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ECHOES OF THE GRAIL: THE ROLE OF THE FISHER KING MYTH IN ELIOT'S "THE WASTE LAND"

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ABSTRACT

The article explores parallels between Troyes' unfinished "Perceval, the Story of the Story of the Grail" and Eliot's "The Waste Land." The research begins with an overview of Perceval's encounter with the Fisher King, as well as his sighting of the Grail, as presented in Troyes' narrative. The article provides a detailed commentary on the significance of the "man with three staves" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") and illustrates how this tarot card can be interpreted in relation to the Fisher King. A proposition is made that this association is not misleading, as are many others from Eliot's endnotes, but is a valid representation of the Fisher King. A detailed examination of both the land of the Fisher King, as well as of the wasteland, depicted in Eliot's poem, is also conducted in parallel. The examination sheds light on some hitherto insufficiently explored correspondences between the two lands which highlights not only their visual comparability, but also their symbolic likeness. The article also shows how certain moments and elements from Perceval's account like: Perceval's failure to inquire about the Grail, the visual description of the Grail as well as Its symbolic weight, and Perceval's bewilderment when faced with the Grail have all been integrated within the framework of Eliot's poem. The present study also provides insight into the modern dimension of these allusions. A proposition is made in relation to the possibility of viewing the devastated lands of the Fisher King as comparable to the devastated lands of Europe as a result of war. In turn, Perceval's silence is interpreted as the disillusionment of the post-war world from spirituality and God as a result of the tragedy of the war. The article also devotes considerable attention to the polyphony in Eliot's poem, which problematizes the resonance of Perceval's voice, as well as of the echoes which proceed from his discourse, within the poem. An attempt is made not only to rationalize these voices in parallel with Perceval's voice, but also to show how Perceval's voice stands out against the polyphony that is deliberately created in the poem. Against the backdrop of the utter fragmentation and the lack of overarching narrative which is created in Eliot's poem, a proposition is made that it is Perceval's narrative, as well as his quest, that appear as unifying to the wastelanders. This unification is achieved through a myth, in particular

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a religious myth, which provides a potential solution for not only the problem of the disillusioned wastelanders, but also for their devastated land.

Keywords: *T.S. Eliot, Modernism, The Waste Land, Poetry, Chrétien de Troyes, Grail, Fisher King, Perceval.*

Before we begin to unravel the parallels between the Fisher King segment from Troyes's unfinished "Percival, The Story of the Holy Grail" and Eliot's "The Waste Land," let us first familiarize ourselves with Percival's own encounter with the Fisher King. Troyes writes that after riding down a steep slope, Percival arrives at a deep and fast flowing river. Unable to cross it, he rides along its banks and reaches a rocky cliff which directly faces the water. After surveying the river, Percival catches a glimpse of a boat. After drifting for some time, the vessel drops anchor in the middle of the stream. Once anchored, the man sitting on the bow casts his line in the water and begins to fish. Percival asks the fisherman if there is a bridge through which he could cross the river. The fisherman replies that there is neither a bridge, nor a boat big enough to carry him and his horse across the fast-flowing current. Realizing that nighttime will soon be upon him, Percival inquires about a place where he could stay and rest. The fisherman offers to host the knight and gives him direction to his house – a house "with rivers / and forests all around it" (Troyes, 1999, p. 96). After riding for some time and reaching the top of a cliff, Percival sees: "in a valley far below / (…) the top of a tower" (Troyes, 1999, p. 96). Upon catching a glimpse of it from the distance, Percival remarks that: "there was nothing / lovelier or better built" (Troyes, 1999, p. 96). After taking a moment to take in the view, Percival continues by saying that the tower: "was crafted of gray-brown stone / and ringed around with turrets" (Troyes, 1999, p. 96).

After passing through the lowered drawbridge and the opened gate, four servants greet Percival – two tend to his horse and two help him out of his armor. Percival is then draped in "a fresh, clean scarlet cloak" (Troyes, 1999, p. 98) and is escorted to the "Hall, / to meet the lord of the castle" (Troyes, 1999, p. 98). As Percival enters the great hall, he sees: "a handsome / knight with grizzled hair" (Troyes, 1999, p. 98), who is "seated on a bed, in the middle of the hall" (Troyes, 1999, p. 98). Upon gazing upon him, Percival notes that: "his head [is] covered by a hat / as dark as a blackberry, wrapped / like a turban in purple cloth. / And all his clothing was black. / He lay leaning on his elbow" (Troyes, 1999, p. 98). After Percival approaches him, he: "[greets] the boy, saying, / 'My friend, don't be offended / if I don't rise to give you / welcome, because I can't'" (Troyes, 1999, p. 99). Following Percival's salutation: "with a great effort / the knight sat up as far / as he could: 'Come closer, my friend: / Don't be afraid. Come sit / quietly at my side. It would make me / exceedingly happy'" (Troyes, 1999, p. 99).

As the two talk of Percival's journey during the feast, a servant enters the hall carrying a white lance. Upon gazing at the lancehead, Percival is able to see a "drop of blood / that rolled slowly down / from the iron point until / it reached the servant's hand" (Troyes, 1999, p. 101). Although amazed by what he sees, Percival remains silent and does not ask the

lord anything. After the servant with the white lance departs, two other servants enter the hall, carrying golden candleholders. With them a girl also enters the hall "holding / a grail-dish in both her hands" (Troyes, 1999, p. 102). Upon gazing at the grail, Percival speaks of how: "it glowed / with so great a light that the candles / suddenly seemed to grow dim / like the moon and stars when the sun appears in the sky" (Troyes, 1999, pp. 102-103). As he watches with amazement, Percival wishes to inquire "to whom / the grail was meant to be served" (Troyes, p. 103), yet does not do so, for he was warned by his master about talking too much. The grail was thus paraded before Percival back and forth, but the knight "did not know why / although he wished to know" (Troyes, 1999, p. 105). As the feast draws to a close, the host proposes that they should go to bed. He informs the knight that as: "I cannot walk, / so they'll have to carry me out" (Troyes, 1999, p. 106), while he could sleep in the hall if so, he wishes.

Upon waking in the morning, Percival is eager to ask the servants: "why the lance / dripped blood (was some sorrow involved?) / and why they'd borne the grail" (Troyes, 1999, p. 108), yet he could not find anyone to talk to. He thus rides through the surrounding woods in search of them. After riding for some time, Percival encounters a girl, who asks if he was "lodged / at the castle of the rich Fisher King" (Troyes, 1999, p. 111). After Percival confirms, she continues by saying that:

He was wounded in battle, and so badly
Hurt, so maimed, that without
Help he can't even walk.
A spear struck him right
Between the legs, and the pain
Is still so great that riding
A horse is impossible (Troyes, 1999, p. 111).

The girl also explains that fishing is the only form of entertainment that the wounded king has, thus he had his house built close to the water. Becoming even more inquisitive, the girl questions the knight if he had seen the bleeding lance and the grail. After Percival confirms that he has in fact seen them, she anxiously asks if he had "[asked] any of these people / where they were going with these things?" (Troyes, 1999, p. 113). Following the advice of his wise master, Percival informs her that he remained silent and did not ask any questions. In a distressed manner the girl informs Percival that:

For had you asked those questions
You could have completely cured
The good king of all his wounds:
He would have become entirely
Whole, and ruled as he should (Troyes, 1999, p. 114).

The response of the girl, who is also Perceval's cousin, reveals several important details about the Fisher King as well as his kingdom. First, she implies that the Fisher King's well-being is linked to the well-being of his Kingdom, in such an inextricable way that his illness

has become the illness of his Kingdom. Second, she reveals that the Fisher King's wound is not an individual wound; it also wounds his entire kingdom, in such a way that his entire land suffers, as do all his subjects. Raffel indicates that the wound between the legs of the Fisher King is "medieval circumlocution for castration" (Raffel, 1999, p. 299) which renders the King not only immobile but also sterile. The King's sterility is reflected in the barrenness of the land which Raffel compares to a wasteland (Raffel, 1999, p. 299). As consequence of Percival's hesitancy to inquire about the grail and the lance, the girl informs the knight that the King "will never be cured" (Troyes, 1999, p. 137) and thus he will "never be able to rule / his own lands" (Troyes, 1999, p. 137). His health will continue to deteriorate and as a result:

Ladies will lose
Their husbands, countries will be ruined,
Girls will have no guidance
And be forced to linger as orphans,
And a host of knights will die (Troyes, 1999, p. 148).

