymor* was the last book White ever prepared for publication, and it is possible to see it as a revision and a re-remembrance of the story of his time in Ireland.

⁷³ For the last letter see (Lena McDonagh, letter to T. H. White, 24 July 1947, folder 4, box 22, MS-4494, HRC).

Chapter 5

Mistress Masham's Repose* and *The Master: White's Post-War Children's Literature

In the midst of the War, White made what may appear an incongruous decision – to write several books for children. He began both *Mistress Masham's Repose* (1946) and *The Master: An Adventure Story* (1957) during the Second World War, although both were published after the conclusion of hostilities. As previous chapters have explored, these years were some of the most productive and conflicted of the author's professional life, and the work for adults that White produced in this period represents his most important literary contributions. White completed *The Once and Future King* (1958) and *The Book of Merlyn* (1977); he produced the diaries that would become *The Godstone and the Blackymor* (1959), and he wrote *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* (1947). In his personal life the War was a time of emotional turmoil, guilt, and loneliness; these years also included his conflict and frustration with his publisher Collins. It may appear odd that during this same period White turned part of his efforts to children's literature. However, as this chapter demonstrates, White did not depart from his interests by choosing to work in a new genre, and the concerns that pervade his adult literature also appear in his literature for children. While he disguises the more mature concepts, both of his postwar children's books still address the War, Ireland, England and Englishness, and the collapse of empire. Similarly to *The Sword in the Stone* (1938), both also have a focus on education. As a former educator and deep believer in the pedagogical power of literature, White saw these books as an opportunity to alter the course of the dangerous history he saw enacted around him.

White began *Mistress Masham's Repose* in 1943, and it was published after the War in 1946. *The Master*, however, had a far more complex publication path that remains somewhat obscure, even with the extensive material in the archive. White

began to outline the text in late 1941, immediately after finishing *The Once and Future King*. Among the notes for this initial draft of *The Master* is the determination that White will not complete the book until after the end of the Second World War. He writes, “This must be the first book I write in the next peace, if they let me live. During the remaining war I can translate the Bestiary with notes from Aristotle, Herodotus, Aldrovandus, Sir Thomas Browne, Giraldus, Matthew Paris, Hilaire, [illegible], Withenby, White of Shelbourne, etc.”¹ Whether he felt that the emotional turmoil of the War would not allow him to compose a children’s adventure book, that his efforts would be better spent on the Bestiary, or that his publisher would prefer a different genre and style is not clear. It is true that a few months later White received a letter from Collins, his publisher, in which Collins refuses to publish the five-volume version of *The Once and Future King* and reminds White, “We have contracts for two Fiction and two Non-Fiction Books to come.”² Collins suggests that White might write “one of [his] ‘nature’ books” in January 1942.³

The decision to write children’s literature appears to have had several motivating factors. Financial gain was one. In the letter to David Garnett in which he describes *Mistress Masham’s Repose* and declares his intention of writing for children, White tells his friend, “The only object of any sensible writer is to make money. This I will do, or die” (D. Garnett 1968, 140). White’s most financially successful novel at the time was *The Sword in the Stone*, a book which appealed to both children and adults, so he was aware of how lucrative a successful children’s book could be. However, money was not White’s sole motive, and he nourished an attachment to children’s literature and took intense pleasure in it throughout his life. In a letter from 1931 to L. J. Potts White gives

¹ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 21 Oct. 1941, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

² William “Billy” Collins, letter to T. H. White, 18 Jan. 1942, in diary 1941–1942, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

³ *Ibid.*

The Midnight Folk (1927) by John Masefield a grade of "A+" (Gallix 1984, 25). Indeed, he is effusive about the text, and he adds, "In my opinion it is [Masefield's] *only* claim to the consideration of posterity, and a *chef d'oeuvre* of the *imagination*. A *poet*. I shall talk to you for hours about its points when I next see you. I admire it so much that I daren't try to begin telling you why. This letter would never end" (Gallix 1984, 25). Masefield, the Poet Laureate of the time, was renowned for his poetry for adults, and thus White makes an argument for the importance and validity of children's writing by placing *The Midnight Folk* above the body of Masefield's poetic work. Masefield was not White's only example in the field. In mid-October 1938, after the publication of *The Sword in the Stone* and about five years before his decision to return to children's books, White wrote in his diary, "I read Kim again today, straight through at a draught."⁴ He describes the text of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) as transformative and transcendent:

In all this welter of shameful misery which men have made of the world, there are wells. The bright, clear, remorseless water of love springs up to shame us and show us what we could be. How they all in that book behave to one another with brimming hearts. Kipling and Masefield are the two writers I think of, off-hand, who have this impeccable instinct for human charity, the pity which is akin to love. In this age of barbarism [. . .] the intellectuals dare not grant the homage due to such people. But they will survive. They will be there, to bathe the soul in, for those few, too few, who will be left to remember human decency. When the torturers have come, and the whips, and the swastikas, and have overpowered all this for a few hundred years, there will be the old books, Kim, Midnight Folk,

⁴ T. H. White, diary 1938-1939, 18 Oct. 1938, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

Pook's Hill, The Bird of Dawning, to show how the [illegible]. From the peak it is down now in the history of human hearts.⁵

It is evident that White felt intensely the emotion that could be conveyed in literature for children and believed that some of the greatest works of literature were directed at a younger audience. This passage also demonstrates that White felt children's literature might have an impact on wider-reaching humanitarian issues.

At about the time that White was writing *Mistress Masham's Repose* and *The Master*, he also composed two unpublished essays on children's literature. One essay explores how books for children may be addressed also (or primarily) to adults and how they can explore adult content, and the other describes reading habits and their development over time.⁶ In his essay on children's books he writes,

It is evident that the most famous of them [children's books] are not written for children. I am sure I never enjoyed Bevis or Treasure Island or Huckleberry Finn [sic] half as much when young as I do now. In fact I remember being exasperated with Tom Sawyer in the latter book [. . .]. I was so baffled that I never tried to read the book again, until I was forty. And then with what pleasure, with what a subtle joy to recognize that Tom Sawyer was a juvenile edition of Don Quixote – a tilter at windmills and an inhabitant of imaginary worlds!⁷

⁵ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 21 Oct. 1941, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

⁶ Although the majority of the items in notebook 6 are undated, including this essay on children's literature, the content surrounding the essay can be tentatively assigned to a specific period. Notebook 6 also contains early drafts of *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*, which White's letters indicate that he composed in the summer of 1943. The other projects in the notebook may also suggest a period between 1943 and 1944. It appears likely that White composed this essay contemporaneously with *Mistress Masham's Repose*, which he began in 1943.

⁷ T. H. White, Notebook 6, folder 1, box 12, MS-4494, HRC.

White recognizes that children's books can contain adult themes and humor, and he also acknowledges that these can alienate the child reader. As shall be explored later in the chapter, his use of dual audience in children's fiction is critical to *Mistress Masham's Repose*, and White's response to the work of Twain suggests that he employs this approach as a conscious strategy. The essay then turns to the issue of satire in children's fiction. In *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Huck faces a moral decision: betray the slave Jim to his former owner (a "Christian" act) or remain loyal to his friend. White writes, "This is a double satire, on Christianity as well as on slavery, and great literature. It is not for children."⁸ As *Mistress Masham's Repose* makes heavy use of satire to discuss mature themes like empire, control, and violence, this evidence of the author noticing and analyzing the same literary tactics offers the suggestion that White viewed his work for children as a continuation of his work for an adult audience.

The second essay on children's literature takes a different position, focusing instead on the child reader's experience. White writes that, despite the adult themes which may be present in certain books for children, he is opposed to prescribing them "serious" reading: "Read what you like reading when you are a kid [. . .]; when you are old you may prefer caviar: and the taste for caviar in old age must follow upon having plenty of candy when you are young."⁹ He argues that the training of intellectual adult readers begins by indulging in unintellectual children's literature:

I began my reading career at the age of seven by lapping up all the comics there were: I went on to ten cent shockers: I had a wild adolescence during which I read all the books that existed about the Three Musketeers and also books by Dumas and a lady called Ruby M. Ayres. The latter wrote exclusively of bronzed

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ T. H. White, Notebook 4, folder 8, box 11, MS-4494, HRC.

Anglo-Indian captains who were the V.C. and slapped their riding boots with natty hunting crops. Went on, after digesting all sorts of trash, with the greatest possible enjoyment, to various semi-intelligent publications that came my way more or less at random: and now, after the lapse of far too many years, I browse through the records of the late eighteenth century — when I am not reading medieval bestiaries in dog latin [sic] manuscript, with short-hand abbreviations.¹⁰ [. . .] Reading develops itself. The taste improves automatically. The greatest possible mistake is to read something that you think you *ought* to read. You will hate it until you *need* to read it, and, when you do need to read it, you will do so. Read Nat Gould about horses and after that you will wish to try Edgar Wallace (a first-rate writer). After that you may have the urge to look through *Right Royal* by John Masefield ~~the present English Poet Laureate~~. Thus the mere interest in horses will have led you to bridge the cultural gap between a kid's [illegible] and the present English Poet Laureate.¹¹

White seems to evince two opposing perspectives in these essays. In one he praises the impact of adult issues, adult perspectives, and satire in children's literature while acknowledging that such tactics alienated him as a child. In the other he claims that children ought to enjoy and self-select the material they read. While these two concepts may seem paradoxical, they illuminate the attempts made in *Mistress Masham's Repose* and *The Master* to address adult themes while remaining respectful of a child audience.

¹⁰ Again, this manuscript essay is undated, but this description of White's current activities allows for a tentative date. White began to collect the eighteenth-century extracts that would become *The Age of Scandal* (1950) in around 1943. Although the translation of the Latin Bestiary took many years to become *The Book of Beasts* (1954), White began to devote more time to it in 1943 as well. On 19 November 1943, for example, he wrote to L. J. Potts, "I am engaged in a work of real scholarship at last. That is, I am translating a 12th century Bestiary out of illegible, abbreviated, dog-latin [sic], into English, with notes about 3 times longer than the work itself" (Gallix 1984, 131).

¹¹ T. H. White, Notebook 4, folder 8, box 11, MS-4494, HRC.

Aside from *The Once and Future King*, the text that has received more critical attention and long-term popular success than any of White's other material is *Mistress Masham's Repose*. Although close critical discussions have been limited, *Mistress Masham's Repose* has nevertheless garnered a place in several of the major surveys of twentieth century children's literature.¹² The protagonist of the story is Maria, a ten-year-old girl, and the setting is the estate of "Malplaquet," Maria's "enormous house in the wilds of Northamptonshire" which is "four times longer than Buckingham Palace [. . .] built by one of her ducal ancestors" (White 1946, 9). Maria is due to inherit the decaying mansion, but as the story opens she is trapped under the power of her controlling governess, Miss Brown, and the local Vicar, Mr. Hater. Maria's two allies on the estate are the Professor, an impoverished and absent-minded Latin scholar, described as "a failure" who "did his best to hide it" (29), and the Cook, a warm-hearted "Old Retainer [. . .] with nobody to love but Maria" (24) who speaks in a stream of malapropisms. The plot begins when Maria discovers a race of six-inch-tall people on one of her estate's overgrown, ornamental islands. Maria befriends this minuscule society and learns that they are the descendants of the tiny humans described in Swift's

¹² For example, extended discussions of *Mistress Masham's Repose* appear in Frank Eyre's *British Children's Books in the Twentieth Century* (1971), Barbara Wall's *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction* (1991), *Modern Children's Literature: An Introduction* (2005) edited by Kimberley Reynolds, and Lisa Sainsbury's *Ethics in British Children's Literature: Unexamined Life* (2013).

Gulliver's Travels (1726).¹³ Their “forebears had been carried off from mighty Lilliput two hundred years before” (48). Because Maria is big and they are small “she [wants] to take control of them” and “to play with them, like lead soldiers, and even [dreams] of being their queen” (82). However, “the Lilliputians [are] not toys” but form a complete and functioning adult society (82). Maria must learn from the wise Professor “about not being an owner” (82). Additionally, now that the secret of the tiny people has been discovered, they are in danger of being kidnapped and controlled not just by Maria, but also by the far more sinister Miss Brown and Mr. Hater. As the story develops, the villains discover Maria’s secret and attempt to force from her the location of the Lilliputians. In the end, Maria, the Cook, the Professor, and the Lilliputians outsmart them and the pair are deposed. Thanks to the efforts of the Professor, “the whole of Maria’s great inheritance [is] restored” (252), and she is free to reconstruct “the ancient glories of Malplaquet” (253). In the final chapter, the audience glimpses the revitalized estate where “a dozen footmen in scarlet and powder [. . .] rush down the steps” (254) to greet visitors, and in which a minuscule village for the Lilliputians hides in plain sight and masquerades as “a wonderful Japanese garden [. . .] with stunted trees and little houses and Hornby trains which really run” (253). One of the most prominent features

¹³ Research indicates that White drew the inspiration for *Mistress Masham's Repose*, odd as it may seem, from Julian Huxley's scientific treatise *Ants* (1930). As discussed in chapter two, White used Huxley's scientific descriptions of ant colonies to inform his description of the fascist ant society in *The Book of Merlyn* and *The Once and Future King*, which he completed in 1941. A copy of the 1935 edition of *Ants* remains in White's library and is heavily annotated, so one may conclude that White was familiar with the text when he began *Mistress Masham's Repose* in 1943. In *Ants*, Huxley makes a passing reference that seems to have inspired *Mistress Masham's Repose*. Huxley, discussing the dramatic variation in size even within a single species of ant, writes, “The range of adult ant-size, however, is much greater than that of man. [. . .] The tiniest ants, like the smallest workers of Carebara, weigh several thousand times less than their largest relatives. Even in one and the same colony, individual bulk may vary up to a thousand times, as in Carebara again, or nearly to the same extent as if Lilliput were sober truth, and Lilliputians and normal men and women lived side by side in one community” (Huxley 1935, 16). In the copy of *Ants* that appears in White's library, White drew a line in the margin to mark this passage (T. H. White, marginalia in [Huxley 1935, 16], HRC). White's copy of *Gulliver's Travels* – which includes marginalia calculating the relative height differences of Lilliputians and humans – is an edition from 1942 (T. H. White, marginalia in [Swift 1942, end pages], HRC). It seems clear that White read Huxley's offhand comment, began considering the political and social implications of such enormous size differences in humans, was inspired to write *Mistress Masham's Repose*, and purchased a new edition of *Gulliver's Travels* to supplement his work.

of the text is White's undisguised use of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and this doubtless offers a clue into both the satirical and allegorical nature of White's children's book. A large portion of Swift's satire in *Gulliver's Travels* arises from the author's use of political allegory in the text; for example, the Lilliputians may be read to represent the Whigs, the liberal party in eighteenth-century politics.¹⁴ In the light of this Swiftian model, it seems likely that White is aiming a political critique at his own contemporaries with his children's story, and the full import of his political commentary is discussed in this chapter.

One of the chief questions raised in many critical discussions of *Mistress Masham's Repose* remains whether or not it is a children's book. The critic Ethel Heins determined that it was not one, writing that *Mistress Masham's Repose* was first published in America as an adult book (Heins 1982, 248). The novel was selected by The Book of the Month Club, which, Barbara Wall writes, "Suggests that initially at least the books were not felt to be for children: adult readers were able comfortably to adopt the implied reader role assigned to them" (Wall 1991, 32). Wall even claims that "many adults have read [*Mistress Masham's Repose*] without suspecting that it was intended for children" (Wall 1991, 34). Establishing the parameters of what defines a children's book is beyond the scope of this chapter.¹⁵ Even so, the question of audience is relevant to the discussion of White as an author.

Whatever arguments may be made about the end result, it appears that White intended *Mistress Masham's Repose* to be read by and to entertain children. In a letter

¹⁴ Interestingly, scholarly analysis of Swift's use of allegory emerged contemporaneously with White's composition of his children's novel. A year prior to the publication of *Mistress Masham's Repose* the critic Arthur Case published *Four Essays on "Gulliver's Travels"* (1945), which made a careful study of Gulliver's voyages and concluded "the political allegory of the first voyage is primarily concerned with the defense of the conduct of the Oxford-Bolingbroke ministry, and incidentally with an attack upon the Whigs" (Case 1945, 80). While it is not clear that White encountered this criticism, he may have been aware of this growing critical engagement with Swiftian allegory.

¹⁵ Other critics have explored this issue in more detail. See, for example, John Stephens (1992), Peter Hunt (1991), and Barbara Wall (1991).

from 10 January 1944, he writes to David Garnett, "I can never be a Shakespeare. I must try, at best, to be a Lewis Carrol [sic] i.e. I must be content to write for children. I have therefore begun, and written 40,000 words of, a book for Amaryllis Virginia" (Garnett 1968,140). Amaryllis Virginia Garnett, born in 1943, was David Garnett's daughter by his second wife Angelica Garnett. White had not met Garnett's daughter when he began to write *Mistress Masham's Repose*, and she was only an infant at the time, but throughout the story he uses an imagined older version of Amaryllis to legitimize his story, and he addresses questions and moral lessons to her. Like Carroll's story for Alice Liddell, White decided to write a novel based around a real-but-imagined girl, and, in making her the narratee, he adopts a style characteristic of the genre he is employing. In this same letter White investigates other successful children's books as models for *Mistress Masham's Repose*. He writes,

All children's books, and at least 50% of grown-up books, depend upon their illustrations. [. . .] I am perfectly certain that without Shepherd [sic] the miserable Milne would have been lucky to clear 2 1/2 d, and Lear without pictures would not exist and, however much you may think this is heresy, I believe that 2/3rds of Lewis Carrol [sic] is really Tenniel. (D. Garnett 1968, 140)

Milne refers to A. A. Milne, the creator of Winnie-the-Pooh. All three of the books featuring this bear – *When We were Very Young* (1924), *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), *Now We Are Six* (1927), and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928) – were illustrated by E. H. Shepard, who was also a cartoonist for *Punch*. Lear refers to Edward Lear, who began his career as a painter but later published illustrated poems and short stories for children, including the famous "The Owl and the Pussycat." Lear's best-known work for children included *A Book of Nonsense* (1861), *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets* (1871), and

More Nonsense (1872). John Tenniel (1820–1914), was famous for illustrating *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871), and was, like E. H. Shepard, also a political cartoonist for *Punch* for many years. From this letter it is evident that White was once again seeking to model himself and his next book on famous, financially prosperous authors; he was seeking an illustrator in order to more perfectly emulate the authors whose success he hoped to replicate.

