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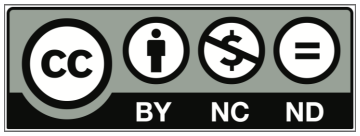

Some *Blunt Talk* about *The Once and Future King*

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"I feel," declares Sir Patrick Stewart, in the role of journalist Walter Blunt in *Blunt Talk*, "like King Arthur!"

The comparison is apt, as the ghostly presence of King Arthur throughout the television show, in particular the first season,[1] is persistent and deliberate: a recurring link to medievalism that provides a vocabulary for exploration of the show's more poignant underlying themes of war, trauma, storytelling both personal and cultural, and the return of the past via newfound engagement with the quest narrative. At the surface level, *Blunt Talk* offers audiences a dark comedy about a newsroom, an aging British broadcast journalist who has moved to America, and the character's search for a cause and a quest to give his life purpose. However, alongside the humor, the show presents a world in which Stewart's character Walter Blunt must cope with nostalgia, paranoia, loneliness, and ongoing post-traumatic stress, elements made explicit in scenes that include meetings with his therapist and flashbacks to his Royal Marines service, during which he—while neither a coward or incompetent—was forced to make on-the-spot decisions about which men to save and which to let die. And Walter Blunt copes in part via medievalism. Specifically, Walter finds an anchor in the medievalism of T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*, which haunts the show like a tangible reminder of warfare, history, and the costs of heroism.

Blunt Talk, created by showrunner Jonathan Ames and executive-produced by Seth MacFarlane, ran for two seasons (2015-16) on the Starz network, and starred Stewart as Walter Blunt, former major in the Royal Marines and now a journalist and host of an impassioned cable news-opinion show; the series also starred Adrian Scarborough as Harry Chandler, Walter's former lance-corporal and present-day friend, valet, and general handler. Stewart was nominated for a Golden Globe for Best Actor in a Television Series—Musical or Comedy in 2016 for his portrayal of Walter Blunt, and the show remains available to new audiences on DVD and on-demand viewing. Though relatively short-lived, and with mixed-to-good reviews—praise for the satire and the cast, especially Stewart, appears alongside critique of sometimes over-the-top vulgar comedy—*Blunt Talk* is intriguing to scholars of medievalism on several levels, from character names to metatextual self-awareness to the centrality of T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*

[1] Themes of medievalism and in particular Arthurian motifs continue to be central to the show's second and final season, which will be briefly mentioned; however, at the time of writing, only season one was readily available on DVD and on-demand viewing. The majority of examples, for ease of access, are therefore drawn from season one.

as a repeated motif and comfort narrative for the show's protagonist. Brian Attebery categorizes White's text as a coming-of-age story, about a hero (not necessarily always a child) who embarks on the "gradual assumption of his proper powers and place in society;"[2] Walter Blunt, as he searches for his place and seeks comfort after trauma, uses medieval fantasy as his guide. Attebery also notes that a feature of White's fantasy medievalism involves the disruption of the linear experience of time, observing that fantasy can explore other modes of interaction with time, bringing disparate moments and temporalities together.[3] In *Blunt Talk*, encounters with *The Once and Future King* connect multiple temporal moments: White's imagined Middle Ages; White's own moment of textual production; moments from the character Walter Blunt's present and past, as viewed in flashbacks and dreams; and his interaction with his future, in the form of his children. These moments of connection ultimately provide both structure and renewal as Walter attempts to process his own war-related trauma and self-doubt. Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl read *The Once and Future King* as a form of fantasy medievalism "heavily influenced by world politics and wars;"[4] similarly, Donald L. Hoffman argues that White's novel, in the context of a second World War and disillusionment with oppressive power structures, is a vision of what to strive for and what to avoid.[5] *Blunt Talk*'s Walter Blunt, journalist and war veteran, embodies these themes—and literally anchors himself via White's novel, finding an emotional affinity to White's characters, albeit in a 2016 setting. Like White's characters, Blunt deals with the aftermath of war and what he views as the present-day callousness of the world by turning to medievalism and to the exploration of other lives and points of view. In finding an affective connection to the past, he also finds a way to communicate with friends and family in the present, and consequently discovers hope for continuing on.

