

The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

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How to cite: Ellmann, M. 'After the Death of Don Juan: Sylvia Townsend Warner's Spanish Novel.' *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 2017, 17(2), pp. 1–26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.stw.2017.07>

Published: 11 December 2017

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double blind peer-review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

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After the Death of Don Juan: Sylvia Townsend Warner's Spanish Novel

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First of all, I'd like to thank the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society for inviting me to re-launch this lecture series, and for publishing my lecture in this admirable journal. One of the most original and versatile writers of the last century, Warner has rarely received the critical attention she deserves. In the last decade or so, however, her reputation has enjoyed a belated boost, partly owing to a revival of interest in *Midcentury Modern Writers* – which is the title of a book series I'm editing for Edinburgh University Press, just to sneak in a plug. In the United States, where until recently Warner was virtually forgotten, despite her long and glamorous association with *The New Yorker*, the reissue by New York Review Books (NYRB) of three of her novels, combined with the expansion of the modernist canon in academic literary studies, has helped to put her back on the map.

At the end of Warner's novel *After the Death of Don Juan*, the dying peasants of Tenorio Viejo, mown down by Don Juan's army, lament that their village is too obscure to be marked on the map of Spain. 'We have lived in a very small place, Diego', Ramon Perez reflects. 'We have lived in Spain', his friend replies.¹ Well, their author also lived in a very small place, both in Britain and in British literature; the aim of this essay, as of this biannual lecture, is to ensure that Warner lives on in the larger map of modern literature.

While some of Warner's novels have been republished by NYRB, *After the Death of Don Juan* has remained out of print since the Virago edition of 1989, and neglected even by Warner's champions. Only one journal essay to date has focused exclusively on this novel, Mercedes Aguirre's 'History and Myth in *After the Death of Don Juan*', which was published in this journal in 2014. In addition, Wendy Mulford provides

a luminous introduction to the Virago edition, Chris Hopkins devotes a chapter to *Don Juan* in his *English Fiction in the 1930s* and Barbara Brothers addresses the novel briefly in two essays on Warner's writings on Spain.² So I hope my contribution will also help to revive interest in *After the Death of Don Juan*, which is one of Warner's finest novels and belongs among the classics of its era.

One possible reason for this critical neglect is the novel's genre: like its predecessor *Summer Will Show*, *After the Death of Don Juan* is a historical novel, a genre that tends to be disparaged in academic criticism, perhaps because it is so popular among 'common' readers, especially women readers.³ The prestige accorded to the one-day urban novels of high modernism, particularly to Joyce's *Ulysses*, has tended to relegate the historical novel to the literary suburbs of the 'middle-brow'. Of course, this pecking order disregards the fact that *Ulysses* itself is a historical novel, set 18 years before its publication date in a Dublin petrified like Pompeii on a single day.⁴ Admittedly, Joyce's time-travel from 1922 to 1904 is less drastic than Warner's leap from the 1930s to the 1760s, and many readers, high- and middle-brow alike, might be daunted by the prospect of parachuting into eighteenth-century Spain. What softens the landing, however, is the vividness of Warner's evocation of this bygone world, which dispenses with period detail and other wordy trappings typical of historical novels. Nor is this world so bygone as you might expect, given that the predicament of the 1930s Spanish peasantry had scarcely altered since 'the seventh decade of the eighteenth century' – the date that Warner assigns to the novel's action (*ADDJ*, p. 1). By focusing on the unrecorded lives of the poor, Warner challenges the Whig conception of history as uninterrupted progress towards enlightenment and economic growth, exposing instead the uneven development that condemned modern-day Andalusian peasants to the same immiseration suffered by their ancestors two centuries before.

Another reason for Warner's relative obscurity lies in her reticence about her own intentions. Most writers leave more tracks, divulging their ambitions to friends and editors, or hinting at their own aesthetic principles in reviews of other writers' work. Warner, by contrast, rarely comments on her literary contemporaries, nor do her letters or diaries give much away about the motives and methods of her work. Only one letter to Nancy Cunard, written six years after the publication of *After the Death of Don Juan*, offers some tantalising hints about the author's intentions; but despite its evident importance this letter is weirdly excluded by William Maxwell from his edition of Warner's

correspondence, where only an excerpt is cited in a footnote. This much-quoted excerpt describes the novel as ‘a parable, if you like the word, or an allegory or what you will, of the political chemistry of the Spanish War, with the Don Juan – more of Molière than of Mozart – developing as the Fascist of the piece’.⁵ In the following pages I try to unpack some of the clues encrypted in this rare disclosure.

First of all, to address ‘the political chemistry of the Spanish War’, I begin with a brief account of Warner’s two trips with Valentine Ackland to Spain, when the couple volunteered their services to the beleaguered republic. I then provide a brief summary of the novel’s action to investigate why Warner chose the Don Juan myth for her ‘parable’ or ‘allegory’ of Spanish war. This myth, as one critic has wittily observed, demonstrates a ‘ferocious intertextuality’, an ‘ability to leap from text to text, plot to plot, genre to genre, and culture to culture as easily as [the seducer] moves from bed to bed’.⁶ In the early decades of the twentieth century, Don Juan became the subject of intense debate among the Spanish intellectuals known as the Generation of ’98, who sought to create a new Spanish identity in the wake of Empire. Thus Warner’s novel belongs to a widespread renewal of interest in Don Juan, providing only one of many afterlives conferred on the legendary libertine. As the Spanish critic Antonio Marichalar notes in T.S. Eliot’s *Criterion* in 1927, Don Juan refuses to stay dead: ‘Don Juan laughed at the skull; even the sight of his own funeral did not frighten him ... it is in conformity with his nature and his legend not to believe himself to be dead...’.⁷

After comparing Warner’s novel to other versions of the Don Juan legend, especially Molière’s, my essay concludes by discussing the affinities between *After the Death of Don Juan* and contemporary documentary cinema, specifically Luis Buñuel’s *Las Hurdes: Land Without Bread*, which investigates a remote and impoverished region often characterised as ‘dark Spain’. Despite their obvious differences of media and genre, Buñuel’s film and Warner’s novel are united in their effort to expose the longstanding inequalities of Spanish agrarian society. They also share an interest in what Buñuel (after Maurice Legendre) calls ‘human geography’, or the influence of landscape, philology and custom on the character of the *pueblo* – the Spanish term for people but also for their settlements.⁸ As Joseph Schraibman explains, ‘*People, pueblo*, is hard to render. It means folk, population, or a collection of persons. It also means town, townspeople, or the common folk, not the lofty politicians.’⁹ I would argue that the hero of *After the Death of Don Juan* is not the legendary rake, let alone his

lovesick stalker Doña Ana, nor even the leader of the peasants' uprising Ramon Perez, but the whole *pueblo* that Ramon represents. Warner dispenses with divas and divos to focus on the chorus of the common people in their harsh surroundings. The only heroism, and perhaps the closest thing to subjectivity, resides in the savage beauty of the Spanish landscape, where human beings figure mainly as *staffage*, or emanations of its parched eviscerate soil.

* * *

On 14 September 1936 Valentine Ackland wrote a letter to the left-leaning *News Chronicle* proposing to assemble a group of self-funded volunteers, if possible bringing their own cars, with a knowledge of first aid and a 'willingness to help, in every way possible, the Loyalists' magnificent fight'. To encourage others, she proposed to transport her own 'small fast 2-seater' to Spain.¹⁰ This well-meaning but somewhat haphazard scheme failed to gain approval from either the Communist Party or the Spanish Medical Aid Committee in London. But Ackland was determined to join the struggle and only regretted that she never got the opportunity to use her expert marksmanship.¹¹ Bypassing official channels, Warner and Ackland made their own way to Spain, where they managed to attach themselves to an ambulance unit in Barcelona, although their duties consisted 'mainly of office work rather than actually driving ambulances'.¹² This three-week stint was followed by an excursion the following year to participate in the Writers' Conference in Madrid. During these visits Warner fell in love with Spain, enraptured by the austere beauty of its landscape as well as by the courageous resilience of its populace: 'I've never seen people who I admired more', she declared in an interview published in *PN Review* in 1981. 'I never again saw a country I loved as much as I loved Spain. A most ungainly country to love, but it's extraordinarily beautiful.'¹³ Perhaps Warner was drawn to the legend of the Spanish seducer because she was so powerfully seduced by Spain.