Nevertheless, some clear objections remain to the conclusion that the text is directed at children. For example, *Mistress Masham's Repose* is a continuation of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, a satire of eighteenth century politics, science, and literature that remains obscure even to contemporary adults. Likewise, the prose descriptions and the dialogue of *Mistress Masham's Repose* are loaded with complex references that would be missed by the vast majority of children, and that can only be enjoyed and appreciated fully by adults. In one example of the complex intertextuality and language of *Mistress Masham's Repose*, when the Lilliputian schoolmaster tells Maria the history of their arrival in England, he says,

For such was the secondary Effect of our Visit from the Man Mountain, whose Name, it was later discover'd, had been Culliver or Gulliban. He Ma'am, Y'r Honour, Miss, unlike Y'r Honour, had made no Efforts to conceal our Whereabouts from the greater World. He had committed the Indiscretion of confiding the Whole of our Oeconomy to the Mariners who convey'd him Home (White 1946, 58).

The direct references to Swift's text, the indirect reference to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* – the schoolmaster, misremembering the name Gulliver, makes it resemble that of

Caliban – the eighteenth-century spellings (Oeconomy), and the capitalization of nouns would likely be beyond the scope of a child’s understanding. While most children would perhaps appreciate that the character is speaking strangely, the intertextual depth of the passage and the language are for the pleasure of adult readers. As Barbara Wall writes of White, “Many of his jokes are jokes primarily because his young protagonists and his young readers will not understand them” (Wall 1991, 33).

Barbara Wall has suggested a possible solution to the question of audience. She argues that *Mistress Masham’s Repose* demonstrates a form of “dual address” that makes it accessible to both children and adults. Wall identifies three styles of narrative address in stories for children: single address, double address and dual address. With single address the narrator speaks only to the child. Double address involves addressing the adult audience and the child audience separately within the same story. As Wall explains, “ ‘Double Address’ [. . .] with the author ‘winking’ at the adult audience [. . .] implies that children are deliberately excluded from the joke” (Wall 1991, 21). The third type of address is dual address in which the author addresses adults and children simultaneously. Wall argues that this style is rare in children’s literature and she suggests that, while White does not create a perfect “dual address” narrative, “*Mistress Masham’s Repose* does however demonstrate what a brilliant ‘dual’ novel White might have achieved if he had been able to maintain the kind of narrative stance which in fact he exhibits only spasmodically, a stance in which the narrator addresses child and adult narratees genuinely in the same voice” (Wall 1991, 33–34). Wall concludes her exploration of *Mistress Masham’s Repose* by suggesting that, “An examination of his work to provide an answer to the question ‘Is it for children?’ must produce the response ‘Sometimes’ ” (Wall 1991, 35).

Regardless of White’s intended or unintended readership, the main thematic issues that are present in his adult literature remain in his literature for children. His

concerns with England, empire, war, and education remain consistent. The Second World War was still underway as he drafted *Mistress Masham's Repose*, and while White's choice of genre might at first appear incongruous, Susan Hancock notes, "Particularly at times of anxiety, transition and upheaval, writers are likely to turn to fantasy to find ways of exploring disturbing material, both for themselves and for the historical moment in which they are working" (Hancock 2005, 43). In this fantasy book for children, White seeks to find ways to explore the questions of power, empire, and physical control that concerned him throughout the War.

Mistress Masham's Repose was written in December 1943 and January 1944, two years after the United States entered the War, and well after the crisis of possible German invasion. Allied troops had landed in Italy and North Africa, Allied planes were bombing German cities, and the tide of the War appeared to be changing. It is difficult to gauge how this affected White. He had ceased to write regularly in his diary at this point in the War, and his letters to David Garnett turned more to the subjects of fishing, gardening, painting, and writing, and, indeed, their correspondence became more infrequent after 1942. The majority of their letters in 1941 and 1942 had revolved around White's requests for help in getting a useful wartime job in England and a new publisher for *The Once and Future King* who would agree to publish all of the anti-war political polemic in *The Book of Merlyn*. When the latter proved impossible and when White eventually shrank from the former, the two friends became mutually frustrated with one another. The War is rarely mentioned again in their correspondence. However, one passage from 12 October 1944 refers to the British resentment of Irish neutrality and, perhaps, illuminates some of the anti-imperial satire that White includes in *Mistress Masham's Repose*. He writes to Garnett,

I see by your letter that you are growing pettish about the Irish, and cannot understand why they should ever again expect to be sent any petrol, after failing to help you defend them from the Hun. (Sighs, goes over to window and gazes out at muck heap, chewing his whiskers.) Well, well. I wonder if you suppose that petrol is sent here in a stocking by dear old Santy Bull, the big hearted Barnardo? The Irish answer could be put in one sentence: which is: that they expect, not as a right, but as students of human nature, to be sent petrol just so long as they pay for it, and not one minute longer. They think that old Barnardo Claus would do the same for the devil in person. They had an idea that trade was a matter of economics. And about being defended from the Hun, they might add that they didn't ask you to. If they were very naughty, they might even enquire whether you intend to partition Poland, which you are defending from the Hun, in the Ulster way, or in some other? (D. Garnett 1968, 166)

This brief extract, while not a definitive description of White's attitudes at this historical moment, does suggest that he was identifying with the Irish arguments for neutrality enough to defend them to his friend. The most prominent allegory in *Mistress Masham's Repose*, which investigates the imperialist tendencies in even the most empathetic and kindhearted of people, can therefore be associated with White's presence in Ireland during the Second World War and the outlook he developed there.

The critic John Crane has suggested that Malplaquet is meant to represent "a microcosmic England in order to demonstrate how the vices that all men possess [. . .] have infested an entire nation" (Crane 1974, 129). He points out that Maria "will have little of which to be proud, since not only is her inheritance full of physical decay, but also its moral reputation has been ruined by previous owners" (Crane 1974, 129). Maria's forbearers have neglected the "palace," once grand and expansive, and it has

fallen into debt and disrepair, but while Crane's observations present a good starting point for understanding White's satire, it seems more likely that White's critique applies to the British Empire rather than England alone. Sarah Godek agrees, arguing, "One of the institutions White is satirizing is the crumbling British Empire" (Godek 2005, 94).

Although reading the house to represent England is possible in the early passages, as soon as White begins to describe the setting in detail he makes the connection with the British Empire explicit. Malplaquet's history and former residents are the builders of empire. Surrounding Maria's house are "Obelisks, Pyramids, Columns, Temples, Rotundas, and Palladian Bridges which had been built in honor of General Wolfe, Admiral Byng, the Princess Amelia, and others of the same kidney" (White 1946, 9-10). The architectural features are associated with the cultures and religions of several conquered peoples of the British Empire – the pyramids and obelisks of Egypt, the temples, columns, and rotundas of Cyprus or, possibly, India. The historical figures honored by these structures are also complicit in the creation of empire. James Wolfe (1727 – 1759) was "popularly immortalized as the conqueror of Canada" after his early death in Quebec (Reid 2004). Admiral Byng (1704 – 1757) failed to hold the island of Minorca (a British possession since 1708) against the French in 1756 and was executed by court martial.

At several points in the story White pauses to catalogue the imperial connections of the house and furnishings, and one of these moments occurs when the Professor searches the house for Maria, who has been imprisoned by Miss Brown and Mr. Hater. As the Professor searches, he wanders through the various rooms in the impossibly large house and in nearly every room he encounters some symbol of empire. One room is "where Gibbon had scratched out a semicolon in the famous last paragraph of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*" (White 1946, 167). As Piers Brendon has noticed, this text helped define empire for the British in the centuries which followed its

publication: “The *Decline and Fall* became the essential guide for Britons anxious to plot their own imperial trajectory. They found the key to understanding the British Empire in the ruins of Rome” (Brendon 2007, xv). Other rooms of the house contain remnants of tattered imperial power. For example, the next room is “the Chart Room,” and in it a former owner of Malplaquet, “one of the viscounts, an admiral” once kept “his sextant and other instruments, on retiring from the service after having lost Majorca, Minorca, Bermuda, Goa, Simla, Hecla, and Alabama, in a series of naval engagements” (White 1946, 168). Perhaps this humorous list, featuring territories in Iceland, the Mediterranean, India, and North America is meant to indicate the breadth and expanse of the British Empire. The “Butler’s Strong Room” contains “an épergne in the shape of a banyan tree which had been presented to the Sixth Duke by the grateful inhabitants of Bombay” (168–169). Of course, White is making humorous references to the eighteenth century with these architectural styles, prominent names, and historical references, but the features of the landscape of Malplaquet also imbue the house with a narrative of imperial conquest. By drawing on Swift, White signals the satirical and allegorical intent of the narrative, and his constant references to the eighteenth century are reminders of the text’s Swiftian heritage; they are tongue-in-cheek winks to the adult audience that add to the atmosphere of the text, but they also emphasize White’s more serious satirical message about empire.

Imperialism forms the focus of the narrative. The heroine, Maria, far from being innocent in her family’s history, is presented as the unwitting inheritor of the imperial agenda. Her journey and the main conflict of the story is the attempt to overcome the tendency to rule, control, and dominate. The Lilliputians constitute an independent nation when Maria first encounters them: they have their own language, their own “Wars and Politicks, Laws, Learning & Religion” and “their peculiar Manners and

Customs" (White 1946, 39). Indeed, they have their own independent utopia formed around a matriarchal socioeconomic structure:

The mothers were considered to be the heads of their families. They believed that the most important thing in the world was to find out what one liked doing, and then to do it. Thus the people who liked being hunters were hunters; those who liked fishing, fished; and anybody who did not like doing anything at all was supported by the others with the greatest care and commiseration, for they considered him to be the most unfortunate of mortals (70).

They also have an education system of their own, and "their children [are] never taught a word about Algebra, but [are], on the contrary, educated in the various sciences of life [. . .]. They [are] never told that their elders [are] better than themselves" (70). From the first moment that Maria encounters this ideal Lilliputian society, White portrays her as an imperial power. Maria discovers the Lilliputians on "the Glorious First of June" (13), another reference to the eighteenth century and one that highlights the significance of British naval superiority during the Napoleonic Wars. Incidentally, the Glorious First of June is another historical moment when the island of England was in danger of invasion, as it was during the Second World War. Maria encounters the Lilliputians by boat, while "feeling piratical" and imagining digging up "some buried treasure" (14). Like earlier explorers, she travels across "seas" (the bodies of water in the estate are called "Other Sea" and "Upper Sea") to reach an island that is virgin territory to her as she "had never landed there" before and that she assumes is uninhabited (13). However, when she discovers the island *is* inhabited, her first action is to kidnap two locals, a baby and its mother. In spite of her good nature, Maria has internalized the attitudes of imperial acquisition, and White makes it clear that she is playing a part, imitating a role (a pirate,

a naval captain) provided for her by history, literature, and her own family. White makes it evident that the blame does not rest solely on Maria; his entire readership is implicated in his protagonist's theft of the baby and its mother: White turns to his readers and asks, "Think to yourself, truly, whether you would have returned a one-inch baby to its relatives, if caught fairly in the open field?" (20).¹⁶ Crucially, White never represents Maria as inherently cruel or lacking in empathy. Even in this moment, the readers are told, "Maria did her best" and she initially attempts to return the baby before at last absconding with both of her prisoners (20). Although the Professor manages to persuade Maria to return her captives after a long discussion, her thinking about the island has already become proprietary, and after returning the prisoners she thinks, "It is my own island. I did discover it, and I have as much right to look about it as anybody else. [. . .] I don't see why I should be warned off from my own island" (35).

From this beginning, Maria's conquest of the island and the Lilliputians proceeds along imperial lines. She first ingratiates herself with the natives by learning a few phrases of the Lilliputian language and presenting them with gifts. She buys their friendship with "six threepenny [handkerchiefs], from Woolworth's, of artificial silk [. . .] a packet of needles [. . .] twopenny worth of nails," and "a shilling's worth of chocolate creams" (White 1946, 48-49).¹⁷ From the tone of the passage it is clear that White

¹⁶ Several critical works have discussed the impact of this moment in the text. Barbara Wall identifies it as an example of true dual narration and she argues that in this sentence White addresses children and adults in the same voice (Wall 1991, 34). Lisa Sainsbury discusses it in *Ethics in British Children's Literature* (2013). Sainsbury writes of the incident, "This sort of direct address and moral signposting is common throughout *Mistress Masham's Repose*, rendering the novel overtly philosophical and shaping the implied reader as thoughtful and responsive to moral attitudes. Consequent to this provocative address, the implied reader is embroiled in Maria's situation and overtly invited to think through her subsequent actions in the manner of a thought experiment" (Sainsbury 2013, 176).

¹⁷ This scene seems reminiscent of various historical exchanges in which native peoples granted great concessions in unequal exchanges for unfamiliar European goods. One historical example is a treaty from 13 April 1670 in which Governor Lovelace, acting on behalf of the Duke of York, arranged for the sale of Staten Island and the eviction of the Munsee Indians in return for clothing, beads, guns, lead, powder, hoes, and knives. Another apocryphal example is the story of the exchange of Manhattan Island for \$24 worth of trinkets in 1630. Although the latter story has proven inaccurate, it remains a popular fiction of American history (Zotigh 2011).

enjoyed imagining how six-inch people would use and react to full-sized trinkets, and Maria's actions are not malicious. Nevertheless, the inherent inequality between Maria and the Lilliputians is stressed in this passage. Even very inexpensive items are valuable to the tiny Lilliputians and their powerlessness and dependence becomes financial as well as physical.

In spite of her initial overtures of friendship, eventually Maria's overwhelming physical superiority over the residents of the island is too much of a temptation, and, when they refuse to do as she directs, she begins to physically force them: "She began to grab and snatch like a rough baby greedy for toys, which generally get broken in the process, saying, 'No, no. Do this. Do that. You be the conquered enemy and I will be General Eisenhower. Give it to me. I will be the Queen and you can be my subjects' " (White 1946, 84). White's use of phrases like "conquered enemy," "General Eisenhower," "Queen," and "subjects" emphasize not only the extreme inequality and injustice of the power dynamic between Maria and the Lilliputians but also the inherently imperial quality of Maria's control. Even the style of capitalization grants emphasis to the words Maria uses to describe herself (Queen, General) while minimizing the words with which she describes the Lilliputians (subjects, conquered enemy), and, consequently, even the typography reinforces their unequal association. In a text where altered typography is utilized extensively to convey elements of a character – for example, their eighteenth-century time period – this use of capitalized letters may carry additional weight.

The Professor serves as a vehicle for the author's critique by attempting to educate Maria and encourage her to question the imperial tendencies of her upbringing, and thus Maria's moral, ethical, and empathic education in *Mistress Masham's Repose* forms the central motif of the story. The Professor, White's spokesperson, opposes all forms of control and oppression and recognizes Maria's imperialist tendencies from the first.

Immediately after she discovers the Lilliputians, he predicts that if she interacts with them, even benevolently, it will destroy their society and integrity: “They would come to depend on you; you would come to boss it over them. They would get servile, and you would get lordly. Do you think that this would be good for either of you? I think that it would only make them feeble, and make you a bully” (White 1946, 34). Maria, who is kind-hearted and honest, is affected by the Professor’s advice at first, but, a few chapters later, she has forgotten the lesson. White writes, “The more she adored and wondered at the doings of her six-inch People, the more she wanted to take control of them. She wanted to play with them, like lead soldiers, and even dreamed of being their queen. She began to forget what the Professor had said, about being an owner” (82). Once again the Professor intervenes and attempts to paint the perspective of the Lilliputians. He tells her, “If they had given in to you, they would never have been able to call their souls their own, and their economic life would have been upset in order to play at queens and subjects. However nice you were to them, it would have been intolerable” (94). Repeatedly in the narrative Maria falls off course and the Professor must remind her to empathize with the Lilliputians, yet, no matter how many times this occurs, Maria proves that she still has not been cured of the desire to make imperial conquests. When she and the Professor discuss the “airy island of Laputa,” another of the places to which Gulliver travelled, Maria instantly says, “What fun! We could capture it from a Flying Fortress,¹⁸ if we wanted!” When the Professor asks, “Why?” she replies, “It might come in useful for something. We could put it over London in the next war, for an air-raid shelter” (204–205). The professor continues, “Why couldn’t you leave it to the people who had it? They were perfectly happy” (205).

Even the Professor, however, is not immune from desire to dominate other cultures, and White deliberately shows him falling victim to the same flaw as Maria. The

¹⁸ The Flying Fortress, or B-17 bomber, was an American aircraft used in the Second World War.

