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The Collapse of Minoan Crete in Mary Renault's *The King Must Die*: Creative Sensemaking in Understanding History

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The King Must Die: Historical Fiction between Minoanism and Academic Scholarship on Bronze Age Crete

After half a dozen novels set in the period in which they were written, Mary Renault's (neé Mary Challans) star rose in the mid-1950s when she made the genre switch to historical fiction with *The Last of the Wine* (1956). In the remaining three decades of her life, she penned a further seven novels in the genre, winning esteem among fellow practitioners of historical fiction (Sweetman 1993, 261-262), the reading public (272-273), and even professional classicists (189, 229).[25] Her most commercially successful novels were a biofiction duology – *The King Must Die* (1958) [*KMD*] and *The Bull from the Sea* (1962) [*BFS*] – on the life of Theseus, the legendary founding figure of the Greek city of Athens, as well as a biofiction trilogy on Alexander the Great.

The King Must Die begins with the childhood of the young hero Theseus, then dwelling in his mother's native land of Troizen in the eastern Peloponnese. After learning that he is heir to the throne of Athens, in Attica, south-east Greece, Theseus undertakes a half-Herculean rite of passage, defeating a half-dozen thugs through the gauntlet of the Isthmus of Corinth, taming the feminine community of Eleusis, and finally claiming the princedom in Athens, under his father King Aegeus. With Athens having to pay a human tax to King Minos' Crete, the dominant imperial, naval power in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, Theseus volunteers himself as one of the fourteen chosen Athenian youths and is ferried along with his other imprisoned compatriots to the island. On Crete, Theseus becomes an accomplished bull-leaper along with

[25] For Renault's correspondences with classics scholars, see, eg, Sweetman 1993, 209-210, 219.

his fellow prisoners (the 'Cranes'), who are made to perform their deadly sport in front of Cretan nobles. Theseus is instrumental in the uprisings which are part of the collapse of 'Minoan' civilisation. His sailing back home as conqueror marks an historical transition from a Minoan-controlled Aegean to a Mycenaean- or 'Hellenic'-controlled Aegean.[26] The subsequent novel, *The Bull from the Sea*, is more episodic, with less of an obvious cohesive structure; Renault herself was apparently less pleased with this novel (Sweetman 1993, 208-209, 217-218). The first adventure in *The Bull from the Sea* picks up where the previous novel ended, touching on the waning power of Crete, with Theseus slaying the 'Marathonian bull' and with a prospective marriage being arranged between the hero and the daughter of Queen Pasiphae of Crete, Phaedra.

Renault's *The King Must Die* is, in part, a work of creative fiction within an intellectual and cultural movement since the start of the twentieth century (and the discovery of the ruins at Knossos by Sir Arthur Evans) which might be termed 'Minoanism': a modern mythmaking phenomenon which draws, with differing degrees of accuracy, on Bronze Age Cretan civilisation (known to us through archaeological finds) and/or its apparent memory in Classical[27] Greek texts (for example, the history of Thucydides, the mythological summaries of Plutarch and Diodorus Siculus, the epics of Homer or Apollonius of Rhodes) and refashions these cultural memories through contemporary contexts and perspectives as 'the Minoan' –

[26] A note on terminology is necessary here. Renault uses the term 'Hellene' as a cultural-ethnic synonym for 'Mycenaean' (the term generally favoured by archaeologists) or 'Achaean' (an Homeric-inspired metonymical term, which Renault considers too confusing on account of its apparent locational specificity) to denote a Bronze-Age 'Greek' mainlander ('Author's Note' in *KMD* 284). Renault seems to use the term 'Hellenic' rather than 'Mycenaean' to avoid confusion between the city-state (or palatial complex) of Mycenae in the Peloponnese (which does not appear in *The King Must Die*, other than in its powerful absence as the dominant community in mainland Greece) and a broader ethnic grouping which scholars refer to as Mycenaean Greece (a network of associated communities rather than an empire). Renault admits that 'Hellenic' is an anachronism; it points to Classical Greece (see endnote 3 below); yet her focus on the rise of Athens as the dominant 'city-state' in pre-Classical, 'Mycenaean' times only adds to this historical confusion (see her supernatural integration of the Battle of Marathon (490 BCE) into the narrative of *The Bull from the Sea* [278-279]).

[27] 'Classical' is capitalised throughout this paper with reference to the broader historical period of Greco-Roman cultural hegemony, as contrasted with the pre-Classical Bronze Age and post-Classical traditions. At times, the terms 'Classical Greek' or 'Classical Athenian' refer more specifically to the period of the fifth and fourth century BCE, as contrasted with the later 'Hellenistic' period, from the late fourth century to the first century BCE. To be clear, Renault's usage of the term 'Hellenic' or 'Hellene' should not be confused with 'Hellenistic'. When referring to the modern academic discipline 'classical' has been given in lower case in this paper.

the Minoan civilisation, the Minoan people, the Minoan landscape, and Minoans legends (the Minotaur, the Labyrinth, King Minos, etc).[28] Minoanism has intersected with several cultural, intellectual phenomena in the twentieth century: for example, feminism, psychoanalysis, and utopianism.

Advanced by the scholarship of classicist Jane Ellen Harrison and inspired by the burgeoning movement of first-wave feminism, Minoan Crete became for many moderns the centre of a perceived original matriarchy (female rulers and feminine deities such as the Great Mother) in the pre-Classical Aegean (Gere 2009, 86-91).[29] Such a view of Minoan Crete had a rich reception in subsequent creative writing, notably Robert Graves' works *The White Goddess* (1948), *Seven Days in New Crete* (1949),[30] and *The Greek Myths* (1955).[31] The idea of the 'Minoan' was also appropriated by psychoanalysts, with Freud himself having expressed interest in the unconscious meaning of mysterious figures such as the Labyrinth or the maternal *omphalos* of Crete itself (Dick 1972, 54-55; Gere 2009, 154ff.). This 'darker' strain of Minoanist reception, a 'Minoan interior', can be detected in creative works as diverse as Agatha Christie's detective story 'The Cretan Bull' (1939), Lawrence Durrell's modernist novel *The Dark Labyrinth* (1947), or Ruth Rendell's (aka, Barbara Vine) *The Minotaur* (2005). Lastly, Minoanism has intersected with utopianism in twentieth-century writings, primarily through the

[28] For some scholarship on this reception movement of Minoanism or 'Cretomania' across various cultural movements since the start of the twentieth century, see Bourke 2014; Cadogan 2004; Farnoux and Momigliano (eds) 2017; Gere 2009.

[29] Modern scholarship (eg Wardle 1994, 214) tends to be more subdued on the apparent feminine character of Bronze-Age Cretan religion.

[30] '"Where do women come into this system?" "We maintain it, because we act directly on behalf of the goddess. We appraise men; we don't compete with them. Naturally, they treat us as the superior sex"' (Graves 1983, 18).

[31] While Robert Graves' lively compendia in *The Greek Myths* reproduce ancient content for a modern audience more or less objectively (as Stephen Fry has recently achieved with his very readable ancient trilogy, *Mythos* (2017), *Heroes* (2018), and *Troy* (2020)), Graves' notes betray his own poetic mythologisation of ancient material. Consider the following footnote to his short chapter on 'Theseus in Crete': 'Theseus's marriage to the Moon-priestess [sic] made him lord of Cnossus, and on one Cnossian coin a new moon is set in the centre of a maze. Matrilinear custom, however, deprived an heiress of all claims to her lands if she accompanied a husband overseas; and this explains why Theseus did not bring Ariadne back to Athens' (Graves 1960, 347). To the best of my knowledge, archaeologists have not unearthed any legible legal documents in the entirely illegible script of Linear A to back up Graves' anthropological supposition on 'Minoan property law'.

idealisation of Sir Arthur Evans (a well-trodden topic in studies on Minoan reception),[32] but also subsequently realised through, for example, travel literature, from Henry Miller's *The Colossus of Maroussi* (1941) to Barry Unsworth's *Crete* (2004), with the site of the Bronze Age ruins becoming a site of potential epiphany (the Romantic sublime) for twentieth-century peripatetic narrators.