In any case, both partners were a lot more enchanted by the Spanish than by their fellow Britons in the Communist Party. In their joint report addressed to 'Comrade [Harry] Pollitt', then General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), the women criticised the party leadership in Spain for its lack of discipline and efficiency. Most egregious was its failure 'to apply political understanding to the situation, and adopt a satisfactory social attitude', or even to master the rudiments of the Spanish language. This situation, the women

wrote, 'can be summed up fairly by saying that the atmosphere amongst the English in Barcelona is the atmosphere of the English in India. (A remark of Com. Luttit (British Party comrade in command of the hospital at Granen) reported to us with approval was "the best way to speak to the Spaniards is with a whip").' The joint report also complained that

[t]here was not sufficient attempt to understand the political situation in Spain, nor the special difficulties of a united front, including Communists, Anarchists, Socialists, and national minority party ... This resulted in the isolation of the British Party ... The general effect was of a clique absorbed in their own affairs and managing them badly.¹⁴

In a letter to Elizabeth Wade White in 1936, Warner rejoiced that the congeniality of the Spanish people 'overleapt any little bounds of language', but she disapproved of her compatriots' linguistic chauvinism.¹⁵ For her own part, she gained enough proficiency in Spanish to translate a number of popular ballads known as *romanceros*, and possibly to glean some knowledge of Spanish intellectual currents; she may have heard of leading figures like Buñuel, Marichalar and the philosopher-poet Miguel de Unamuno, whose concept of the '*intra-historia*', I'm going to argue, invites comparison to *After the Death of Don Juan*. But her joint report's criticism of the CPGB was largely restricted to the party's monolingualism; although the authors mention 'the difficulties of a united front', neither Warner nor Ackland paid much attention to the infighting among the Left, which looms so large in George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).

The partners' omission of such matters from their writing, as Angela Jackson has pointed out, reflects a common tendency among British women in Spain 'to focus their attention on aspects of the war other than the political divisions within the Left'.¹⁶ Neither Warner nor Ackland grasped the extent to which the Spanish republic had become a pawn in the struggle between the major European powers of Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and the Communist USSR. Nor did they protest against the Communist Party's suppression of rival leftist groups, including the anti-Stalinist POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista), to which Orwell was affiliated. Ackland refers once to POUM as 'the smallest and noisiest of the three parties in Barcelona',¹⁷ but ignores the fact that this group was maligned by the Communist Party as a disguised Fascist organisation whose fifth-column rising had been thwarted by loyal troops.¹⁸ Orwell was so outraged by this slander, as

well as by the propaganda blasting from all sides, in which history was 'being written not in terms of what happened but of what ought to have happened according to various party lines', that he feared the imminent 'abandonment of the idea that history *could* be truthfully written': a fear that culminates in the nightmare of 1984, where the ruling clique 'controls not only the future, but *the past*'.¹⁹ In contrast to Orwell, Warner and Ackland saw the Spanish war as a Manichean struggle between Right and Left: as Warner stated categorically, 'The choice of all who think and feel is ... between Fascism and Socialism.'²⁰

Having joined the Communist Party between 1934 and 1935, Warner had rapidly become a *jusqu'aboutiste* for whom Stalin could do no wrong.²¹ In fact her devotion to 'Uncle Joe' persisted throughout the 1950s, when she turned a blind eye to mounting evidence of Stalinist atrocities, dismissing such reports as bourgeois propaganda. Ackland, for once the saner partner, abandoned the Communist Party at this time, appalled by Stalin's murderous regime as well as by Warner's obstinate defence of it. As Arnold Rattenbury discerns: 'However bewitched [Warner's] pen, however bewitching, she lived wholly in an unambiguous world where the only duty lies in taking sides. The books as well as the author are always partisan.'²² This partisanship undoubtedly affects her presentation of class warfare in *After the Death of Don Juan*, which pits right against left, rich against poor, with few allowances for admixture in the 'political chemistry'. It could even be argued that Warner's historical novel is trying to control the past, as Orwell feared, and to rewrite history 'not in terms of what happened but of what ought to have happened' according to the author's party line. But Warner, in her own words, offers a 'parable or allegory' of the Spanish crisis, making no claims to historical truth, which opens up her narrative to ambiguity, deflecting her own tendency to absolutism. In this way the artist in Warner gets the better of the propagandist; instead of nailing down an ideology – to vary D.H. Lawrence's famous aphorism – 'the novel gets up and walks away with the nail'.²³

* * *

The *mise-en-scène* of *After the Death of Don Juan* divides sharply between the indolent aristocrats, fortified in their towering palaces, and the labourers outside these edifices, who are usually presented at ground level. Above and below, inside and outside: the narrative ricochets between these class-marked vantage-points, emphasising their disjunction with abrupt scene-changes. The first scene takes place

inside the palace in Seville where the pampered heiress Doña Ana moons about Don Juan, whose advances on her honour have been cut short by his death. That Don Juan killed her father the Commander, who tried to protect her from the libertine's sexual assault, has done nothing to dampen her lust. Convinced by Leporello's report that the sinner was dragged by demons into hell, Doña Ana insists on conveying this news in person to Don Juan's father Don Saturno. Hence she sets forth on an arduous pilgrimage to the remote region of Tenorio Viejo, accompanied by a large retinue of flunkies, including her newly married foppish husband Don Ottavio. At every church along the way, Doña Ana insists on stopping to indulge in fervent prayers, ostensibly to save her father's soul but really to stoke her own erotomania, thus slowing the expedition to a snail's pace.

When the cortège finally reaches its destination, the travellers are greeted by the landowner Don Saturno, a dilettantish philanthropist whose hospitality conceals his irritation with these uninvited and expensive guests. Informed by Doña Ana of the supernatural comeuppance inflicted on his son, Don Saturno dismisses the rumour as too good to be true. Much as he would like to be relieved of his son's debts, which have crippled his estate and thwarted his projects to improve the peasants' lot, he has heard this story too often before: it is the stuff of family legend, regurgitated by the 'rapscaillionly valet' Leporello, the only witness to his master's supposed abduction into hell (*ADDJ*, p. 13). This is a gloriously metafictional moment: Don Saturno, himself a recycled figment of the Don Juan myth, discounts this very myth for having been recycled.

Flummoxed by her host's reaction, 'slow-witted' Doña Ana gradually reaches the conclusion that her heart-throb is still alive: 'Not damned, not even dead' (*ADDJ*, pp. 48, 50). On the eve of the travellers' return to Seville, Doña Ana decides to hold an all-night vigil in the local church. During her nocturnal devotions, a cat begins to yowl, 'venting its shameless desolate sexual cry', and the lady and the cat continue to pray and yowl in counterpoint throughout the night (*ADDJ*, pp. 81–2). Back at the palace, superstitious Don Ottavio mistakes a valet for the ghost of his father-in-law the Commander and tumbles downstairs in the servant's arms, resulting in a knee injury that delays the homeward journey for another week: 'It is the will of heaven!' exclaims Doña Ana, far from disappointed by this outcome (*ADDJ*, p. 87).