Professor imagines, "If I had my own choice of capturing one of the species mentioned by Gulliver, I would prefer to capture a Brobdingnagian. Think of the glory and excitement of catching somebody who was as high as a church spire!" (175). He devises a plot for acquiring one of these giants: he would take an aircraft carrier to the spot where Gulliver claimed to have found the island and kidnap a fisherman off the coast. Inside the aircraft carrier, "the moment he was asleep we should go down with the chains and handcuffs and leg irons" (177). After subduing the giant and transporting him to England, they would explain the power of anti-aircraft guns, demonstrating how they could easily kill him, and tell him, "You are in England, thousands of miles away from home. You cannot get back, nor do much harm to us. [. . .] We will take the Albert Hall for one year, for you to live in, and we will charge five shillings for a ticket to see you having your dinner every evening" (179). White clearly understands the humor of having the voice of morality in the story making these suggestions, and continues, "He [the Professor] considered this for half a mile, before concluding: 'Perhaps it would be wise to keep the gun pointed at him, from the Gentleman's Cloakroom or somewhere like that, just in case. We would not tell him about it, of course, for fear of hurting his feelings' " (179). The Professor is at least vaguely aware of his own hypocrisy: " 'Also,' added the Professor later, still feeling a little uncomfortable, 'we would naturally pay him a commission of ten per cent' " (179). Even the Professor, the moral compass of the story, fantasizes about enslaving another race of humans. The idea of paying the giant comes as an afterthought, and nowhere does the Professor acknowledge that this would be kidnapping and violating another sentient being. White deliberately undermines the Professor's moral superiority in this passage, and in this way, makes it evident that the tendency to dominate and control does not belong to Maria alone, and her nature is not inherently bad. Instead, White insists, this tendency is a universal human quality that must be guarded against by everyone, no matter how educated or enlightened.

While other scholars claim that the ending is optimistic and that Maria has learned compassion, the final outcome of the story remains ambiguous and pessimistic. Helen Godek writes, “Many aspects of *Mistress Masham’s Repose* show that White had great hopes for the children for whom he was writing, if only they were educated properly. [. . .] Maria is bright, resourceful, and always thinking ahead of her adult persecutors. The optimistic ending of the book shows that Maria has fulfilled her potential” (Godek 2005, 96). On a closer reading this optimistic conclusion seems doubtful, although initially the ending does seem happy. As the story closes, “the whole of Maria’s great inheritance [has] been restored” (White 1946, 252). The other characters, we are told, “All looked forward, with hopeful hearts, [. . .] to the time when the ancient glories of Malplaquet would flourish as they had in days of yore” (253). However, on closer examination, it is clear that Maria has not learned the ultimate lesson of the book, and the Lilliputians are now completely colonized and under her command. The Lilliputians now reside in “a wonderful Japanese garden” (253) like the one that Maria imagines earlier in the narrative:

If only one were rich enough to own a grouse moor [. . .] it would be much more suitable for the People. [. . .] The trouble would be, she thought, that it would be impossible to protect them. [. . .] On a moor, you see, it would be impossible to keep them hidden. [. . .] If you put a fence round it, with enormous walls, this would only make people more inquisitive than ever. [. . .] Do you know, I would not try to keep it a secret at all? I would buy doll’s houses and toy trains and Japanese plants and all that, quite openly, and I would set them up on my islands. I would even have a public day, Friday, when anybody could visit them on paying a shilling to the Red Cross. I would get people to think: There is that funny old Miss Maria, whose hobby it is to make sort of Japanese gardens in her loch. And

all the time the People would be living there safe. It would have to be a big enough loch to give them proper warning, so that, when a boat set out from the banks, they would have time to hide themselves in the man-raid shelter. [. . .] Everything would have to be hidden. They could leave the houses and gardens standing [. . .] but no slops or half-cold cups of tea or telltale details of that sort. We should have to hold raid drills. When I came out by myself, they would still have to hide, until I blew a certain whistle. We should have to be strict about it. If I ever found a fire burning or a bed rumped, I should call the magistrate at once, and show him the evidence. (116–118)

As the story closes, Maria has achieved this dream, but while she may be a benevolent dictator, and is clearly loved by the Lilliputians under her control, their safety, liberty, and the integrity of their society is by no means assured. On their original island the Lilliputians were not dependent on human kindness, human services, or human products, and their society was a utopia where every citizen had a purpose and a perfect education. Now they live in houses produced by humans and subsist on food provided by Maria, and their whole society must now revolve around her. Furthermore, their physical safety is not even assured. By the final chapter, the existence of the Lilliputians is known to Maria, the Professor, Mr. Hater, Miss Brown, the Cook, the Lord Lieutenant, and Dumbledum, (the two latter are characters introduced in the final chapters). Although White informs us that “the People had voluntarily disclosed their secret to these two [the Lord Lieutenant and Dumbledum]” the anonymity of the Lilliputians has been compromised (249). As the final pages close, we learn that over three hundred other people may also know about the tiny people: “The fact is that every man on that estate, and there are 365.2564 of them, is, on one subject, sworn to deadly secrecy” (255). The number of men on the estate signifies the average length of the year

in the Julian calendar, and thus there is one man who knows about the People for every day in the year. White seems to be insisting to the audience that the Lilliputians must necessarily be discovered and exploited. Given time, the likelihood is that the Lilliputians will be captured and enslaved by humanity.

In light of where he was living at the time of composition, White's critique of empire might be seen to apply specifically to the relationship between Ireland and England. As has been explored, Maria is the larger and more powerful entity and is read as representing either England or the British Empire by several critics. The Lilliputians are a neighboring island nation, rural and essentially powerless when compared to Maria's physical size and strength. Additionally, they are the characters of Swift – an Irish author known in large part for his satire against British imperial policy in Ireland. It is quite possible to read White's allegory as a specific satire of the nature and consequences of British imperialism in Ireland. However, while this may represent a part of White's intention, the satire can perhaps be read more generally as well. White is careful not to represent Maria's imperial tendencies as unique to her character. Rather, all of the characters in *Mistress Masham's Repose* and, indeed, all of its readers are drawn into complicity with an imperial agenda. Perhaps the power of this satire is that it need not be read in terms of any particular historical moment or geographical location. Rather, it must be understood as a condemnation of more general human tendencies that remain problematic across history. The other children's book that White wrote in Ireland carries an equally ambiguous message, which, like the episode of the ants and Maria's Malplaquet, explores the implications of a fascist system of government.

Before he wrote *Mistress Masham's Repose*, White began a book for children which, he wrote in his diary, "could be a trump. It could be as much greater than the Arthur book as Arthur was greater than anything else I have written."¹⁹ In 1941, after

¹⁹ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 1 Nov. 1941, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

White finished drafting *The Once and Future King*, he turned to a story of “a Stevensonian small boy, Peter Sheepsbottom, 2nd son of 5th Lord Sheepsbottom.”²⁰ He expected it to be an adventure story in the tradition of *Treasure Island*, and in White’s outline, like in Stevenson’s classic, an older man looks back and tells the story of boyhood adventures on a remote island under the thumb of an attractive, appealing, male villain. Although *The Master* never achieved financial or critical success, the book’s early drafts can be seen as an apprenticeship in the style and genre that would later make *Mistress Masham’s Repose* so effective. White intended to write *The Master* for a dual audience made up of both adults and children: “This must be a cross between *Treasure Island*, *Brave New World* and *Grasshoppers*²¹ or *R. Crusoe*. It must be an adventure story good for the most adult as well as the child.”²² The story, White imagined, would, like *The Once and Future King*, investigate humanity’s tendency towards war and violence, and it would present a possible solution through the education of a young Anglo-Norman aristocrat.

The book changed entirely from the initial outline, composed in 1941, to the final published version: *The Master An Adventure Story* (1957). *The Master* is set on the island of Rockall, “a granite peak, about seventy feet high, hardly bigger than a large house,” located off the coast of Ireland in the North Atlantic (White 1957, 17). Twelve-year-old twins Nicky and Judy²³ encounter a hidden doorway in the rock while picnicking on the island, and, as they investigate, the door opens and the children find themselves and their dog Jokey kidnapped by the island’s hidden denizens. At first imprisoned, the

²⁰ Ibid., 21 Oct. 1941.

²¹ White is referring to *The Grasshopper’s Come* (1931) by David Garnett.

²² Ibid.

²³ The main character is called Peter in the outline but later re-christened Nick. Judy is a much later addition.

children later meet the head of the island community: “the Master.”²⁴ He is described as a very old man “dressed in a Norfolk jacket with cycling breeches and black stockings rolled into a kind of bangle below the knee” and “high boots [. . .] protected by white spats” (White 1957, 45). The Master possesses the powers of mesmerism, and at their first meeting he mesmerizes Judy, captures her memories, and manipulates her into trusting his good intentions; however, the Master fails to penetrate Nicky’s mind, and Nicky is therefore selected to receive special tuition. Under the Master’s instruction, Nicky studies “H. G. Wells and Julian Huxley and that sort of thing, with pictures of prehistoric animals and diagrams of the Descent of Man” (White 1957, 103). After meeting the Master, the children are set free to explore the hollowed-out island, and they meet its various citizens: a “Chinaman,” the Master’s right-hand man; Pinky, a black pacifist and follower of Gandhi whose tongue the Master has had cut out; Mr. Frinton, a helicopter pilot; and various engineers and laborers. The Master has hypnotized the minds of the majority of Rockall’s inhabitants; they conceal his plans while simultaneously “they [do] not know that they [are] hiding anything” (White 1957, 63). The children gradually discover that the Master is ancient, over 150 years old, and he plans to use Rockall as a base from which to “conquer the world” (White 1957, 138). Using vibration machines to create an ever-widening circle of destruction and death, he will blackmail the world into uniting under his control. The children and the other islanders band together to overcome the Master, but he outsmarts them and mesmerizes Judy into betraying her brother and the conspirators: “Her mind was the Master’s, and it knew their plans” (White 1957, 244). As the world begins to fall to the waves of vibrations, Nicky, the last unmesmerized conspirator, determines to murder the aspiring dictator, but even as Nicky raises the gun, the Master finds “the way to his

²⁴ The Master is occasionally referred to as “Alpha” in White’s drafts. This name is dropped in the final, published version of the text.

mind,” and Nicky, mesmerized, fails to complete the task (White 1957, 228, 246). At the last, when all hope is lost, Jokey, the twins’ dog, accidentally trips the Master, and he falls and breaks his hip. Crippled and recognizing his defeat at the hands of the dog, the once-powerful overlord commits suicide.

The published version bears little resemblance to the outline White created in 1941. In the original, the character of “Alpha,” later renamed “the Master,” was a mouthpiece for White’s ideas about the War, and thus Alpha was to be a far more sympathetic and talkative character than the sinister, largely silent monster White eventually created. White had great hopes for the book, and he felt making the eponymous character a compelling, likable force would be crucial. On 1 November 1941 White wrote,

That book, the Master, could be a trump. [. . .] All would depend upon really realizing a vigorous brain like Darwin’s in its second century. [. . .] In seeing that tweed-cloaked figure standing motionless in the spray of Rockall, propped on the cliff against the storm, almost as mighty as the cliff against the sea, as old and wise as death almost, with its chin on its hand and the hand in the crook of the stick and the stick on the winter stone with the stormy sun setting in desolation behind.²⁵

His character would be a beautiful force of nature, overwhelming and terrible, but also compelling and elemental. He ended his initial analysis of the character with a telling comparison: “For a wickedness to be good, it must be absolutely great. See Milton’s [sic] Satan.”²⁶ With this doomed, wise, and Merlyn-esque figure, White hoped to create a

²⁵ T. H. White, diary 1941–1942, 1 Nov. 1941, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

²⁶ Ibid.

character who could convince the audience through logic and argument that a morally reprehensible thing (indiscriminate bloodshed, murder, genocide) could be necessary for the good of the world (ending war). Like Milton's Satan, arguably the protagonist of the epic *Paradise Lost* (1667), White's character Alpha is given the opportunity to express himself and persuade the audience in the early drafts of the text. He imagined that Alpha would have a series of discussions with Peter, and, on 4 November 1941, White planned a way of relaying the Master's ideas directly to the audience: "By the way, the Master, when he jumped off Rockall, left his journal behind in the study. From this journal, eventually coming into the boy's possession before he writes his book, quotations can be made in the earlier chapters about the kind of man he [Alpha] was."²⁷ This idea of including extensive excerpts from Alpha's diary would have made Alpha able to speak without the intervention of the main narrator, adult Peter. In these extracts, White's diary reveals, the character would have quite literally spoken with the author's voice – White planned to use his own diary entries and poetry as excerpts from the evil genius's journals:

For Master's journals, in 15 folio volumes each covering a decade, we could use:

The two poems on the Pope, dated 1940;

The grouse poem, 1881;

Some acid epigram on Boer War, like the Polonaise verse;

Parts of Tony's book of Common Despair for the 1914–18 war.

Some of the New Testament criticism.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., 4 Nov. 1941.

²⁸ Ibid., 5 Nov. 1941.

In this outline, White is concerned that his own diaries do not contain the “genius” material that he imagines Alpha, a brilliant scientist with over a century of experience to hone his mind, would produce. His solution was that “only the dimmer extracts (my own) can be quoted” because the majority of the diaries are illegible and incomprehensible to the average human intellect.²⁹ In later drafts, this scheme of extensively quoting Alpha’s journals was abandoned, and in the published version the Master cannot speak except by using quotations derived from other authors, virtually silencing the character.

Alpha began as a sympathetic anti-hero. In the outline he possesses the wisest, oldest, and most scientific mind on earth; he finds a cure for war, a cure that involves genocide and violence on a massive scale, and his character allows White to explore whether violent and destructive means are ever justified. However, as White developed the character and explored Alpha’s motivations, it became clear that Alpha’s amoral logic would make him an impossibly controversial figure, and on 5 November 1941 White writes,

I am reluctantly beginning to think that Alpha would have written an approving note about Hitler. Certainly he wd. have considered H’s new order better than the British ideal (as it is) in point of religion, economics and nationalism. He might have disapproved of censorship of thought. He wd. *not* have disapproved (as I do) of the use of Force as an arbiter – for that is the very thing which he himself is going to do.³⁰

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Although the themes of super weapons, massive worldwide destruction, and even the book's publication date might suggest a book with its foundation in the Cold War, White's diaries reveal that he began it during the Second World War and that the issues of mass death, new weapons, and armaments races were in the forefront of his mind as early as 1941. Like *The Once and Future King* and several of his other wartime books, *The Master* asks whether it is possible to use violence to compel peace, and it aims to cultivate peace by exploring the nature and origins of violence. Crucially, White conceived *The Master* in October 1941 during a perilous point in the war effort, and at the time, the War was ever-present on his mind. France had fallen to Hitler's army over a year previously, the Blitz had shaken London and killed thousands, America would not enter the War for another two months, and, although Hitler had turned his attention to Russia, England doubtless still seemed in a desperate situation. White, as demonstrated in the chapter on *The Once and Future King*, was consumed with guilt about his own lack of involvement. Only a few weeks after his initial outline for *The Master*, he drew up a scheme for aircraft refueling and rearmament at sea, complete with detailed diagrams. He hoped that it would allow the Royal Air Force to "keep an almost unlimited number of aircraft in the air."³¹ He was newly dedicated to helping the war effort in his personal life, and he had recently volunteered to join the Royal Air Force.

His diaries indicate that the draft of *The Master* and his thinking on the War may have mutually impacted each other. His diary shows that he believed that a super weapon had to be developed and deployed in order for England to win the War:

Wars are won by New Weapons, seldom by having more of the same weapon. Germany won the first part of this war because she used the Petrol Engine as a new weapon. We are pouring out our blood in Lybia [sic] now because we are

³¹ Ibid., 28 Nov. 1941.

trying to match her by having more of the same. The thing has become a mortal armaments race, in which both sides will bleed to death, leaving it difficult in the end to decide which has been the victor. [. . .] To win the war, we must have a New Weapon.³²

He then goes on to elaborate on his design for amphibious planes, basing his diagrams and ideas on the fact that “birds land on the open sea.”³³ Meanwhile, a few pages further on in the diary as he turns his mind to his creative work, and he outlines *The Master*, a novel about the appropriate use and deployment of a super weapon. Further, the weapon that the Master uses in the early outline remains the same in the later, post-Cold War, published text. While it may appear to be a text inspired by the Cold War, is also a book which was born out of the Second World War and out of a feeling of intense need for an advantage in technology.

In 1941 White himself was attempting to design a superior weapon to aid in the war effort, and questions about the ethics of creating such a device appear to have entered his story later. In his 1941 draft White still felt that this master-weapon might be necessary and good in the right hands – British, Anglo-Norman hands. In his diary from 5 November 1941 he decides that the Master’s journals, which contain the plans for building his lethal vibration machines, should end up in the hands of the British government:

Book must end with statement that journals have been turned over to B. Government or P. M., on Alpha’s principle that the Norman-anglo-mongrel is the best for these things i.e. for world domination, if it must be. Boy, even when

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

grown up, in respect of decisions like this, must feel a child playing with a bomb – dreadfully at a loss, responsible, unable.³⁴

After the conclusion of the War, White altered his decision to end his book by passing the Master's plans for a world-dominating super weapon over to the English government. Although in 1941 White planned to make Peter/Nick's decision to hand over the journals a tenuous, unhappy one, it seems clear that this idea was originally motivated by the panic and pressure of war and later revised in the altered atmosphere of the Cold War.

Further proving the prevalence and importance of the War to this text, the two World Wars influence the calculations both of the Master in his bid for world domination and of the protagonists as they decide whether or not to oppose him: both select what they believe is the ethically correct path through reference to the Wars. The Master uses the First World War as a calculation to determine how much loss of life will be necessary in order to establish a new, peaceful society under his dominion. He estimates whether or not destroying the population of the British Isles will be enough. White writes,

To abolish the British would mean killing about one person in forty-eight. The Master doubted whether this was enough to solve the conflict of interests

³⁴ Ibid., 5 November 1941.

mentioned by Freud.³⁵ He sat at the chess table in the laboratory, working out the simple sums. [. . .] In the first world war [sic], the Central powers had mobilized 22,850,000 people, of whom 3,386,200 had been killed before the powers collapsed. Call it one in seven. Probably – he decided – it would be better to wipe out even more than the British. (White 1957, 239-240)

Like a modern general, the Master pragmatically calculates the number of civilian casualties necessary to convince the governments of the world that war is unsustainable. In this moment and elsewhere White may be referencing contemporary arguments in support of the use of the atomic bomb to end the Second World War.