Renault's *The King Must Die* conforms to such typical tropes of Minoanism. Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths* is cited by Renault in her 'Select Bibliography' at the end of the novel alongside various works of classical scholarship (*KMD* 288), and it is clear that Renault was influenced by his notions of Crete as an original matriarchy in her depiction of a pre-Classical Aegean civilisation becoming a patriarchal, Classical society ('Notes' 83; Zilboorg 2001, 155).[33] Her Theseus is the key agent in helping to install the new political-religious patriarchal order. As a young boy, Theseus is opposed to the matriarchic ritual of king sacrifice, which in Troizen (a liminal community, half-matriarchic, half-patriarchal) is realised through the slaughter of the King Horse (*KMD* 5-17). When Theseus later becomes king of Eleusis, a Mother-worshipping community of so-called Shore Peoples, he manages to invert the political hierarchies, effectively ousting the powerful Queen, ending the ritual king sacrifice, and becoming the key decision-maker (*KMD* 96-99, 116-125). In one symbolic narrative in the Eleusinian countryside, the hero kills the gigantic she-boar Phaia, a sacred animal to the Mother-worshippers, who 'hated men' (*KMD* 75).[34] Next, Theseus manages to vanquish the witch Medea from the halls of his father Aegeus, who has been living under her bewitching sway. Finally, Theseus conquers Minoan Crete, the feminine character of which is evident through the dominant Mother cult (of which Ariadne is a disciple) (*KMD* 161-168) and through its 'feminised' (orientalised) elite (*KMD* 154-157).[35] The vassalage of the formerly powerful matriarchy of Crete to the patriarchal culture of Thesean Attica is consolidated at the start of

[32] On Sir Arthur Evans' [Victorian, modernist, etc] reconstructions at Crete, see Gere 2009, 105-139; Marinatos 2014; MacGillivray 2000; Schoep 2018; Sinclair 2013.
[33] For Jane Ellen Harrison's and Renault's dual interest in the anthropological rituals behind myth, see Dick 1972, 59-60.
[34] On the killing of Phaia, see Dick 1972, 63-65.
[35] On Renault's Crete as not only a declining matriarchic realm, in contrast to Theseus' ascending patriarchal world, but also a place of liberating gender ambiguity (with, for example, androgenous bull-dancers), see Hoberman 1996, 286.

The Bull from the Sea, where Crete acts as a servant state to Athens, even providing Theseus with a queen, Phaedra.

On a Jungian (if not Freudian)[36] reading of her story of Minoan (matriarchic) collapse, Renault herself provided the groundwork for such analyses in a letter to fellow speculative fiction writer Jay Williams, discussing the psychic changes and struggles of her Theseus: 'What is Theseus, after all, but primitive man struggling to defend his new-found ego against the surrounding jungle of the unconscious […]' (in Sweetman 1993, 206).[37] As a precursor to her Thesean novel, Renault alluded to the interior aspect of the Minoan Labyrinth in *The Last of the Wine* (1956): '[t]here is a labyrinth in the heart of every man […], and to each comes the time when he must reach its centre, and meet the Minotaur' ('Notes' 82).

Lastly, on notions of Minoan Crete as a utopian, sublime sphere, Renault reproduces the idea of Minoan Crete as a hypercivilisational, proto-occidental paradise, inherited from the idealism of Sir Arthur Evans in his *The Palace of Minos* (1921, 1928, 1930, 1935).[38] Thus in a later note on her novel, Renault clearly draws on Evansian characterisations of Minoan Crete: 'the mannered elegance of the Minoan. […]. Crete's millennial sophistication […]' ('Notes' 82-83). In *The King Must Die*, Minoan Crete is at the end of its civilisational lifespan, and yet the notion of decline implies that it was once perfective (experiencing the Classical golden age): 'the golden age of the Bull Dance [in Crete] […] is a good while back now' (*KMD* 148). From a more biographic perspective, like many travel writers such as Henry Miller (2016, 100, 125-131) and Lawrence Durrell (2002, 71-75, 82-83), Renault regarded Crete as a site of utopian, sublime experience during her own short visit there; as Cadogan (2004, 543) points out, her Minoan Crete was partly drawn from [often highly creative] archaeology, partly from the mythical narratives, but also partly from her own 'inspiration' while visiting Crete (Sweetman 1993, 167-170). Renault started mythologising Crete as soon as she had left it:

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[36] On Renault's preference for Jungian analytical psychology over Freudian psychoanalysis, see Sweetman 1993, 205-206.
[37] For the psychological growth of Theseus, see Dick 1972, 57, 59.
[38] '[T]he dominant element that now comes into view represents an incomparably higher stage of civilisation than anything that had existed before on the Helladic side' (Evans 1921, 22-23).

> The boat left with Mary still lost in spirit in Minos' labyrinth. When they docked at Santorini, she refused to go ashore for fear of breaking the spell, preferring to remain aboard and gather her memories of Knossos (Sweetman 1993, 170; see Zilboorg 2001, 151).

A maternal feminist milieu (Renault is less encomiastic about this aspect than Robert Graves),[39] a psychoanalytical journey for the hero, a place of utopian, epiphanic, transcendental potential – Renault's Crete is, in part, *Minoanist*. It is modern, contextualised according to twentieth-century concerns. Yet, perhaps more than any other creative writer, Renault also endeavoured to bring to life a genuine pre-Classical *Cretan*[40] (and Mycenaean Greek) past in the Bronze Age Aegean.[41] She was deeply concerned with the truth.[42] There are indications that she was engaging with contemporary scholarship on the Aegean Bronze Age. At the conclusion of *The King Must Die*, her 'Select Bibliography' lists a number of academic articles and monographs, including works by respected scholars on the Bronze Age Aegean such as John Pendlebury, John Chadwick, Leonard Palmer, and Michael Ventris.[43] According to her biographer Sweetman (1993, 157), Renault was a stickler for historical accuracy and engaged in painstaking research into the ancient world to outline her plots; this entailed reading academic journals and monographs, corresponding with academics as to

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[39] For critical views on Renault's writing as misogynist or patriarchal, see Hoberman 1996, 277-279. Hoberman (279-292) challenges this view by exploring, for example, the 'Platonic' masks which Renault's characters employ to effectively 'de-gender' themselves, how homosexuality (male and female) destabilises traditional masculine heterosexuality (such as the male gaze), and the ambiguous depiction of the male anatomy. For further discussion on Theseus' masculinity and heterosexuality in *The King Must Die*, see Walton 2012, para. 12-18; Zilboorg 2001, 155-159, 190.

[40] In order to avoid confusion in this paper, the term 'Minoan' is used to describe the general fictional civilisation as represented in Renault's novel; the term 'Bronze Age Cretans' is used to refer to the civilisation as designated by archaeologists (although usage of the term 'Minoan' is indeed common in scholarship). To be clear, this goes against Renault's employment of terms since she refers to her fictional 'Minoans' as 'Cretans' throughout her story. She also distinguishes between a mixed Mycenaean-Minoan ruling elite in Crete and a subordinate class of 'native Cretans'. This latter grouping is referred to as 'native Cretans' in this essay to highlight this class conflict, although they are still indeed Renault's own fictional construct (and thus 'Minoan').

