



Discussion Questions: *The King at the Edge of the World*

“Words, Words, Words” Book Club—March 2022

1. What are your first impressions of the novel? Are there any passages that stuck out to you?
2. Elizabethan England is often depicted as a powerful, advanced, and thriving culture, but the Turkish diplomats look down on it in comparison with Constantinople and see it as a “tiny, wet, and blustery island, impossibly far from civilization.” How does this affect your own perception of England at the time?
3. The espionage at the heart of the book is laced with theatrical imagery, built from Belloc’s own time as part of a playing company. What did you think of this juxtaposition? Was it fitting or distracting?
4. There are many subtle references to Shakespeare’s plays threaded throughout the novel. Were you anticipating an appearance from the playwright? Why do you think Phillips chose to allude to him in this way? Did you find it enjoyable or distracting?
5. What does the continued treatment of Mahmoud Ezzedine as a “gift” say about how people were seen by the court/nobles?
6. Why do you think Ezzedine decides to convert to Christianity? What insight does this choice give him when approaching the situation in the Scottish court?
7. In what ways do we see the identities of Belloc, Ezzedine, and King James shift over the course of the novel? Are the changes of their own making or due to circumstances out of their control, and how well do you think each handles those shifts?
8. The novel culminates in the test devised to determine James’ true faith, yet we as readers see that that test brings false results. What does this say about our understanding of truth?
9. What did you make of the ending and Ezzedine’s fate(s)?
10. This novel touches on a number of themes, including truth, faith, agency, and identity. What would you say resonated most strongly for you? If asked, what would you say this novel is about?