With this key moment from Troyes' story in mind, let us now turn our attention to Eliot's poem to see how particular elements from this narrative are integrated within the framework of "The Waste Land." Frey indicates that "although the Fisher King is never mentioned by name in 'The Waste Land,' he appears at least three times" (Frey, 2022). In her article, Frey points out that the first indication of the Fisher King's presence is derived from "The Burial of the Dead." More specifically, the segment of the poem which centers around Madame Sosostris, who pulls "the man with three staves" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") from her tarot deck (Frey, 2022). As all interpretations of "The Waste Land" which are related to a certain allusion, parallel, or borrowing on Eliot's behalf, Frey leads us to the endnotes of the poem (an inevitable step in this type of interpretation) in which Eliot states (in his typically elusive and oblique manner) that he associated the card with the Fisher King himself (Frey, 2022). In delineating further on the significance of the card, Frey directs us to the work of Creekmore, who writes the following of the card:

> The card shows the back of a man (…) looking out over the sea where there are ships (…). Beyond the sea is a *jagged range of mountains*. The man stands in *green vegetation interspersed with rocks*, and the three staves he holds are living boughs. The color of the water in this card is important because it looks like *desert sand*, while water is blue in all other cards in which it is shown. The ships' sails are full, but the vessels appear to be stranded in the desert (…) (Frey, 2022).

Even a surface level reading of the card's description is enough to arouse in our minds a parallel between certain visual and descriptive similarities that exist between the two texts. The imagery which is outlined in the card (the jagged mountain range, the rocks, and the desert sand) gives us reasonable ground to think that Eliot drew inspiration from the description of the Fisher King's desolate kingdom when depicting certain visual aspects of the land in his poem. We can even go so far as to say that Eliot quite openly invites us to

seek such a correspondence, both from the imagery presented in the tarot card, but also from the very title of Eliot's work. If we consider the title of Eliot's poem in relation to Percival's account, and if we draw a parallel between the imagery of the card and the landscape which Troyes' describes, we can perceive how the fate of the Fisher King's land resonates in "The Waste Land" – a desolate and waning plane, comparable to the arid and ailing lands of the Fisher King. One need not look further than "What the Thunder Said" to begin to see a parallel between the card's significance in relation to the waste depicted in the poem and the Fisher King deteriorated kingdom. The narrator from this part of Eliot's poem (for there are many other narrators) speaks of a vast waste which is utterly dry and arid. No trace of water can be found in this arid plane, only rocks and sand make up its desolate environment. The narrator's description of the waste is as follow:

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water (Eliot, "The Waste Land").

The lines that follow continue to build upon the dryness and sterility of the scene through a refrained yearning for water – a desire which is not satisfied at this point in the poem. Although, the narrator desperately wishes that "there were water / and no rock" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") and greatly longs for a sound other than "the cicada / and the dry grass singing" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"), ultimately his hopes are crushed as "there is no water" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") in the waste that surrounds him. If we deconstruct the card into its different elements, we will see how "the man with three staves" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") was not chosen at random by Eliot, but was purposefully selected so as to allude to Troyes' story. If we adhere to Creekmore's description of the card, we can clearly see how the jagged mountain range, upon which the man is gazing, is recreated in Eliot's poem through the image of rocky mountain range (as well as through the rocky landscape in general) which reinforces the portrayal of the land as desolate and dry. The fact that these mountains are without "spring" or "pool" reverberates the aridity and bareness of the Fisher King's kingdom. As these mountains are made up solely of rocks and sand, they highlight the utter lifelessness which afflicts the land – a land that has lost its fertility and life-giving ability. Like the lands of the Fisher King, the waste which stretches before the man depicted in the card, and by extension before the narrator, is barren, desolate, and above all lifeless. Like the Fisher King, who spends his day fishing and overlooking the river, so too does the card depict a man who gazes upon a body of water. If we connect the depiction of the Fisher King and that of the tarot card to the following fragment from "The Fire Sermon", the parallel becomes even more fascinating and significant: "I was fishing in the dull canal" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"). From Troyes' narrative we learn that the Fisher King has sustained a terrible injury which immobilizes him (see Troyes, 1999, p.106, line 3343-3344). Fishing thus becomes his only form of amusement. This is revealed in the following lines:

He was wounded in battle, and so badly
Hurt, so maimed, that without
Help he can't even walk.
A spear struck him right
Between the legs, and the pain
Is still so great that riding
A horse is impossible. And when
He needs to amuse himself
A bit, to rest and relax,
He has himself put in a boat
And sits in the bow, fishing,
And that's why he's called the Fisher
King. Fishing is his only
Distraction (Troyes, 1999, pp.111-112).

The similarity here is far too precise to be the result of chance. Both the tarot card and the fragment from "The Fire Sermon" depict a man, who is located near water (like the Fisher King). The fragment from "The Fire Sermon" introduces the echo of an "I", who, like the Fisher King, is fishing in an unspecified body of water. The stance of both the man from the tarot card and the one who is fishing in the canal also aligns them with the Fisher King from Troyes's narrative, as both appear passive, like the Fisher King himself. The man in the tarot card is surrounded by three staves. If we pay closer attention to the depiction of the card, we will be able to notice that the man is holding (or rather leaning for support) on one of the staves. The fact that he needs support to stand could be interpreted as an allusion to the Fisher King's own inability to stand on his own. The fact that the unnamed "I" from "The Fire Sermon" is fishing could also be interpreted as a reference towards the Fisher King, who "has himself put in a boat / and sits in the bow, fishing" (Troyes, 1999, pp.111-112). The canal itself, which the unnamed "I" refers to, could thus be an allusion to the stream in which the Fisher King fishes as "his only / distraction" (Troyes, 1999, pp.111-112) – this could possibly be the same river in which Percival first meets him. The similarities, however, do not end here. Creekmore indicates that the man (i.e., The Fisher King as per Eliot's instructions) is surrounded by green vegetation which is filled with rocks. This representation aligns with the "dry grass" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") and the rocky terrain which comprise the second half of the narrator's discourse. It seems reasonable to think that the presence of vegetation, regardless of how insignificant and partial it might be, can be interpreted as an indicator of the diseased state of the land (or of life in decline), an idea that is further reinforced by the presence of the stones in Eliot's landscape. The lifelessness of the land is further developed through the image of the dry grass, more specifically through the adjective "dry", which indicates both the land's lack of vitality, but also its deterioration. Much like the sterile land of the Fisher King this land has also fallen into decay. This notion is reinforced even further through the imagery of the desert sand which aligns well with the image of the sandy road which the narrator from Eliot's poem speaks of. This arid and desolate environment once more transports us to the barren lands of the Fisher King. What is more, the fact that the body of water in the card is

painted in yellow and is thus made to look like a desert, solidifies the overarching sense of desolation, aridity, and bareness which dominate the land of the Fisher King – a land which, it would seem, has been recreated, projected, or even transported, in Eliot's poem.

Even when we read Eliot's poem on a surface level, we can discern that the motifs of desolation, aridity, and lifelessness, which are central to "The Waste Land," could indeed be inspired by the Fisher King's desolate kingdom. One need not look farther than the first part of Eliot's poem, "The Burial of the Dead," to begin to draw such parallels. The narrator describes the land as a "dead land" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") with "little life" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"). Even though the first semantically unified fragment of Eliot's poem unfolds during springtime (April) – the time of the year which is associated with rebirth and renewal – no plants sprout and no new leaves flower in the narrator's discourse. Unable to support the renewal of life, April thus "breeds" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") life. Traditionally, we consider spring as a serene season which naturally renews life in a tranquil way. The use of the verb "breeds" is important as it implies the violent and abnormal way in which life is forced (or attempted to be forced) into existence. This unnatural and abnormal reanimation does not produce vegetation which is rich in life, but spawns twisted and deformed growths, described by the narrator as "dull roots" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") and "dried tubers" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"). Only desolation prevails in this "stony rubbish" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"), as is indicated by the landscape of "dead trees" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"), "dry stones" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"), and the lack of water which the narrator(s) repeatedly highlight(s).

The narrator is moved by the cruelty of such a violent reanimation (much like Perceval is moved by the kingdom's suffering). The act itself stirs and mixes "memory and desire" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") in him which is to be symbolically covered "in forgetful snow" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"). The use of the word "memory," and the fact that this "memory" is forgotten, is important as it could lead us to a particular point in Troyes' story in which "Percival had lost his memory to such a degree that he no longer remembered God" (Bryant, 1982, p. xiii). What is even more intriguing is the fact that Percival strays from his path in April (or during springtime) – the same month and season in which the opening lines of "The Waste Land" takes place. Bryant writes that: "April and May passed by five times – that's five whole years – without him entering a church or worshipping God or His cross" (Bryant, 1982, p. xiii). It is not by mere coincidence that memory mixes with desire in this scene, for this particular desire could be interpreted as an allusion to Percival's profound *desire* to inquire about the lance and the Grail during his stay at the castle of the Fisher King – a *memory* that for him is also symbolically covered with "forgetful snow," to such an extent that it fades from his mind, until his uncle reminds him of it. Upon remembering (the moment when memory and desire mix within him), Perceval says the following:

Once I was at the Fisher King's

Castle, and I saw- without
Any question-the bleeding lance,
And seeing that drop of blood
On the bright white of its point,
I never asked what or why.
There are no amends I can make.
And when I saw a holy
Grail, I had no idea
For whom it was meant, and said nothing,
And ever since I've felt
Such sadness that I wished to die (Troyes, 1999, pp. 201-202).