Shortly afterwards Don Juan himself reappears, as if he had been summoned from the grave by Ana's lust. As it turns out, he was neither dead nor damned; instead, an embarrassing attack of nettle rash

compelled his sudden departure from Seville – ‘I could not face them with a face covered with blotches’ (*ADDJ*, p. 207) – where Leporello was entrusted with the task of spreading the thrilling cover story of his master’s death. But Don Juan redivivus shows little of his legendary ardour for the female sex. Far from pleased to learn that Doña Ana has been stalking him, ‘mewing and spitting and caterwauling’ (*ADDJ*, p. 219), the resurrected villain spurns her lust. His attitude confirms Stendhal’s diagnosis of the Don Juan syndrome: ‘Instead of losing himself in the enchanting reveries of crystallization, he thinks, like a general, of the success of his manœuvres and, in a word, he kills love, instead of enjoying it more keenly than other men, as ordinary people imagine.’²⁴

Short of cash and weary of playing the gigolo, Warner’s Don Juan has come back to Tenorio Viejo to squeeze money out of the family estate. Foreseeing that irrigation will vastly increase profits, he seizes on his father’s philanthropic plan as a chance to enrich himself at the peasants’ expense. These peasants, whose hopes for irrigation had been raised by the rumours of Juan’s death, which would relieve the estate of his gambling debts, are dismayed to hear that the *roué* is still alive. Crowding around the castle, they demand to see their nemesis with their own eyes. When Don Juan presents himself in an upper-storey window:

They looked up at him and he looked down on them, and saw on every face the same sullen despairing recognition. A moment after, the doors were thrown open, and Doña Ana appeared on the top step. Looking out on the crowd she said in a ringing voice, ‘He lies! Do not believe him, good people ... Before God and the most Holy Virgin I swear to you he lies. He is not Don Juan. I, who speak to you, have known Don Juan well. I have loved him and lain in his arms. A woman who loves is not mistaken in the man of her love. I tell you, this man here is not Don Juan. He is some impostor’ (*ADDJ*, pp. 222–3).

Evidently too much praying has driven Doña Ana mad, but no one contradicts her delusional confession; instead, at Don Juan’s signal, Leporello drives the grandees’ carriage hastily away. Inside the carriage, Doña Ana broods in silence, ‘inaccessible as a mermaid in the sea’ (*ADDJ*, p. 225), while her husband sulks about his wounded honour; outside the castle, the crowd puzzles over these conflicting signs. One peasant guesses that Doña Ana is ‘[c]razed for love’ (*ADDJ*, p. 228), but

others object that she doesn't rave and slaver like a madwoman. If her words can be trusted, and the man who calls himself Don Juan is really an impostor, Don Saturno must be trying to renege on his commitment to the irrigation project: 'rather than pay for the irrigation, and to have an excuse not to pay for it, Don Saturno is tricking us with a false Don Juan ... he'll give us another Don Juan instead of the water' (*ADDJ*, pp. 236–7). At this point the cheerful gathering escalates into an angry protest.

Meanwhile Don Ottavio, his injured honour demanding satisfaction, returns to the besieged castle to take revenge on his wife's supposed lover. The assembled peasants, sympathising with the cuckold's plight, help him sneak into the stronghold in the hope that he will finish off their enemy. But Don Ottavio abhors the peasants as a greater evil than his rival. Instead of killing Don Juan, he saves his wife's seducer from a peasant's knife. Thus the claims of class eclipse those of masculine pride: it is more important to these rivals to keep the peasants down than to keep their woman from each other. United by class interest, the two aristocrats connive in summoning an army to put down the uprising. Appalled by this fiendish plan, Don Saturno tries to warn the peasants, but Don Juan ties him to a chair. Thus the old well-meaning liberal sits in helpless silence as the army opens fire on his tenants and the newly bonded rivals gloat over the carnage.

* * *

As this summary indicates, Warner's novel shifts drastically from the high-camp comedy of its opening scenes to the apocalyptic massacre of its finale. The author clearly relishes such jagged disjunctions; her previous novel *Summer Will Show* catapults its English heroine from the pastoral world of Jane Austen into the Paris Revolution of 1848, making little effort to justify this preposterous jump. In allegorical terms, Don Juan's supposed death and resurrection correspond to Franco's banishment to the Canary Islands in 1936 and his subsequent return to Seville in the military coup of 17–18 July. Much as Warner's Don Juan enlists the army to attack his long-established neighbours, so Franco connived with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy to attack his own people, as in the bombing of Guernica on 26 April 1937.

Why did Warner choose the Don Juan legend for her allegory of the Spanish Civil War? The obvious answer is that 'Don Juan is Spanish', as Marichalar insists.²⁵ In point of fact, Don Juan's national origins have been subject to debate, with some factions claiming him

for Italy, others for Portugal; Unamuno uproots him from his traditional stamping ground in Seville to relocate him in Galicia.²⁶ Meanwhile the literary figure of Don Juan, far from staying put in Spain, has roamed across the globe, where his progeny extend from Brazil to Japan. To say Don Juan is Spanish, then, is to repatriate his nomadic legend; it is also to confer a unity on Spain belied by its divisive regionalisms, as well as by its mutinous empire, which collapsed after the Spanish–American War of 1898. A profound shock to Spain’s national pride, this collapse provoked a thorough philosophical and artistic reevaluation of Spanish culture by the Generation of ’98, who seized on the figure of Don Juan to represent their country’s contradictions. While his legendary energy and virility were seen to herald the revival of the nation, his decadence testified to its stagnation and decay, thus making Don Juan an apt ‘symbol of Spain’s contemporary dilemma as a tradition-bound country seeking to enter the modern world’.²⁷ In this context the legendary Don Juan was seen to combine a nativist past with a cosmopolitan future.²⁸

Writing in 1927, at the height of the Don Juan revival, Marichalar jokes that ‘there is not a single Spanish pen that has not written something about him. Philosophers, dramatists, essayists, poets, journalists, and others; and now they have been joined by the doctors who go after Don Juan with new methods.’²⁹ By doctors, Marichalar is referring specifically to Gonzago Rodríguez Lafora and Gregorio Marañón y Posadillo,³⁰ who had recently produced studies of the Don Juan legend. Outside Spain, the most famous doctors to go after Don Juan were psychoanalysts. Freud’s disciple Otto Rank, in his influential book *The Don Juan Legend* (1924; revised 1932), interprets the seducer’s promiscuity as a symptom of erotic fixation on the unattainable mother. Less predictably Freudian is Freud himself, who – no doubt inspired by Leporello’s famous catalogue aria in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* (*Madamina, il catalogo è questo*) – views Don Juan as the prototype of the collector.³¹

Fending off such psychoanalytic probing, Warner’s version of *Don Juan* offers little access to the inner lives of its protagonists. From a psychoanalytic perspective, however, it is intriguing that the narrative is virtually devoid of mothers: both the leading figures Don Juan and Doña Ana are motherless, as are minor characters like the miller’s light-fingered daughter Celestina. Of course, motherlessness is a familiar trope of the nineteenth-century novel, whose heroes have generally lost at least one parent, or two if they’re particularly careless, as Wilde’s Lady Bracknell chides. In Warner’s novel, on the other hand, the disappearance of mothers could be seen as a symptom not merely of Don Juan’s individual pathology but of the malaise of the whole *pueblo*,

labouring under the yoke of a desiccated patriarchy. This motherlessness could also refer reflexively to Warner's narrative itself, her austere 'parable or allegory' severed from the sentimental tradition of the novel in which the mother, lost and found, plays such a pivotal role.

While psychoanalysts pathologised Don Juan, the Generation of '98 attempted to purge the Spanish icon of 'his socially irresponsible dimension' in order to exalt him as a national hero.³² Yet several Spanish women writers of the period resisted the rehabilitation of Don Juan, producing a number of adaptations that emphasise the libertine's mistreatment of his victims. As Roberta Johnson has shown, these adaptations strip the Don Juan figure of 'his illustrious past associated with national glory and transform him into a contemporary national disgrace'.³³ While it is unlikely that Warner knew about these adaptations, she shares their impulse to de-heroicise the libertine. In her version, however, Don Juan's victims are the poor rather than the jilted; in fact the most dated feature of her novel, and possibly the most off-putting, is its indifference to the plight of women, except for those oppressed by the class structure.³⁴ In Warner's scale of values, class trumps gender: the idea that Doña Ana, with all her wealth and privilege, might also be oppressed by sexist customs and conventions never punctures the Marxist worldview of the novel. Warner's antihero, meanwhile, shows little sign of what Joyce calls 'dongiovannism'.³⁵ Devoid of the charm of his precursors, as well as their exuberant lust, Warner's Don Juan is a sexless thug. Even his legendary rhetorical prowess, epitomised in Molière's play, is redistributed by Warner among the peasants in a kind of Marxist economy of eloquence.