The show's title includes a pun on Walter Blunt's name—*Blunt Talk*—and is from the beginning a deliberate act of metatextual medievalism, chosen to reference the character Sir Walter Blunt of William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1*, which was Stewart's first role with the Royal Shakespeare Company,[6] and medievalism forms a core component of the show throughout both seasons. *Blunt Talk* offers a satire of—to list some of the many elements—newsrooms, journalism as a profession, "Britishness" and "Americanness," and heroic quests, as reflected in season one's environmentalist crusaders and seasons two's increasingly quixotic and desperate efforts to prove a drought-causing conspiracy

[2] Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 88.
[3] Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 58.
[4] Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl, *Medievalisms: Making the Past in the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 52.
[5] Donald L. Hoffman, "Arthur, Popular Culture, and World War II," in *King Arthur in Popular Culture*, ed. Elizabeth S. Sklar and Donald L. Hoffman (Jefferson: McFarland, 2002), 45-58, at 50.
[6] Stewart has a long history of playing medieval and specifically Arthurian characters as well, in both film and television roles; the medievalism is thus present in the audience's metatextual awareness from the moment he first appears on screen.

among Los Angeles water companies. However, alongside the satire, *Blunt Talk* also provides complex and thoughtful interrogations of fantasy and storytelling as a coping mechanism, post-traumatic stress, medievalism, and a desire for/rupture with the past—in particular a medieval-influenced past—which the show suggests is both always an imagined construction and a potential building-block for future reconstruction of self and community.

Many academic studies of medievalism have explored the influence of the Middle Ages on the fantasy genre; as Pugh and Wiesl comment, "reimaginings of the Middle Ages are essentially fantasies built upon fantasies,"[7] including medieval authors' own imagined conceptions as well as later reinterpretations. Fantasy, however, is made up of "fuzzy sets," as Brian Attebery famously described the genre,[8] and fantastic medievalism may take many forms, opening up various questions: what about medievalisms that are not (overtly, at least) easily incorporated into the realm of the "fantastic"? In what ways does the medieval enter into and engage with other genres—romance fiction, for instance, or comedy, or trauma narratives? Rob Gossedge, though focusing primarily on the Disney adaptation of White's *The Sword in the Stone*, references Alan Lupack's description of *The Once and Future King* as "a book that grows up,"[9] one that moves from educational pedagogical text to a pensive examination of the relationship between Might and Right, and ultimately to a search for an antidote to war.[10] White's medievalism, for Gossedge, thus becomes a response to war and the trauma it inflicts: a text about the resultant desire not simply for peace but to ensure that war does not continue to cause harm. The choice of White's text specifically as a core narrative for *Blunt Talk*, then, emphasizes multiple themes: the importance of pedagogy, communication, and learning; the question of what defines Right; and the suggestion that shared (sometimes bittersweet) experience and storytelling might provide a hope for finding that antidote, or a first step to it. Walter Blunt's story—through his talk show, journalistic quests, and reading of *The Once and Future King* with those he loves—centers that affective shared experience as a means of finding comfort.

Blunt Talk, with its complicated and self-aware relationship to past trauma at both the personal and cultural levels, functions as a recent example of popular-media medievalism that bridges genres—comedy, drama, talk-show parody, trauma narrative, and, importantly, also the liminal fantasy. The show's positioning of White's fantasy novel as a

[7] Pugh and Weisl, *Medievalisms*, 3.
[8] Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, term used throughout.
[9] Rob Gossedge, "*The Sword in the Stone*: American *Translatio* and Disney's Antimedievalism," in *The Disney Middle Ages*, ed. Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 115-131, 121. See also Alan Lupack, "*The Once and Future King*: The Book That Grows Up," *Arthuriana* 11, no. 3 (2001): 103-114.
[10] Gossedge, "Antimedievalism," 118.