It seems possible to speculate that Percival's craving to ask "what or why" (Troyes, 1999, p.201) is precisely the feeling which is reverberated through the desire of the unnamed narrator at this point in Eliot's poem – a desire which is now recalled only in memory. For both Percival and the narrator from the opening lines of "The Burial of the Dead" this memory becomes a repository of not only unfulfilled desires (his failure to inquire about the lance and the Grail), but also of missed opportunity (his inability to act as the lance and the Grail are paraded before him).

Percival's inaction and his failure to raise the much-desired question are implied in the "Burial of the Dead" in another way as well. In the first part of Eliot's poem, the unnamed narrator speaks of a moment in which "my eyes failed" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"). During this moment, the narrator explains that he was "neither / living nor dead, and I knew nothing" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"). This condition, he later explains, was brought about by his "looking into the heart of light, the silence" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"). A comparable scene unfolds during the procession of the Grail during Percival's stay in the castle of the Fisher King. It can be argued that the narrator's dazed sight can be paralleled with Percival's own bewilderment when he sees the Grail for the first time. The scene in which Perceval sees the Grail for the first time is described in the following lines:

(…) it glowed
With so great a light that the candles
Suddenly seemed to grow dim
Like the moon and stars when the sun
Appears in the sky (Troyes, 1999, pp. 102-103).

The inability of the narrator from Eliot's poem to behold the Grail could be compared to Perceval's own inability to face the incredible radiance with which the Grail shines. Although both the narrator from Eliot's poem and Perceval manage to get at least a vague glimpse of the object being paraded in front of them, to the point that one understands it as a wellspring (or heart) of light and the other as a source of unimaginable light, which in its own way is again a parallel, they fail to understand what the full meaning and significance of this object is. For this reason, Perceval's eyes also fail him in a sense, as he, like the narrator from Eliot's poem, fails to comprehend the object as the Grail. As a result of the

strong light that emanates from the Grail, both characters (Perceval and the narrator at this point in Eliot's poem) become stupefied. On the one hand, the obvious interpretation of this condition would be related to the inability of Perceval, as well as of the narrator from Eliot's poem, to perceive opportunity, hence their failed eyesight, but also of their inability to act when opportunity presents itself, hence their stupefied state in the face of said opportunity. This is precisely one of the main motifs in Troyes' story, a motif that haunts Perceval almost to the abrupt end of the story. This is a motif that teaches us that it is not enough for someone to be physically present at a certain place and a time to be able to seize an opportunity. Recognizing said opportunity is one thing, but seizing it requires much more – it requires action, something that both the narrator from Eliot's poem and Percival, himself, lack at this point. They both fail to act, as they both remain silent when the Grail is presented before. In other words, their silence becomes their inaction and their failed eyesight – their blindness to opportunity. This will be precisely the basis of Perceval's quest, who sets out to grow out of his state of youthful inexperience (through various heroic deeds) in order to be able to save the Fisher King, as well as the land, by asking the right question at the right place. Here it is worthwhile to mention a secondary interpretation of the condition of both characters which is elaborated further in a later segment of this analysis. Although Perceval's mother brought him up in Christian values, we must not forget that he is still very young when he comes to the castle of the Fisher King. It is his youth and inexperience that prevents him from seeing the Grail as a Grail, but as something that he himself cannot fully comprehend. It is very important to highlight, however, what type of inexperience we are referring to. While as a young knight Perceval suffers from many deficits that are to be overcome in favor of the purest of qualities, the aspect that hinders him the most in this situation – the same thing that prevents his eyes from seeing truly and his mind from comprehending fully – is his spiritual inexperience. In other words, we can make the assumption that he has not matured enough spiritually to be able to see what he needs to see, and in seeing it, see it as the right thing. What is more, his mind is also not spiritually mature enough to be able to act in the right way and ask the right question when the right thing is presented before him. Such are the eyes of the narrator from Eliot's poem as well, who although gazing upon the light and its source, never truly recognizes it; such is his mind as well, for it too falls silent. The relationship between light and sight, and between light and mind, are motifs that are often present in texts that deal with religious symbolism. The astute reader will at once recall the process through which Dante's vision and mind pass through in the development of the "Divine Comedy," so that he may see more clearly and understand better the scenes which unfold before his eyes in "Paradise." Such is the case with Troyes' story. We can make the assumption that both Perceval and the narrator from Eliot's poem are not spiritually mature enough to be able to see what they need to see, as well as to fully understand it.

Yet, what do they ultimately see? It is appropriate to devote some time to the description of the Grail, as this is the next parallel between the two texts. Percival describes the Grail as emitting a strong radiance which shines so bright that it outshines the candles which light up the Hall of the Fisher King. When the Grail is brought in the room for the first

time, Percival speaks of how the flames from the candles appear to grow dimmer and dimmer, as they are eclipsed by the brightness of the Grail (see Troyes, 1999, pp. 102-103). It is plausible to make the proposition that the "heart of light" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") could be interpreted as a functional symbol for the Grail in Eliot's poem for the following reasons. First, like the lights which emanates from the Grail in Perceval's account, this light is also extremely intense. In Eliot's text, this is implied by the fact that this light shines directly from its center, or heart, as he himself puts it. As it shines directly from its source, it appears in its strongest and most intense form. Second, like Perceval's account, this light source occupies a central position in the narrator's discourse. The central position of this light is indicated through the word "heart." It is the use of this word that makes the parallel truly sound, for it is through it that the centrality of this light is established. The Grail's light truly does become the heart of both scenes, as it literally is the focal point of attention for both Perceval and the narrator from Eliot's poem. It seems possible, then, that the light which Eliot presents us with in the image of the "heart of light" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") is not there as some type of a descriptive stroke in the composition of the scene, nor is it there as a decorative ornament for the overall artistic effect of the poem; but, is meant to draw the discerning reader's attention, as well as his imagination, to its focal position in this scene. It is also possible to argue that this light dominates what both Perceval and the narrator from Eliot's poem can perceive; so much so that it consumes everything else in the scene. For this reason, the Grail's light is not only central, or at the heart of both scenes, it becomes the sole center of attention for both Perceval and the narrator from Eliot's poem. It captivates him to such an extent that it becomes the heart of his description.

On a purely descriptive level, we could accept the proposition that the "heart of light" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") into which Eliot's narrator gazes could be a functional equivalent, or at least a comparable image on a descriptive level, for the Grail of Troyes' story. But, is it also so on a symbolic level? Nordenhaug points out that in describing the Grail, Troyes utilizes a poetical metaphor which compares its radiance to that of the sun which is significant (see Nordenhaug, p.34). Although, "it is difficult to be certain as to what Chretien's Grail symbolizes" (Nordenhaug, 1962, pp. 45-46) we can safely analyze its significance from a Christian perspective, as "it was an object which lent itself readily to the medieval mind for a Christian interpretation" (Nordenhaug, 1962, p.3). This could in fact be the case, as "the medieval concept of symbolism was different from our present idea about it, in that everything in the medieval universe could be symbolically made to point towards God" (Nordenhaug, 1962, p. 47). It is precisely the medieval universe and mind of Troyes' that leads Nordenhaug to think that "many things about the Grail's nature and its mysteries point toward God" (Nordenhaug, 1962, p.47). According to the author, the fact that the Grail shines with such powerful radiance that manages to outshine all other light sources in the room could be compared to God's description in the Bible as the source of all light in Creation through which all life is sustained. Thus, the strong radiance of the Grail could also be indicative of its life-sustaining properties (see Nordenhaug, 1962, p.47). Alternatively, the Grail could also be interpreted as a symbol for the indescribable beauty of Heaven (hence the inability of the narrator to speak and Percival's silence) and the

unimaginable radiance which fills Heaven with life-sustaining powers (see Nordenhaug, 1962, p.47).

Yet, when the narrator gazes into "the heart of light" (i.e., The Grail) (Eliot, "The Waste Land"), only "silence" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") follows his vision. It is intriguing to ponder as to why Eliot chose exactly *silence* to be the supplementary component to this vision. It seems plausible to speculate that the silence that follows after the narrator's vision of the "heart of light" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") could be another fascinating juncture between Eliot's poem and Troyes' text. The parallel between the two texts is formed on the basis of an allusion which Eliot makes to Percival's own silence when he sees the Grail paraded before him. Although the young knight wishes to ask his host about his vision and of the nature of the Grail, he does not do so, as he was warned by his master about being overly inquisitive. Troyes speaks of this in the following passage:

But kept himself from asking
What it might mean, for he'd never
Forgotten-as his master at arms
Had warned him, over and over
He was not to talk too much.
To question his host or his servants
Might well be vulgar or rude,
And so he held his tongue (Troyes, 1999, p.102).