[41] For a concise summary of the archaeological finds in Bronze Age Crete, see Wardle 1994, 204-217, 237-242. For a lively, informative account of the archaeological discoveries by Schliemann, Evans, and their successors, see Wood 2008.

[42] '[I]t is inconceivable to me how anyone can decide deliberately to betray it [the truth]' ('Notes' 85). For Renault's desire for her readers to dig deeper into the actual sources, see her letter in Dick 1972, xiv.

[43] For Renault's citation of scholarship on Mycenaean archaeology and Linear B, see 'Notes' 82-83. On Renault's choice to provide such instructive endnotes, see Dick 1972, xiv.

minor historical or archaeological matters, and, of course, extensive reading before she put pen to paper.

Such scholarly consultation, along with her own visit of the Knossos palace, most likely had the greatest influence on Renault's depiction of the material life of the Bronze Age:[44] for instance, how Bronze Age warriors rode horses without stirrups (Sweetman 1993, 209-210; see *BFS* 57); how the dress of the Bronze-Age warrior differed from that of the Classical Athenian ('Notes' 82); how bulls were used in sport (based on the Knossos frescoes) (Dick 1972, 66-67). Her interest in getting 'right' the materiality of this pre-Classical age is also illustrated through her description of the Knossos ruins to match the present-day archaeological site (itself, admittedly, in part a modern reconstruction by Evans) (Dick 1972, 67):

> Presently we came out on a wide space of ruin. […]. Three of its sides had fallen in on it, the south right to the ground; to the east were leaning floors with flames licking among them. But the west wing stood. One of its balconies had fallen; the crimson pillars had smashed through the flagstones, and painted flowers stood bare upon the wall. But in the lofty entrance-porch the huge king-column upheld the lintel above the stairs […] (*KMD* 255).

Beyond material descriptions, however, the non-narrative focus of archaeological scholarship on Bronze Age Crete[45] meant that Renault had to turn to creative solutions to provide her story with suitable characters and events. To this end, she makes the speculative, historically improbable attempt to link the Classical Greek myths on Theseus' adventures in Crete (eg Plutarch, *Life of Theseus*, 15-21) and the historiographical comments of Thucydides on King Minos' thalassocracy (1.4) to the pre-Classical, Bronze Age civilisation of ancient Crete. In her

[44] On the accuracy of her reproduction of Mycenaean material life, see Dick 1972, xiii; Walton 2012, para. 9.
[45] On the illegibility of Linear A, see, eg, Wardle 1994, 213. Hallager provides a good summation of the problem of interpreting archaeological evidence when discussing two important Minoan artefacts (the Palaikastro Kouros; the Master Impression from Khania): 'To the inhabitants of Late Minoan I Crete, the meaning of both objects would have been obvious, but we can only guess what they actually represent, at least on present evidence. And this is characteristic of the period: A great deal of good evidence enables us to agree on most of the facts, but uncertainties start emerging as soon as we begin to interpret the facts' (2012, 149).

'Author's Note' to *The King Must Die*, Renault acknowledges the fictional nature of this attempt to bridge the gap between the Classical and the pre-Classical,[46] while, at the same time, showing an interest in rationalising anthropological truths behind symbols and myths:

> By classical times the Theseus legend […] had so fabulous a garnish that it has sometimes been dismissed as pure fairy-tale, or, after Frazer, religious myth. This briskness was not shared by those who had observed the remarkable durability of Greek tradition; and the rationalists had their first setback when Sir Arthur Evans uncovered the Palace of Knossos, with its labyrinthine complexity, eponymous sacred axes, numerous representations of youths and girls performing the Bull Dance, and seal-carvings of the bull-headed Minotaur. The most fantastic-seeming part of the story having thus been linked to fact, it becomes tempting to guess where else a fairy-tale gloss may have disguised human actualities (*KMD* 282).

A few points of criticism here. In recent times, scholars have come to appreciate the [partly] creative nature of Sir Arthur Evans' reconstructions at Knossos,[47] both on the level of archaeological groundwork and presentation (Wood 2008, 110-112)[48] and in terms of scholarly writings (to which he exerted a strong 'ethnic copyright' for his Minoans).[49] It would be misleading to refer to his 'excavations' as 'linked to fact' in an absolute sense. Renault, as her biographer explains (Sweetman 1993, 27-28), was captivated from an early age by the work of Evans and, to an extent, idealised him.[50] Furthermore, in her 'Author's Note', Renault's persuasive rhetoric might distort the archaeological evidence: to be clear, that the Palace of Knossos is 'labyrinthine' does not imply an actual labyrinth (Wolfe 1969, 162); secondly, the seal carving which Renault seems to be referring to does not exactly depict a 'Minotaur' (as

[46] See also her remarks in 'Notes' 81-82.
[47] For scholarship on Evans' reconstructions, see endnote 8 above.
[48] Much like writing a narrative, archaeological groundwork involves a great degree of selection of what is considered worthwhile and disposal of what is not – 'Archaeology then, in destruction' (Wood 2008, 111).
[49] On the influence of Evans in publishing circles, the complaints of John Pendlebury serve as a good indication (see Powell 1973, 86-89): 'Why nobody should be allowed to write about Knossos but Evans I don't know. Of course all future work must be to a certain extent based on him […]' (a letter from John Pendlebury to his father, as in Powell 1973, 86).
[50] 'In matters of taste, Sir Arthur Evans was Mary's unwitting tutor' (Sweetman 1993, 27).

later Classical artwork certainly does in various forms) but various parts of a human, goat, and a bull, with figures of eight in between.[51]

This paper is not suggesting that Renault's guesswork in creating lively characters and events in her story – in linking Classical mythology and mythic history with pre-Classical, Bronze Age archaeological remains – should be treated as approximating any objective sense of history, in providing us with veritable content.[52] However, from a methodological perspective, *The King Must Die* was a landmark work of Minoan fiction which could offer some creative insights to academic scholarship on the Bronze Age Cretans, particularly regarding how we conceive of the famous collapse[s] of this civilisation.[53] *The King Must Die* offers creative, compelling ways of understanding Minoan collapse which conforms to modern scholarly investigations into understanding Bronze Age Cretan collapse. Renault provides a multifactor model, which views collapse as entailing a number of interrelating, cumulative factors ; she expands our temporal sense of collapse as a single civilisation-ending event; and she uses comparative analysis to make some aspects of her narrative understandable to a contemporary audience. From this standpoint of writing historical events, this paper is in agreement with Bernard Dick's opening assessment in his monograph on Renault's relevance to classical philology and ancient history studies: 'What is unique about Mary Renault is a methodology that should endear her to

[51] See the item 'sealstone (lentoid); intaglio' in The British Museum catalogue, described as: 'seal engraved with a design of a 'minotaur': the foreparts of a bull and a goat joined to human legs walking right. Figure-of-eight between legs' (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1877-0728-3) [accessed on 16 May 2001]. As Ken Wardle surmises (1994, 214), the bull motif, whether in the 'Bull-Leaping Fresco' or in the Bull's Head Rhyton, '*may* be the origin of the legends of the Cretan Bull and the half-human Minotaur' (italics added).