central referent constantly reinforces the theme of the fantastic; additionally, scenes of heightened or unstable or dream "realities" frequently intrude, whether via intoxication or manifestations of Walter's PTSD or nightmares. Walter's attempts to find a quest, to chase a good story, and to "perform" in the created space of his fictional news show are reminiscent of Don Quixote. The show thus aligns neatly with Farah Mendlesohn's definition of "liminal fantasy" as involving "the anxiety and the continued maintenance and the *irresolution* [sic] of the fantastic," often involving disorientation, absurdism, possibility, and irony.[11] As a show that's overtly aware of its own medieval and early modernism from its inception through two full seasons, *Blunt Talk* is worth examining: what is medievalism doing when it plays with and incorporates multiple genres? What is it doing when it combines contemporary newsroom satire with an apparently deeply sincere centering of a core text of Arthurian adaptation?

Louise D'Arcens observes that existing scholarship on affect and emotion in medievalism tends to focus on yearning and loss, nostalgia, and historical melancholy,[12] concluding that while these threads of scholarship are vital and undeniable, other forms of medievalism must also be considered—after all, the Middle Ages themselves enjoyed humor, comedy, impressive scatological jokes, and moments of unrestrained play. Looking at texts from this direction, scholarship might emphasize emotional investment and pleasure of experience, foregrounding moments when genial comedy might be "contrasted with or even presented as antidotes for the nihilism, enervation, and rationalism of modernity."[13] D'Arcens notes that "from the earliest parodies of medieval chivalry such as Chaucer's Tale of Sir Thopas…through to the pedagogical parody of televisual 'jocumentary', or the post-modern ironic stance of comic heritage tourism, people have been encouraged to laugh at, with, and in the Middle Ages."[14] Ames' *Blunt Talk* and specifically Patrick Stewart's portrayal of Walter Blunt provide a recent and complex example of this function in the form of televisual and satirical comic medievalism, one which both deploys and subverts the wistful melancholic medievalism of White's *The Once and Future King*, a novel which is itself an act of desiring and melancholy play with (and in) an imagined Middle Ages.

The choice of White's novel as central to *Blunt Talk*'s narrative and protagonist foreshadows the ways in which medievalism will be deployed in the show, introducing themes of revisionism, anachronism, nostalgia, and fear of the potential futility of the heroic quest. In their *Short History of Fantasy*, Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James

[11] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), xxiii-xxiv, 182-4.
[12] Louise D'Arcens, *Comic Medievalism: Laughing at the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 7.
[13] D'Arcens, *Comic Medievalism,*182.
[14] D'Arcens, *Comic Medievalism,* 5.

comment that White's book is a "masterpiece"[15] and give its publication history: *The Sword in the Stone* (1938), covering Arthur's education by Merlyn; *The Witch in the Wood* (1939), when Arthur begins his reign; and *The Ill-Made Knight* (1940), dealing with Lancelot and the Grail Quest. In 1958 White published *The Once and Future King*, rewriting and combining the previous three novels, in particular shortening *Witch* and renaming it *Queen of Air and Darkness*, and adding *A Candle in the Wind*, dealing with the last weeks of Arthur's life. Mendlesohn and James suggest that with these revisions, the "tone of the whole is much darker, and what began [in *Sword*] as a lighthearted parody of Arthurian tradition, eminently suitable for younger readers, became a depressing lament for a past age, very much reflecting Britain's experiences in the 1940s" while "much of the humor comes from anachronisms: knights like Sir Grummore Grummursum and Sir Pellinore presented as old-fashioned English gentry who treat questing like fox-hunting, but above all Merlyn, who is living backward and thus has already experienced Arthur's future."[16]