Troyes highlights Percival's silence two more times in the scene which unfolds in the Fisher King's Great Hall. When the Grail is paraded before the young knight, he watches with awe, yet does not raise any questions. Troyes describes this episode in the following passage:

And the boy watched them, not daring
To ask why or to whom
This grail was meant to be served,
For his heart was always aware
Of his wise old master's warnings.
But I fear his silence may hurt him,
For I've often heard it said
That talking too little can do
As much damage as talking too much.
Yet, for better or worse,
He never said a word (Troyes, 1999, p.103).

When The Grail is presented before Percival once more, he marvels at its wondrous beauty, but does not say anything. Although he wishes to inquire as to what this vision means and why it is presented before him, he remains silent. Troyes describes this in the following passage:

But again the boy was silent,

Not asking to whom it was served.
And again it was thoughts of his master
Which kept him from speaking, for he never
Forgot how clearly he'd been warned
To beware of too much talking.
And so he stayed silent too long.
With every course, the grail
Was borne back and forth,
Uncovered, plainly visible,
And still he did not know why.
Although he wished to know (Troyes, 1999, p.105).

When we approach the possible correspondence between Percival's silence and that of the narrator with the acquired knowledge from these segments from Troyes' narrative, we can see how such a parallel can indeed be plausible. The narrator's paralysis, indicated in Eliot's poem by him falling silent, could be considered as an allusion to all of the instances in which Percival does not inquire about the nature of the Grail and of his vision. The fact that this state of inaction is brought about after the narrator gazes into the "the heart of light" (i.e., The Grail) further brings the two texts together, as Percival's silence occurs after he sees The Grail for the first time.

The silence of both the narrator from Eliot's poem and Percival is significant, as "the asking about the Grail brings the attainment of its kingdom which means life and prosperity. The failure to ask brings desolation and death. These are precisely the Judeo-Christian concepts of the consequences awaiting man who has the alternative to either accept or reject God" (Nordenhaug, 1962, p. 47). If we accept Nordenhaug's hypothesis that the Grail can be viewed as a symbolic representation of God (this is, in fact, the closest representation of Him that a mortal like Percival could conceive) and if we adhere to the Biblical portrayal of light as not only a source of spiritual vitality and healing, but also of God's life-sustaining powers, what, then, can be said of the silence which follows after such a boon is presented before both characters? It seems reasonable to think that by remaining silent, both Perceval and the narrator at this point in Eliot's poem indirectly distance themselves from Divine intercession which could heal the King and restore his lands. The silence, regardless if it is caused by ignorance or an inability to act, can be interpreted as a withdrawal from the Divine, or an inability to realize the Divine. Regardless of what the cause of the silence might be, it indicates a moment in which both the narrator and Percival fail to answer the Grail's call (i.e., God) and attain Its healing and life-sustaining powers. As a result, both Perceval and the narrator deprive the land of the opportunity (at least at this point) to be healed through the rejuvenating and life-sustaining powers of the Grail (God). By extension, the silence of both characters also eliminates the prospect of renewal, restoration, and healing of not only the Fisher King, but also of his desolate kingdom; which through their inaction (possibly a metaphor for the inability to let God in their hearts) will remain barren, until the question of the Grail is answered. These are the Judeo-Christian

consequences, to allude to the comment of Nordenhaug made earlier in this paragraph, with which the narrator and Percival have to live with, as a result of their free will.

In Eliot's poem, the silence of the narrator also manages to take up a modern dimension which still remains reminiscent of Percival's own silence. In order to fully understand the significance of the narrator's silence, we must first explain what this modern dimension is. It can be argued that the narrator's silence could proceed as a reaction towards the aftermath of the First World War. Readers and critics of Eliot's poetry are well aware that "The Waste Land" is traditionally considered as a meditation on the "disillusionment and the bareness of the post-war generation" (Gaur & Mudgil, 2023, p. 66). Rhee highlights the words of Harold Bloom, who labels "The Waste Land" as a "testament to the disillusionment of a generation, exposition on the manifest despair and spiritual bankruptcy of the years after World War I – a dead land of spiritual famine and drought" (Rhee, 2012, pp. 6-7). When viewed in relation to the tragedy of the war and its devastating aftermath, the silence of the narrator could be indicative of modern man's inability to connect with the Divine and to put their faith in the prospect of healing and restoring life through the life-sustaining powers contained therein. This proposition is supported by Eliot himself, who claimed that "conventional religious belief and morality have been compromised by the atrocities of war and the moral decay of civilization" (Gaur & Mudgil, 2023, p. 70). As a result of these atrocities "the people and the country are dead and this dead culture has lost all the things that would keep it going" (Gaur & Mudgil, 2023, p. 68) - including their faith in God and salvation. This observation is also supported by Rhee, who claims that:

> During the Modern age [...] people believed in the idea of progress and prosperity. However, they realized that their optimism and belief in security and peace did not protect them from the horrifying events of the war. Because they have been disappointed by the futility and impotence of the worldview and attitudes that their society relied on, people in modern Europe were disillusioned and confused in shock at the aftermath of the catastrophic war (Rhee, 2012, p.8).

It is precisely this disillusionment, Rhee points out, that has made it impossible for modern man to hold the beliefs of bygone days (Rhee, 2012, p.8). One of these beliefs being God and the Divine.

When viewed from the perspective of the disillusioned wastelander, who has lost faith in religion and in God (see, Fuaday, 2022, p. 6654) it does not seem too far-fetched to claim that the narrator fails to act when faced with the Grail, as he is so profoundly disillusioned by the war, that he sees no point in seeking divine intercession as a means of restoration and healing. The narrator's silence becomes representative of modernity's inability to imagine a deliverance for their land and their lives that involves God or some kind of Heavenly intervention or intercession. Perhaps, this is why we do not have one focal point of narration as in Troyes' narrative, rather we have a collective voice (comprised of a kaleidoscope of different voices and echoes) that conjointly remains silent, at least for a moment, as a sign for the shared disillusionment from the "heart of light" (Eliot, "The

Waste Land"). Could it be that modern man had become so skeptical of the Divine, had become so disconnected from his faith, and become so utterly discouraged in God, that when the Divine boon is presented, and the prospect of healing the people and restoring the land is laid bare, the Grail is dismissed out of a disbelief in God – a God, Who had turned His back on humanity's suffering and allowed such a tragedy to befall the land? This hypothesis could be worthwhile, as the atrocities of the First World War dramatically shattered humanity's beliefs about the sanctity of human life, which was vitiated on the battlefield. What is more, the unimaginable suffering of the soldiers on the front also proved incompatible with the concept of an all-loving and caring God. The inability of modern man to equate the suffering and horror of war with God provoked a tremendous rupture between the souls and minds of humanity, who have been so defiled by what happened on the battlefields that they simply could not imagine divine intervention or intercession as a means of restoration and healing. For this reason, "the speaker's listless attitude (...) communicates a sense of tiredness" (Rhee, 2012, p.9), hence the silence that follows after the Grail is presented before the wastelander. This could be interpreted as humanity's collective exhaustion from harboring hopes in the Divine as a means of salvation.

Yet the loss of faith is not something exclusive to the narrator (or the collective voice) from Eliot's poem, but is also present in Percival's story. As Raffel explains:

> Although his mother instructs him on what the church is, tells him to pray, and gives him a brief account of Christian beliefs, and although he does indeed pray for her health, Perceval eventually forgets God and does not enter a church for five years until the Good Friday on which he meets the penitents, one of whom again gives him a summary of the tenets of Christian faith. When last heard of in the romance, Perceval has learned again about Christ's death and has received the Eucharist from his uncle. One cannot help thinking that if he was to come again to the Grail castle and this time ask the questions, his correct conduct would have resulted from his spiritual progress (Raffel, 1999, p.300)

An equally intriguing parallel could also be derived from the fact that "the disjointed and barren world" (Rhee, 2012, p.7) which is depicted in "The Waste Land" has been traditionally interpreted as "a metaphor for modern Europe" (Rhee, 2012, p.7). According to Rhee, "The Waste Land" is fundamentally a poem about Europe. The connection between the poem and the historical context of the modern era reveals that the poem metaphorically illustrates the actual condition of modern Europe: the barren and lifeless waste land is a metaphor of Europe after World War I" (Rhee, 2012, p.6). Rhee points out that "rather than discussing the condition of modern Europe in factual terms, Eliot uses the poetic, the allusive, and the obscure to depict an image of the physical desolation of the warn-torn society and also communicate a sense of spiritual disillusionment and despair" (Rhee, 2012, p.7) which is often times contained in the "dry, barren, and lifeless images" (Rhee, 2012, p.7) which are depicted in the poem.