In the published text, the Master’s opponents are again entwined with the recent worldwide conflict and with the Cold War, and their motives and decisions are informed by their experiences of violent and uncertain history. For example, Mr. Frinton explains why he feels conflicted about killing the Master in terms of Cold War politics and atomic weaponry:

At present we have got people like President Eisenhower and Sir Anthony Eden and Mr. Khrushchev or whoever it is, all armed with atomic bombs. Most politicians can barely sign their own names or read a comic strip. They are too

³⁵ This refers to a moment earlier in *The Master* in which the villainous character of Mr. Blankinsop, the “Chinaman,” tells the children, “Freud says somewhere or other: ‘Conflicts of interests among human beings are principally decided by the application of violence’ ” (White 1957, 155–156). It is interesting to speculate on where White found this quotation. This precise wording was used by Fredric Wertham in a *New York Times Magazine* article from 1954 in which he wrote, “Buried in the works of Freud is this sentence: ‘Conflicts of interests among human beings are principally decided by the application of violence.’ Undoubtedly that was true. But I don’t believe it always will be. Even though we live in a violent period, I am certain that the ways of violence will eventually be replaced by reason” (Wertham 1954, 50). Freud’s quote is drawn from *Why War?* (1933), which contains an exchange of letters between Freud and Einstein. In the original English translation of the text, however, Freud’s own phrase is different. On September 1932, Freud wrote to Einstein, “Conflicts of interest between man and man are resolved, in principle, by the recourse to violence” (Nathan 1963, 192). It seems possible, therefore, that White encountered this phrase at second hand from the work of Fredric Wertham.

busy winning elections to educate themselves. They have to rant instead of reading or growing up, but they have these weapons all the same. Wouldn't you rather be organized by a wise man of a hundred and a half, especially if there was only one of him doing it, instead of a competition between the ones we've got? (White 1957, 142)

Ironically, the argument Frinton makes in favor a fascist government is based upon a fear of the atomic bomb – a product of fighting fascism in the Second World War – and the deadly standoff between nations. He suggests that the decision to support the Master's totalitarian ideology would be straightforward; the problem, however, is that, "he has been digging out the island for forty years [. . .]. Before the atomic bombs" (White 1957, 143). This chronology indicates that the Master's motives are not enlightened because, Frinton argues, the Master's fascism was unjustifiable prior to the danger of mutually assured destruction. Finally Mr. Frinton comes to the conclusion, "I believe – this I must believe or perish – that we *have* to have freedom of choice" (White 1957, 143). This work of fiction appears to conclude that society after the Second World War is broken, and the narrator presents one possible solution to be a wise, benevolent, English, aristocratic dictator. All versions of the text disavow this conclusion, and the published novel makes this disavowal emphatic. The original draft, prior to the Cold War era, offered the Master's character a greater opportunity to persuade the audience of the morality of his plan, but, ultimately, the post-war political world appears to have made the Master a far less sympathetic character. The reality of the Cold War and of the atomic bomb made the original concept of Alpha as a benevolent, amoral, and complex villain impossible. History had made it clear that powerful new weapons, even in the hands of governments to which White was sympathetic, would not solve political problems.

Like several of his other texts, particularly his other stories for children and his wartime work, White intended *The Master* to express his philosophies on pedagogy. The original draft emphasizes descriptions of Peter's formal tuition and allocates several chapters to the topic; one of the outline's central chapters is headed "Peter's education on Rockall."³⁶ In this preliminary draft, the relationship between the mentor and the pupil is crucial and drives the plot. Their bond is chaste and platonic, yet Peter is completely objectified and controlled by his mentor: "The old man loves him in the same way as one might love a perfect piece of jade or a ming vase or whatever. Never touches him. Too old. Peter is the last living person that he regards as a person. He calls him the Norman Ideal or the English Lord. [. . .] He is satisfied to watch [Peter's] doings as one might be to watch a vase."³⁷ The Master kidnaps Peter and holds him hostage in order to deliberately perfect this specimen of the "Norman Ideal" through education: "Let Master remark that ideal type of Norman Lord is possibly highest type of humanity at present, and be interested to see whether this type can be educated into real greatness, hence initial keeping of Peter and scheme of education."³⁸ Like a corrupt Merlyn trapping and kidnapping the Wart for his use, the relationship serves as an experiment in creating the perfect leader, the perfect representative of humanity and Englishness. Clearly, if developed this text would have allowed White to explore the areas he was most interested in at the time. He could express his attitudes towards student and teacher relationships, homosexual relationships, the importance of education, and what it meant to be an English man. White recognized that he could introduce these themes with relative impunity, and he wrote in his outline, "There could be a certain amount of educational theory. What for? What way? Corporal punishment etc. And something

³⁶ T. H. White, diary 1941 – 1942, 21 Oct. 1941, folder 2, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

about homosexuality, but it must be civilly done. There may be a lecture about diversion of energy, very much de haut en bas.”³⁹ White was designing a book that would allow him to discuss education and growth, matters that engrossed him during the Second World War as he struggled to defend society by creating culture. The subject would also allow him to reflect on his own upbringing and education, which, as has been discussed in both Sylvia Townsend Warner’s biography and in Helen MacDonald’s *H is for Hawk*, was miserable and marred by corporal punishment.

To this end, White initially imagined the Master’s supervision of Peter’s education as positive and productive, and the final moment of the book was to be Peter’s “realization that he loved him [the Master].”⁴⁰ At the close of the outline, Peter is not traumatized or damaged by his kidnapping, and, in fact, has prospered. White writes, “The boy must be decent, have a sense of humor, and have profited from his education.”⁴¹ White, many years earlier, described *The Sword in the Stone*, as “a kind of wish fulfillment of the kind of things I should like to have happened to me when I was a boy” (Gallix 1984, 87). Perhaps *The Master* began as a wish fulfillment for the kind of things White wished had been possible during his time as a teacher. The outline exhibits the bones of a text in which a captive student, a member of the English aristocracy, is trapped indefinitely but nevertheless remains receptive to all his teacher’s ambitions, personal oddities, and theories of education. Ultimately the student comes to love the teacher, even as he surpasses his master, and goes on to improve the world.

As with so much of the book, however, the final version of *The Master* departed from the outline and the impact of education in the final version of *The Master* seems to be negative. Indeed, the Master is corrupted by the perfection of his intellect, and his

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

extreme levels of technical knowledge make him unable to connect with other humans. Even his language and his ability to express himself are curtailed by his learning, and White writes, “At the turn of the century, the Master found that it was no longer possible to express his mental processes in English, so he cast about for an alternative way” (White 1957, 158). He begins to speak Chinese, but eventually even this becomes impossible, and he must communicate in clichés or through quotations. Nicky’s education, too, is far from the idyllic romp described in *The Sword in the Stone* or imagined in the outline of *The Master*. The system of education that is imposed on Nicky is described as “Biology, Anthropology, Pre-history, History, Psychology, Economics. In that order,” and his exams test rote memorization rather than self-expression or understanding (White 1957, 137). Furthermore, there is little or no direct contact with the instructor. Nicky himself describes the process,

“It’s not like learning anything. You just read books. As a matter of fact” he added with shame, “I like them. [. . .] H. G. Wells and Julian Huxley and that sort of thing, with pictures of prehistoric animals and diagrams of the Descent of Man – like a Mexican cactus. G. Elliott Smith. Dr. Lorenz. They have a set of Witherby. And there’s the one about how Black-headed Gulls will sit on tobacco tins instead of eggs.” (White 1957 103)

At the conclusion of the narrative, it is possible to mistrust Nicky’s education. Other members of the island (Mr. Frinton, for example) have been educated in this method only to succumb to the Master’s mesmerism. While Mr. Frinton is originally immune to the Master’s mind control, his immunity fails after the Master tutors him. Likewise, after being instructed, Nicky is mesmerized at last, and White writes, “The Master had found the way to his mind” (White 1957, 245-246). While it is by no means clear that

education is the ultimate culprit in Nicky's failure – Judy, who is never educated by the Master, can be mesmerized from the outset – it does seem possible that White is hinting at the power of education to place a young mind in the power of the one who teaches it. The change from the original draft in the style of education as well as the change in the Master's position in the story significantly alters the purport of the text. Possibly this reflects a change in White's thinking over the course of the fifteen years between the original draft and the final publication.

The Master, since it was begun before *Mistress Masham's Repose*, may be read as White's early attempt to discuss his intense concern with warfare and violence in a way that was accessible and enjoyable for children and young readers. Taken together, these two children's texts represent yet another phase in White's life when he experimented with a means of expressing a political message crucial to him at that time. Deeply preoccupied with the issues of the War, he turned to children's literature, fantasy, and science fiction, and these two works for children allowed White to discuss adult issues in a way that remained disguised yet unambiguous. Indeed, perhaps children's literature allowed him to more openly explore the issues that concerned him in his personal life and in his books for adults. In his books for children he explores questions of empire, tyranny, totalitarianism, enslavement, mind control and manipulation, and weapons of mass destruction, more openly than anywhere else in his oeuvre. While he may have taken on the identity of a children's author for financial motives, it is clear that the medium allowed him to investigate the concerns that troubled him during and after the Second World War. Once again, Ireland, where he began both of these texts, served as a catalyst and a space in which White could critique the world at large. These novels express the emotional turmoil of the time White spent in Ireland in a more modulated and distanced manner than that of his adult narratives. While he did not return to children's literature after *The Master*, his fantasy and children's literature texts did

provide him the financial security he sought, and they are still the titles for which the author is best known. The impact of *Mistress Masham's Repose* was far reaching: it became a Book of the Month Club selection and, as White had hoped, brought him financial security. The next chapter investigates the impact that lasting success had on the author's work, and discusses his final, prosperous years.

Chapter 6

Final Years: *Camelot*, Financial Success, and Physical Decline

After White left Ireland in September 1945 he produced little new writing. It is deceptive that much of his most famous work has a postwar publication date. Although the postwar years saw a consistent stream of publications under White's name, and a list of his most popular, successful, and well-remembered books would show that all appeared after the War, all were begun before White left Ireland. It is easy to imagine, as John K. Crane does, that "during World War II, he [White] produced no work of literature" (Crane 1974, 19) and that the majority of his productivity occurred after the War, but this assumption leads to a profound misunderstanding of White's wartime and postwar experience. However emotionally harrowing White found Ireland during the Second World War, his circumstances created an environment that inspired new and original material. Indeed, nearly every full-length book of fiction and non-fiction that White published following the close of hostilities was conceived during his time in Ireland. As the preceding chapters discuss, *The Once and Future King* (1958), *The Godstone and the Blackymor* (1959), *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* (1948), *Mistress Masham's Repose* (1946), *The Master* (1957), were all drafted, outlined, imagined, and at least partially written before White left Ireland. *The Age of Scandal* (1950), *The Scandalmonger* (1952), and *The Book of Beasts* (1954), which are discussed in the following chapter, were also begun in Ireland. *The Goshawk* (1951), first written in 1936, is a lone outlier and the only volume completed before the War. Warner summarizes the situation when she writes of *The Age of Scandal*, *The Scandalmonger*, *The Goshawk*, and *The Book of Beasts*, "Four books in five years suggests an active authorship. In fact, all

four came out of his larder” (Warner 1967, 246).⁴² However, in spite of this several texts can be more readily ascribed to the postwar era, specifically White’s attempts at non-fiction and scholarship: *The Age of Scandal*, *The Scandalmonger*, and *The Book of Beasts*. While all three were begun in Ireland, much of the content was finalized after the War. To understand why White stopped working creatively and why his work turned to non-fiction, it is necessary to look at the growing problems and conflicts in the author’s personal life. This chapter will explore the possible reasons for this decline in productivity, before investigating White’s concern with his own legacy, and his turn towards non-fiction. Finally, the chapter will show the author’s rise to fame with the success of *The Once and Future King* and the Lerner and Loewe musical *Camelot* (1960), and his increasing financial prosperity which, as David Garnett writes, “bewildered him and lead indirectly to his death” (D. Garnett 1979, 216).

This chapter demonstrates that *The Age of Scandal*, *The Scandalmonger*, and *The Book of Beasts* conform to White’s life-long tendency of selecting a literary model to imitate, and that these three books comprise White’s final literary role as a historian and literary scholar. In the guise of this persona – likely drawn from White’s longterm friends Sir Sydney Cockerell and L. J. Potts – White employs Medieval scholarship and eighteenth-century history to express a postwar style of nostalgia. This particular and distinctive type of alienation from the past represents a part of a larger literary trend that is evident in the postwar writings of such disparate authors as Evelyn Waugh, John Betjeman, George Orwell, Harold Nicolson, and Siegfried Sassoon. White’s three books represent the final inspiration that sustained the author’s work in his declining years,

⁴² Accounts from White’s friends suggest that the author disliked the imputation that he was less productive in his final decade. The actress Julie Andrews recalls that on a visit to Alderney her first husband, Tony, “provocatively asked Tim why he hadn’t written anything since *The Once and Future King*” (Andrews 2008, 281). White, offended, “sulked in his room for the rest of the day” and, the next morning, arrived in his guests’ bedroom to throw “long, thin ledgers onto the bed,” and demand that they read them (281). It was an outline of White’s retelling of the legend of Tristram and Isolde. Even this project languished, however, and the book never progressed beyond the voluminous initial outline. (See T. H. White, diary volume 13, Queen’s College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge] for the surviving outline and notes)

but, nevertheless, this portion of White's life has a distinct lack of literary material when compared with any other period of his career. Even his unpublished work is sparse and often draws upon his earlier successes for inspiration.⁴³ From 1957 White kept a voluminous diary, but, although he claimed to be reading voraciously,⁴⁴ the diary nevertheless contains little literary material and only infrequent references to the authors he was consuming. Additionally, much of White's diary from this time contains ideas that are repugnant and unpalatable to the modern reader – one example is White's growing sympathy towards a fascist system of government⁴⁵ – and the author's personality at the time, as represented in his diaries, is often irascible and misanthropic. In 1959 and 1960, with the rehearsals and eventual success of the musical *Camelot*, White became involved in a world of celebrity, and, indeed, became a momentary focus of the celebrity press. Portions of his diary at this time read like a gossip column, and this chapter necessarily touches on these contacts that White made in his final years. Many of these factors make White's later career difficult to discuss critically, but this chapter attempts to disentangle the literary inspirations that influenced the author's last fifteen years.

On 24 September 1945 White left Ireland; he was financially destitute and had two half-trained gun dogs in tow that he would have to feed on postwar rations (D. Garnett 1968, 207). After a brief and acrimonious stay with David and Angelica Garnett, he moved to the Garnetts' tiny vacation cottage, Duke Mary's – also known as Ridley

⁴³ For example, White's untitled draft about Tristram and Isolde is a sequel to *The Once and Future King*. (See T. H. White, diary volume 13, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge] for White's notes on this unfinished story)

⁴⁴ White remarks in his diary on 17 November 1959 that the funeral of a friend from Alderney was the first time he had remained seated without a book in his hand in his recent memory, and even then, he records, he read the funeral service (T. H. White, diary volume 17, 17 Nov. 1959, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge])

⁴⁵ In one diary entry he laments that Hitler was such an unsuitable leader, but expresses a longing for a strong fascist dictator. (See T. H. White, diary volume 1, 16 Mar. 1957, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge]).

Stoke – in the Yorkshire dales. He remained there, finishing *Mistress Masham's Repose*, until the spring of 1946, after which he spent some time in various pubs and hotels and stayed for a time with L. J. Potts and his wife Mary in Cambridge. Eventually, the financial success of *Mistress Masham's Repose* and the tax implications of the £15,000 he expected from its selection by The Book of the Month Club made him consider a move to the tax haven of the Channel Islands. He eventually settled in Alderney and purchased a house. This house would remain his permanent residence until his death abroad in January 1964. It was in Alderney, therefore, that White came into the commercial success of his later years.

Three aspects of White's personal and professional life appear to have contributed to the decline in his creative productivity: his increasing use of alcohol, the breakup of his strong literary friendship with David Garnett, and a sudden influx of wealth. Perhaps the primary cause was White's drinking, which became increasingly problematic and uncontrolled after his return to England. White's problems with alcohol were long-standing. Most of his close literary friends – Garnett, Potts, and Cockerell, for example – urged the author to moderate or stop his drinking at some point in his life. White's first recorded attempt to curb his drinking was in July 1939 when he wrote to Mary Potts, "I have been on the water-wagon for 5 weeks" in order to encourage the family to make plans to stay with him at Sheskin lodge in September (Gallix 1984, 103). This and all of White's subsequent attempts to restrict his drinking did not last. While in Ireland, he claimed to have found a viable drinking routine that allowed him to be productive. In the spring and summer he drank nothing and remained sober and productive, while in the winter he returned to heavy alcohol consumption. In a letter from August 1944 he justifies this process to Sir Sydney Cockerell: "If I had not taken 3/4 of a bottle of whisky each night during the long wet winter darkness of Irish isolation I should have been mad by now" (Meynell 1956, 125). Whatever White told

himself and his friends, however, by the time he left Ireland, his drinking had begun to have an impact on his health, his writing, and his relationships. White's diary records, "When I had my 'American wake' on leaving Dublin, I fell down a long flight of wooden stairs on my head when drunk, and I have had two rages since – one with Bunny. I dont [sic] usually have them."⁴⁶ He wondered if an undiagnosed concussion or the alcohol could have altered his personality. Any functional balance between his creative work and his drinking began to dissolve after his return to England.