White's novel, like the show it will inform, exists at a crossing-point of genre and temporality: past and present, anachronism and humor, romance and pedagogical text. Locating White's work in a section on educational themes in Arthurian adaptations, Stephen Knight reads *The Once and Future King* as "a characteristic 1930s response, both in its moral seriousness and also, sadly, in its failure to work out any real way of opposing brutality on an international scale;"[17] for Knight, White is "firmly" concerned with the politics of international violence, and the inherent problems of an implacable power imbalance: good people may exist, but they are ineffective against larger forces of power and aggression.[18] Knowledge and understanding are individual, personal, and emotional, but not enough in practice. Knight concludes by reading *The Book of Merlyn* as a fitting ending to what he calls "this reworking of the Arthur story in time of war, one that insists that the story of Arthur and Merlin is always more than just a fiction, and that knowledge must interact with power to educate us into a better world;"[19] in this reading, White's text is insistent, active, calling attention to the need for both knowledge and power, with the hope that through education a better world might still be formed. It is also a text that seeks to cope with a "time of war," and finds power in shared fictions, imagined worlds, and "reworkings" of our inherited past with an eye toward the future.

[15] Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, rev. ed. (Faringdon: Libri Press, 2012), 32.
[16] Mendlesohn and James, *Short History*, 32.
[17] Stephen Knight, *Merlin: Knowledge and Power Through the Ages* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009),196.
[18] Knight, *Merlin*, 196-197.
[19] Knight, *Merlin*, 198.

The Once and Future King presents an Arthurian world that exists at a point of paradox, or rather multiple paradoxes—comedy and sorrow, anachronisms and genuine knowledge of medieval texts, a lament for an inevitable failure and a hope that humanity might yet learn to do better—and consequently repeatedly draws attention to its own constructed nature. Mendlesohn and James locate the novel in a period—1900-50—which according to them "has provided the taproot texts for the fantasy writers of the 1990s and 2000s,"[20] texts which are frequently highly experimental and exploratory in nature, as writers attempt to reimagine the Matter of Britain and more generally the role of fantasy in the post-WWII world; as Knight suggests, White's medievalism in particular is inextricably linked to warfare, moral questioning, and critical examination of the mechanisms of power and aggression. Hoffman makes the connection to trauma explicit in the context of the Second World War: "The implicit analogy between Arthur protecting his island from the continental invaders and the British defending themselves from a German invasion has now become explicit…the trauma of the world-historical context provides a somber background to White's often witty and magical novel".[21] By linking White's "often witty" and anachronism-filled novel with the dark comedy of *Blunt Talk*, a show explicitly about storytelling and journalistic quests for the truth, we might also reexamine *The Once and Future King* as not necessarily, or not *entirely*, Mendlesohn and James' "depressing lament," but as at least in part an act of comic medievalism, returning to D'Arcens' conception of affectionate parody as an ameliorative and hopeful (though not naïve) vehicle for considering explorations of trauma and desires for an imagined future.

D'Arcens suggests that comic medievalism functions as a "vehicle for commentary on the past as well as the present," helping to express cultural anxieties about issues such as social change and tolerance or intolerance;[22] if White's novel reflects an experimental fantasist's attempts to cope with a mutable and distressing world in 1958, the use of the novel as an anchor text for the newsroom comedy of *Blunt Talk* serves a similar function in 2015-16. D'Arcens identifies three main strands or strategies of comic medievalism (and indeed comedy more generally): first, drawing attention to incongruities; second, puncturing or alternately upholding narratives of superiority; and finally amelioration, which involves the ability to laugh, to be relieved of burdens for a moment, and consequently to continue on in the face of those burdens. *Blunt Talk* contains elements of all these strands of comic medievalism, as the show centers itself around a novel rife with anachronisms and incongruities, presents an overall narrative arc concerned with power and the questioning of assumed superiority, and also offers a potential vision of one way in which medievalism might be used for healing or amelioration. White's novel

[20] Mendlesohn and James, *Short History*, 30.
[21] Hoffman, "Popular Culture," 49.
[22] D'Arcens, *Comic Medievalism,* 6.

is shown to be Blunt's comfort text while he struggles with fatherhood, with his attempts (often comically undercut) to report the truth of corrupt agencies and officials, and processing both personal and national trauma.