Both Molière and Mozart inherited the Don Juan theme from the first theatrical version of the legend, which is credited to the Spanish monk and playwright Tirso de Molina. In his 1630 play *The Trickster of Seville* [*El Burlador de Sevilla*], Tirso grafted a contemporary stereotype – the wealthy and licentious reprobate – onto an old folktale, retold in popular song and verse-romance, in which a reckless sinner invites a dead man (or his head, or his statue) to a banquet.³⁶ This cross-fertilisation of old and new could be compared to John Polidori's reinvention of the 'Vampyre' two centuries later, which was accomplished by fusing the folkloric vampire – typically a drooling zombie that returns from the grave to torment his relatives – with the Byronic Regency rake.³⁷ This fusion brought forth the now-familiar figure of the aristocratic vampire, who boasts several traits associated with Don Juan, notably his irresistible seductive power, along with his polymorphic afterlives in literature, stage and screen. Indeed, Warner's Don Juan is

vampire enough to stage a comeback from the grave, although we soon learn that reports of his death have been greatly exaggerated – but the same applies to vampires as a constituency.

What probably appealed to Warner in Molière's staging of the legend was its flagrant violation of moral and theatrical propriety. Notorious for its uneven structure, as well as for the sacrilegious hubris of its leading figure, Molière's *Dom Juan, ou le festin de pierre* (1665) was withdrawn after its initial run in Paris, where audiences were scandalised by its impiety. Thereafter the work languished in critical and theatrical neglect until the twentieth century, when it became one of the dramatist's most popular comedies. Molière's 'crime', as it was termed by a contemporary sonneteer, was to have taken a Spanish morality play and, relocating it to contemporary France, transformed it into 'a dangerously ambivalent study of a powerful nobleman running roughshod over Christian morality'.³⁸ To make matters worse, there are no countervailing voices in the play to stand up for religion and morality. Tirso, by contrast, assigned the role of moral watchdog to Don Juan's servant Catalinón, thereby inaugurating a tradition whereby the master is paired with a valet, much as Don Quixote is paired with Sancho Panza, or Faust with Mephistopheles. In his psychoanalytic study of Don Juan, Otto Rank views this master-and-servant pair as two halves of a divided personality, the Don having cast off his conscience and scruples – anything that could interfere with his career as a successful libertine – onto his reproving valet.³⁹

Like Tirso, Molière assigns to the valet Sganarelle the traditional task of moralising at his master and sympathising with his victims. But instead of standing up for justice, Sganarelle is overwhelmed by Dom Juan's rhetorical skills, literally falling flat on his face: 'Splendid! There lies your argument with a broken nose' [*Bon! Voilà ton raisonnement qui a le nez cassé*], his master mocks.⁴⁰ Sganarelle's famous last words – 'Oh, my wages, my wages!' [*O mes gages, mes gages!*] – put '*mes gages*' where '*mon dieu*' should be, thereby disclaiming all pretence to moral authority: what he laments is the loss of Dom Juan's purse rather than his soul.⁴¹ Although his master is punished in the grand finale when he disappears under the floorboards, supposedly consumed in the flames of hell, this gimmick is so contrived as to travesty the principle of divine retribution. Morally ambiguous, Molière's work also flouts aesthetic decorum, casting off the classic unities to produce a baroque machine-play with an episodic, jerky plot and a preposterous denouement. In a further assault on theatrical etiquette, *Dom Juan* is written in racy prose, rather than dignified Alexandrines.

What Warner borrows from Molière's play is its sceptical outlook, along with its jolting scene-changes and slapstick humour. But she departs from both Molière and Mozart by playing down the trademark motifs of the legend, especially Don Juan's last supper with the Stone Guest. As several commentators have observed, this traditional climax smacks of oral sadism: when Don Juan is swallowed up into the jaws of hell, the diner effectively becomes the dinner. This oral *contrapasso* provides a fitting punishment for the oral crime of promise-breaking, or in J.L. Austin's terms, of infelicitous performatives.⁴² In a fascinating study of Molière's play, Shoshana Felman argues that Juan's offence, as well as his seductive charisma, lies in his speech acts – those promises and invitations he lavishes on women, creditors and the Stone Guest. The 'scandal of the broken promise', Felman argues, 'raises the problem of the performative in a spectacular way'.⁴³ Juan's victims mistake the performative for the constative, misinterpreting his promises as statements of truth rather than acts of power. What these victims fail to grasp – or refuse to accept – is that the promise, as a performative utterance, is accomplished in the act of promising, regardless of its consequences.

In contrast to Molière, Warner portrays little of Don Juan's promises or invitations; in fact his whole career of scandalous performatives emerges only through second-hand reports, principally those of his unreliable valet. The 'after' of Warner's title underlines the belatedness of these reports, while insinuating that the hero and his myth are past their prime. 'After' also connotes pursuit: Doña Ana goes *after* Don Juan's death, too besotted to believe in its finality, while her author goes after the endless repetitions of the legend, which exists only in its retold forms. Meanwhile the whole narrative evokes the affect of the morning after, disintoxicated and dried out. After strange gods, or all too familiar ones, including the Catholic god that Warner accused of bullying the Spanish poor with threats of hellfire; after false consciousness and the mystifications of the ruling class; after the cult of machismo associated with the leading figure. While tapping the resources of myth, Warner's irony demythologises the cultural landscape as pitilessly as the arid winds that decimate the Spanish olive groves. 'The air had a heartless, a terrifying purity, it wounded the nostrils ... they saw a landscape strewn with blocks of stone, a cowering vegetation, the reddish fangs of the roots of trees torn up by tempests' (*ADDJ*, p. 19).

Don Juan also comes 'after' Spain in that his most famous incarnations were created by a French playwright and an Austrian composer. But this internationalism appealed to the Generation of '98, who looked

to Don Juan as 'a symbol of a new cosmopolitan Spanish culture'.⁴⁴ For the same reason these intellectuals enlisted Don Quixote, the ascetic antitype of Don Juan's hedonism, in the project of recreating Spanish identity after the glory days of Empire. The most celebrated literary characters in Spain, Don Juan and Don Quixote are doubles and inversions of each other. Both are aristocrats, as signalled by their title 'Don'; both are always on the move, restlessly pursuing chivalrous or amorous adventures, much as their stories roam across the globe, colliding or colluding with indigenous traditions. Both therefore lend themselves to picaresque narrative and could even be regarded as its guiding spirits. But Don Quixote is an idealist, whereas Don Juan is a realist; Don Quixote a believer, Don Juan a sceptic; Don Quixote faithful to one woman, Dulcinea, and Don Juan unfaithful to them all, although these betrayals – according to some commentators – testify to his fidelity to a feminine ideal, in comparison to which all living women are woefully deficient. For Otto Rank, this ideal is the mother, whose primordial loss gives rise to an insatiable quest for her equivalent.⁴⁵

Faithful to one woman, Don Quixote is also faithful to romance, the genre that was superseded by the realist novel, much as Quixote's romantic illusions are dispelled by sober facts. In fact, the quixotic theme of disillusionment, which has dominated the novel from Cervantes to Balzac and beyond, re-enacts the subordination of romance to realism to which the novel owes its own emergence as a literary form. Warner, however, retains a quixotic attachment to romance that defies the realist protocols of the novel, creating hybrid narratives that enable a mythical figure like Don Juan to crash into the everyday tribulations of Spanish agricultural labourers. In generic terms, aristocratic romance crashes into socialist realism, each disrupting the conventions of the other.