It seems plausible to speculate that the "dead land of spiritual famine and drought" (Rhee, 2012, p.7), which was Europe after the end of the First World War, could be interpreted as yet another revealing metaphor for the lands of the Fisher King, as well as for the fate of their Wounded Ruler. Booth's interpretation supports such a proposing, as in "Reading the Waste Land from Bottom Up" she writes the following:

> *From Ritual to Romance* reverberates through Eliot's *Waste Land* in a number of ways, relating to both large structural issues and small descriptive details—what Eliot calls the 'plan' and the 'incidental symbolism' of his poem. Structurally, by directing us to Weston's book, Eliot situates his bleak vision of postwar London in a rich and ancient narrative context, a context in which the crisis of a troubled land becomes the object of a quest (as in the Grail legends) [...] (Booth, 2015, pp. 24-25).

When viewed from the prism of this parallel, it does not seem too far-fetched to consider a wounded Europe as a metaphor for the Fisher King himself. It also does not appear implausible to consider the devastated lands of Europe as a projection of the desolate lands of the Fisher King. Just as the Fisher King had suffered a terrible wound that desolated his lands, so too did Europe, quite literally, sustain a terrible wound as a result of the war efforts. This wound left both Europe and the Fisher King in an ailing state. As a result of the war efforts, entire stretches of land were obliterated, farmland was decimated, forests were devastated, and villages and cities were destroyed. As a result of this, Europe had quite literally become a desolate land, akin to the kingdom of the Fisher King. Similar to the subjects of the Fisher King, who must face the hardships of their wasteland and live with the harsh fate of their Ruler, so did the people of Europe had to live and deal with the hardships and wounds which Europe had suffered – wounds which were quite literally imprinted on the land. To consider the people of Europe in relation to the subjects of the Fisher King does not appear a far-fetched proposition, as Eliot's poem "strongly reveals those fragmented lives of persons who suffered the consequences of the first world war through metaphors and fictitious characters" (Fuady, 2022, p. 6652) which could indeed proceed from the Fisher King from Troyes' narrative. Similar to the Fisher King's fate, Europe too would have to wait until a healing force is bestowed upon the land, or a boon of redemption is presented, so that the land may be made whole and the ruler's wound - healed.

An intriguing parallel could also be drawn from another aspect of Troyes' narrative. In "The Waste Land," the unknown narrator at this point in the poem (for there are many other narrators), makes mention of "my cousin" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") which has conventionally been interpreted (as per Eliot's instructions in his endnotes) as an allusion to the memoirs of the Austrian Countess Marie Larisch, which recall her youthful experiences in the Habsburg court. Objectively, however, Eliot's endnotes are traditionally considered as being not only deliberately misleading, but also quite evasive. As such, they give us the opportunity to question whether this small fragment, which appears in the scene

with Marie, which is itself also a fragment, could be interpreted in another way as well. This analysis does not wish to propose that the whole of this scene can be associated with a complementary narrative structure from Troyes' story, but that it could be possible that the reference which the narrator makes to his cousin, may perhaps function as yet another likely conjunction between the two texts. Although Troyes does not outline Percival's kinship in detail, Raffel speaks of this relationship in the afterword of his transition. There he writes the following:

> Perceval's father has died of grief after his two older sons were killed on the same day, but his mother's kin play key roles in the romance. The Grail King is her brother and the Fisher King is her nephew, which means that the Fisher King is Perceval's cousin and the Grail King his uncle, although Chretien does not spell out the relationships" (Raffel, 1999, p. 297).

The fact that the Fisher King is Percival's cousin is further supported by Nordenhaug, who points us to that part of the story, where Percival's uncle informs him that: "the one they serve with the Grail is his brother, therefore Perceval's uncle who is the brother also of his mother, The Fisher King is his son, therefore Perceval's cousin" (Nordenhaug, 1962, p. 36). If we adhere to the perspective that the arid plane which the narrator describes complements The Fisher King's desolate Kingdom, and if accept the proposition that "the heart of light" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") is an allusion to The Grail, and that the silence of the narrator is comparable to that of Percival, then it does not appear far-fetched to speculate that Eliot could have encrypted the familial ties between these characters from Troyes's work in his own poem. Given the intruding proximity between these elements, it could be argued that the cousin which the narrator mentions is none other than The Fisher King himself. Yet, if he is the Fisher King, who is the narrator? Whose is the voice that not only manages to work its way past the multitude of other voices, but also to arouse in minds certain fragmentary glimpses from Percival's encounter with the Fisher King? Could it be Percival?

In Eliot's poem, there is no one central figure around which the poem unfolds. Rather than one focal point of narration, Eliot presents us with a kaleidoscope of narrators, whose accounts all unfold in fragments (varying in length and coherency). This lack of a centralized figure, through whose perspective the narrative unfolds, problematizes us viewing him as a Percival. Admittedly, however, amidst the multitude of voices and noises which comprise "The Waste Land," we can trace and distinguish a voice (amongst the many others), which reverberates certain fragmentary glimpses from Percival's encounter with the Fisher King. Although these fragments are far too partial and insufficient to be deemed monumental (see Booth, 2015, p.25), they do have the capacity to transport us, or to arouse in our mind, certain incomplete glimpses from Percival's quest. When viewed together, however, these fragments have a tendency to coalesce into a single voice which, though manifested at different stages in the development of the poem, is clear and distinct in a way that makes him easily identifiable as emanating from the work of Troyes. This

study does not intend to propose the idea that this echo is as monumental as Perceval's voice, for it is not; but it does want to advance the idea that when we take into account all the moments in which this one voice reverberates a given moment from Troyes's work, and consider them as a single thread, then these small shards, these tiny and fragmentary echoes, become the building blocks that could make up a large monument. For this reason, this research does not fully agree with Booth's proposition that:

> One major difference between the waste lands in those legends and the wasted land of Eliot's poem is that in Eliot's poem, the characters of Fisher King and questing knight do not announce themselves as monumental. These figures appear, but fleetingly, and without creating any strong sense that they might be involved in the solution to big problems. They don't seem to be at the center of the action (Booth, 2015, p.25).

To some extent Booth's claim can even be considered as somewhat superficial, as there is no real possibility and no actual prospect for the Fisher King and for the Questing Knight to announce themselves as monumental in "The Waste Land" amidst the deliberate cacophony that resonates throughout the poem. This deliberate and meticulous arrangement of layers upon layers of different utterances, sounds, and clamor, prohibits any one voice, or any one figure, from becoming monumental. Admittedly, fragmentary echoes from different voices can be heard and perceived for brief intervals of time, yet these voices are immediately engulfed and consumed by other noises in a ceaseless kaleidoscope of cacophony. This perfect mixture of polyphonic chaos prevents any figure, voice, noise, or echo of standing out, of becoming fully prominent, or of becoming central; as, each voice and each figure is drowned and swept away in a ceaseless maelstrom of dissonance. Thus, there is no real possibility for these two figures to be at the center of attention as this storm of dissonance has no real center – in it, everyone and everything is equally swept away by cacophonic chaos.

This dissonance also indicates that there is no one central figure, no one central voice, and no one central narrative that has full meaning and prominence alone. What we can observe as a phenomenon in "The Waste Land" is the presence of multiple fragmentary narratives and voices, which reflect the profound fragmentation and disillusionment of modernity from traditional sources of collective meaning (myths, faith, and even God). This disintegration of society's collective views and beliefs is reflected in Eliot's poem through the multitude of voices that fail to communicate with each other. It is these voices that testify to the fact that Eliot's wastelander no longer belongs to a collective identity, but has disintegrated into separate and isolated beliefs, views, perspectives, and thoughts that fail to construct a common, collective, narrative, or a shared belief system. The many such perspectives that echo throughout Eliot's poem build layers upon layers of noise that is devoid of true meaning. Although Eliot's poem is saturated, even deliberately oversaturated, by such reverberations that attempt to verbalize a truthfulness of their own, their constant talking over one another prevents any meaning or truthfulness from coming

to light. But this is also intentional, as there is no one truth or one unified meaning that can unite the disintegrated collective consciousness of the wastelander. Within this polyphonic chaos, any source of meaning, even that which comes from the myth of The Fisher King and the Questing Knight is reduced to fragments or isolated echoes; in other words, their full symbolic meaning is defused, in such a way as to illustrate the idea that for the wastelander, these sources of thought can no longer fully provide guidance and edification – they, like the multitude of other such sources of meaning, have lost their full significance for the wastelander, and are therefore only fragments that can convey half-truths that are ultimately consumed by the multitude of other half-truths in this ocean of polyphonic chaos.

In "The Waste Land and Ash Wednesday" (1987), Hinchliffe highlights the words of I.A. Richards, who also scrutinized Eliot's poem for the "absence of any 'coherent intellectual thread' on which items of the poem could be strung" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p. 14). What is more, Hinchliffe continues: "Richards felt that the search for such a thread was pointless, since the unity of the poem was in the 'accord, contrast, and interaction of their emotional effects' and not in any intellectual scheme" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p. 14). This scheme was also quite problematic as it was based on a multitude of allusions and voices which are intertwined in a seemingly incomprehensible framework. In this framework, as Hinchliffe indicates, readers must not only deal with layers upon layers of meaning, as well as different perspectives and beliefs, that are presented in an almost simultaneous manner; but also attempt to make an evaluation on the centrality of some of these positions (see, Hinchliffe, 1987, p. 15). Hinchliffe states that: "It is this realization of everything happening at once that can lead to chaos or, if the artist can find the pattern, unity" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p. 17).