Patrick Stewart, in an interview included on the season one DVD release, has noted that *Once and Future King* "is Walter's favorite book;" in the "Inside Blunt Talk" featurette, Jonathan Ames comments that "we've been reading this all season."[23] The book itself is depicted in nearly every of the ten episodes of season one, and recurs frequently in season two as well. The physical volume can be seen in multiple scenes, ranging from brief glimpses on a shelf or table in nearly all establishing shots of Walter's living room to more elaborate scenes in which he reads from or is read to from *The Once and Future King*. Examination of specific examples of the latter reinforces the show's linkage of medieval narratives, and the desire for an imagined Middle Ages, with a need for interpersonal, emotional, human (re)connection. While many scenes might serve as examples, two moments of season one in particular best reflect these themes of longing, nostalgia, and comedy as amelioration. The first is a scene from episode four, in which Walter, attempting to mend his troubled relationship with his young son, volunteers to read to his son's primary-school class and chooses a chapter from *The Sword in the Stone*. The second is a scene from the end of the season one finale (consisting of the linked episodes 9 and 10), in which Walter's loyal companion/valet/former military subordinate Harry reads aloud to him from *Candle in the Wind*. In these episodes, Walter also plays the role of young Arthur by pulling a sword out of the throat of a sword-swallower at Walter's own party, wandering alone through thickets of guests at said party, and being forced to step into a leadership role, drawing on his wartime experiences, as an eco-terrorist takes the studio hostage.

In episode 4, "A Beaver That's Lost Its Mind," Walter volunteers to read to his son's class in an attempt to become a more involved parent; the book he chooses is his own favorite, *The Once and Future King*. While the moment might be played for broad comedy—Walter is not, as seen on several occasions, good with children—and indeed initially seems to be moving that direction, the opposite proves true: the moment of shared medievalism turns into a moment of connection. The young students are talkative and restless, and the visuals—the large and perhaps old-fashioned book, Walter's discomfort sitting down close to children, and other characters' facial expressions—suggest doubt at Walter's choice. However, Walter, as played by Patrick Stewart, approaches the moment with dignity, trusting in his own love for the novel and his experience as a storyteller on his news talk show—and the students, we are shown, settle down and begin to listen attentively as he reads. Ultimately, the scene is a tender one, as Walter's genuine

[23] *Blunt Talk*, season 1, DVD. "Inside Blunt Talk" and cast interview featurettes.

attempt—initially awkward as it may be—to share his beloved novel is treated as a moment worth lingering over and paying attention to, as the students do.

In episode 4, then, as Walter literally brings medievalism into the classroom, *Blunt Talk* the show suggests the importance of listening to the past in order to learn and connect, on multiple levels. The specific passage Walter chooses to read appears in *The Sword in the Stone*, when Arthur's foster brother Kay is about to be knighted; the young Wart (Arthur) becomes acutely aware of the sharp distinction and loneliness of differences in social class, sitting in a kitchen that White a few pages earlier describes as "colored by the flames until it looked like hell"[24] and recognizing that Kay no longer wants to spend time with him. It is a moment that reflects the difficulties of growing up (appropriate for school children), but also lingers over the nostalgia of a relationship that will never again be what it was. Merlyn at this point arrives to console Wart, and it is this speech which Walter reads aloud to the class:

> 'The best thing for being sad,' replied Merlyn, beginning to puff and blow, 'is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honor trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then—to learn.'[25]