As I have suggested, what Warner borrows from Molière is the hero's scepticism, but this attitude, no longer restricted to the central figure, pervades her novel's affective atmosphere. In Molière's play, the Don's scepticism is dramatically revealed in the scene where Sganarelle interrogates his master's beliefs in a kind of parody of the Spanish Inquisition. Asked if he believes in heaven, hell or the afterlife, Don Juan brazenly replies: 'I believe that two and two make four, Sganarelle, and four and four make eight.' [*Je crois que deux et deux sont quatre, Sganarelle, et que quatre et quatre sont huit.*]⁴⁶ Probably in homage to Molière, Warner includes a similar scene of inquisition in *After the Death of Don Juan*, where Doña Ana quizzes the sceptic Don Saturno, who has cast doubt on Leporello's account of Don Juan's last supper with the

Stone Guest. When Doña Ana protests, 'Are there not things stronger than reason?' Don Saturno responds by assuring the young woman that her father, safe in the hands of God, would never dream of leaving this repose to 'sup in a restaurant'. 'But surely you believe in hell?' demands the chaplain Don Isidro. 'The question seems rather, do I believe in Leporello?' Don Saturno replies.

His reason for doubting Leporello is that 'the legend of the wicked Don Juan' has 'passed into literature'; even the great Molière 'wrote a play on the theme', an 'uneven work', in Don Saturno's judgement, but 'not without merit' (*ADDJ*, p. 33). With this sly allusion to Molière, Warner underscores the intertextuality of her own novel; she also aligns herself with the 'rapscallionly valet' who has filched the Don Juan legend from its previous authors. This legend, like that of Psyche and Eros in Warner's previous allegorical novel *The True Heart*, demonstrates the interpenetration of popular and literary culture; Leporello, acting like a parody of the Homeric poet, restores the story to the oral tradition from which it was co-opted into literature. The final section of this essay compares Warner's novel, with its interest in folk culture and the oral tradition, to Buñuel's contemporary documentary about Las Hurdes. Both these Marxist works, I argue, strive to bring the Spanish peasantry out of the shadows into the limelight of history.

* * *

Despite this resemblance, it is unlikely that Warner ever saw *Las Hurdes*, either at home in rural Dorset or abroad in Spain, although the ban imposed on the film by the Republican government was briefly lifted in 1937 when Warner and Ackland made their trip to Madrid. Judging by her diaries and letters, Warner was not much of a movie-goer, but she and Ackland did go to considerable efforts to organise a showing of Ivor Montagu's stirring film *Defence of Madrid*, which was aired more than six thousand times in Britain. In her own neighbourhood, Warner complained, 'either the film won't fit the cinema, or the hall can't be got on a weekday, or the principal enthusiast can't bring himself to break the Sabbath, or the man who would turn the handle has a dead aunt. Or something.'⁴⁷ Given her enthusiasm for Montagu's film, Warner may have also made a point of seeing Joris Ivens's propaganda film *The Spanish Earth* (1937), scripted by John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway, where the opening sequence shows the villagers of Fuentedueña struggling to eke out a living from the arid soil, the need for irrigation having been neglected by absentee landlords for centuries.

In *After the Death of Don Juan*, the peasants of Tenorio Viejo are shown to be struggling with the same oppressive conditions 170 years before the labourers of *The Spanish Earth*.

While irrigation plays a central role in both these works, the romantic sensibility of *The Spanish Earth* differs sharply from Warner's ironic distance – an attitude more akin to Buñuel's directorial stance. In fact Buñuel's live reading of the narration of *Las Hurdes* in 1933 was criticised for its 'insolent indifference' to the fate of those he filmed.⁴⁸ Two literary works had inspired Buñuel's interest in the poor and isolated region of Las Hurdes: one was a 1914 travelogue about the region by Unamuno, and the other an ethnographic study by Unamuno's travelling companion Maurice Legendre, which was published as *Las Jurdes: Etude de géographie humaine* in 1927. Borrowing Legendre's subtitle, Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* announces itself as 'a filmed essay in human geography'. Long before Unamuno and Legendre undertook their pilgrimage, however, Las Hurdes had figured as 'Spain's internal other of choice',⁴⁹ inspiring a tradition of travelogues that goes back to the sixteenth century. Some travellers were drawn to the region by humanitarian concern for its inhabitants, but others by prurient curiosity about this primitive backwater, peopled by the freakish products of malnutrition and incest.

Buñuel's film hovers between these attitudes of concern and voyeurism. Having joined the Communist Party in 1931, Buñuel sets out to expose the horrors of poverty in a region so backward that the art of bread-making supposedly remains unknown. But there is a kind of morose delectation in the way the camera lingers on images of disease, deformity and cretinism; after all, this is the same director who zoomed in on the slitting of an eye in his 1929 surrealist film *An Andalusian Dog*. In *Las Hurdes*, the visual montage is accompanied by a detached voiceover, American in one version and French in another, which comments on the silent scenes of misery, while Brahms's lush romantic *Symphony No. 4 in E Minor* (1885) booms incongruously in the background. We might compare the way that Warner evokes our memory of Mozart's ravishing music in *Don Giovanni* while training her camera eye on the impoverished victims of Don Juan's exploitation.

In Buñuel's film, the voiceover, together with the Brahms, was added in the final stages of production and often clashes with the visual content. In one notorious scene, for instance, a donkey is stung to death by bees, which is described as an everyday misfortune. What the narrator conceals is that the unfortunate creature had been smeared with honey by the film crew and ambushed by the swarming contents

of two beehives. Evidently Buñuel was not a member of PETA. In another staged scene, a goat falls off a precipice – a common mishap, the voiceover explains, in this steep rocky terrain. But a puff of smoke on the lower right-hand side of the frame reveals that the animal was shot before it fell. According to film critic Jeffrey Ruoff, ‘To fabricate an illusion of continuity, the film crew shot the goat, hauled its carcass up the side of the mountain, and threw it off again.’⁵⁰ By retaining that give-away puff of smoke, rather than editing it out, Buñuel shows his directorial hand, dispelling the illusion of documentary realism. This smoky signature of the production process indicates that the film is not a catalogue of horrors recorded by a neutral camera but a contrived series of *tableaux vivants*.⁵¹ Because of such sleights-of-hand, *Las Hurdes* has been described as a mockumentary, or alternatively as a parody of ethnographic film.

After the Death of Don Juan also opens with a parody of an ethnographic journey, in which the aristocratic Sevillians venture forth into the forbidding rural hinterland of Extramadura. But instead of confronting its inhabitants, these travellers cower behind curtains, sensing ‘only by the smell’ that their caravans are passing by the poor (ADDJ, p. 15). The narrative proceeds as jerkily as the cortège, with abrupt shifts of perspective reminiscent of Buñuel’s staccato montage. *Las Hurdes* is largely composed of stills, some of which were published in the leftist journal *Octubre* in 1933, where they notably retain their haunting power independent of their diegetic context.⁵² Even when movement occurs in Buñuel’s film, it tends to be painfully constricted and ineffectual, as in the scene where the donkey tries to shake off the attacking bees.⁵³

Buñuel’s montage could be compared to Warner’s jump-cuts between vignettes of rich and poor, where the gaps in the texture of the narrative emphasise the gulf between social classes. Her narrative zooms in on representative types, rather than probing individual psychologies: the power-hungry sacristan Don Gil who sidelines as a blackmailer and loan shark, holding the whole community in thrall; the miller Dionio Gutierrez who entrusts his daughter Celestina with donations for church masses in the hope of rescuing his ailing silkworms, unaware that the girl is saving up these handouts to skedaddle to a convent; the labourer Ramon Perez who leads the peasants’ protest but fails to control its consequences, dying at the hands of the army co-opted by Don Juan.