In this respect, Eliot's "The Waste Land" is somewhat of a paradox. On the one hand, throughout the course of the poem, Eliot presents us with a multitude of disjointed voices all attempting to verbalize certain disjunct and partial perspectives that they cannot collectively agree upon. This is to be expected, as:

> The Waste Land looks at the dreariness of great modern cities, places of desolation but also anarchy and doubt. In the post-war world of shattered institutions, strained nerves and bankrupt ideals, life no longer seems 'serious or coherent'" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p. 15).

On the other hand, however, the poem nudges us toward the idea that collective meaning will not come to light until these voices begin to think together and are able to collectively articulate a collective truth (no matter how partial it may be). Until these voices come together and make sense of a collective narrative, or are able to express a single vision (regardless of how partial), they will forever remain captive to their fragmented chaos. Eliot, however, does not provide the wastelander with a clear path to follow in the search for collective meaning, nor does he build a collective monument around which the

wastelander can gather as a unified and common symbol of significance or direction. What he implies as an idea in "The Waste Land" is that the wastelanders must build this monument themselves, out of the many perspectives, visions, and beliefs that are scattered throughout the poem. These perspectives, when sifted in the right way, will serve as the building blocks through which the wastelanders can construct their monuments of collective meaning. Only when the wastelanders find the right fragments will they be able to build the right monuments to provide instruction and direction for healing.

If we look carefully into the maelstrom of chaos, we can perceive that Eliot exposes certain echoes in such a way as to show the reader that amidst the polyphonic chaos of the poem, there are voices that not only manage to resonate with one another, but also manage to complement one another in some way; that is, there are voices, or more precisely certain constructs that manage to connect and form meaningful associations with one another. In other words, there appears to be a pattern behind the chaos which Eliot creates in the poem. Yet, what could this pattern be? Hinchliffe highlights Matthiessen's claim that "Eliot's pattern was anthropology, myth and Jessie Weston" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p.17) which offers support to the proposition that the Fisher King myth can be viewed as one of the monuments of meaning which are constructed in the poem. Perhaps, this could be the reason why Eliot alludes to Troyes' work so systematically and with such precision. Through the series of fragments from Percival's encounter with the Fisher King that are scattered throughout the poem, Eliot is likely prompting his readers to "register surface similarities" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p.17), or to construct "chains of likeness" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p.19) among the different echoes that proceed from this myth; which run like a thread throughout the whole poem - from beginning to end. It is only when the material of this myth is sifted, however, out of the other such "(...) structures of parallel myths" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p.17) (for there are many more such parallels of meaning which form their own structure) and when certain images, symbols, and scenes are, as Hinchliffe puts it, judiciously selected from this myth can unity and meaning be found (see,Hinchliffe, 1987, p.18). Thus, as Hinchliffe indicates "the most radical (but simple) treatment of this tangle is (...) offered by Charles Moorman, who solves the problem of unity with the following formula: 'unity=myth'" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p.19).

Moorman's equation is important, not because it is correct, but because it points us where to look for some trace, however small and fragmentary, of unity. His claim, however, is flawed because he assumes, from the outset, that Eliot presents some kind of unity in the poem, or that the poem builds a collective monument of meaning around which the wastelander can rally, and which provides him with guidance, or direction, for overcoming his fallen condition. This, however, is not so. Since Eliot's poem presents a multitude of different viewpoints, a variety of different perspectives, a number of different beliefs and visions, both contemporary and archaic, it does not seem plausible to claim that such a simple equation could place all voices under a common denominator; but, neither should it. What the discerning reader can and should do is to place under a common denominator only those voices that can truly perform some meaningful function among themselves, and

these are not all voices; but only those that manage in some meaningful way to complement, elaborate, or build upon one another. These are precisely the voices that can create structures, as Hinchliffe put it, or chains, that convey some degree of meaning among themselves; in other words, these are the structures and chains, whose elements have a common denominators. For this reason, the current study proposes a revision of Moorman's formula from "unity = myth" to "*one* source of unity and meaning = *one* particular myth," whose elements could be added together and brought under a common denominator. It is important to emphasize the word "*one*" within this equation, as a universal source of unity and meaning does not exist in Eliot's "Waste Land." For it is much more appropriate to view the poem as a source of multiple monuments of meaning and unity, even too many, which in their own autonomous way could help the wastelander, as long as he can build and understand them, to overcome his fallen state.

This approach, however, is not without its critics. Hinchliffe points out that:

> It is a commonplace that the interpretation of The Waste Land lies in analyzing the use of myth in the poem, and critics have frequently complained that this is merely to impose a mechanical unity on the poem: Eliot puts a scene from myth or literature close to a scene from modern life, and then leaves us to work out the effect of the comparison (Hinchliffe, 1987, p.19).

Mechanical unity aside, Hinchliffe also raises the question of whether an organic unity could exist in Eliot's poem. Given the multitude of voices and perspectives that resonate through the poem, such a claim could not be entirely true, he points out in his analysis, since, referring us to Moorman's words, the poem is in its own a hodgepodge (see, Hinchliffe, 1987, p.19). But when we consider the fact that most of the elements in this mixture come from myths, the most meaningfully unified being from the Arthurian cycle, he concludes that it is there that we might look for the common unifier to which the whole mixture boils down to (see Hinchliffe, 1987, p.19). According to him "all the images and the comparisons boil down to one image and one comparison: the basic metaphor involves the waste land of Arthurian myth" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p.19).

This statement, however, is not entirely true. On the one hand, we can indeed maintain that in "The Waste Land," Eliot puts an emphasis on the Arthurian cycle. To be more specific, he devotes considerable attention to one legend from this cycle, namely that of Percival and his quest for the Holy Grail. This is evident in the repeating character of these allusions, but also in the way he weaves them within the framework of his own poem. These references, unlike many others that appear at a certain point in the poem's development and are never called upon again afterwards, are present in "The Waste Land" from its beginning to its end. Quite literally, the poem ends with the Fisher King, "fishing, with the arid plane behind me" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"). For this reason, we really must, at least to some extent, agree with Hinchliffe's proposition that the image of "The Waste Land" might indeed be comparable to the desolate kingdom of the Fisher King of Arthurian legend. By considering the analyses of these allusions, as well as their possible symbolic

interpretations that have been proposed in this article, we can indeed, at least with some degree of confidence, make the assumption that Eliot's wasteland can be the wasteland of the Fisher King. Yet, to claim that this is the basic metaphor, is not entirely accurate, as this is only *one* of two such metaphors; the latter involves viewing "The Waste Land", as well as the wasteland which is portrayed in the poem, as comparable to Hell, as imagined by Dante.

Although this is not a work which aims to shed light on those moments in "The Waste Land" in which Eliot draws parallels with Dante's "Inferno," it is appropriate to make some sort of comment relating to Dante's presence in Eliot's poem since, like Troyes, he is there from the beginning. Such is the nature of Eliot's poetry that whenever a critic takes the arduous path of analyzing or commenting on anything by Eliot, no matter where he decides to start, or which path he decides to take, the conscious critic will always end up in the same place at some point in his/her research. This is the place where all the roads in Eliot's poetry converge. This is the place and moment in which Dante stands. And if the conscious researcher is to make some sort of meaningful advancement in his work, he must face and pay homage to Dante. Similar to the echoes from Troyes that Eliot weaves into his poem, in such a way that these seemingly separate and isolated reverberations manage to form, when considered together, apart from the cacophony of the multitude of other reverberations that resonate throughout the poem, a thread of meaningfully connected elements, the echoes he integrates from Dante also possess this property. When we consider those echoes that come from Dante's "Inferno," isolating them from the general noise that is created in the poem, we can perceive that, like those echoes that originate from Perceval and his encounter with the Fisher King, these reverberations also manage to converse with each other, in such a way that they complement, elaborate, or build one meaningful unit together – that of the "Inferno." Beginning with his allusion to the "unreal city," (Eliot, "The Waste Land") which critics have traditionally interpreted as an allusion to the city of Dis, moving to Eliot's allusions to "Canto III" and "Canto IV" with which he portrays the ordinary lives of the London clerks as comparable to that of hell, and arriving at his allusion to "Canto XXXII" in "What the Thunder Said" with which he conveys humanity as not only fallen, but also imprisoned within the icy waters of Cocytus. Like the echoes of Troyes, these allusions are all too deliberate; their very exposition in the poem's own contexts, and the specific way in which they are incorporated into the poem's structure, indicate that they are the product of strenuous planning and selection. Indeed, we might refer to it as selection, for Eliot has chosen such moments and elements which are relevant to the wastelander and his condition in some way.