This moment occurs very shortly before Merlyn transforms Arthur into a badger, and Merlyn's words are significant, spoken as they are by a representative of dislocated temporality, or to borrow Carolyn Dinshaw's term, a form of noncontemporaneous contemporality,[26] a form of heterotemporality that emphasizes *feeling as if* we might be contemporaries with each other without actually ever sharing the same location in time. Merlyn, after all, ages backward, and is always "out of time." *Blunt Talk*'s fourth episode thus provides viewers with a scene of connection across non-contiguous moments in time, conveyed by a story about learning about, quite literally, how to be, and how to *feel with*, someone or something else, in young Wart's case a badger. Walter's choice of this passage, and the show's choice to show it to us, as well as the students' ultimately attentive reaction, suggests that sharing emotions and affective responses—a love of a certain story, a love of medievalism, a self-aware reflection on shared experiences of aging and loss—can open up productive avenues for mutual comprehension. Walter

[24] T. H. White, *The Once and Future King*, rev. omnibus ed. (New York: Ace Books, 1987), 129.
[25] White, *Once and Future King*, 183; *Blunt Talk*, season 1, episode 4, "A Beaver That's Lost Its Mind," directed by Michael Lehmann, aired September 12, 2015 on Starz.
[26] Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), term used throughout.

takes an early step toward developing a relationship with his son (an ongoing plot thread, and one with Arthurian connections as far as complicated relationships with children), and the comedy of the initial awkward moment transmutes to a glimpse of potential future bonding over shared stories. The rest of the class is shown to be interested and engaged, demonstrating the power of White's text and of the Middle Ages to capture the popular imagination. For scholars of medievalism, the scene provides another kind of optimism: a reaffirmation of relevance and of the power of medievalism, in a (fictional) classroom setting, to make affective connections across time and space and distance.

A second significant moment of medievalism as avenue for compassionate heterotemporal connection occurs at the end of the season one finale. In episodes 9 and 10, Walter draws on military experiences to handle a hostage situation, as his show's filming is interrupted by an angry "eco-terrorist" who demands attention for his cause.[27] While the situation is also played for comedy—and ultimately successfully resolved—the aftereffects are not simply laughed away. On the anniversary of a Falklands War battle in which he was personally engaged in combat, the veteran Walter reflects on his conflicted feelings—guilt, self-justification, the difficult decision to save some of his men instead of others when forced to make that choice—through a dream of his battlefield experience. The audience sees Walter rescue his lance-corporal and friend Harry in a blurry dream-memory sequence. In the dream, as Walter arrives, Harry asks him a question: "You didn't leave me?"[28] Although Harry is alive and well in the present, as both audience and Walter know, and Harry believes that Walter saved his life, the question he asks raises the specter of doubt: has Harry (and the audience) believed this incorrectly? Does Walter's own memory provide a different narrative?

In his dream-memory, however, this doubt is answered: Walter replies, "Of course not."[29] And he does not. Walter is therefore shown to be an inexperienced but instinctively good commander placed in a no-win situation, a commander who will run onto the field to save a single wounded soldier while knowing that he cannot save them all. Like T.H. White's vision of an aging King Arthur, Walter has tried to do the best he could. He has not necessarily failed, but he is aware that he has not entirely succeeded; he suffers the trauma and the knowledge of war. Significantly, then, in the final scene of the first season, it is Harry—once saved by Walter—who uses White's novel and Arthur's thoughts to comfort Walter on the anniversary of their shared battle. Harry reads and Walter listens; as in episode 4, the invocation of medievalism is gently comedic, tinged with humor—Walter settles down in bed while being read to—but also gently healing, providing comfort

[27] *Blunt Talk*, season 1, episode 9, "I Brought a Petting Goat!,"directed by Tristram Shapeero, aired October 17, 2015, on Starz and episode 10, "Let's Save Central Florida! Let's Save Midtown!," directed by Tristram Shapeero, aired October 24, 2015, on Starz.
[28] *Blunt Talk*, episode 10.
[29] *Blunt Talk*, episode 10.

and care via stories of an imagined Middle Ages, stories with themes that resonate with Walter's and Harry's own experiences.