At Duke Mary's in Yorkshire he remained deliberately sober and productive for a little over a week, before, on a shopping trip to the local village, he writes, "Some devil lead me to the local pub, the Punch Bowl."⁴⁷ There, he records that he "drank 2 double gins and one double whisky. Arranged to have lunch there on Mondays and Thursdays (shopping day)."⁴⁸ White recognized the danger this posed to his goals: "I must, must, must, must regard this as an opportunity for food only. If I start boozing, I shall never get any writing done."⁴⁹ The next day, 11 October 1945, the danger and the temptation filled White's mind, and his resolution had already begun to falter: "If I go to the Punchbowl for dinner on Mondays and Thursdays, I must never drink anything but beer, and never more than 2 pints."⁵⁰ In spite of White's repeated efforts to control his drinking, he never solved the problem, and while he might stay sober for months at a time, when he did drink it took up the majority of his time and attention. The actress Julie Andrews, who met the author in 1959, recalls in her memoirs, "He drank a great deal – mostly Pernod, especially in the winters" (Andrews 2008, 281), and writes that when he was drinking he would be either despondent and reclusive or rude and hostile: "When he was drunk,

⁴⁶ T. H. White, diary 1945–1948, 30 Oct. 1945, folder 3, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 Oct. 1945.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 Oct. 1945.

it was best to leave him alone” (280). In July 1960 White wrote to Dawn Arlott, the first wife of the cricket commentator John Arlott, that he had been diagnosed with alcoholic neuritis.⁵¹

The end of White’s life was also plagued by periods of loneliness and melancholy. While it would be impossible to say with any certainty that he suffered from a specific ailment – such as clinical depression – his diaries between 1957 and 1959 mention suicide over thirty times. At Christmas in 1957 White, who was staying with the BBC sport commentator John Arlott and his family,⁵² apparently threatened suicide, placed a copy of his will on the pillow in his bedroom, and left the house without his luggage. Assuming the worst, the Arlotts called the police, but found White a short while later at the home of a friend.⁵³ White claimed in his diary that he had never intended suicide, but had only hoped to punish the family for what he considered poor behavior. After the death of his dog Killie in the summer of 1958, White again recorded in his diary that he felt close to suicide.⁵⁴ If he was experiencing the symptoms of clinical depression alongside the periodic abuse of alcohol, it may help explain why he produced so little during these years.

⁵¹ Alcoholic neuritis is a disease of the nervous system caused by nutritional deficiencies in chronic alcoholics. This seems to have been one of the explanations doctors posed for the numbness and paralysis that White experienced in his legs in his later years (Dawn Arlott, letter to T. H. White, 14 July 1960, in diary volume 18, Queen’s College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge]).

⁵² John, his wife Dawn, and their two sons spent several months of each summer with White in Alderney from 1953[?] to 1960 and occasionally visited at other times. It is possible that John Betjeman introduced Arlott and White in the early 1950s as all three were mutual friends. Betjeman’s daughter, Candida Lycett Green, recalled in her introduction to her father’s letters that Arlott “stayed once a year as regularly as clockwork for the Wantage Cricket Club dinner” (Green 1994, 4). When White stayed with the Arlotts for Christmas of 1957 John Arlott wrote to White ahead of the author’s arrival to suggest that they might invite Betjeman to dinner to allow the two writers to reconnect. It is not clear if this invitation was issued or accepted. (John Arlott, letter to T. H. White, 31 Oct. 1957, in diary, volume 5, Queen’s College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge].)

⁵³ Dawn Arlott, letter to T. H. White, 1 Feb. 1958, in diary volume 7, Queen’s College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁵⁴ T. H. White, diary volume 10, 29 June 1958, Queen’s College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

The second element of White's literary life that began to crumble at this juncture was his career-long friendship with David Garnett. Their relationship had experienced some strain during the War when White's demands for help finding wartime work alternated with self-righteous denunciations of violence. Warner, writing to Garnett while researching White's biography, remarks that during the War, "You must sometimes have been near wringing his neck" (R. Garnett 1994, 87). Nevertheless, the two men, who disagreed about politics, about Irish neutrality, and about the morally right thing to do in the War, remained friendly and continued their regular exchange letters until the end of the conflict. On their first meeting after the Allied victory, the underlying tension broke out into a bitter and venomous argument that caused a substantial chill in their relations and precipitated a distance between them which was to last for the rest of White's life. Garnett published two separate accounts of the argument, one twenty-three years later in *The White/Garnett Letters* (1968) and one thirty-four years later in *Great Friends: Portraits of Seventeen Writers* (1979), and both accounts, in spite of their distance from the events, retain a tone of hostility. White never published an account of the argument, but he wrote extensively about it in his diary at the time.

The groundwork for the quarrel was laid in 1944. After the death of White's beloved dog Brownie, Garnett asked White to obtain and train a pointer puppy. Garnett requested the favor in part to comfort his grieving friend, who was in deep despair at the time. Giving an indication of his state of mind, White wrote to Garnett, 29 November 1944, "I have found out how people 'die of a broken heart.' It just means that they lose interest in being alive" (D. Garnett 1968, 181). Garnett, in an attempt to give his friend comfort and hope, urged White to purchase and train two dogs: one for each of the two writers. White did as his friend suggested and obtained both Killie, a new red setter, for himself and Quince, a male pointer, that he set out to train for Garnett (184-185).

White's diary claims that he took intense pains with training Quince. When Garnett met Quince, however, he was unimpressed with the dog's training, and decided that he had been misled regarding White's skill at forming gun dogs. In Garnett's memory, Quince was untrained and unmanageable. He writes, "Quince was as big as a yearling calf and quite as stupid and clumsy in the house. He kept sweeping crockery off the table with his tail" (210). The two men quarreled over the dog, and, in the end, Garnett refused to take Quince.

White, on his side, was annoyed to be contradicted by Garnett now that they were in close proximity. The tensions of their different wartime politics erupted and formed a point of contention. White writes, "I am beginning to disapprove of the frivolity of his [Garnett's] mind! When a person has a first-rate mind, if Bunny has, it is criminal to devote it to political propaganda, John Bullism and the jingoism in which he dabbles at present.⁵⁵ It annoyed me to be contradicted on all current news topics from the angle of my-country-right-or-wrong."⁵⁶ Politics was only half of the conflict, and sportsmanship – the shared interest that had originally brought them together – formed the second half.

A second argument, and the moment of crisis, came when White shot at a blackcock, firmly believing he had hit it, and called to Garnett to mark where the bird fell. Garnett, watching the bird fly and believing it to be uninjured, shouted to White that the bird was unharmed. White was certain that Garnett had deprived him of his bird, and Garnett was certain that White had missed the shot. White writes,

⁵⁵ It is true that Garnett was heavily involved in propaganda during the War. Early in the conflict he received a commission from the Air Ministry for *War in the Air* (1940), a deliberate attempt to influence British and American public opinion, and he composed pamphlets for the Ministry of Information (Knights 2015, 346). From 1942 Garnett served as the Secretary to the Agricultural Committee, a job which involved overseeing the creation and deployment of propaganda leaflets to farmers in enemy and occupied countries (Knight 2015, 360). However, White's suggestion that Garnett had ceased to question the validity of the pro-British wartime message is inaccurate. Indeed, his *The Secret History of PWE: The Political Warfare Executive 1939-1945*, which was not published for political reasons until 2002, used "irony and humour" to expose "the absurd intrigues of political infighting" (Knights 2015, 370)

⁵⁶ T. H. White, diary 1945–1948, 13 Oct. 1945, folder 3, box 8, MS-4494, HRC.

It was infuriating [sic] to be told exactly what one ought to think about (a) world affairs, (b) morals, (c) shooting. Also maddening to be treated as if one would claim to hit birds (the black cock) when one had really missed them. And this by a pompous old fidget who missed everything himself, understood nothing about shooting-dogs or habits of grouse, and who had trained up his over-excited son William to point his gun at the pit of one's stomach.⁵⁷

Garnett traveled with White to Duke Mary's where a financially destitute White would spend the winter, and the two parted a few days later without having resolved their quarrel. Garnett left Quince with White, and a few days after Garnett's departure from Ridley Stoke, Quince impregnated White's dog, Killie, which further exacerbated White's rage. The resentment between the two men deepened, and in 1947 White moved to the Channel Islands, eventually settling on Alderney where he spent the remainder of his life. Garnett visited him in at least twice on Alderney,⁵⁸ but the frequency of their letters fell off sharply.

These first rifts were mended, but never perfectly, and the correspondence between the two did not regain its habitual warmth and regularity. A final disagreement between the two occurred in January 1956. Already their exchange of letters had slowed to a trickle, and they might now send one another two or three letters in a year, but the final loss of trust occurred when Garnett sent White *Aspects of Love* (1955), a book which he had described to White the previous September as "my best book" (D. Garnett 1968, 269). Garnett's biographer describes it as "a deeply personal book, coloured by

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Garnett describes these visits in *Great Friends: Portraits of Seventeen Writers*. The first he describes as "not a success" (D. Garnett 1979, 221) while the second, brightened by the presence of the actress Julie Andrews, was "delightful" (D. Garnett 1979, 222).

events from Bunny's life" (Knights 2015, 419) and also as the "most personal of all Bunny's novels" (Knights 2015, 420). In it, Garnett "elaborated upon his emotional life and presented a manifesto of his beliefs. Thus *Aspects of Love* might stand as an extended footnote to his memoirs" (416). The letters that followed represented the first discussion Garnett and White ever had about physical love and sexual morality, and each author appears shocked to discover such strongly opposing views in his friend. White's response to the novel begins by informing Garnett, "As you predicted, I *dont* like *Aspects of Love* [sic]" (D. Garnett 1968, 274). He ascribes his dislike to their different personalities and educations, and, due to his own history, White insists, "I believe human beings ought to be monogamous [. . .] – that if they consciously take a solemn vow in public they should stick to it – or not take it – and that women ought not to behave like headstrong babies" (274). It was Garnett's main character, the sexually liberated Rose, whom White found most unappealing:

I hate Rose, like a cat, for going to bed with Alexis first, then tossing him over for Sir George, and then taking him and other lovers. Surely women are dependable people as well as men? [. . .] If a woman cannot behave herself according to [. . .] the laws of honour [. . .] then take down her crenellated, lace, Victorian pants, and give her one resounding blow with the flat of the hand on the buttocks. In short, I think your Rose is a selfish, short-sighted, self-admirer and a bore. Obviously you dont think so, and neither of us is right.⁵⁹ (274)

⁵⁹ Garnett's biographer suggests that the character of Rose was based on Garnett's second wife, Angelica, which may have compounded Garnett's feeling of offense. She writes, "Angelica is there too, as Rose, the beautiful young actress who becomes even more beautiful approaching middle age" (Knights 2015, 418).

In his response Garnett professed himself shocked at what he termed White's "mediaeval monkish attitude" (277).⁶⁰ Their correspondence virtually ceased, and their long, loving, creatively productive friendship was effectively over.

The final possible cause of White's dwindling productivity was his increased financial security. Although White continued to complain until the end of his life about Inland Revenue, the injustice of paying both American and British taxes, and the fees of his agent, after 1947 and the success of *Mistress Masham's Repose* he never experienced serious financial hardship again, and, as White himself acknowledged, this removed a great deal of the motivation for producing fiction. All through his life White would protest – largely humorously – that he wrote purely for financial reasons. As quoted previously, he wrote to L. J. Potts that he was concerned *The Sword in the Stone* contained "some swinish, Milneish parts," but, he added, "My God, I'd gladly be Milne for the Milne money" (Gallix 1984, 87).⁶¹ In White's more productive years most of these protestations appear humorous and are a way of expressing frustration over the stagnation or the possibility of the poor reception of a particular project. In his diaries and letters from the latter half of his life, however, the statements appear more sincere and pervasive. By March 1958 he recorded in his diary that he no longer felt any desire to write for the sake of writing, and he expressed resentment at the heavy taxation of his earnings that compelled him to publish *The Godstone and the Blackymor* for purely

⁶⁰ Garnett's letter goes on to vehemently rebut White's comments on *Aspects of Love*. Garnett responds, "Rose is in my opinion a healthy, normal and delightful woman. [. . .] Unlike you I do not believe in marriage vows and have never made any. [. . .] Your remarks about taking down a woman's drawers and beating her smack of flagellation. [. . .] But the corporal punishment of women though pleasant for its addicts will not make them live with men they dislike, or give up the lovers whom they do. [. . .] The views you express are as dead as the dodo. [. . .] I don't intend to discuss the subject any further. I have been twice married, have had six children and been the lover of an enormous number of other women, so that my views are founded on a great variety of experience which you have avoided" (D. Garnett 1968, 277–278).

⁶¹ White is referring to A. A. Milne, who wrote a series of books about the teddy bear Winnie-the-Pooh that were highly successful.

financial motives.⁶² When reading *The Journals of Arnold Bennett* in December 1958, White was struck by Bennett's consistent notation of the number of words he composed each day. White regarded this as evidence that Bennett, like himself, rarely felt any true desire to write, but instead had to force himself for financial motives.⁶³ Perhaps the most telling piece of evidence appears in the diary on 29 March 1959: when the contract with Broadway composers Lerner and Loewe for *Camelot* offered the prospect of lasting wealth, White expressed delight that he would now be free to pursue other enthusiasms – painting, filming, audio recording – and would no longer have to write popular fiction.⁶⁴

It appears likely that both White's growing financial independence and his quarrel with David Garnett contributed to the final stage of productivity in his life: a turn towards non-fiction. The failure of this one defining relationship may have moved other literary and scholarly models – L. J. Potts, Sir Sydney Cockerell – to the front of White's mind. Crucially it was Cockerell who first showed White a copy of the medieval *Bestiary*,⁶⁵ and who consistently encouraged White and offered help on the project. Perhaps because these relationships grew in importance with the diminishment of David Garnett's influence, the next identity that White selected for himself, and, arguably, the final literary identity of his life, was that of a scholar and antiquarian. In

⁶² T. H. White, diary volume 7, 4 Mar. 1958, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁶³ T. H. White, diary volume 12, 11 Dec. 1958, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁶⁴ T. H. White, diary volume 14, 29 Mar. 1959, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge). White had long held an interest in painting, and it was a practice that David Garnett discouraged and, as early as September 1944, feared would distract his friend from his work. Garnett writes, "I am not at all attracted by your wasting your time in such a way. I dont [sic] think you are a painter or have any particular taste for it. The less you have to do with art, theories of art, & religion the better. On the other hand the more you have to do with writing & with animals the better" (Garnett 1968, 149)

⁶⁵ The date of this interaction is somewhat confused. In his 1949 diary White would claim that he first saw the *Bestiary* manuscript in "1934 (1936?)" when staying with Sir Sydney Cockerell at Kew (T. H. White, "Provenance of this translation," no date, in diary 1949, folder 1, box 9, MS-4494, HRC). It seems apparent that he misremembered this date in both of his guesses, however, as he did not meet Cockerell until 1938 when they were introduced at the home of Siegfried Sassoon. He stayed at Kew for the first time in late August of that year, so it appears likely that he first encountered the *Bestiary* in 1938.

addition, financial security may also have played a considerable role in the change as financial freedom gave White leisure to consider his legacy and examine how he wished to be remembered.

Through *The Age of Scandal*, *The Scandalmonger*, and *The Book of Beasts*, White hoped to establish himself in an intellectual world, a world to which, he began to tell his friends, he had always longed to belong. He wrote to L. J. Potts that he was translating the Bestiary on 19 November 1943: "I am engaged in a work of real scholarship at last. That is, I am translating a 12th century Bestiary out of illegible, abbreviated, dog-latin [sic], into English, with notes about 3 times longer than the work itself" (Gallix 1984, 131). In February 1944, White wrote again to Potts, "The first thing to tell you is that I am in the seventh heaven with my Bestiary etc. I was always intended to be a scholar – thwarted by buggers like you – and now I am being one at last, off my own bat" (148). He was still working on the Bestiary six years later, and again wrote to Potts in June 1950 to insist that Potts had inspired his desire to write for something other than economic gain. He writes,

If you hadn't educated me, I could have happily gone on writing rubbish for rubbishy people. But having had the disadvantage of being educated by you, I have to try to be a scholar once every ten years. It's like a seal that has to come up through the ice sometimes to breathe. This is my first breath since I left Cambridge – so please be kind to it – and I have two more gasps up my sleeve. After that, if you dont [sic] extend a helping harpoon to me, I shall simply sink back into the depths and write best sellers. (221)

By producing non-fiction, White hoped to cast himself in the role of a scholar, thinker, and historian, and he began to seek out ways to verify this through an official university

degree. As he finished *The Book of Beasts*, *The Age of Scandal*, and *The Scandalmonger*, he began to hope that the books would provide him with the necessary credentials to receive a postgraduate degree from Cambridge. In January 1953, anticipating the publication of *The Book of Beasts*, White asked Mary Potts to intercede with her husband:

Ask Potts how I am to get a D.Litt or Ph.D. or whatever it is, I can't remember. [...] I shall have to get a lecturing job somewhere, and a Dr. would help me. I seem to remember that one was allowed to submit 3 printed works to some committee or other, who then either did or did not give you this degree. I could put in *The Age of Scandal*, *The Scandalmonger*, and *The Book of Beasts* [sic]. But I would rather put in the *Beast Book* by itself, as it really is a piece of original research, not a mere anthology like the scandal books. I am excited about it. (225)

This proved to be impossible – Potts informed him that none of the three books would be acceptable for the requirements of a postgraduate degree, but the fact that White was seriously considering this option demonstrates that he believed these three books to be both genuine works of scholarly research and worthy of recognition from the intellectual community at Cambridge (226). Even after discovering that he could not acquire a degree on the back of his three non-fiction texts, White hoped that they would make his reputation and serve as his legacy. All three take a different approach from that of a traditional history, and all three retain the voice and interests that White explores in other mediums and genres. As Reay Tannahill noted in the introduction to a recent edition of *The Age of Scandal*, “T. H. White is not – was not even in his own day – an orthodox historian” (Tannahill 1993, 16).

The Age of Scandal is a historical narrative that attempts to tell the story of the second half of the eighteenth century in a style that imitates the methods of the time period it describes. In the first few pages White draws his audience's attention to the style that he has chosen. He writes,

In this little scrap-book of a nostalgic Tory, I have tried to extend Mason's kind of biography to an age, attempting rather to string together a series of quotations from the people themselves, than to speak "in my own person" – "by which," as Boswell added with self-sacrifice and some regret, "I might have appeared to have more merit in the execution of the work."

In short, I have here tried to picture the nature and history of a minor period in its own words rather than mine (White [1950] 1993, 22).