It is these voices, which are highlighted by Eliot for a reason (through their various resonances at different stages of the poem's development), and which manage to complement one another amidst all the noise, that provide the wastelanders with the building blocks for the construction of two pivotal monuments, through which two fundamental messages about the condition of the wastelanders are asserted. On the one hand, through the multitude of fragmentary echoes and voices which emanate from Dante's

"Inferno," and which manage to converse in such a way amid the other noises that, when taken together, and considered as a single thread, manage to create the monument of "Inferno" itself, which serves as a testament for the fallen state of the wastelander, whose life has become comparable to that of Hell. On the other hand, by means of the echoes and voices which resonate from Troyes' narrative, and which also manage to commune with each other, in such a way that when they are considered together, as one voice, they succeed in constructing the monument of "Percival, The Story of the Grail," which symbolizes the possibility of healing through a quest.

Regardless of the fact that "Chretien was never able to tell the final outcome of Perceval's quest" (Nordenhaug, 1962, p. 45), there is a common consensus that "whether he achieved his goal or not it is Perceval's striving, his quest which is important" (Nordenhaug, 1962, p. 45). Yet, what is Percival's quest? Nordenhaug explains that the quest of the knight has two sides which run in parallel to one another. On the one hand, "the main external object of the quest was the restoration to health and vigor of a suffering king whose infirmity (...) had a disastrous effect upon his kingdom" (Nordenhaug, 1962, p.45). On the other hand, however, the quest becomes a quest for God. The latter is further elaborated upon in the following passage:

> Because knowledge of the Grail was the object of his quest, the Grail in some measure became symbolic of the quest. In that his quest was unsuccessful until he had repented for his sins and found God again, the quest is not just a search for the meaning of the Grail, but also a search for God, although Perceval did not realize this right away. Hence the Grail being a symbol of his quest, and the quest being a quest for God, the Grail has become a symbol of Perceval's quest for God (Nordenhaug, 1962, pp. 45-46).

In relation to this, Hinchcliffe remarks that: "few readers at the time saw 'The Waste Land' as a religious poem; most with some justice saw it as the disillusionment of a generation that was lost" (Hinchcliffe, 1987, p. 43). Nonetheless, "the idea of God abandoning man, of pilgrimage from imperfection to perfection, of the world as a waste land as a prerequisite to experiencing it in faith" (Hinchcliffe, 1987, p.46), were reflected in Eliot's poetry as early as 1922 – the year he published "The Waste Land." Within the framework of "The Waste Land" we can also perceive that there is an active search for God as well as for salvation, but this search is presented in a rather indirect, evasive, and even roundabout way – a standard for Eliot's poetry. That is to say, there is no direct quest within Eliot's poem that is clearly traceable and episodic, as there is in Troyes, but there is a seeking that we might compare with that of Perceval from Troyes' story. This search is expressed in the quest for, as well as the longing for water, which is a leading motif in Eliot's poem. Although Eliot never explicitly states this, like Troyes, water, as it would seem, becomes a possible redemptive force that could have the ability to heal not only the desolate kingdom of the Fisher King, but also the devastated land from Eliot's poem as well. In order to attempt to throw some light on the symbolic meaning and function of water in these two

texts and how that function is related to the prospect of healing, we must begin our quest for answers in the endnotes to Eliot's poem, where he states that:

> Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: From Ritual to Romance (Cambridge). Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest of the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble (Eliot, "Endnotes").

"Chapter Three" of Weston's book appears highly revealing in this regard, as it precisely deals with the relationship between water and land – a relationship which is reflected in both Troyes' work, but also that of Eliot. In her book, Weston explains that that the archetype behind the construct of the arid land in decline, and of the yearning for water and its healing properties is inspired by the:

> actual bodily needs and requirements of a mainly agricultural population, i.e., of a people that depend upon the fruits of the earth for their subsistence, and to whom the regular and ordered sequence of the processes of Nature was a vital necessity. Their hymns and prayers, and, as we have strong reason to suppose, their dramatic ritual, were devised for the main purpose of obtaining from the gods of their worship that which was essential to ensure their well-being and the fertility of their land—warmth, sunshine, above all, sufficient water (Weston, 1997, pp.21-22).

Weston highlights that "the boon of rain and abundant water" (Weston, 1977, p.22) is "precisely the feat by which the Grail heroes, Gawain and Perceval, rejoiced the hearts of a suffering folk, i.e., the restoration of the rivers to their channels, the 'Freeing of the Waters'" (Weston, 1977, p. 22). Weston also states that the suffering of the folk (and of the land) is also tied to the Fisher King's health:

> We have already seen that the personality of the King, the nature of the disability under which he is suffering, and the reflex effect exercised upon his folk and his land, correspond, in a most striking manner, to the intimate relation at one time held to exist between the ruler and his land; a relation mainly dependent upon the identification of the King with the Divine principle of Life and Fertility" (Weston, 1977, p.69).

As water is traditionally associated with cleansing, purification, and renewal, the search, or yearning for it symbolize two things. On the one hand, water becomes a symbol for the Grail itself – the thing that will wash away the sickness from the land and restore, through its life-giving and life-sustaining power, the health of the King and the fertility of his kingdom. On the other hand, the yearning and active search for water symbolizes Perceval's seeking, or questing, for the Grail itself – the Godly boon that will heal, unify, and restore.

Yet, water is not only presented as a coveted boon in "The Waste Land," its portrayal in Troyes's story also depicts it as something that is vital to the well-being of the Fisher King as well as to his land. In other words, the way water is presented in Troyes' narrative is just as symbolic as it is in Eliot's poem. In particular, the way the Fisher King is situated in relation to water is the thing that piques the interest of the researcher. In his story, Troyes depicts the Fisher King as positioned next to water, which we could argue holds symbolic meaning. We know that water, as a Biblical symbol, has the ability to heal, cure, restore, renew, and purify – all things that the Fisher King is in great need of. In this regard, his position is quite ironic and paradoxical. On the one hand, he himself is situated next to water, the thing that has the ability and the capacity to heal and purify him, on the other, he remains unhealed and uncured. We can make the assumption that salvation or redemption is within his reach, yet it remains unreachable and unattainable without the right intercession on someone's behalf. The other thing to pay attention to when addressing the symbolism of water is the fact that the Fisher King is fishing. Here it is only proper to raise the question of whether he is really trying to catch fish, or is the act of fishing a metaphor for something else? If we interpret his fishing literally, we must agree with Troyes' story that this is the King's only pastime – it is the only thing that distracts him from his otherwise dire state. If we accept that the catching of fish has a metaphorical meaning, then the act of fishing, if we adhere to its biblical interpretation, could be indicative of the "outreach and efforts needed to bring people to faith in Christ" (David, 2014). When we consider his fishing from this perspective, we could assume that the act itself is indicative of his own efforts to draw closer to God. Be that as it may, the fact is that he is near the water, but not in contact with it, which could be interpreted as a spiritual void that must be bridged before healing and purification can be initiated. This, in turn, creates a visual paradox, as the text depicts an abundance of water that exists in parallel with a desolate Kingdom that is in desperate need of water. We must not forget that this is also the case with "The Waste Land." As much as we comment on the aridity and barrenness that has engulfed the land, we must not forget that the Thames flows through Eliot's desolate plain. Despite the fact that the river is presented as "broken" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") and polluted by "empty bottles, sandwich papers, / silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") – it is still a source of water that the wastelanders crave, and that the land desperately needs. Like the water that flows through the kingdom of the Fisher King, this water does not heal the land – it is there, within reach, but is also unattainable until the right intercession (just like the Grail). As in the case of the Fisher King, the land is trapped in a paradox – healing is so close, but remains unattainable until Europe does not bridge the same gap that stands before the Fisher King and his water. Although water is physically present in both narratives, its healing properties are not attainable for the wastelander and for the Fisher King which becomes symbolic for a spiritual void that must be overcome if the land and ruler are to be healed.