The section Harry reads famously occurs near the very end of *The Once and Future King*, as King Arthur, with full knowledge of his imminent downfall, prepares to ride out to face his son Mordred. White's Arthur finds comfort not in the realities of his own time but in a dream of a future in which men realize that wars are fought over imaginary lines, and in which communication and exchange of ideas and access to each other's worlds are freely granted. Arthur passes on this dream to the young Tom Malory and by implication the reader, who will not let the candle of the dream go out. This same act of reparative, healing, future-oriented storytelling recurs here to close the first season of *Blunt Talk*, as Harry reads aloud to Walter and to us, the audience:

> The old king felt refreshed, clear-headed, almost ready to begin again.
>
> There would be a day—there must be a day—when he would come back to Gramarye with a new Round Table which had no corners, just as the world had none—a table without boundaries between the nations who would sit to feast there. The hope of it would lie in culture. If people could be persuaded to read and write, not just to eat and make love, there was still a chance that they might come to reason.[30]

As in episode 4, the initial comedy of the scene gives way to genuine emotion, as the camera lingers on Walter and Harry and their obvious bond. Harry's—and the show's—choice of moment offers both comfort and optimism: things might be bad in the present, nightmares might not go away readily—but, with a gesture of love and care, Walter finds rest and renewal, and will continue his quest as a journalist in search of truth, seeking stories, in the morning.

More might be said about season two of *Blunt Talk,* which offers fascinating extended parallels between the Grail Quest and Walter's personal quest to discover the mastermind behind the artificially created water scarcity and "parched land" in Los Angeles. Both the nostalgia and the quixotic nature of the quest are amplified, as are questions of performance and good "kingship," as Walter and Arthur attempt to navigate their roles as leaders and build legacies, whether in Camelot or in Walter's fictional newsroom. Walter's Britishness, in contrast with the Los Angeles he's moved to, might be fruitfully explored through audience Anglophilia and the desire for some imagined Middle Ages through a (white, male, war veteran) Arthurian heroic figure—a desire that is deconstructed and critiqued, given the ways in which the show consistently portrays Walter as deeply

[30] White, *Once and Future King*, 639; *Blunt Talk*, episode 10.

vulnerable, flawed, and in need of healing care, at times professional, involving a therapist. The metatextual nature of the show also invites further investigation of its playfulness; in one delightfully self-aware casting choice, Patrick Stewart's real-life son Daniel Stewart portrays Walter's other (already adult) son Rafe, in appearances that emphasize both the comedy of recognition—the in-joke for cast and viewers aware of the actors' relationship—and an awareness of time, age, and the next generation. In this light, *Blunt Talk*'s complex relationship with the past becomes an integral means of investigating identity: Walter must work through history on multiple levels—personal, political in the sense of his research into Los Angeles water rights, and cultural in terms of the medievalism he loves, which informs his worldview—in order to become the man he wants to be.

Blunt Talk is rich in medievalism and in cross-genre exploration, and this has been a preliminary discussion; I will end by suggesting that while the show satirizes many elements of modern culture and contemporary journalism, it is perhaps best understood as a representative example of one way in which comic medievalism—in a genre not generally recognized explicitly as fantasy—might explore both nostalgia and hope, especially given the deliberate choice of T. H. White's text as the vehicle for that exploration. The show's complicated medievalism—mournful, aware of loss, yet finding comfort in shared storytelling—might provide a fruitful jumping-off point for future examinations of this desire for engagement with the past, as medievalism and neomedievalism remain entrenched in political and cultural discourse in powerful and pervasive ways. In this atmosphere, *Blunt Talk*'s use of *The Once and Future King* therefore offers a glimpse at a counternarrative: an elegiac but potentially optimistic, even healing, love for the Middle Ages, in which the show's comic medievalism permits both profoundly serious questioning of our relationship to the past and equally serious visions of efforts to connect with, comprehend, and care for other survivors of past traumas and past times.