[52] From a genre perspective, there is also the question of whether *The King Must Die* should be considered 'historical fiction' or 'legendary romance' (Burns 1963, 109), given that its primary ancient source material is essentially mythology.

[53] This paper, therefore, differs from the type of analysis pursued by Bernard Dick, who is concerned with finding historical truths in Mary Renault's fictions on the level of content (and form), including 'ethos, ideology, and […] language patterns' (1972, xii). Renault is obviously drawing on speculative, likely historical events in her narrative, such as a Mycenaean invasion or the eruption of Thera, which were part of scholarly discourse, and her writing deserves praise for considering these likely events; but the focus of this paper is far more on noting how she brings these events together in helping us to understand a complex event such as the Bronze Age Cretan collapses. In terms of Dick's reference to 'ethos and ideology', we have no clear-cut way of ascertaining how closely her Minoan and Mycenaean characters approach their real-world, Bronze-Age analogues; Renault was likely using the 'Iron-Age' heroes of Homeric poetry and tradition to furnish the war-like ethos of heroes such as Theseus (see Dick 1972, 58-61, 73).

academicians, for she is the only novelist writing historical fiction today [circa 1972] who approaches her material from the standpoint of a scholar' (1972, xiii-xiv).[54]

The following analysis is loosely structured according to the different methodologies which Renault employs for understanding the complexity of her Minoan collapse, although, to be clear, there is inevitably much discursive overlap within each of these categories. A close reading of a selected passage in the 'Crete' section of her novel (*KMD* 143-262) forms the basis of the analysis, with which other parts of the novel are compared. While scholarship on Mary Renault's *The King Must Die*[55] has tended to focus on themes such as leadership, individualism, and the political order (Burns 1963, 114-115; Wolfe 1969, 155-168);[56] the symbolic, archetypal value of Theseus' actions according to psychoanalytical, Jungian, or Frazerian interpretations of myth (Dick 1972, 54-55, 62-64, 69);[57] and representations of gender or sexuality (Hoberman 1996, 286-290),[58] the focus of this essay on the creative-historical aspects of her novel, somewhere between Minoanist fiction and academic scholarship, will hopefully open up new lines of enquiry into the works of a writer who, above all, cared deeply about historical accuracy and the truth.

Understanding Collapse in *The King Must Die*

[54] See the praise of classicist Prof. Moses Hadley (Columbia University) for *The King Must Die* : '[h]er [Renault's] narrative is not, nor does it claim to be, history; but it is a well-considered suggestion of how things may have happened, and for the personality and culture with which she deals we have nothing more plausible. Books from which we learn so much so agreeably are rare' (in Sweetman 1993, 189). For the praise of other professional classicists, see Sweetman 1993, 229.

[55] On the early neglect of critical studies on Renault's works in literary studies, see Burns 1963, 102; Dick 1972, xi-xix, 57-58 (on *KMD*); Wolfe 1969, 15. Dick speculates that bias against 'popular fiction' and the complexity of ancient material are two reasons for this neglect.

[56] 'Theseus […] develop[s] by discernible stages. The pace of *The King Must Die* captures the growing complexity of his ordeals as he advances vigorously towards his *moira*. […]. While learning self-reliance and independence, he gains either a new skill or a new insight; […] each step in his personal growth touches both Greek political life and the character of Western civilization' (Wolfe 1969, 165). These elements are probably a characteristic of Renault's generally liberal strain of thought (see Williams 2021).

[57] 'It remained for Mary Renault to combine her knowledge of myth, archaeology, anthropology, and Freud to produce a colourful romance [ie *The King Must Die*]' (Dick 1972, 55).

[58] For a further study on gender, sexuality, and lesbianism in Renault's writings and life, see Moore 2003.

A Multifactor, Cumulative Model for Collapse

Modern historical, archaeological discussions of Bronze Age Cretan collapse (or collapses, in the plural, see 2.2) tend to stress a variety of factors:

> [I]t makes sense that they [ie the destructions during the collapse of the Neopalatial period in Crete] could have had different causes, as Rehak and Younger pointed out. Earthquakes may have destroyed some sites, people, others. Elites at one site could have taken advantage of weakness elsewhere. Under certain circumstances, non-elite people may have withdrawn support for elites and their ideology, also effecting change in Minoan society and resulting in what we find in the archaeological record (Middleton 2017, 122; see Hallager 2012, 153).

This is in line with modern archaeological views on causality and collapse in general:

> In collapse, we are likely to be seeing multiple factors (rather than competing mutually exclusive explanations), proximate and structural, feeding back into each other and responses may have had unpredictable outcomes – the situations would have been dynamic (Middleton 2017, 35).[59]

Such modern scholarly approaches are a response to older scholarship (as well as perceptions in popular culture), particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, which tended to be more dogmatic or essentialist with regard to the causality of Bronze Age Cretan collapse. Driessen (2017, 19-22) has noted how Sir Arthur Evans became increasingly convinced in the mid-1920s as to the causal link between earthquakes and destruction (most likely because of personal experiences) in marking definite terminations (collapses) in 'Minoan civilisation'; Driessen refers to Evan's general tendency 'to look for specific agents with which to end archaeological and stylistic periods. He [Evans] is careful to underline that the MM IIIB earthquake happened before the end of this phase. […] [T]he connection between destructions and earthquakes seems to have developed from a hypothesis to a fact [for Evans] and it is with this legacy that we still have to deal' (2017, 22). The scholarly legacy which Driessen refers to can be detected in the work of other Bronze Age Cretan archaeologists who tended, through their rhetoric, to prioritise a certain factor in being the key causal instrument

[59] For examples of such multifactor analysis across other civilisations or ethnic groups, see McAnany and Yoffee 2010, 12-13.

behind a period of collapse.[60] Spyridon Marinatos, for example, propagated the view that the eruption of Thera was a leading factor in the collapse of Minoan civilisation, although the chronology of the eruption and its relationship to palace destruction has been questioned since the 1960s (Manning 2012, 457-458ff.). Alternately, in his foreword to Chadwick and Ventris' *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (1956) (which Renault cites in her bibliography to *The King Must Die*), Alan J. B. Wace (1959, xxvi), in opposition to a Mycenaean invasion hypothesis and a natural disaster hypothesis, puts greater emphasis on domestic unrest in Crete in response to elite, mainland influence as causing the collapse at the end of Late Minoan II.

Renault certainly had access to these different scholarly hypotheses, as her bibliography at the end of *The King Must Die* attests to. Yet one notable aspect of Renault's depiction of Minoan collapse is the sheer multitude of different factors which she shows to be at play around the time of this critical historical period: including natural disaster, an outside invasion, domestic revolt, social-moral decay, religious decline, and a transition from matriarchic to patriarchal societies. Although Driessen (2017, 23-24) points to Renault's *The King Must Die* and *The Bull from the Sea*, along with popular historian Leonard Cottrell's *The Bull of Minos* (1958), as key works which have cemented the scholarly link between earthquakes and Minoan collapse in popular culture,[61] it is not evident in Renault's narrative that any one of the above-mentioned factors is the most instrumental in engendering her Minoan collapse. When taken together, these factors provide a dense, cumulative picture which transcends unifactor ideas on collapse. Consider the following passage ('Passage A' henceforth) set during the final chapter (10) of the section 'Crete', which represents the closing stages of Renault's Minoan civilisation from the perspective of Theseus as first-person narrator:

> I could feel Ariadne's fingers clutching my hair, as our charge bore her forward. Presently we came to some carrying-chairs, which had brought nobles to the dancing; we throned her in one of these, and the Cretans lifted the poles. As she rose above

[60] Driessen (2017, 22-23) gives the example of John Pendlebury.
[61] For some subsequent examples of the Knossos-earthquake motif in popular culture (novels, comics) (with links to the Atlantis story), see Driessen 2017, 24-25. For the general tendency of popular news media and cultural representations to simplify ancient collapses into monocausal, sudden, civilisation-ending events, see Middleton 2017, 1-10, 34; 2018, 91-95ff.