This void is to be mastered by "the most perfect of [Knights]" (Newell, 1897, p. 117), who himself, suffers from a spiritual deficit which in time he overcomes. Here again we find

another point of correspondence between Eliot's poem and Troyes' story. From Troyes's narrative, we learn that Perceval's spiritual deficiency is the fact that he forgets about God during his wanderings. "Perceval eventually forgets God and does not enter a church for five years until the Good Friday on which he meets the penitents, one of whom again gives him a summary of the tenets of Christian faith" (Raffel, 1999, p.300). From the section of this study that briefly summarizes and sketches the spiritual landscape of Eliot's poem, we know that there has been ample research and analysis done to support the idea that one of the aims of the poem is to portray the spiritual desolation of the wastelander, whose faith in God has been displaced by alienation and disillusionment. For this reason, we can make the proposition that, in this respect, we can place both Perceval and the wastelanders from Eliot's poem under a common denominator – that of their lacking faith. But that's where the similarities, at least those that are evident on a surface level, end. The parallel between the wastelanders and Perceval is problematized by the fact that there is no monumental figure, like Perceval, who sets out on a quest in Eliot's poem. We have mentioned before that there are multiple voices which resonate across the space of "The Waste Land." Each of these voices seeks, offers, shares, speaks, some individual fragment. That is, within the framework of the poem, there is no one thing being sought, no one truth being offered, no one purpose being shared, and no one common vehicle of meaning being expressed and accepted by all. It seems that everyone is looking, longing, and thinking about something individual. This seems so at least on a surface level reading of Eliot's poem. The reality, however, seems to be somewhat different. The critical reader and the discerning critic will perceive a moment in which the voices of the wastelanders transition from the individual "I" to the collective "we," which signals, regardless of how fleeting, that there is something, some purpose, that can unite the voices of the wastelanders into a common voice. This voice is most prominent precisely in the moments when the wastelanders seek and express their yearning for water (the Grail). It is precisely in the wastelanders quest for water do they align themselves most prominently with Perceval, so much so that the quest for water becomes the quest for the Grail. Yet, this only occurs when the wastelanders transition from the fragmentary "I" to the collective and unified "we" which highlights the presence of a shared vision. We need not forget that Perceval's quest is not individual. That is, he does not set out to find the Grail for any need of his own. He seeks the Grail to heal both the Fisher King and his *entire* Kingdom. In other words, his quest is the quest of the entire Kingdom. It is this idea that is expressed in Eliot's poem. The moment that the wastelanders begin to speak of "we," they overcome the fragmentation of the individual in favor of the common desire for healing. It is in this common ideal that they come closest to Perceval, not because of any heroic feat, but because of their shared spiritual longing to be healed together, in one way, through one object, and one quest – the Grail.

Yet, the question is, can we talk about the presence of a quest in Eliot's poem in the full sense of the word? The simple answer is no, because the elements that Eliot provides us with are too few, too fragmentary, and too partial for us to be able to assemble a complete and meaningful timeline that encompasses the development of such a quest. In other words, we cannot, at least not in the same clear and sequential manner, trace the development of

Percival's quest, as it is presented in the writing of Troyes. This, however, does not prevent us from discerning that certain fragmentary glimpses from this quest have been projected onto "The Waste Land" for a specific reason. It is safe to assume that there is premeditated reasoning behind these fragments, as when we consider them as a linear thread, we can arrange them in such a way so that they can follow the course of Percival's narrative. The encounter with the Fisher King, the depiction of the devastated land, the sighting of the Grail, the silence of the Questing Knight, just to name a few, all contribute to the idea that Percival's quest is, indeed, projected onto "The Waste Land." Regardless of the fact these episodes are not presented in the same sequential and consecutive manner as they are depicted in Troyes' writing, we can fairly easily arrange Eliot's allusions to "Perceval, the Story of the Grail" in such a way so as to fit Troyes's chronology. Although, Percival's questing in "The Waste Land" is not as fully articulated as it is in Troyes's writing, it gives us just enough to understand that "the poem summarizes the Grail legend: not in the usual order but retaining all the principal incidents adapted to a modern setting" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p. 62). This approach is at the heart of Eliot's mythical method in which conventional narrative structures are replaced by mythological constructs (see, Cuba and Schuchard, 2014, p.479) as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Cuba and Schuchard, 2014, p.479). As such, "The Waste Land", as Freer and Bell indicate, shows clear signs that it is dependent on not only on the myth of the Grail, but also on the motif of journeying and questing for redemption through the Holy Grail (see, Freer & Bell, 2016, p. 2).

Yet, is the Grail recovered and is the land cured in Eliot's poem? Whether inspired by the open ending of Troyes' story or not, the fact is that Eliot's "Waste Land" also ends in a comparable cliffhanger. Essentially, we do not know for certain, like in Troyes's narrative, whether the Grail is recovered, the ruler healed, and the land restored. These questions are never truly answered neither by the ending of Eliot's poem, nor by the ending of "Perceval, the Story of the Grail." What we do know for certain is that the moment of healing and rejuvenation will come through water. Yet water, or in the case of Eliot's poem, rain, does not fall upon the wasteland. It is essential that we highlight this fact, as some critics believe that "The Waste Land" is healed and unity is restored; however, this is not the case. Nowhere in the poem's last part does Eliot indicate, or even attempt to imply that the purifying rain makes contact with the land and thus heals and purifies it. What the poem's last part does indicate, however, and this is presented rather directly and without any form or manner of covert masquerading on Eliot's part, is the fact that there is an anticipation for rain. In other words, there are sure signs and indicators that rain will come and fall upon the devastated land, yet this time is not now. We know that the moment of purification is not now, as the poem's last part quite directly indicates that the "damp gust / [is] bringing rain" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") and that the "limp leaves / waited for rain" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") and that the whole land is "humped in silence" (Eliot, "The Waste Land") in anticipation for this rain; yet, this rain is still not here. Although the clouds have gathered in the distance and although they appear to carry rain, this rain is still far away and must

still travel a certain distance before it reaches the land. Regardless of the fact that it is within reach, the land and its people must wait before the rain reaches them. Until that moment comes, if it comes at all – for we do not know for certain, the land will remain devastated and the King's wound will remain unhealed. Booth supports this argument by writing the following: "thunder implies rain, and rain is what the voices in the poem have been wishing for: rain, fertility, rebirth, springtime. Yet there is no sense of relief here. Instead, there is anxiety, obsessive reiteration, and a lack of narrative thread" (Booth, 2015, p. 197). This is quite directly portrayed in the poem's last part which again conjures up the image of the Fisher King, who is "[sitting] upon the shore / fishing, with the arid plane behind [him]" (Eliot, "The Waste Land"). The fact that he is sitting indicates that his wound persists, the fact that his land is still arid indicates that the land has not yet been healed. Like Troyes' ending, we never really witness the healing of the waste land and the healing of the King. Whether this is intentional or not we cannot say, but the similarities are far too many and far too precise to be deemed a coincidence.

What we do know for certain is the fact that in both texts we have a King with a problem and "the problem of the king has spilled over into his kingdom: the wasted king produces a waste land" (Booth, 2015, p.23). In both texts "the waste land is eventually diagnosed as the symptom of the problem rather than the problem itself; the source of the national trauma really resides in the body of one man, whether that man is the Fisher King" (Booth, 2015, p.25) or in Europe as a whole. Regardless of how we consider to embody this trauma, "the central element that holds true [...] is the fact that the problem of the king produces a problem of the land" (Booth, 2015, p.24) which is to be overcome by a quest which is supposed to culminate with the "asking [of] a question – about the king and his problem, or about the relationship between the two, or about the Grail, or about the situation in general" (Booth, 2015, p.24). What is more, we also know that both works build the anticipation of asking the question which, as Booth indicates, "[is the] the cure; the restoration of the king and his land occur simultaneously when the knight does the asking properly" (Booth, 2015, p.24). Like Troyes' narrative this question is never revealed to have been properly answered in Eliot's poem as well. Like in Percival's account there is an anticipation of this question, but it is never actually verbalized; and, as the question is never verbalized, the quest is never actually completed in both "The Waste Land" and in Troyes' "Percival." Booth proposes that the very meaning of the word quest implies this. "Quest and question derive from a common Latin root meaning to inquire, the quest is completed by the articulation of questions: etymologically, questions constitute both the itinerary and the destination of a quest" (Booth, 2015, p. 24). As the question is never articulated properly (at the right time and the tight place) the quest is never actually completed. This is the reason why the wasteland is not restored at the end of Eliot's poem, but rather ends without the land and king being healed, like in Troyes' unfinished "Perceval, the Story of the Grail." What is interesting is that while both texts end with open endings, they do something very important in the course of these endings – they communicate the means of restoration. In other words, even though in the original, Perceval fails to heal the King and his land, he at least understands what he needs to do to make it

happen. By the end of the narrative, he has acquired the necessary knowledge, not only of his personality defects, but also of the correct course of action that would ensure his success should such an opportunity arise again. The same thing happens in Eliot's "The Waste Land." Although the land is not healed from the rain (the Grail), and the wastelanders yearning for water is not satisfied (i.e., the quest is not yet realized), they at least understand that they must overcome their own spiritual deficiencies (like Perceval himself) before the rain can pour down and heal the land. Yet this will only happen when the wastelanders realize that both the path to the Grail, as well as that to the coveted water, all lead to God (as is also the case with Troyes' story). Fuady is thus shrewd in observing that "The Waste Land is [...] a call to modern persons back into the world of faith in God" (Fuady, 2022, p. 6654), a call which Eliot realized through Arthurian myth, which according to Hinchliffe, was the perfect objective correlative for curing the wasteland (see Hinchliffe, 1987, p.19) – a cure, which according to Hinchliffe, "is religious in nature" (Hinchliffe, 1987, p.19).

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