Wendy Mulford (ADDJ, p. 13) argues that Ramon Perez is the nearest approximation to a hero in this novel. But Warner – like Buñuel – is more concerned with the ‘human geography’ of this

community than with raising any single protagonist above the rest. The inhospitable countryside looms large in this geography; much as Buñuel frames the Hurdanos in their craggy habitat, as if they were autochthonous creations of the rocks, so Warner frames her peasants in their arid landscape, where the mountains perch 'high-haunched as cats lie', while 'the castle on its hillock' and 'church on its hillock' lord it over the *pueblo* below (*ADDJ*, pp. 71, 253, 24). 'I have never seen churches so heavy and hulking and bullying, one can see at a glance that they have always been reactionary fortresses', Warner wrote to Elizabeth Wade White on 14 November 1936 (*Letters*, p. 42). Buñuel makes this point visually in *Land Without Bread* by 'calling attention to the exaggerated ostentation of the region's churches in comparison with the Hurdanos' absolute lack of resources for sustenance'.⁵⁴

As we have seen, the *grandees* in Warner's novel tend to be framed in the carceral interiors of church and castle, whereas the peasants are pictured in the open air outside these bastions of privilege. One outdoor scene in particular epitomises Warner's conception of human geography. In this scene we follow Leporello as he strolls through the castle's dilapidated grounds, where the dried-out irrigation channels, the plane trees already wilting in May and the thin sheep nibbling at dead saplings testify to Don Juan's ruinous extravagance.⁵⁵ At the edge of the estate Leporello overhears the village women 'thumping and splashing' their laundry at the riverbank (*ADDJ*, p. 99). His voyeurism piqued, the valet crouches in the rushes to ogle the washerwomen's swinging rumps and eavesdrop on their lively chatter. This scene harks back to Euripides' *The Bacchae* where King Pentheus, hiding in a treetop, is torn to pieces by the Maenads for spying on their Dionysian rites; Warner's Leporello, by contrast, escapes the women's vengeance by cowering in the undergrowth beneath their gaze.

Warner's washerwomen could also be compared to those of the 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' (ALP) section of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, portions of which were published from the early 1920s onwards; it is therefore possible that Warner came across these excerpts, or at least heard tell of Joyce's radical experiment. In the ALP episode the village gossips gather at the riverbank to wash their dirty linen in public, both literally and metaphorically. 'O tell me all about Anna Livia! I want to hear all about Anna Livia', these peasants cry.⁵⁶ Similarly Warner's washerwomen collectively narrate their own community, creating what Ezra Pound, after Stéphane Mallarmé, calls 'the tale of the tribe'.⁵⁷ Focusing on the chorus rather than the soloists, Warner reduces tagged speech to a minimum, although she stops short of removing the inverted

commas – or ‘perverted commas’, as Joyce denounced them – that distinguish one speaker from another.⁵⁸

The laundresses of Tenorio Viejo begin by scoffing at their absent menfolk, who are planning to meet up in the evening to complain about their landlord’s failure to implement the irrigation scheme; a complaint that their descendants would still be voicing in the 1930s. If the men’s gathering looks forward to modern forms of labour organisation, however, the women dismiss it as a laughable excuse to get drunk. ‘Talking of grievances makes a dry mouth. Empty your heart and empty the cask. On the day of mourning the innkeeper rejoices’ (*ADDJ*, p. 100). Cast in proverbial form, this anonymous observation testifies to the continuity of cultural tradition; the speaker is the tribe, rather than a single person, endowed with the accumulated wit and derision of the past. What Warner is depicting here is something like the ‘*intra-historia*’, a term coined by Unamuno in 1897 to refer to the unbroken current of tradition that underlies the diachronic history of events; ‘un concepto vivo, fecundo, de la tradición’. This concept of the *intra-historia* resembles and may have even influenced T.S. Eliot’s idea of ‘tradition’, which also stresses the vital persistence of the past within the present, or in Unamuno’s terms, ‘[la] vida intra-histórica, silenciosa y continua como el fondo vivo del mar ... la tradición eterna ...’.⁵⁹ To keep this tradition alive, Eliot notoriously argued, ‘it would appear to be for the best that the great majority of human beings should go on living in the place in which they were born’.⁶⁰ Unamuno was drawn to Las Hurdes for the same reason Eliot was drawn to places where people stay put, thereby resisting the mobility of modern urban life, for only in such out-of-the-way places can the past survive within the present as a structure of feeling rather than a written record or an ossified memory.

As a Marxist, Warner might have resented this comparison to the arch-conservative Eliot, and even to Unamuno, who drifted away from his early socialism (and indeed from his concept of *intra-historia*) with his later insistence on ‘the tragic sense of life’;⁶¹ but she shares these writers’ concern with the unwritten history that persists in the rhythms of everyday life. Where she differs from them and from Buñuel is in her delight in the peasants’ sparkling repartee; Buñuel’s peasants, by contrast, remain voiceless throughout the film, where the only spoken words belong to the external narrator. Rather than silencing her Spanish peasants, Warner regarded them as ‘a people naturally intellectual’, whose intelligence transcended the concerted efforts of church and aristocracy to imprison them in ignorance (*Letters*, p. 42).

Both ignorance and native wit are showcased in the scene where the washerwomen kvetch about Teresa Mauleon, who has cornered the market in the village laundry thanks to the machinations of her father-in-law, the village tyrant Don Gil. Hogging the laundry, however, hasn't made Teresa fat, and her competitors joke about her scrawny figure. 'It's my belief that she's got a worm', Serafina sneers. 'Not an ordinary worm, but what they call a queen-worm' (*ADDJ*, p. 100). More delicate than other worms, a queen-worm works its way up the backbone, 'and then when it tastes the brain it begins to dance on its tail for pleasure' (*ADDJ*, p. 101). 'The virgin protect us!' cries her niece.

'How do you get this worm, Aunt Serafina? Where does it come from?'

'It enters by the fundament, my child ... And you get it by squatting to piss in a place where dead Moors lie buried.'

'Good gracious! But how can one tell where dead Moors lie buried?'

'Not in any way, my dear. Only by the queen-worm. Heaven does not condescend to mark out Moors by any other method' (*ADDJ*, p. 101).

This explanation wormishly bites its own tail: you can avoid the queen-worm only by steering clear of places where dead Moors lie buried, but only the queen-worm can show you where those places are. Steeped in folklore and tribal prejudice (apparently Moors are too uncivilised for funerary monuments, and God tactfully obscures their heathen graves), Serafina's saucy speech reveals a vital oral tradition in which local myths and superstitions are constantly embellished and exaggerated. That Serafina is probably pulling her niece's leg also accords with popular tradition: Ralph Bates, in his novel *The Olive Field* (1936), which is set in much the same terrain as Warner's *Don Juan* and also explores the 'political chemistry' that erupted in the Spanish Civil War, describes how the peasants 'release tension with a *guasa* [joke], the redeeming Andalusian jest'.⁶²

In Warner's novel, the washerwomen's banter also harks back to the device of *stichomythia* in classical Greek drama, where alternating lines are spoken by alternating characters, each repeating or reversing the expressions of the other without the intervention of a mediating voice. It is a technique deployed by other mid-century novelists, such as Ivy Compton-Burnett and Henry Green, who present dialogue as a self-generating interchange, frequently (and sometimes confusingly)

untagged by speakers' names. In Warner's case, this stichomythic method reflects her admiration for the anonymity of folk narrative, in which the story is constantly retold by different voices and cannot be traced back to an original source. 'The story was there, and went on', Warner explains in the introduction to *The Cats' Cradle-Book*, a collection of stories supposedly passed on to nursing kittens by their mothers, which was published the year after *Don Juan* in 1940 and shares this novel's interest in folk culture; it is no accident that the feline storytellers of *The Cats' Cradle-Book* reside at 'Spain Hall' in Norfolk.⁶³ In *Don Juan* Serafina assumes the role that *The Cats' Cradle-Book* assigns to nursing moggies, transmitting the folk tradition to the younger generation, complete with queen-worms, ghoulish Moors and Mariolatry.

Serafina's style of fabulation also exemplifies the 'cat-like' qualities that Warner attributes to folktales, the 'objective', 'cool and dispassionate' attitude that distinguishes these anonymous narratives from the 'heated and sentimental' temper of the bourgeois novel.⁶⁴ Like other leftist writers of the 1930s, such as William Empson, who corresponded with her, Warner was exercised about the question of proletarian literature; her playful response was to invent Mrs O'Toady, the working-class Irish tabby with a treasure-trove of stories dating back to Aesop, the prototype of the low-born fabulist.