> the mellay, I looked to see if she was frightened; but she was leaning forward, grasping the chair-arms, her lips parted as if she drank the wind.
>
> A roar broke forth like spring snows rushing down a mountain; but the spate streamed upwards, and was made of fire. The flames had found an oil-store. As they met the breath of the gale they were flattened, and blown streaming to the north. By this huge cresset the House of the Axe was lit like day, and I saw that one block still stood entire. It was the western wing, where the great stair led down to the sunken shrine and the white throne of Minos. I thought, "if he [Asterion] lives, he is there."
>
> They had found a second chair, and tossed me into it, lifting it shoulder-high. I made them turn it round, so that I could stand as in a chariot, with the high back for a rail. I did not want the bull-dancers to lose me. On I rode like a ship on a tossing sea, the Cranes close around, the Cretans cheering. To them I was Theseus the bull-leaper, whom the Mistress fancied; the odds-on favourite who had saved their bets. But to myself I was once more Kouros of Poseidon, Kerkyon of Eleusis; Theseus, son of Aigeus, son of Pandion, Shepherd of Athens, riding to my enemy. "Ahai! Ahai!" I shouted, as one leads the battle-line. The war-calls answered. My blood sparkled and sang (*KMD* 254-255; 'Passage A').

Renault's fall of Knossos is triggered, in part, by natural disaster.[62] A major earthquake occurs earlier in the chapter during the uprising of the imprisoned bull dancers:

> The earth lurched beneath me, grinding and shuddering. The marble flags I ran on tilted endways, flinging me down on hands and knees. There was a mighty crashing and roaring, shrieking voices, cracking wood (*KMD* 250).

At a later stage Theseus describes the tsunami which had rolled onto the Cretan coast:

> The ebbing sea, that had grounded the keels at Amnisos, had rushed back with the earthquake. It had broken the mole, and dashed the ships upon it, and flooded the lower town, and killed more people than a war (*KMD* 263).

[62] For a summary of theories of natural disaster causing the collapse of the Neopalatial period in Crete, see Middleton 2017, 114-118.

Lastly, Theseus' fleeing company witness the after-effects of a volcanic eruption which has changed the landscape of the island Kalliste:

> As we drew nearer, an ashy dust began to fall on us […]. And then, as we stood in to westward of Kalliste, we saw the dreadful thing that the god had done. Half of the island was clean gone (*KMD* 264-265).

Earthquake, tsunami, and volcanic eruption suggest a potent cocktail of natural disaster which spelt the end for Renault's Minoans; in Passage A, to these natural causes of collapse can be added a great conflagration, a fire which has been enhanced by an oil depository and further spread by a strong gale. The fire is so intense that the normal human experience of the world is inverted: night appears as day.

However, natural disaster alone cannot be responsible for her Minoan collapse. Renault artfully maintains the agency of her hero Theseus during this natural catastrophe. One notes the brilliant simile[63] the novelist employs in Passage A – 'On I rode like a ship on a tossing sea'. Natural chaos, no doubt, is present in this scene of palatial destruction, which is indicated literally by the conflagration and figuratively by the image of 'a tossing sea'there is also, however, a subjective 'I' in this narrative – Theseus, described as a single 'ship', an instrument of human navigation, is guiding an invading force of his fellow Attican countrymen in order to overthrow the remnants of the previous overlords of Minoan Crete, represented by Asterion, who is to be found around 'the white throne of Minos'. In short, Renault has added and intermingled 'an outside invasion' hypothesis to the natural disaster hypothesis.[64] Theseus is depicted by Renault as a victor, almost in a Roman-like triumphal procession, raised 'in a chariot', with 'cheering' erupting around him. Tellingly, Theseus proclaims his status as a conquering warlord, identifying himself as 'Theseus, son of Aigeus, son of Pandion, Shepherd

[63] On the simile as one of Renault's trademark stylistic devices, see Wolfe 1969, 167.
[64] My focus here is on Renault's methods of providing many intermingling factors in describing collapse, not on the actual accuracy of the content of these factors; for the debatable notion of natural disaster enabling an outside (Mycenaean) invasion during the Neopalatial collapse, see Middleton 2017, 119. To be clear, Renault's 'Hellenic' or 'Athenian invasion' is a fictional, anachronistic construct (Theseus being symbolic of the might of the later Classical Athens), and it is perhaps representative of the oft-hypothesised 'Mycenaean' or mainland invasion or, at any rate, a 'second mainland invasion' since Renault's Minoan Crete has already been colonised by a previous generation of Mycenaean/Hellenic elites.

of Athens, riding to my enemy'. His focus is on battle, war, and blood. The successful revolt of the mainland Hellenes (Athenians, Atticans) under Theseus in Minoan Crete, storming the palace and Labyrinth and slaying the evil prince Asterion, marks the start of an Hellenic hegemony across what was, at the start of the story, the Minoan Empire. This outside invasion is fully realised at the start of *The Bull from the Sea*:

> We fought the war in Crete before the summer broke and the streams washed down the mountains into the rich plains. […]. In sight of it [the Labyrinth and Bull Court] we fought the clinching battle for the Knossos plain. […]. Minos ruled them lightly and so do I (*BFS* 33).

Another likely factor which leads to civilisational collapse in Renault's *The King Must Die* is a decline in religiosity, the sincerity or authenticity of religious belief among the elite in Crete (see Dick 1972, 67-68).[65] Prior to Passage A, there have been tokens of religious decline among the aristocracy. Ariadne, in her first love scene with Theseus, reveals how the sentiment for their Mother goddess has changed from genuine worship to idolatry:

> Here in Crete, no king has been sacrificed for two hundred years. We hang our dolls on the trees instead, and the Mother has not been angry (*KMD* 212).

In response to this, a less-secular Theseus performs the appropriate 'sign against evil' (*KMD* 213), to which ritual Ariadne in turn responds with child-like confusion. Later, it is revealed to Theseus' great distaste that Ariadne has been faking religious epiphanies, revealing prophecies according to her own rational will (*KMD* 227). Ariadne's stepbrother Asterion performs a similar affront when he drugs the sacred bull of Poseidon so as to ensure sufficient financial returns for a bet he has made on the bull-leaping (*KMD* 241-242). To be fair, at least one aristocrat is religiously devout: King Minos believes in the sanctity of tradition and of divine will (see *KMD* 224), and Theseus recognises that Minos 'was still priest as well as king' (*KMD* 224); however, Minos is representative of an older more 'golden' generation, and his chronic illness—leprosy—physically reflects the general decay of high society (and genuine religiosity) in Minoan Crete (Dick 1972, 68).

[65] On the possibility of a decline in religious belief at the time of the Neopalatial collapse in Crete and a change in belief structure, see Middleton 2017, 121.