In White's mind, his scholarship in *The Age of Scandal* and *The Scandalmonger* lay not just in his compilation of quotations and evidence from dozens of sources, or in his analysis of the social customs of the time period, but in the style in which he chose to convey his message. White compares *The Age of Scandal* to *Memoirs of Thomas Grey* (1775) by William Mason, and tells his audience that "before Mason, a biographer had been content to write about the subject in his own words. Mason invented the idea of letting the subject speak for himself" (21). This style was later used again, White tells his readers, by James Boswell in his *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791). White hopes to do for writing about a time period what Mason and Boswell did for writing about an individual: provide a compelling narrative and explanation using mainly direct

quotations from the subject itself.⁶⁶ In this way, White constructed for himself an ancient scholarly society, and he encourages his readers to consider his work a continuation of and contribution to the eighteenth century scholarship that he describes. By choosing the style of *Memoirs of Thomas Grey* and *The Life of Samuel Johnson* and by indicating this style to his audience, White portrays himself as member of the society that he eulogizes. Claiming to represent the time in its own words lends White's history a level of authenticity, but of course White still retains control over the content and conclusions of his account: he selects the extracts and volubly interprets them for his reader. In a way, therefore, this pretense at impartiality is disingenuous.

The Age of Scandal and *The Scandalmonger* were forays into scholarship and non-fiction, but it was the translation of the Bestiary that White hoped would win him a reputation as a true scholar. He wrote to Potts on 19 March 1953, "After 1954, anybody who wants to write about Bestiary [sic] will have to apply to me for information, just as I used to have to apply to Sir Sydney Cockerell and Mr. G. C. Druce. In fact, after 1954, Bestiaries and White will be wedded for eternity" (Gallix 1984, 226–227). White's comparison of his own legacy to those of Sir Sydney Cockerell and G. C. Druce is further proof that White had focused on non-fiction models for his literature during this period. His prediction was moderately prescient: White's translation of the Cambridge Bestiary is still cited as an authoritative resource in scholarly interpretations of Medieval literature and art.⁶⁷ Although the text is ostensibly a faithful translation, White makes little or no attempt to render the Latin literally, to disappear into the background, or to

⁶⁶ White would remain fond of comparing his writing to that of famous seventeenth and eighteenth century authors. In addition to his purposefully created parallels to eighteenth century authors in *The Age of Scandal* and *The Scandalmonger*, White would also repeatedly compare his diary with the diaries of Samuel Pepys and James Boswell. In his diary he urged himself to modify his style and content to make them more like those of these admired predecessors (T. H. White, diary volume 1, 25 Apr. 1957, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge]).

⁶⁷ For examples of modern medieval scholarship that use White's translation, see (Hall 1979), (Brown 1999), (Gravestock 1999), (Haist 1999), (Hassig 1999), and (Miyazaki 1999).

allow the original author's voice to speak unencumbered by interpretations. Regarding the translation, Crane praises White's use of "modern idiom" and provides an example: "In literal Latin, the lion wanders 'without severe concern,' but in White's version he is 'fancy free' " (Crane 1974, 167). In addition to the modification of the idiom, White inserts his own comments into nearly every entry, and sometimes includes footnotes that run on far longer than the original Bestiary's discussion of the animal. The notes are often devoid of impartial historical information or simple translation clarification, and several of White's notes comment on the mood he imagines the scribe is in as he transcribes the original author or complain about how tiring White finds decoding the complex or incorrect Latin in a certain passage. In one footnote he quotes a problematic Latin sentence and adds, "It does sometimes become tiresome to have to unravel these readings" (White [1950] 1969, 73). White also decides to eliminate an entire chapter of the original text, the "section on Trees" (217), and excuses it by writing, "Their interest is slight. There are no illustrations, except one picture of the scribe himself. The present translator proposes to spare the reader the trouble of wading through them in full, by preserving whatever of interest there may be in one longish footnote" (217). With these notes and with a long Appendix, he maintains tight control over the message and the interpretation of the Bestiary's text, and also inserts quotations and references that he feels are of scholarly import. White felt that these notes would represent the crucial appeal of the text, and would ensure his recognition in scholarly society. In a letter, White told Sir Sydney Cockerell,

Please understand that it will not be a bibliophile's edition: its only excuse will be the *notes*, i.e. that my own discursive reading furnishes me with peculiar little sidelights on the composition, for instance, of the unguents used by various

historical whores, and this gives me a good note to the article on crocodile.
(Meynell 1956, 130)

Indeed, the notes and Appendix that White composed and bibliography that he compiled have proved useful to scholars and are cited at least as often as the translated text of the Bestiary. White's explanation of the symbolism of the various animals is quoted extensively in *Creation and the World of Science: The Bampton Lectures, 1978* (Peacocke 1979, 278).⁶⁸

The notes permit White to offer comments on a wide variety of topics, some only tangentially related to Bestiaries, and they gave him an opportunity to emphasize the breadth of his own reading and scholarship. White offers critical analysis of texts and subjects far outside of the medieval period of the Bestiary. For example, in several notes White enters the realm of Shakespeare criticism, and he writes, "Although Shakespeare generally gives the impression of having been a universal genius who knew everything, it is evident that he had never read a *Bestiary*. His natural history is of his own personal observation, or else what he might have heard discussed in any country tavern" (White [1950] 1969, 120). He returns to this subject in a subsequent note, and adds, "Neither Shakespeare nor Chaucer seems to have been interested in Bestiaries as such. [. . .] There are no Manticores in Shakespeare, no Aspidodelones, no Amphisbaenae with a head at each end. Had the bard heard of these fascinating creatures it seems likely that he would have mentioned them, as Milton did" (128).

The author's desire to achieve recognition for his scholarship was a key motivating factor behind the composition and release of these three non-fiction books. They indicate White's growing concern with his legacy and a desire to achieve

⁶⁸ For other examples of authors referencing White's appendix and notes see (Panofsky 1972, 90), (Paxson 1994, 141), and (Attfield 1991, 47).

recognition in a field outside of popular fiction. However, these three non-fiction texts also express a second and equally defining aspect of their author during this period of his life: postwar nostalgia. All three of these texts were composed, in large part, following the Second World War, and they embody, as we shall see below, a more general retrospective trend in literature after the War along with a style of nostalgia that is more recognizably specific to White.

In addition to the attempt to solidify White's reputation as a scholar, a central theme of all three texts is an intense longing for the past. *The Age of Scandal*, *The Scandalmonger*, and *The Book of Beasts* all represent a return to the nostalgia that influenced White's early work, but in a far more pessimistic form. These later texts all explore an intense postwar nostalgia that is distinct from the longing White articulated prior to the War in *England Have My Bones*. Unlike the prewar text, which can be read as instructions on how to embody a nostalgic ideal, *The Age of Scandal* and *The Scandalmonger* disavow any possibility of emulating the admirable historical figures with whom White identifies; he now believes that it is impossible for a modern man to embody their values with any degree of perfection.

This alteration following the traumatic upheaval of the War is one that Robert Hemmings identifies as a distinctly modernist longing for the past. Hemmings distinguishes modernist nostalgia from Georgian nostalgia and that of earlier periods by drawing attention to the increasingly impassable gulf between the modern nostalgic's present and the idealized past. Hemmings writes, "Modernist disdain for the present does not in itself distinguish modern nostalgia from its incarnations in previous periods; nostalgia is always predicated upon an aggrieved relation to the present. What in my view distinguishes modern nostalgia is the shock of the gulf between the retrospectively constructed innocence or benevolence of the pre-traumatic past and the present staggered by the lingering after-effects of modern war" (Hemmings 2008, 10). White's

prewar nostalgia in *England Have My Bones* borrowed from Georgian imagery and the Romantic revival movement described by Alexandra Harris, and it, like the writing of other authors of the period, suggested a means of returning to an imagined past through personal effort and social reform. However, as Hemmings notes, “Modern war enforced a destructive breach that made the past ever more inaccessible, apparently even more distant, which served to intensify the longing for it” (5).

After the Second World War, several British authors, even those with opposing political views, returned to prewar subjects with a growing sense of loss and distance. Peter Lowe has explored how both John Betjeman and George Orwell returned in the postwar period to values and concepts that had been important to them prior to the War, but argues that they approached these topics with a growing sense of an impassable gap and a more intense nostalgia than they had previously evinced. Lowe suggests that Betjeman’s “vocation, in the post-war years, was to introduce his audience to the diversity and value of the ‘heritage’ around them before it was lost for good. [. . .] The ‘quaintness’ of his England is an integral part of the nation’s soul; to bury it under steel and concrete, or to iron out the social inconsistencies and apply a more uniform set of values and tastes, would be a process of destruction every bit as bad as a German air raid” (Lowe 2009, 256). After the close of the War both Orwell and Betjeman felt a deep desire to preserve “the peculiarly ‘English’ aspects of national life” (262), and both increasingly felt “an awareness of the fragility of the country’s bond with its national and cultural past” (263). Alan Sinfield argues that Elizabeth Bowen also experienced this impassable breach with the literature and society of the past: “For Elizabeth Bowen and her circle, the war was destroying not only lives and homes, but the leisure-class refinement and sensibility fundamental to ‘good’ culture” (Sinfield 2004, 49).

After the Second World War, White experienced a similar alienation from the past, and – like Betjeman, Bowen, Orwell, and others – his nostalgia became far more

hopeless, and he began to see the past as untouchable and no longer duplicable. By revisiting themes like gentlemanly conduct, fox hunting, and aristocratic writing in *The Age of Scandal*, White expresses what he perceives as the irretrievable nature of the society that he once hoped to join through the imitation described in *England Have My Bones*. *The Age of Scandal*, *The Scandalmonger*, and, to a lesser extent, *The Book of Beasts*, represent a return to elements of White's prewar interests and values, but with a distinct and substantial change: in these three new texts there is no longer the possibility of acceptable emulation of gentlemanly attributes.

The Age of Scandal, although it purports to be a history of the eighteenth century presented in the century's own words, is by no means an accurate or unbiased portrait of that age. Rather, the main focus of the text is White's condemnation of modern, postwar society conducted via a nostalgic elegy for what the author represents as an irretrievable golden age. As Reay Tannahill summarizes, "*The Age of Scandal*, in effect, was to be taken as condemnation of today and a requiem for yesterday" (Tannahill 1993, 16). White felt disillusioned and distressed by liberal postwar politics. He was disgusted by the election of a Labour government and by the foundation of what he termed the "Fare-Well State," and he expounds against modern socialist politics repeatedly in his diary.⁶⁹ As may be surmised by his move to the Channel Islands, a tax haven, White detested paying income tax.⁷⁰ He blamed the Labour government not only for his increased taxes, but even for other minor inconveniences like tradesmen sending him

⁶⁹ This included making up comical names for his least favorite Labour politicians. For example, Aneurin Bevan, who worked as Minister of Health in the postwar government and established the National Health Service, became "Urinal" Bevan (T. H. White, diary volume 3, 17 July 1957, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge]). Mary Potts recounted to Sylvia Townsend Warner after his death, "Ellen Wilkinson [Labour's Minister for Education] was his symbol for all that was bad in England. He burned her in effigy on Guy Fawkes' night" (Warner 1967, 236).

⁷⁰ Complaints about taxes appear over two dozen times in his diary entries between 1957 and 1962.

the wrong bills,⁷¹ poor workmanship on the swimming pool in his garden,⁷² and customs delays between England and Alderney.

White's intense concern with the liberal political climate of England following the War was not uncommon in intellectual and literary circles. For example, Sassoon, too, felt that the "Labour government amounted to a further threat to the hierarchical vision of an Elysian English rural life" that had already been damaged by two world wars (Hemmings 2008, 92). Even among writers who had identified themselves as sympathetic to a liberal or socialist agenda prior to the War, there was strong sense of wistful regret for an imagined past period of leisure, art, and good taste. For example, Nigel Nicolson, the son of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson, later recalled his surprise when he learned that, after the end of Second World War, his parents "both believed that the world which they knew and loved would be irreparably broken by the war" (N. Nicolson 1967, 23). Nigel records his father's surmise that the life of leisure and creativity that they had enjoyed in Bloomsbury, "was now 'an obsolete tradition,' " and, he adds, "They feared the permanence of the new vulgarity which the war had introduced" (24). However, Nigel Nicholson adds, "their fears about the future were ill-founded. They continued to live after the war the same life as they had lived before it" (24). White likewise found himself financially far more successful and independent in the years following the War.⁷³

White makes no attempt to conceal the retrospective mood of *The Age of Scandal*, and the text opens with an extensive diatribe on the state of the modern world, setting the tone for the subsequent lament for the eighteenth century. He begins with the

⁷¹ T. H. White, diary volume 8, 27 Mar. 1958, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁷² T. H. White, diary volume 16, 26 June 1959, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁷³ Indeed, as discussed above, his growing wealth and leisure time was a contributing factor in his failure to write and live up to the ideal of a literary gentleman, a rather ironic twist.

declaration, “Well, we have lived to see the end of civilisation in England” (White [1950] 1993, 19). The second sentence continues, “I was once a gentleman myself” (19). This opening sally sets the tone for the rest of the text’s ideological stance; recalls the “gentleman,” a chief concern of *England Have My Bones*; and connects the concept of civilization with an aristocratic leisure class. The disappearance of the leisured, upper-class gentleman, White proposes, is equivalent to the destruction of civilization, and thus in his first two sentences White diagnoses the problem with modern civilization as the growing lack of respect for an educated and empowered aristocracy. As early as 1940, Harold Nicolson describes in his diary the “angry tide which is rising against the governing class,” and he expresses a similar sentiment to White:

I have always been on the side of the under-dog, but I have also believed in the principle of aristocracy. I have hated the rich but I have loved learning, scholarship, intelligence and the humanities. Suddenly I am faced with the fact that these lovely things are supposed to be “class privileges.” When I find that my whole class is being assailed, I feel part of them, a feeling that I have never had before. [. . .] We imagine that we are fighting for liberty and our standards of civilization. But is it perfectly certain that by these phrases we do not mean the cultured life which we lead? (H. Nicolson 1967, 57)

White and Nicolson both associate the civilization that they fought for in the War with the aristocratic means to write, read, and engage in literary criticism, and both found themselves identifying with this class as they perceived it to be under threat.

The first piece of evidence White presents to prove the fall of civilization is, “When I last stayed in Cambridge, I lunched with two Masters of colleges. Both of them had to help with the washing-up after luncheon” (White [1950] 1993, 19). The shrinking

of the servant class, the consequent lack of leisure time, and what he saw as a decreased level of respect for an educated elite distressed White. In the author's view, the postwar politicians failed to respect the cultural importance and the sacrifices of the wealthy upper class: "They [the aristocracy] were generations of statesmen and proconsuls, who gave their sons in war more lavishly than any other class. Yet we have lived to see a Labour Minister of War stating that he does not give a tinker's curse for people of that sort, and the Minister of Health describes them indiscriminately as 'vermin' " (20). He diagnoses the problem and writes, "It is the logical result of our half-baked Victorian humanitarianism. All men are not equal. That ridiculous idea of English democracy was invented in the reign of Queen Victoria, and it has now become bureaucracy" (20). White summarizes his deeply pessimistic view of the future of English society. He writes,

Now that it is no longer possible to be a gentleman, now that there is no longer enough time or money to be cultured, now that civilisation has vanished along with the Word which gentlemen once kept [. . .] I have been looking back along the corridors of history, taking stock of that venture which once brought England to the leadership of the world. I believe that the peak of British culture was reached in the latter years of George III: that the rot began to set in with the "Romantics": that the apparent prosperity of Victoria's reign was autumnal, not vernal: and that now we are done for. (20)

Unlike *England Have My Bones*, *The Age of Scandal* is not presented as a solution to the problems that White diagnoses in the culture and the population. Instead, it is purely an act of explicit nostalgia: "I have been consoling my old age by running away from the Bondfields and the Shinwells and the Bevans, by going back to the grand old days of Horace Walpole, and I have written this book in the effort to give one last, loving and

living picture of an aristocratic civilisation which we shall never see again" (21). *The Age of Scandal* is not, therefore an optimistic text, but one that cannot imagine the possibility of a successful future for England.

White revisits several of the concepts that appealed to him in the early 1930s, particularly the question of personal courage. Once again White is preoccupied with how to prove the existence and the level of an individual's courageousness. As in *England Have My Bones*, in the society represented in *The Age of Scandal* there are specific sets of prescribed behaviors that, depending on how they are performed, show whether or not an individual is courageous or cowardly. In *The Age of Scandal* White identifies the quality that he is attempting to cultivate as "Bottom": "In the eighteenth century [. . .] a gentleman was expected to have 'Bottom.' It was a word of composite meaning, which implied stability, and also what the twentieth century calls 'guts.' [. . .] Bottom, in fact, was synonymous with courage, coolness and solidity" (White [1950] 1993, 77). White interprets this as a defining quality of the time period, and he uses it to explain and defend practices that even during the eighteenth century were deplored. Gentlemen of the eighteenth century, White argues, were expected to display their "Bottom" through gambling; dueling; behaving recklessly when "dared" by their friends; fox hunting; and, when young, taking corporal punishment without tears or complaint. White's portrayal of the eighteenth century is unquestioningly positive, even when he is describing an aspect, like corporal punishment, that he elsewhere decries. In *The Age of Scandal*, violent and unrelenting corporal abuse of schoolboys is presented as a means of cultivating the desirable quality of "Bottom," and White attempts to prove that this practice was conducive to a healthy society. After describing how one boy, later Lord Holland, was forced to toast bread with his fingers for another boy until his fingers were so injured that they became permanently deformed, White concludes, apparently without irony, "Some of the fags survived, and, according to the inexorable law of nature,

the survivors were the fittest” (83). In this context White does not choose to recognize these behaviors – gambling, unnecessary risk-taking, dueling, extreme corporal punishment of both children and adults – as cruel, self-destructive, or irresponsible. Instead, they represent an admirable nonchalance about risk or physical pain. Of course, gambling thousands away in a night with nonchalance is a behavior only open to the wealthiest. White implies that none of these tests of “Bottom” is available to the modern man.