'Bother the human heart, I'm tired of the human heart', Warner exclaims in her *PN Review* interview published in 1981. 'I want to write about something entirely different.'⁶⁵ At this late stage of her career Warner had turned away from both the human and the heart to write *Kingdoms of Elfin*, a series of stories about frosty, unsentimental elves, which were collected and published in a single volume in 1977. But her impatience with the human heart long predated this departure into elfland: thirty years earlier *After the Death of Don Juan*, along with *The Cats' Cradle-Book*, turns away from the 'sentimental education' narrated and enacted by the bourgeois novel, with its emphasis on personal development, and shows a growing fascination with human geography. (Human, not feline, incidentally; as Warner explains in *The Cats' Cradle-Book*, cats have 'chosen to live among us', and their stories cast a cold eye on human folly: 'The proper study of catkind is man.')⁶⁶ More interested in groups than individuals, in surfaces than depths, Warner studies the effect of habitat on character, taking habitat to include the natural, social and cultural environment, as well as the persistence of past habits in present-day practices—that is, the *intra-historia*.

* * *

In her recent book *The Common Cause*, Leela Gandhi argues for an ethics of 'the common', which she discerns in a series of failed mutinies by the colonial Indian army, as well as in Mahatma Gandhi's 'eschewal of distinction'.⁶⁷ This ethics resists the culture of perfectionism characteristic of fascism, imperialism and even liberalism. I would suggest that *After the Death of Don Juan*, along with Warner's other wartime writings, also aspires to an ethics of the common and the commons. Having demythologised Don Juan, Warner resists the temptation to replace him with a working-class hero. Instead she casts a cool, cat-like eye on the peasants of Tenorio Viejo, who exhibit every common failing: ignorance, superstition, cunning, jealousy and greed, as well as the casual cruelty to animals that Buñuel both records and practises in the filming of *Las Hurdes*. Yet Warner's peasants also honour forms of commonality that defy self-interest; when they prune the olive trees they work together, even though the olive groves have been partitioned to provide each tenant with a private strip of land. As all these workers know, their custom of communal labour is 'foolhardy' and 'inequitable', because the 'trees that were pruned earliest got a week's advantage in ripening over the others, and if a storm came, trying the boughs weakened by too heavy a burden, the owners of the trees still unpruned might lose the chief of their crop. But for all that the work was done in company' (*ADDJ*, p. 144). In the event a dust storm destroys the olive crop, as abruptly as the army destroys the mutiny of the tenants. But the failure of these common efforts at farming and protest does not refute the ethics of the common or cancel out the utopian possibilities prefigured by these collective practices. On the contrary the very failure of these efforts reaffirms their commonness and unexceptionality. Ramon Perez, the leader of the protest, is no hero, as we learn in a passage highlighted by Warner in the copy of the novel that she gave to Ackland: 'He was a man of certain steadfast ideas – nothing uncommon in that, and the ideas were nothing out of the ordinary' (*ADDJ*, p. 248).⁶⁸ Only his steadfastness distinguishes Ramon from his neighbours, a steadfastness that embodies the resilience of the common people, despite the endless setbacks and fiascos of their lives. Ordinary, unexceptional and indestructible, these Ramons and their ideas survive the horrors of oppression, renewing the promise of a life in common, however victimised by Don Juans and their armies.

* * *

In this essay I have taken a centrifugal approach to Warner's novel, showing how it responds to multiple sources of the Don Juan story, as

well as to the ‘chemistry of the Spanish War’. This approach is justified, even necessitated, by a novel that flaunts its intertextuality, as well as its theatricality, and emphasises surface over depth, eschewing the secretive tactics associated with high modernism. For this reason, *Don Juan* resists the kind of close reading that attempts to crack the novel’s code or penetrate the characters’ psychology. Instead Warner’s *dramatis personae* stand out sharp and shadowless as olive leaves glinting in the midday sun: their meaning lies in what they refract, not what they conceal. Dry and austere as the Spanish landscape, the novel encourages its readers to adopt a distant and acerbic stance, similar to that of its detached narrator. This ‘cool and dispassionate’ attitude may appeal to cats but seems to have discouraged human readers, judging by the longstanding critical neglect of *After the Death of Don Juan*. Nonetheless the novel’s hybrid form, interweaving history and myth, realism and allegory, farce and tragedy, along with its feline sangfroid, represents a revolution in the genre, too radical to be enjoyed without discomfort.

Notes

- 1 Sylvia Townsend Warner, *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938; London: Virago, 1989), p. 301. Henceforth cited as *ADDJ*.
- 2 Mercedes Aguirre, ‘History and Myth in *After the Death of Don Juan*’, *Sylvia Townsend Warner Journal* (2014), pp. 76–90; Wendy Mulford, ‘Introduction’, in *ADDJ*, pp. v–xvii; Chris Hopkins, *English Fiction in the 1930s: Language, Genre, History* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 102–19; Barbara Brothers, ‘Writing Against the Grain: Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Spanish Civil War’, in *Women’s Writing in Exile*, ed. M. L. Broe and C. Ingram (Chapel Hill and London: University of Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 349–68; Barbara Brothers, ‘Through the “Pantry Window”’: Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Spanish Civil War’, in *Rewriting the Good Fight: Critical Essays On the Literature of the Spanish Civil War*, ed. Frieda S. Brown et al. (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1989), pp. 161–73. See also Jan Montefiore’s invaluable bibliography, ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner Scholarship 1978–2013: An Annotated Bibliography with Introduction’, *Literature Compass* 11:12 (2014), pp. 786–811.
- 3 See Diana Wallace, *The Woman’s Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900–2000* (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. ix: ‘The tendency has been to associate women’s historical novels with romance and thus to stigmatise [them] as escapist. We need to reassess both the assumption that historical novels are necessarily escapist ... and the assumption that escapism is *per se* a bad thing.’ Clearly Sylvia Townsend Warner held no such disdain for romance or for escapism, but relished the opportunity to play with their conventions.
- 4 Barry McCrea makes this observation in his forthcoming essay, ‘Dublin, Paris, and the World Republic of Letters’.
- 5 Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Letters*, ed. William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), p. 51 n. 1. Henceforth cited as *Letters*.
- 6 Ben A. Heller, ‘Don Juan in the New World: The Erotics of Conquest in Chocano, Fuentes, and Walcott’, in *The Hispanic Connection: Spanish and Spanish-American Literature in the Arts of the World*, ed. Zenia Sacks DaSilva (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), p. 175.