In Passage A, the collapse of Minoan civilisation (or at least Minoan-Mycenaean aristocracy) pivots upon the religious insincerity of the aristocracy, with the triumph of a new order belonging to devout individuals. The native Cretans believe 'the mistress [ie the Cretan Mother] fancied' Theseus. Theseus proclaims his identity as 'Kouros of Poseidon'. And, most tellingly, Ariadne herself, although earlier refusing to 'imbibe' the drugs of divine inspiration, has now taken a literal turn towards 'inspiration', which will ultimately see her unwittingly becoming a Maenadic follower of the god Bacchus on the island of Naxos, so effectively ending her future queenship with Theseus (*KMD* 263-276). As for Asterion, Theseus, appropriating the ritual axe of Minoan cult tradition and the mask of the Minotaur, duly sacrifices the imposter-king – 'he who had thought to rule without the sacrifice, who had never felt the god's breath that lifts a man beyond himself' (*KMD* 262) – decapitating Asterion in the final climactic moments during the siege of the Knossos palace (*KMD* 260-262). Yet while observing Minoan cult custom and religious tradition as a religious individual, in Passage A Theseus also markedly rejects the native Cretans' labelling him as the chosen one of the Mother goddess, regarding himself rather as the 'Kouros [literally, 'the Boy'] of Poseidon', a representative of a male god and part of a new patriarchal order which will dominate the Aegean after the defeat of the matriarchic realm of Crete (see Section 1). In short, then, Passage A shows Minoan collapse pivots around multiple, often accumulative or intermingling factors, including natural disaster, an outside invasion, religious insincerity, and a gendered transition from a matriarchic to a patriarchal religious-political system.

Challenging the Temporality of Collapse

The problem of just how 'abrupt' a collapse should be to distinguish it from a more gradual decline has been observed by Guy Middleton (2017, 11-19 [esp. 16]) in a discussion of various scholarly attempts to define civilisational collapse. And, with regard to Bronze Age Crete, the simple narrative of a singular devastating collapse in the Neopalatial period has likewise been

criticised: ‘Although the destructions of the collapse seem contemporaneous, in view of pottery styles, they may really have happened over some decades, and so destructions were not unusual events in the Neopalatial period’ (Middleton 2017, 122; see Preston 2008, 313). Mary Renault’s *The King Must Die* challenges a simplistic understanding of Minoan collapse not only through providing a complex intermingling of accumulating factors, which, therefore, question what exactly is collapsing (physical infrastructure, aristocracy, and/or belief systems), but also through interrogating the temporality of collapse, as an abrupt rupture in a linear timeline of history. Renault shows civilisational destruction to be gradual, repetitive, and, indeed, undermined by cultural continuity.

A dominant feature of Renault’s narrative technique is the usage of foreshadowing throughout her story: each of the factors which contributes to Minoan collapse has been prefigured and forecasted from early on in the novel; it comes as no great surprise, therefore, when civilisation ‘falls apart’ because its decline has been a long time in the making – it comes across as a gradual process in the narrative time of *The King Must Die*. This is true for most of the factors: an outside invasion, a transition to a patriarchal system, and even natural disaster. For example, the notion of an outside invasion spelling the end of the Minoan thalassocracy has been clearly forecasted. Theseus touts the idea of an invasion first to Ariadne:

> Hush, and listen. If I could get word to my people at home, and they sent me ships, what then? (*KMD* 219)
>
> Later, he confesses to the amiable King Minos: “I have sent word to my father I am alive, and asked him to send ships for me. […] My father has not enough ships [ie to overthrow the Minoan Empire]. I told him to try the High King at Mycenae” (*KMD* 225).

Even before the ‘Crete’ section of the story, the fact that the Minoans will be upended by an invasion from the mainland is apparent when an angry young Theseus confronts the arrogant imperialism of Minoan sailors in Troizen, whom the young hero regards as weak and effeminate (*KMD* 47-49).

It has already been shown how the transition from a matriarchy to a patriarchy is a theme which runs throughout *The King Must Die*; the collapse of the Minoan matriarchy to a 'Hellenic' patriarchy which occurs in the narrative of collapse in Passage A has in fact been building since the very start of the story, when Theseus is vehemently opposed to the symbolic tradition of killing the King Horse (*KMD* 5-17). Even the sudden, catastrophic cocktail of natural catastrophes which afflicts Renault's Minoan Crete has been prefigured in the narrative through the focalisation of Theseus, whose 'extrasensory' ability to detect earthquakes has helped prepare the reader for this final rupture:

> Something caught my ear. I put up my hand for silence. Then I heard it, low and far down, the thing I had heard tell of; the great muffled bellow of the Earth Bull in his secret cave (*KMD* 243).

While Renault's collapse of Minoan Crete is exciting in its immediacy in the closing action sequences, her tale has been building up to it for a considerable amount of narrative time.

In addition to the gradual nature of her collapse, Renault might also be employing a model of collapse in her story which historians and archaeologists (drawing on pre-modern historiographical ideas) have term 'cyclical' or 'dynamic', which emphasises the repetition of collapses as normal across history (see Middleton 2017, 36-40).[66] To this end, one must first note Renault's depiction of cultural, ethnic intermingling during the late (Neopalatial or Postpalatial?) history of her 'Minoan Crete'.[67] Broadly speaking, *The King Must Die* consists of two political groupings of people: the Minoans, who hold Crete as well as various Cycladic islands north of their home base and who have subjugated people along the coasts of mainland Greece to their economic imperialism; and the 'Hellenes' ('Achaeans', 'Mycenaeans'), who are the rising political (and ethnic) grouping in continental Greece (apart from the weakening 'Shore Peoples' who are allied to the Minoans through their matriarchic religion and social structures). Yet Renault's Minoans are already a Mycenaean-Minoan composite, having been conquered in a previous generation by a Mycenaean invasion, a collapse in aristocratic society which is a prelude to that which Theseus' invasion engenders:

[66] For criticisms of systemic approaches to history, Middleton 2017, 40-41.
[67] On the hybridisation of cultures in Bronze Age Crete, see Middleton 2017, 125-126.

> Though the name of Minos is old Cretan, and the Kings have borne it time out of mind, this house had only a strain of the ancient blood. Ever since the great raid from Mycenae, when the royal kin were put to the sword and the Lion King's brother married the Goddess-on-Earth, the kings had ruled in their own right as well as the Queen's, and were no longer sacrificed in the ninth year. Many of the victors had taken Cretan wives, so that most of their customs were still of the old religion […] (*KMD* 193).

The idea of repetitive, multiple Minoan collapses in *The King Must Die* crops up again when Theseus moves through the subterranean foundations of Minos' palace, there witnessing the different layers of Minoan civilisation, pointing to successive collapses (likely from the Old Palace Period).[68]

> The way went winding, through the Labyrinth's very bowels. We passed old uncouth masonry that looked like the work of Titans or the first Earth Men. For this was the core of the foundations, belonging to the earliest House of the Axe, the stronghold of Cretan Minos, two palaces ago. These mighty piers, made strong with the blood of a thousand victims, had withstood the rage of Poseidon when every wall had fallen that stood above the ground (*KMD* 221).

Lastly, there is a continuity to 'native Cretan' civilisation in Renault's narrative, which is apparent in *The Bull from the Sea*, once Theseus has taken over as overlord of Crete in a new Hellene-controlled dynasty: 'They [the native Cretans] thought I would give them more justice than their half-Greek lords, so they helped me every way. And if you go even now to Crete, you will hear them say that I kept faith with them. […]. Minos ruled them lightly and so do I' (*BFS* 33). Renault's usage of the present tense to describe the amicable 'post-collapse' condition of the 'old Cretans' and the similarity of their present lives to their past lives, under King Minos, belittle the collapse of *The King Must Die* as a civilisation-ending event.[69] This notion of continuity conforms to recent scholarly interrogations of the apparent absolute nature of collapse (as it often appears in popular history writings and cultural representations):

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[68] For a brief summary of the Old Palace Period and its collapse, see Driessen and MacDonald 2020, 11-12.