Equally, the *Book of Beasts* serves as an argument for the intelligence, creativity, and value of bygone eras. Although never so explicitly stated as in *The Age of Scandal*, the *Bestiary*, too, is a work about a lost age of gentlemen and scholarship. White displays this nostalgia by demonstrating a deep admiration and respect for the author(s) of the *Bestiary*, and he takes every opportunity to point out the intelligence and clarity of the *Bestiary*’s reasoning. One example is in the migration of birds. The knowledge of winter migration patterns was lost to more recent scholars and had to be rediscovered, but White describes, “Here is a plain statement of the migration of swallows which remained partly a mystery even to the immortal Gilbert White. In 1703 it was the naturalist Morton who stated that they migrated to the moon” (White [1950] 1993, 147).

White attempts to educate his readers in the correct method to read his translation. He writes, “A medieval *Bestiary*, when one first comes across it in the twentieth century, is irresistibly reminiscent of Hilaire Belloc. But to approach it through the attitude of *A Bad Child’s Book of Beasts* is to lose its fascination” (White [1954] 1969, 237). *The Book of Beasts*, White argues, holds a deeper and more significant meaning than that of an ancient curiosity, and it should not be treated as a humorous or childish book nor as a modern picture book. He instructs his reader on the proper manner of enjoying the text: “It can hardly be repeated too often that the *bestiary* is a serious

scientific work [. . .] the real pleasure comes with identifying the existing creature, not with laughing at the supposedly imaginary one. Indeed, the more the reader is amused by the foolishness of Physiologus, the more he is liable to make a fool of himself" (237). By the same token, White defends his choice to study and make a translation of the Bestiary. By making the argument that the text has value as a historical and scientific work he defends his own scholarly endeavor. He also attempts to educate his ideal reader by distinguishing between false or superficial pleasure and "real" pleasure, which is based on scholarship, true understanding, and some form of communication with the earlier text. White's ideal reader is knowledgeable in history, Latin, zoology, and is able and willing to use these skills to make leaps of logic. This reader also respects the scribe and the originator(s), and gives them the benefit of the doubt.

White's portrait of the scribe is both nostalgic and, perhaps unintentionally, patronizing. The group of scribes is imagined as ingenuous and un-jaded, full of "innocent enthusiasm for learning" (White [1954] 1969, 243). The scribes are described as perched on high stools like schoolboys "at high desks" (243). They sit with "their tongues between their teeth and their blunt, patient, holy fingers carefully forming the magic letters" (243). In spite of White's obvious admiration, this description might at first appear condescending. As scholarly as they are for their day, the learned scribes are represented as overgrown schoolchildren; however, this representation is another example of White's nostalgia. The scribes are representatives of a more innocent and credulous age that remained open to learning and to magic into adulthood. Their genuine and youthful enthusiasm is contrasted to the imagined modern readers' "impertinent," cynical, and worldly "smile at the Phoenix" (238). In addition to their learning and innocent wonder, these scribes are pioneers and frontiersmen, living a bleak and wild existence of constant danger. They possess the courage and the survival skills that White coveted and attempted to cultivate in *England Have My Bones*. He

describes the scribes as existing in an England like “a backwood of the Wild West, with its sheriff’s posse and its escaping slaves” (White [1954] 1969, 239). The Abbey represented “a safe sanctuary [. . .] in the forest of England, over-run by outlaws and lawless barons” (White [1954] 1969, 240). This combination of practical survivalist and intellectual scholar always appealed to White, and his tendency to ascribe these skills to these medieval monks is another indication of his acute nostalgia.

As in *The Age of Scandal*, in *The Book of Beasts* White references the impassable divide between the world of today and the Medieval world of the Bestiary. In a footnote in his bibliography, White makes it clear that the modern world makes scholarship impossible. After describing several manuscripts once owned by G. C. Druce and, after his death, given to the Society of Antiquaries, White adds, “The present translator who is resident in the Channel Islands, has unfortunately been prevented by that circumstance, and by the poverty of authors who are under the penal taxation of a philodemotic government, from moving his household to London in order to consult this important archive” (White [1954] 1969, 275). The age of the Bestiary is irreparably divided from White’s, and this belief is emphasized in the final sentence of the first section of his Appendix. The Bestiary, he writes, has “a reverence for the wonders of life, and praises the Creator of them: in whom, in those days, it was still possible absolutely to believe” (White [1954] 1969, 247).

Fame came to White in the late-1950s. Even before the publication of *The Once and Future King* in 1958, which would catapult him into the public eye, he was becoming a well-known figure, and he was beginning to move in more illustrious and bohemian circles. The success of his first three Arthurian books was followed by *Mistress Masham’s Repose*, the second Book of the Month Club selection in White’s career. He began to find himself on the edge of a new circle of well-known artists, actors, and aristocrats. For

example, White had known the actor Michael Trubshawe since 1934, and this connection brought him into more eclectic circles after the Second World War. He stayed with Trubshawe in London early 1958, prior to the publication of *The Once and Future King*, and there, in a haze of alcohol, he met a long list of prominent figures. The most intriguing to White himself was Fiore de Henriquez, the sculptor. Fiore, who was born with both male and female genitalia, fascinated White and impressed him deeply both with her artistic ability and with her ability to live in a manner that defied conventions. He wrote that he admired her intensely, and planned to stay with her in Italy.⁷⁴ White also met the director Charles Crichton, and the author Geoffrey Willans, who co-created children's school stories about the character Nigel Molesworth, and several other bizarre and interesting characters.⁷⁵ This was before the publication of *The Once and Future King*, which would appear later that same year, and White was already successful enough to feel entitled, though still excited and privileged, to be moving in these circles. *The Once and Future King* brought yet more attention, and eventually true fame and financial success.

After mid-1958 the media became increasingly interested in White. By mid-July both *Time* and the *Times Literary Supplement* were asking him for interviews about *The Once and Future King*.⁷⁶ On 27 August 1959 White's agent, David Higham, wrote to warn

⁷⁴ T. H. White, diary volume 7, 13 Mar. 1958, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ (Michael Demarest, letter to T. H. White, 14 July 1958, in diary volume 10, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge]). See also (T. H. White, diary volume 10, 16 July 1958, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge]) If the *Times Literary Supplement* ever conducted an interview they do not appear to have published it; an earlier review of *The Once and Future King* appeared on 25 April 1958, but no interview followed. However, the *Time* review/interview appeared on 8 September 1958. *Time's* reporter noted White's growing nostalgia: "Medievalist White has small use for the modern world, and bitterly resents Britain's decline. He is likely to poke a horny finger into the nearest American chest and hiss dramatically 'You pinched my bloody empire from me'" (*Time* 1958, 105). The interview by *Time* also contains some inaccuracies that make it clear the interview must have been conducted by phone. It claims that White still kept hedgehogs, snakes, and hawks, but White had ceased to keep hedgehogs and snakes in early 1939 and hawks in the mid-1940s, a fact that the reviewer would have noticed had he visited Alderney.

him that the television program “This Is Your Life” was attempting to have him on their show. The premise of the program was that a prominent or famous figure was brought to the studios on some other pretext and then ambushed with information from his or her past. White recorded in his diary that this prospect was frightful,⁷⁷ and his agent’s letter urged him to stay away from the television studio where the program was recorded at all costs as the program’s motive was to make its subject appear foolish.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, White must have been at least slightly proud of being selected, for he saved the letter from David Higham in his diary.⁷⁹ White also suggested to the filmmaker Grahame Tharp an idea for a television program like “This Is Your Life” in which the famous subject would appear to interview himself by means of trick photography, and White volunteered to be the first figure featured.⁸⁰ The title for the program would be “SPLIT,” referencing a split personality, and White wrote in his diary that he believed the idea would be a financial success.⁸¹

It was in 1958 that the team at Lerner and Loewe conceived the idea for *Camelot*, the Broadway musical that would open in December 1960 and become White’s most lasting legacy. Alan Lerner, the librettist of the famous duo, later recalled that he was “reading through the book section of the *New York Times*” when he came across a review of *The Once and Future King*, and felt intrigued. The next day, independently, his producer entered his office, “placed the review on [his] desk” and said, “Lerner, [. . .]

⁷⁷ T. H. White, diary volume 16, 28 Aug. 1959, Queen’s College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁷⁸ David Higham, letter to T. H. White, 27 Aug. 1959, in diary volume 18, Queen’s College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁷⁹ T. H. White, diary volume 18, 15 Feb. 1960, Queen’s College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁸⁰ T. H. White, diary volume 17, 3 Dec. 1959, Queen’s College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁸¹ Ibid.

here's your next show" (Lerner 1978, 171).⁸² Lerner would later recall *Camelot* as the end of an era, as the final moment in the golden age of musical theatre. He describes it as "a musical play that became, in a way, the twilight of the gods" (Lerner 1978, 16), and it represented that decline because it was the final effort of many of people Lerner considered the greatest creators in the genre. *Camelot* was "the last musical score for Broadway by Frederick Loewe who retired, the last costumes ever designed by Adrian who died after he completed his first sketches, the last production of the famous English producer Jack Hylton, who died shortly after it opened at Drury Lane, the last contribution to Broadway of the great Moss Hart who died of a heart attack within a year after it opened; and a musical that became the symbol of John F. Kennedy's all too 'brief shining moment' " (Lerner 1978, 16). It would also serve as the final legacy of T. H. White.

The possibility of a Lerner and Loewe musical based on *The Once and Future King* sparked the public and press interest in White as an individual. Months before any contract had been formally signed, reporters flew to Alderney to interview White about the rumored production. On 20 February 1959 the literary editor of the *Sunday Dispatch* arrived and during the interview told White that the project would make him a millionaire.⁸³ White, who had read in *The Daily Mirror* on 23 March 1959 that the producers had secured the actor Laurence Harvey for Lancelot and were already

⁸² The review, "The Sorrows of Arthur" appeared in *The New York Times* on 24 August 1958, and it was unequivocally positive. It says that as the reader progresses through the narrative "thought follows laughter;" and adds, "White is wondrously at home in the Middle Ages, and his descriptive prose is that of a master" (Redman 1958).

⁸³ T. H. White, diary volume 14, 20 Feb. 1959, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge). At this point the prospect of the project was so new that even White could not recall the proper names of the producers. When describing the interview in his diary he first writes the names of Rodgers and Hammerstein before correcting himself.

teaching him lyrics, felt that he had an advantage in contract negotiations.⁸⁴ White therefore refused to sign the initial contract, demanded that he retain the rights to any sequels to *The Once and Future King* that he chose to write, among other things, and, once a mutually acceptable arrangement was reached, refused to fly to London to sign the document. The lawyers from Lerner and Loewe, he insisted, would have to come to him. Photographers from various papers waited at the Alderney airport to photograph the representatives of the production company getting off the plane.⁸⁵

White was interviewed on *The Monitor* in the summer of 1959. Peter Newington, a producer on the BBC television show, wrote to White on 29 May 1959 and suggested that the program's crew would be willing to fly to Alderney to conduct the interview in order to give the author the minimum amount of inconvenience.⁸⁶ In his diary the author dismisses the show as a piece of ephemera, but in his next sentence he undermines his own nonchalance by noting that the show's recent episodes featured Ezra Pound, Robert Graves, and Wanda Landowska.⁸⁷ In a separate entry he wonders why, after having acquired these important figures, the program is bothering to interview him.⁸⁸ This personal uncertainty did not prevent him from making further demands on the producer. When the dates of the crew's proposed arrival conflicted with the visit of the deaf and blind Miss Collier, also known as Puck, White extracted a

⁸⁴ T. H. White, diary volume 14, 26 Mar. 1959, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge). The reporting was not as reliable as White seems to have trusted, and Laurence Harvey did not end up playing the part of Lancelot in the 1960 Broadway production as was initially reported. Robert Goulet took the part. Harvey did eventually play King Arthur in the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1964, after White's death.

⁸⁵ For examples of the photos see *The Guernsey Star*, 16 Apr. 1959.

⁸⁶ Paul Newington, letter to T. H. White, 29 May 1959, in diary volume 15, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge)

⁸⁷ T. H. White, diary volume 16, 15 July 1959, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge). Landowska, the famous harpsichordist, would have been 80 in 1959, and would die that August. White's anxiety about the interview makes it evident that he admired these famous and influential figures. Graves in particular influenced White at several junctures in his life and writing.

⁸⁸ T. H. White, diary volume 15, 5 July 1959, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

promise from Peter Newington that the entire crew would learn how to sign in the deaf/blind alphabet and would help Puck to participate in the taping of the interview.⁸⁹ As it happened, however, the crew's visit did not correspond with Puck's holiday, and the BBC filming crew was not required to learn this new skill.

White met Julie Andrews, who would later appear as Guenever in *Camelot*, in November 1959 on the miniseries *The Julie Andrews Show*, on which he was asked to appear after the success of *The Monitor*.⁹⁰ He agreed to do the show in the early autumn, but after having seen the first episode of the show, which featured the portrait painter Pietro Annigoni, he was unimpressed and apprehensive. He felt all the participants were bad actors and suggested that everyone involved was superficial and had put on a falsely artistic front for the cameras. His diary entry makes it clear that he was fearful that the show would give him a script that he would find difficult to master or that the skits would make him appear foolish.⁹¹ When he rehearsed for the show, he recorded that he was more terrified than he had ever been in his life, but he set himself out to learn about theater, found that he liked Julie Andrews, and, when the time came to do the show, felt calm, prepared, and well-liked by the professional actors.⁹² He reveled in the showmanship and his diary describes at length the dressing table with electric light bulbs all around the mirror and the dressing room door with his name on it.⁹³ White, Julie Andrews, and her husband of the time, Tony Walton, became close friends. White

⁸⁹ T. H. White, diary volume 15, 28 June 1959, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge). In 1956 White had become interested in helping several deaf and blind people by giving them and their families summer holidays on Alderney. Puck was the first of these visitors and she and White became close friends. They corresponded for years, and she returned each summer for at least a week until White's death. (T. H. White, letter to Miss Collier, 28 Aug. 1956, in diary volume 11, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge].)

⁹⁰ T. H. White, diary volume 17, 7 Oct. 1959, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge). The miniseries, produced by the BBC, ran for three episodes in 1959.

⁹¹ T. H. White, diary volume 17, 12 Nov. 1959, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1959.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

recorded in his diary that immediately after their first meeting Julie and Tony had decided to adopt him,⁹⁴ and Andrews recorded years later that she quickly “fell in love with this endearing, professorial man” (Andrews 2008, 275). They stayed in Alderney in the summer of 1960, and White spent over a month with them in New York for the opening of *Camelot* in December 1960.

Camelot encountered many problems as it moved forward towards production,⁹⁵ and it was rewritten several times even after its initial opening on Broadway. The musical’s team had difficulty cutting White’s enormous epic down to a manageable size. When it opened first in the O’Keefe Centre in Toronto the performance lasted over four and a half hours; after rewrites and a move to the Shubert Theatre in Boston, Alan Lerner and the director, Moss Hart, cut it by an hour. It opened on Broadway on 3 December 1960 to mixed reviews and poor audience reception (Lerner 1978, 214), and Lerner, Loewe and Hart felt that the play still needed rewriting (215). They completed the final rewrite while the cast was performing, brought the length down to two hours, and, after a special on *The Sullivan Show* had reignited the public’s interest, “*Camelot* was finally a hit” (216). Julie Andrews writes in her memoirs, “To my knowledge, it was the first time a Broadway show had been so substantially reworked after it had already opened” (Andrews 2008, 302).

White felt that the critics never understood *Camelot*. In an article for *Vogue* describing the experience of watching his book transformed for the stage, White writes, “Why isn’t it like *My Fair Lady*, they wail. Well, thank God, it isn’t. [. . .] *Camelot* is a musical tragedy, not a musical comedy” (White 1961, 97). In November 1963 the legacy of *Camelot* would change forever when Jacqueline Kennedy quoted lines from the final

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ These problems included the hospitalization of Alan Lerner with a bleeding ulcer and of Moss Hart, the director, with a heart attack (Andrews 2008, 292). The original costume designer died before the musical was in rehearsals, and Alan Lerner and Frederick Loewe found themselves locked in a constant disagreement that would lead to the severing of their partnership (Lerner 1978, 196–197, 217).

song of the musical in an interview to *Life* immediately following the assassination of her husband.⁹⁶ Whatever the reviews or the initial success of the musical, after the debut of *Camelot*, White was still more highly sought after by the media. His diary describes how *The Daily Express*, to protect the exclusivity of their interview, met him at the airport upon his arrival into London, and, after taking press photos of him with the prop Excalibur, escorted him to Alderney.⁹⁷

White, as despondent as he often was, appears to have been quite impressed by the new and famous society into which he found himself invited. On two separate occasions he made long lists in his diary to record the names of all the notorious people to whom he had recently been introduced. After his trip to New York in 1960, White recorded meeting Marlene Dietrich – the classic film star and stage performer – and included the comment that on *Camelot's* opening night he had ordered her to shut up, which, he claimed, went over rather well.⁹⁸ He also noted that the famous photographers Richard Avedon⁹⁹ and Irving Penn¹⁰⁰ (and, he adds, many others) took his picture. White drew up a long list of actors, playwrights, and reporters that he met during the opening month of *Camelot*. He recorded meeting Noël Coward, the

⁹⁶ In a somewhat bizarre coincidence, the journalist who interviewed Jacqueline Kennedy for *Life*, Theodore H. White, had the same surname and initials as the author, and they had once been named Book of the Month Club winners within one month of each other in 1947.

⁹⁷ T. H. White, diary volume 19, 31 Dec. 1960, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge). The photos and the article appeared in *The Daily Express* on 3 January 1961 under the title "Excalibur."