[69] For the continuity of late 'Minoan' civilisation into the Mycenaean period, and the complex intermingling of the different cultures, see Middleton 2017, 122-124.

> When closely examined, the overriding human story is one of survival and regeneration. Certainly crises existed, political forms changed, and landscapes were altered, but rarely did societies collapse in an absolute and apocalyptic sense (McAnany and Joffee 2010, 5-6).[70]

Comparative Approaches to Collapse or Creative Anachronisms?

To add to my earlier discussion, there is a further factor to add to Renault's depiction of cumulative collapse. Similar to how Renault employs the simile of a ship to denote the combined forces of nature and of Theseus' invasion in the Fall of Crete, so another simile in Passage A weds the natural catastrophe with the domestic revolt of the native Cretans.[71] A 'gale' is responsible for spreading the fire and lighting 'the House of Ax […] like day', and, in the preceding paragraph, Ariadne is described with 'her lips parted as if she drank the wind'. The natural catastrophe – and consequently the palatial destruction it causes – is imbibed by the Cretan princess, who like Theseus is raised triumphantly on a chair, and she is raised, importantly, by native Cretans, who 'lifted the poles'; Ariadne has become the totem, the victory standard, for a domestic revolt by indigenous Cretans (pre-Mycenaean Minoans), oppressed by a ruling class of Mycenaean-Minoan 'nobles' who have been ruling Crete. The natural catastrophe has provided this oppressed class of native Cretans with the means for a successful revolt (consuming the winds of change, we might say) against their former overlords, 'nobles' whose 'chairs' (a symbol of power) in which they were conveyed to festive dancing (a symbol of wealth and decadence) are now vacated, and into which Ariadne can now climb. In Renault's multifactor, cumulative approach to Minoan collapse, domestic unrest among the native inhabitants of Crete against a decadent, abusive aristocracy plays an important role in the subsequent fall of this once-great empire.

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[70] It should be reinforced that while Renault challenges the abrupt temporality of collapse, her depiction of the exact scientific chronology of Minoan collapses (and general Bronze Age collapses) is confusing, at least in light of modern studies.

[71] For the idea of social stresses and local unrest combining with natural disaster at Crete, see Middleton 2017, 119-121. For the possible tensions between Knossos elites and other subjugated people in Crete in the Postpalatial period, see Preston 2008, 313-315.

This narrative thread has been forecasted, as with Renault's other factors, throughout the 'Crete' section of the novel. When Theseus' Cranes first arrive on the coast of Crete, it is at once clear that the island aristocracy are living in a 'late' stage of societal decadence and luxury. 'Cretans are full of manners and fanciful customs' (*KMD* 192). The nobles are carried about by slaves on litters, suitably curtained off from the outside world (*KMD* 154-155). Luxurious banquets are frequently held during which accomplished bull-dancing slaves, such as Theseus, are paraded in front of the amused eyes of idle aristocrats (*KMD* 194-195; 217-218). Emphasis is given by Renault to the material, artistic sophistications of the Minoans – in fact, they have evolved so far in their aesthetic tastes that Theseus' own 'primitive' artistic attempts at pottery are heralded as genius by the arbiters of elegance (much to Theseus' common-sense chagrin) (*KMD* 198). Renault also partners such decadence, which is regarded by Theseus as a softness and weakness, with moral decay, most observable in the loose sexual morals of the Minoan aristocrats, with rich women frequently taking attractive bull-leapers as their lovers (*KMD* 194). In the case of the men, there is a growing interest in betting and gambolling on the sacred rite of the bull-dance (*KMD* 196-197).

If this portrait of an ancient imperial civilisation in decay seems vaguely familiar, that is because it is a stock motif in Classical historiography: Herodotus writing about the social-moral decay of fifth-century BCE Persia, Thucydides of Classical Athens, Sallust of Republican Rome, Tacitus of Imperial Rome; not to mention the post-Classical legacy of this theme, most evident in the historiographies of Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776). Renault might well have drawn on this generic ancient-world motif in characterising her Minoan Empire as 'late', as ripe for the fall. Most obviously, the adoption of litters (vehicles for carrying nobles) and slaves feels like a scene from the pages of Suetonius, styling her Minoans as proto-Roman elites, encumbered by oriental luxury: 'The litters approached; first a man in a carrying chair, nursing in his lap a cat with a turquoise collar; then two women's litters, the curtains open, the servants running side by side to let their mistresses gossip' (*KMD* 155).

The very idea of employing comparative (whether modern or ancient paradigms) means to understand civilisational collapse has itself been regarded as a legitimate historical study.[72] Guy Middleton (2017, 114-118) explains how documented natural disasters, for example, the volcanic eruption of Krakatau in 1883, Indonesia, or the tsunami which struck Alexandria in around 365 CE, have been used by scholars as a comparative means to make sense of the physical devastation caused by the natural disasters which might have ended the Neopalatial period in Bronze Age Crete.[73] Middleton (2017, 120) also provides the contemporary example of the Haiti earthquake (2010) as an example of how Cretan civil society might have been destabilised by the effects of natural disaster over and above the immediate physical destruction.

In addition to using stock themes of ancient societal decay, 'the Fall of Decadent Rome' motif, Renault also seems to draw on modern paradigms of destabilised societies to explain Minoan collapse to her readers; in particular, in understanding the domestic political unrest of the native Cretans, Renault points to racial (particularly relating to skin colour) and class-based divisions. Thus, there appears to be a racial or ethnic-based division between the nobility of the Minoans (being more Mycenaean/Hellenic) and the native Cretans. The racial divisions between these two groups are made manifest in the character of Ariadne, whose father Minos was of Hellene origin, and whose mother was a native Cretan: 'My mother called me a little Cretan; I hated Hellenes and their blue eyes' (*KMD* 213). Ariadne's ethnic affiliation with the native Cretans is consolidated in Passage A. Racial divisions are immediately apparent when Theseus first sets foot on the island: the Hellenes 'were much bigger than the Cretans round them, and fairer too' (*KMD* 155), and Asterion is not 'russet like the native Cretans' (*KMD* 156). Theseus later is greatly incensed by the racism towards the native Cretans:

> [T]hey [the Mycenaean/Hellenic ruling class among the Minoans] held the native Cretans, who came of the land both sides, in the greatest scorn. I could see no sense in this, for they were not barbarous, being as everyone knows the best craftsmen

[72] For a summary of comparative approaches to collapse, with criticisms on the approach, see Middleton 2017, 20-29.
[73] Manning refers to the Santorini/Thera eruption as the 'prehistoric Pompeii of the Aegean world' (2012, 457).

> anywhere; it was they indeed who taught these half-Hellenes to write. They are small-made, like most Earthlings, and reddish-dark, but not unpleasing to look at; and some of them came from very ancient lines, though now brought down and poor. As far as I could see, they were being humbled only to make their masters think better of themselves. It set my teeth on edge to hear them miscalled by scornful nicknames, Scabby or Bandy or Squint, and talked of in their presence as if they were dogs (*KMD* 193).

This race-based discrimination is, then, further exacerbated through a class-based, economic distinction which relegates native Cretans to a lower social standing. Both Theseus and Asterion realise that the battle for dominance over the former Minoan realm will centre around the successful inciting of this suppressed native population (*KMD* 219). Unsurprisingly, this class-ethnic revolution is critical in the closing sequence of Minoan collapse:

> And then I saw that all around us, in the mounting glow of the fires, the walks and lawns were black [sic] with Cretans. They came swarming and clambering up the slopes from the open places where they had fled to abide the wrath of Poseidon. The servants in the Bull Court had heard my warning, and run out to warn their friends. All through the Palace, Cretan had told Cretan; they had put down broom and pot and lamp and trencher, and slipped away (*KMD* 253).

While archaeologists have alluded to the possibility of domestic unrest in Crete as a result of a dominating elites (based in Knossos) as leading to collapse, Renault's focus on tensions which arise because of racism with specific respect to skin colour (and physical constitution) and because of a collective class revolt (a 'workers-of-the-world-unite', 'put-down-your-brooms-and-pots' narrative) suggest that she is applying twentieth-century notions of social, ethnic inequality in order to help contemporary readers understand why her Minoan civilisation might be veering towards collapse. Renault's explanation of Minoan collapse is, in part, understandable to us because we have modern examples of societies declining and heading towards collapse because of ethnic racism (Nazi Germany and Apartheid South Africa, in which Renault spend the second half of her life) and because of class inequalities between elites and peasantry (Tsarist Russia). Renault's benevolent characterisation of the oppressed native Cretans suggest a modern sensibility which can be found in postcolonialism and critical Marxism (although Renault was no fan of group thinking).

Using comparative means to understand ancient collapse, while presenting the historian with some creative possibilities for rethinking a given historical event (particularly when there is a lack of data as in Minoan Crete), will of course also introduce obvious anachronisms. Modern notions of racism because of skin colour differences and an idealised, mobilised working class probably do not add much in the way to our historic understanding of Bronze Age Cretan collapse. Renault seems at times to have been quite self-conscious of the modernising aspect of her writing.[74] To cite one obvious example from *The King Must Die*, Renault's Anglo-American readership was at least familiar with one modern bull-worshipping culture in the form of Spain – the bull arena, the heroic figures of the matador and toreador, and the ritualistic, honourable killing of the bull, indoctrinated into the popular imagination by Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), with a long cultural afterlife. Renault makes such a comparison in her 'Author's Note':

> From the Knossos finds, it is clear that the Cretan bull-ring equalled that of Spain in popular esteem. It is not inconceivable that a leading *torero*, enjoying perhaps the combined prestige of a Manoleto and a Nikinsky, might become a princess' lover […](*KMD* 283).

And Renault does discreetly insert this motif of the popular *torero* in *The King Must Die*: Theseus' popularity among the Cretans is gradually enhanced through his spectacular performance as a bull-leaper, a quasi-*torero* in the arena, and it is there in the arena, moreover, that Theseus catches the eye of Ariadne. The motif of the bull-fighter running off with the young female admirer, often with tragic end results, is a well-trodden motif in contemporary fiction on the Spanish bull arena: from, for example, Hemingway's Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) who taunts her throng of Anglo-American admirers (Jake, Mike, Robert) by running off for a short-lived romance with the matador Romero to the matador in Woody Allen's satire *Zelig* (1983), who steals away, with comically fatal results, with the sister of the 'human-chameleon'.

[74] On the tension for Renault between the contextualising (modernising) tendencies of a writer and the appeal of the universal in historical fiction, see 'Notes' 85-86; also Zilboorg 2001, 139. For other examples of modernisations in *The King Must Die*, see Wolfe 1969, 151-152. Renault's tendency to modernise can also be seen in her rationalisation of the supernatural (see Burns 1963, 110-112).

Renault's anachronisms—drawing on modern notions of inequality, on images from modern popular culture (the slave revolt of Theseus in the bull court, moreover, might draw on the popular image of Spartacus, in numerous twentieth-century representations)— have been deemed spurious by historians in trying to reconstruct Bronze Age Crete. Dryer (1974, 283) regards Renault's heroes as, in some respects, essentially English, and on account of such anachronisms he is, therefore, more sceptical of Bernard Dick's claim of Renault's relevance to professional classical scholarship.[75] That historical fiction inevitably introduces modernisms and anachronisms does not discount, however, the utility of such creative sensemaking, as that of Renault, for ancient historians. As this paper has tried to show, Mary Renault's text on Minoan Crete aligns with the works of modern historians from broader methodological perspectives – creating a complex view of collapse, which transcends unifactor, abrupt notions of the end of Minoan Crete.

Conclusion: Renault's Legacy

Mary Renault's *The King Must Die* lies within a tradition of twentieth-century Minoanist writings, the reception of the Minoans, Minoan Crete, and its symbolic terrain, a category which includes theorists such as Jane Ellen Harrison, Sigmund Freud, and, certainly, Sir Arthur Evans; travel writers such as Evelyn Waugh, Henry Miller, and Barry Unsworth; 'literary-fiction' writers such as Nikos Kazantzakis, André Gide, and Lawrence Durrell; popular fiction novelists such as Robert Graves and Poul Anderson. Perhaps more than any of these writers, Renault's construction of Minoan Crete encourages comparison with academic scholarship, with the archaeological discussions on Bronze Age Crete and historical hypotheses regarding this pre-Classical civilisation. This paper has argued that Renault's description of the collapse of Minoan civilisation employs a methodological sophistication which has been reinforced by modern archaeologists and scholars. Collapse, as a field of enquiry, seems uniquely suited to Renault's abilities; 'Collapse', as Middleton says, 'lies at an interface between academic research and popular culture; it is a subject for serious analysis by archaeologists, historians, and academics in other fields, as well as for entertainment, sermonizing, and spectacle' (2018,

[75] On Renault as a writer defined by the social-political struggles of the 1930s, even in her Classical works, see Wolfe 15-32.

91). Renault's *The King Must Die* finds for itself a middle-ground between the domains of the creative and the scholarly, providing a level of historical complexity which is often lacking in other popular accounts of Minoan civilisation, while at the same time providing creative insights for scholars into how and why Minoan civilisation might have 'collapsed'.

Given the popularity of her works among Classicists (especially as an adolescent entry-point into the academic profession), a topic for further enquiry in 'Renault studies' (surely a literary studies field which deserves as much scrutiny as 'Tolkien studies' or other author-driven subfields) might be to trace the subtle legacy of Renault's discourse on the Minoans in subsequent scholarship (particularly British scholarship) on the Bronze Age Cretans. Certainly, Renault's depiction of Minoan Crete has been enormously influential with regard to creative writers and popular historians. Three examples from different genres will suffice to prove the point. While Michael Wood generally stays clear of popular accounts of the Mycenaean/Minoan world in his popular history *In Search of the Trojan War* (2008 [1985]), he does cite Renault's popularisation of the Theseus myth in his discussion of the Classical Greek myths (102-103). In his lively travel guide to Crete, which provides a smorgasbord of different historical periods 'left' on the island, Barry Unsworth (2007, 119-120) cites Renault's *The Bull from the Sea* when discussing the 'bull-leaping' fresco. And in Poul Anderson's time-travelling science fiction novel set in the Bronze-Age Aegean, the narrator Duncan Reid explicitly cites Renault:

> The prince [Theseus] actually topped the American [Reid] by a couple of inches. The latter had been surprised at the degree of surprise that caused him, till he tracked down the reason: Mary Renault's fine novels, which described Theseus as a short man. Well, she'd made—would make—a logical interpretation of the legend; but how much of the legend would reflect truth? (Anderson 1972, 78)[76]

[76] See also: 'You breed your cattle, not for slowness as Mary Renault had suggested, but for intelligence […]' (Anderson 1972, 118).