⁹⁸ T. H. White, diary volume 19, 31 Dec. 1960, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

⁹⁹ It is possible that the interest was more mutual than might be imagined, for Richard Avedon has a second, tangential connection to the work of T. H. White. Years later the British fashion photographer Tim Walker, who worked as Avedon's assistant in New York, would reference White's fiction in his own photography (Muir 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Penn's portrait of White was published in *Vogue* in July 1961.

playwright and director;¹⁰¹ the actor Rex Harrison; Josh Logan, who, White noted in the diary, was the richest impresario in America; Cathleen Nesbitt, the former fiancé of Rupert Brooke; Sir Laurence Olivier, who, White insisted, had begun imitating the author's style of hats; actors Henry Fonda, Rock Hudson, and Elliot Reid; and Allene Talmey, the editor of *Vogue*. Some of these contacts would continue as White's friends after this initial first acquaintance. One of these was Richard Burton who later wrote to White of his first encounter with Elizabeth Taylor and, indeed, professed himself unimpressed with his future wife's appearance which he regarded as bovine, comparing her unfavorably to their mutual friend Julie Andrews.¹⁰²

In the midst of all this dazzling society, White found himself despondent and dispirited.¹⁰³ His health was deteriorating. He was plagued by insomnia and by mysterious problems of numbness and weakness in his legs: initially his doctor seems to have diagnosed him with alcoholic neuritis,¹⁰⁴ and later he underwent an operation for circulatory problems (Warner 1967, 307). White himself believed that the ailment was at least partially psychosomatic, for he was mentally unwell at this time as well.¹⁰⁵ His doctor had prescribed him perphenazine, now used as an antipsychotic medication, for anxiety, and Nembutal for the chronic sleeplessness that plagued the author. White

¹⁰¹ White records the meeting in his diary as if it is the first time, but the two corresponded briefly in January 1939 over a draft of a play which White would eventually rewrite into prose as *The Candle in the Wind*. At the time Noël Coward wrote, "I think the play is exquisitely written as I would have expected but theatrically speaking I'm not so sure of it" (Noël Coward, letter to T. H. White, 27 January 1939, in diary 1939-1940, folder 1, box 8, MS-4494, HRC). Alan Lerner records that Coward came to the opening night performance of *Camelot* which White also attended, so it is likely that the meeting that White records in his diary took place there (Lerner 1978, 211).

¹⁰² Burton claimed that Taylor's appearance reminded him of a cow. (Richard Burton, letter to T. H. White. 15 Nov. 1961, in diary volume 21, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University [Cambridge].)

¹⁰³ T. H. White, diary volume 19, 31 Dec. 1960, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge). White insists that he felt little or no true pleasure in his trip to New York, in spite of the success, the famous acquaintances, and the food.

¹⁰⁴ Dawn Arlott, letter to T. H. White, 14 July 1960, in diary volume 18, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

¹⁰⁵ T. H. White, diary volume 22, 29 June 1962, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

noticed that the medicine made him calmer during the day, but found that he woke in the middle of the night with what he described as a profound despondency.¹⁰⁶ He was producing little or no writing at all, aside from his diary, and even his enthusiasm for nature films and painting had faded. Of course, descriptions of his health and medications are of little critical value, but his serious and ongoing mental and physical illnesses may further serve to account for the lack of motivation and productivity during the final decade of his life.

¹⁰⁶ T. H. White, diary volume 18, 23 Oct. 1960, Queen's College Library, Cambridge University (Cambridge).

Conclusion

In 1958 Elizabeth Bowen recorded her thoughts on her generation, those writers who came of age in the '20s and '30s and lived through the Second World War. She wrote to her close friend William Plomer on the 6th of May 1958, "What an agreeable life we all had, seeing each other *without* being 'a group.' Perhaps ours was, is, the only non-groupy generation" (Bowen 1986, 209). Bowen might well have agreed that there existed groups *within* the larger generation – such as the leftist poets who came out of Cambridge in the late 1920s and who went on to cluster around Auden – but her analysis was true of White who, though he read widely and developed friendships with several of his contemporaries throughout his life, nevertheless remained apart and refused to become involved in any true coterie. Indeed, White tried on many literary identities throughout his working lifetime, and tended to imitate the literature in which he had the most interest at the time. His writing as a whole remains consistently outside of any one definable group, and across his lifetime his writing shifts between genres, subjects, and styles.

White spent much of his literary life imitating the fellow writers that he found interesting, engaging, or important. He built his life and his work around a series of scholars and figures who intrigued him. This tendency can make his work and his perspectives appear to vacillate and has previously made his output difficult to categorize. He moves between children's literature, satirical allegory, serious historical scholarship, and intensely nostalgic autobiographical diaries within a five-year period during the Second World War. This versatility is part of what makes *The Once and Future King* such a complex and layered narrative; the story shifts from a lighthearted portrait of the ideal childhood, to a story of romance and chivalry, to an incisive political discussion of war, and, finally, to a tragedy. Because factors like his literary circle, his

changing personal interests, and his political preoccupations gave shape to his literature, the author's major works are best understood when considered in relation to his biography.

One aspect of the author's creative life that the archives illuminate is the extreme creative importance of Ireland and the Second World War. The author's most important works of fiction were born out of this conflict in which he deliberately took no part. Without access to the archival material it might be argued that his physical removal from his generation's defining struggle damaged the author's creativity, or that by residing in Ireland he was somehow cut off from the world of imagination, literature, and scholarship. Instead the archives show us that Ireland's neutrality and his own self-imposed removal from the conflict accelerated his creativity and turned his work in new and unexpected directions. Far from being disengaged from the struggle, White remained intimately involved in the conflict no matter how he tried to avoid it in Mayo or Meath. *Mistress Masham's Repose* and *The Master* measured the limits and pitfalls of a fascist system and asked if there would ever be a way to create a perfect ruler for humanity. *The Once and Future King* sought for a peaceful system, or, possibly, the education of a more perfect, more enlightened ruler. The allegory of *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* discussed the futility of a type of imperialist government that tried to impose policy on an unwilling or unready society. *Mistress Masham's Repose* questioned whether any ruler, no matter how generous or well-tutored, could ever remain uncorrupted by power. *The Master* imagined the terror of weapons of mass destruction and questioned the morality and legitimacy of their existence.

White's work from before and during the Second World War displays some optimism and offers humanity a chance of redemption from what he viewed as the failures of modern, mechanized life. In *England Have My Bones* renewal is possible through a return to rural pastimes and skills, and in *The Once and Future King* the utopia

of King Arthur's Camelot is still achievable, if ultimately fleeting. Further, his epic seeks solutions to violence and war. After the Second World War, however, White felt deeply dissatisfied with the state of the world. In 1951, in a discarded passage intended for *The Goshawk*, he writes that his grandmother, when he was young, wrote a memoir of her life. In this memoir, he recalls, "The thing about it which impressed me most [. . .] was that her mother's coachman had only been able to eat meat once a week. This must have been in the 'hungry forties.' How dreadful! Well, it is 1951 now, after five or six years of the Socialist Surprise which is blackening everybody's horizons, and we are down to four ounces a week. In fact, we are back to great-grandma's coachman."¹ He saw the Labour government's policies as a decision to "[level] everybody downward even if we have not managed to level anybody up," and he felt that this decision meant the death of arts like falconry.² The books which he finished in the period after the War, even when they are light hearted, reveal this underlying pessimism. As we have seen, *Mistress Masham's Repose*, in spite of its whimsical subject matter, ends with a deeply ambiguous assessment of the human tendency to dominate and control, and *The Master* carries a grave anxiety about weapons of mass destruction, governmental power, and even education. His final, nonfiction books are deeply nostalgic and, unlike *England Have My Bones*, offer no possibility of redemption through emulation.

Nevertheless, the posthumous *America at Last*, published due to the efforts of David Garnett, contains some slivers of a new optimism. On a lecture tour across the United States, White began teaching again. It was his first teaching job in almost thirty years, and his talks on the emperor Hadrian, poetry, and the joys of learning were greeted with standing ovations by a new generation of young American students, much to the gratification of the aging author. He remained sober for the trip as a favor to Carol

¹ T. H. White, Notebook 5, 8 Feb. 1951, folder 9, box 11, MS-4494, HRC.

² Ibid.

Walton, his young secretary, although his health continued to deteriorate.³ In an interview years later she recalled, “The idea of America, before he went there, appalled him, he felt that everything was going to be fantastically vulgar. And yet he liked everything [. . .] there was something, even in the vulgarity, there, that he liked.”⁴

The author’s notes for his lecture on the emperor Hadrian, which Walton remembers was his least-requested talk, include several pages that are handwritten on stationery from a Washington D. C. hotel.⁵ He writes, “By the grace of God, I decided to find out a little about the greatest of your presidents, Thomas Jefferson.” He was “thrilled to bits” to find out that Jefferson was a “tall, athletic man of 6ft 2. Traveller + horseback rider. [. . .] He doubled the area of the U. S. A. by purchase, not by war. A scholar who could read Latin, Greek, French, Italian and Anglo-Saxon. He once tried Gaelic. A practical architect [. . .]. A universal genius and a practical man of his hand.”⁶ The reason White was thrilled was that he clearly saw parallels to the Roman emperor Hadrian, who he describes as “tall, very strong, well made, athletic, fond of hunting and plain food. First bearded Emperor.”⁷ Of the emperor’s interests, he writes, “Riding, walking, travel, [. . .] hunting (lion), reader of the classics, [. . .] singer and musician, [. . .] poet, [. . .] painter, sculptor, above all architect [. . .]. A universal genius. He could do as well as create and learn things.”⁸ Just as he did years earlier with Sassoon and Dunsany, this passage shows White once again seeking models for his interests, his behavior, and, perhaps, his legacy. Even in his final months he looked for figures to emulate and to

³ Walton’s father, a doctor, warned her that White might not live long enough to complete the trip, and indeed, he died only a few months after it ended.

⁴ Carol Stallings, interview by François Gallix, 15 July 1974, folder 4, box 23, MS-4494, HRC

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ T. H. White, “In Search of an Emperor,” no date, folder 4, box 7, MS-4494, HRC.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

admire. White himself was a tall, athletic man who wore a beard for all of his adult life. He loved hunting and learning the practical arts such as carpentry and falconry, and he, like Jefferson, had “once tried Gaelic.” It is consistent that both of these men were historical figures, and they were therefore removed from the degenerate time that White so deplored, and both were also powerful statesmen, who, at least according to White’s interpretation, advanced their countries’ interests peacefully. To the very end of his life White was still seeking inspiration and personal validation from historical and literary figures. In another short note on hotel stationery, White adds that Hadrian was “Emperor of the civilized world [. . .] A Hitler. A God.”⁹ Again he displays, as he did in the unpublished outline of *The Master*, his sympathy with a fascist government and his longing for a wise, scholarly, benevolent emperor who could compel humanity to live peacefully.

The previous biographical explorations of White’s work have ignored the impact of the context in which his literature was produced. The archives, however, make it clear that the circumstances of composition are vital in this author’s creative process. White has been neglected by many scholars, perhaps in part because his creative work jumps between genres and styles. This examination, supported by archival evidence, of the themes and preoccupations he maintained in spite of his stylistic experiments may encourage further scholars to explore other themes in his oeuvre and allow a fresh perspective on the complex intertextuality of his major works of fiction.

Appendix: A Chronology of White’s Creative Life

29 May 1906: White born in Bombay, India.

1915: White and his mother Constance White return to England, leaving his father in India.

1920: White goes to Cheltenham Preparatory School.

⁹ Ibid.

January 1923: White's mother and father divorce.

1925: White joins Queen's College, Cambridge.

1927: White is diagnosed with tuberculosis. Several of his professors at Cambridge raise money to send him to Italy to recover.

Spring 1928: White drafts *They Winter Abroad* while in Italy.

March 1929: Publishes *Loved Helen and other Poems*.

1929: Graduates Cambridge with a degree in English.

1930 – 1932: White works as an assistant master at St. David's school in Reigate.

1931: *Dead Mr. Nixon*, co-authored with Ronald McNair Scott.

1932 – 1936: White teaches English at Stowe School, Buckinghamshire.

1932: Gollancz publishes *Darkness at Pemberley* under the name T. H. White. Chatto and Windus publishes *First Lesson* and *They Winter Abroad* under the pseudonym James Ashton.

1933: White publishes *Farewell Victoria* with Collins.

March 1934 – March 1935: White keeps diaries describing his life hunting, flying airplanes, etc. in expectation of future publication (*England Have My Bones*).

1934: Collins publishes *Earth Stopped*.

1935: Collins publishes *Gone to Ground*, a sequel to *Earth Stopped*.

1936: *England Have My Bones* is published from White's diaries.

8 January 1936: White and David Garnett begin their regular correspondence.

April 1936: On the basis of profits from *England Have My Bones*, White hands in his resignation at Stowe and moves to a gamekeeper's cabin near the school.

Summer 1936: White attempts to train a goshawk, keeping notes for what will later become *The Goshawk*, but abandons the book when the hawk gets loose and flies away.

1938: Collins publishes *Burke's Steerage*.

June 1938: White learns from the American Book of the Month Club that they will select *The Sword in the Stone* if he alters several chapters. He begins the alterations.

August 1938: Collins publishes *The Sword in the Stone* in England and Putnam publishes the altered American edition in the United States. White meets with Sassoon

and Sir Sydney Cockerell. Cockerell shows White the Medieval manuscript that later becomes *The Book of Beasts*.

September 1938: During the Munich crisis, White writes to his friends, including Sydney Cockerell, Sassoon, and Garnett, asking if they can find him useful work in the war effort or if he should enlist.

November 1938: White finishes a draft of the play about King Arthur that he will later convert into prose for *The Candle in the Wind*.

22 February 1939: White travels to Ireland with David and Ray Garnett.

May 1939: White finishes a first draft of *The Witch in the Wood*. Disney purchases the movie rights to *The Sword in the Stone*.

June 1939: Collins asks for major rewrites on *The Witch in the Wood*.

October 1939: Publication of *The Witch in the Wood* by Putnam in the United States. White continues reworking it for publication in England, and also begins outlining the characters for *The Ill-Made Knight*.

December 1939 – February 1940: White makes a trip to Mayo and hears stories about the Inishkea islands and the *naomhóg*. He begins collecting folklore that will later become “Letter from a Goose Shooter” and *The Godstone and the Blackymor*.

24 March 1940: David Garnett’s wife Ray dies of breast cancer.

April 1940: Altered version of *The Witch in the Wood* published by Collins in England.

Autumn 1940: White begins working on redrafting *The Candle in the Wind* from a play into prose.

14 November 1940: White arrives at the idea for a fifth Arthur book (*The Book of Merlyn*) that would endeavor to solve the problem of war by examining biology, particularly ants.

Winter 1940: Publication of *The Ill-Made Knight* in the United States by Putnam.

Spring 1941: Publication of *The Ill-Made Knight* in England by Collins.

Autumn 1941: Having completed drafts of *The Candle in the Wind* and *The Book of Merlyn*, White begins another major rewrite of *The Witch in the Wood*, and transforms it into *The Queen of Air and Darkness*. The new version includes many Irish themes and references.

October 1941: White decides to return to England and join the war effort in order to make his now “anti-fascist” book (*The Once and Future King*) more legitimate. He quickly decides against it. White simultaneously begins outlining the book that would become *The Master* in his journals.

January 1942: Collins refuses to publish White's idea for a single volume including all five books of *The Once and Future King*. White begins the search for a different publisher.

Spring – Summer 1942: White joins the publisher Jonathan Cape. They are also unable to publish *The Once and Future King* as an omnibus. White abandons his Arthur books and instead focuses his efforts on the "The Insolence of Man," repurposing many of his ideas from *The Book of Merlyn*. White conducts many experiments on ants in and around Doolistown during this period.

1943: At some point during this year White begins *Mistress Masham's Repose*. The notebook which contains chapter drafts for this book also contain segments for *The Age of Scandal* and *The Scandalmonger*, indicating that he likely began them at around the same time.

Summer – Autumn 1943: White drafts *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*.

Winter 1943 – Spring 1944: White returns to work on the translation that would become *The Book of Beasts*.

25 November 1944: White's dog, Brownie, dies.

March 1945: White sends a completed draft *Mistress Masham's Repose* to David Garnett.

24 September 1945: White leaves Ireland and travels to Yorkshire to live in David Garnett's holiday cottage. The friendship between White and Garnett begins to unravel.

Autumn 1945 – Winter 1946: White works on *The Book of Beasts*.

1946: Jonathan Cape publishes *Mistress Masham's Repose*.

1947: Jonathan Cape publishes *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*. White's relationship with the McDonaghs ends.

Early 1947: White moves to Jersey in an effort to avoid taxes from the success of *Mistress Masham's Repose*.

June 1947: White buys a house on Alderney in the Channel Islands.

March 1949: Wren Howard, working for Jonathan Cape, discovers the discarded manuscript of *The Goshawk* while on a visit to Alderney.

June 1950: Jonathan Cape publishes *The Age of Scandal*.

1951: Jonathan Cape publishes *The Goshawk*.

1952: Jonathan Cape publishes *The Scandalmonger*, a sequel to *The Age of Scandal*.

December 1952: White's mother, Constance, dies.

1953: White begins to complain of leg problems in his letters.

1954: Jonathan Cape publishes *The Book of Beasts*.

January 1956: White sends David Garnett a letter about Garnett's *Aspects of Love* that destroys what remains of their friendship. Their correspondence essentially ceases.

20 March 1957: White begins revising *The Once and Future King* for publication.

1957: *The Master* published by Jonathan Cape.

1958: *The Once and Future King*, with the initial three books rewritten but without *The Book of Merlyn*, is published.

1959: *The Godstone and the Blackymor* published.

March 1959: White negotiates a contract with Lerner and Loewe for the musical that later becomes *Camelot*.

3 December 1960: *Camelot* opens on Broadway.

January 1964: White is found dead in his cabin on board of a ship off the coast of Greece. He is buried in Athens.

1977: The University of Texas Press publishes *The Book of Merlyn*.

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