- 7 Antonio Marichalar, 'Madrid Chronicle: Don Juan', *Criterion* 6:4 (1927), p. 355.
- 8 The term 'geographia humana' appears in the intertitles of Buñuel's *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan (Las Hurdes)*, 1932.
- 9 Joseph Schraibman, 'Two Spanish Civil War Novels: A Woman's Perspective', in *The Spanish Civil War in Literature*, ed. Janet Pérez and Wendell Aycock (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1990), p. 150.
- 10 'Letter from Valentine Ackland to the Editor', *News Chronicle*, 14 September 1936, Marx Memorial Library (London), Box 29A. See also Wendy Mulford, *This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters and Politics, 1930–1951* (London: Pandora, 1988), p. 88; Angela Jackson, *British Women and the Spanish Civil War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 134.
- 11 Mulford, *This Narrow Place*, p. 86.
- 12 Jackson, *British Women*, p. 279 n. 61.
- 13 Michael Schmidt and Val Warner, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner in Conversation', in *Sylvia Townsend Warner 1893–1978: A Celebration*, ed. Claire Harman, special issue of *PN Review* 23 (1981), pp. 35–7.
- 14 Ackland and Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Party Position in Barcelona', joint report addressed to Comrade Harry Pollitt, Marx Memorial Library, Box C, File 7–1.
- 15 Warner, *Letters*, p. 41.
- 16 Jackson, *British Women*, p. 135.
- 17 Valentine Ackland, *Daily Worker*, October 1936; quoted in Mulford, *This Narrow Place*, p. 95.
- 18 See Stanley Weintraub, *The Last Great Cause: The Intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1968), p. 106.
- 19 George Orwell, 'Looking Back on the Spanish War' (1943), http://orwell.ru/library/essays/Spanish_War/english/esw_1. Accessed 6 June 2017. See also Weintraub, *Last Great Cause*, p. 101.
- 20 Quoted in Mulford, *This Narrow Place*, p. 82.
- 21 See Mulford, *This Narrow Place*, p. 55.
- 22 Quoted in Mulford, *This Narrow Place*, p. 66.
- 23 D.H. Lawrence, 'Morality and the Novel', in *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Anthony Beal (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 110.
- 24 Stendhal (Henry Beyle), *On Love*, trans. Philip Sidney Woolf and Cecil N. Sidney Woolf (New York: Brentano's Publishers, n.d. (1916?)), p. 257.
- 25 Marichalar, 'Madrid Chronicle', p. 348.
- 26 Miguel de Unamuno, 'Regarding Don Juan', in *Our Lord Don Quixote and Sancho with Related Essays*, trans. Anthony Kerrigan, vol. 3 of *Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno*, ed. Anthony Kerrigan et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 374–82 (375–6).
- 27 Roberta Johnson, *Gender and Nation in the Spanish Modernist Novel* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), p. 111.
- 28 Gayle Rogers, *Modernism and the New Spain: Britain, Cosmopolitan Europe, and Literary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 39.
- 29 Marichalar, 'Madrid Chronicle', p. 348.
- 30 Dr Gregorio Marañón also studied medical conditions, such as cretinism, in *Las Hurdes*; on one of his expeditions he was accompanied by Maurice Legendre, whose essay on the 'human geography' of the region inspired Buñuel's documentary, discussed below. See Jordana Mendelson, *Documenting Spain: Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation, 1929–1939* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), p. 68.
- 31 Gonzalo Rodríguez Lafora, *Don Juan, Los milagros y otros ensayos* (Madrid: Biblioteca nueva, 1927), trans. Janet H. Perry as *Don Juan and Other Psychological Studies* (London: T. Butterworth, 1930). Marañón's essays on Don Juan are collected in *Don Juan: Ensayos Sobre El Origen De Su Leyenda* (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, 1946). See also Otto Rank, *The Don Juan Legend* (1924; rev. 1932), ed. and trans. David G. Winter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 95 and *passim*; Sigmund Freud, 'Draft H. Paranoia', in *Extracts from the Fliess Papers* (1892–9), *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Standard Edition, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953–74), vol. 1, p. 209. For Lorenzo da Ponte's libretto to Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787), see http://www.murashev.com/opera/Don_Giovanni_libretto_Italian_English. Accessed 2 June 2017.
- 32 Johnson, *Gender and Nation*, p. 111.
- 33 Johnson, *Gender and Nation*, p. 123.

- 34 Mulford, in *This Narrow Place*, p. 72, points out that neither Warner nor Ackland 'took a specifically feminist perspective upon women's role in society ... like other Communists of the time, they did not see women as the exploited class in relation to men'.
- 35 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922), ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 188.
- 36 J.W. Smeed, *Don Juan: Variations on the Theme* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 1.
- 37 John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) was conceived on the same night as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: see my introduction to Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. xvi–xvii.
- 38 David Whitton, 'Don Juan the Director's Play', in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière*, ed. David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 201–13 (202).
- 39 Rank, *Don Juan Legend*, p. 51. In the introduction to this study (p. 21), David R. Winter speculates that the 'extended discussion of the master-servant relationship reflected some of Rank's concern about his own relationship with Freud'. See also David Punter, 'Don Juan, or, the Deferral of Decapitation: Some Psychological Approaches', in *Don Juan*, ed. Nigel Wood (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), pp. 122–53 (128).
- 40 Molière, *Don Juan*, Act 3, line 62.
- 41 Molière, *Don Juan*, Act 5, line 91.
- 42 See David G. Winter, 'Introduction', in Rank, *Don Juan Legend*, p. 22.
- 43 Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages* (1980/1983; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 4.
- 44 Rogers, *Modernism and the New Spain*, p. 39.
- 45 Rank, *Don Juan Legend*, p. 95: 'the characteristic Don Juan fantasy of conquering countless women, which has made the hero into a masculine ideal, is ultimately based on the unattainability of the mother and the compensatory substitute for her ... it involves the deeply-rooted biological wish for the exclusive and complete possession of the mother...'
- 46 Molière, *Don Juan, ou le festin de pierre* (1665), in Molière, *Don Juan and Other Plays*, trans. George Graveley and Ian MacLean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Act 3, line 61.
- 47 Mulford, *This Narrow Place*, p. 92.
- 48 Francisco Aranda, *Luis Buñuel: A Critical Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976), p. 94; quoted in Jeffrey Ruoff, 'An Ethnographic Surrealist Film: Luis Buñuel's *Land Without Bread*', *Visual Anthropology Review* 14:1 (Spring/Summer 1998), pp. 45–57 (49), <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~jruffoff/Articles/EthnographicSurrealist.htm>. Accessed 2 June 2017.
- 49 Sara Nadal-Melsiò, 'Buñuel's Eschatological Avant-Garde: "Las Hurdes" and Indexical Realism', *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 66:2 (2013), pp. 183–203 (187).
- 50 Ruoff, 'An Ethnographic Surrealist Film', p. 51. Judging by the camera angles, either the dead goat was hurled down the mountainside, or several goats were killed to produce the two-shot sequence.
- 51 See Nadal-Melsiò, 'Buñuel's Eschatological Avant-Garde', p. 188.
- 52 See Mendelson, *Documenting Spain*, pp. xxxii, 86–7. As E. Rubinstein remarks, 'to recall the viewing of *Land Without Bread* is to revive in one's memory a striking series of nearly motionless pictures ... Even the scenes of more extended action, like the fording of the river with the dead child, can to an unusual degree be reanimated by single frame enlargements.' Rubinstein, 'Visit to a Familiar Planet: Buñuel among the Hurdanos', *Cinema Journal* 4 (1983), pp. 3–17 (9).
- 53 See Rubinstein, 'Visit to a Familiar Planet', p. 9.
- 54 Mendelson, *Documenting Spain*, p. 78.
- 55 This tour of Don Saturno's grounds directly contradicts the prettified preview of the scene that Leporello works up for the grandees: 'There indeed was a rural paradise. Purling streams ... neat cottages, sheep fat as maggots, smooth pigs, splendid poultry, oliveyards, vineyards, silk-worms, shepherdesses, a population devoted to virtue, industry and music ... a village of the Golden Age' (*ADDJ*, p. 16).
- 56 James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (1939; London: Penguin, 1976), p. 196.

- 57 For the history of this phrase, see Michael André Bernstein, *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* (1980; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 7–8.
- 58 Joyce, *Letters*, ed. Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking Press, 1957–66), vol. 3, p. 99.
- 59 Miguel de Unamuno, 'La tradición eternal', in *En torno al casticismo* (1895), https://es.wikisource.org/wiki/En_torno_al_casticismo: 'the intra-historical life, silent and continuous as the living background of the sea ... the eternal tradition...'. Accessed 2 June 2017.
- 60 T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948; London: Faber, 1962), p. 52.
- 61 Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life* (1912), trans. J.E. Crawford Fitch (New York: Dover, 1954), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14636/14636-h/14636-h.htm>. Accessed 2 June 2017.
- 62 Ralph Bates, *The Olive Field* (1936; London: Hogarth, 1986), p. 337.
- 63 Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The Cat's Cradle-Book* (New York: Viking, 1940), pp. 20, 41.
- 64 Warner, *The Cat's Cradle-Book*, pp. 24, 28.
- 65 PNR 23, p. 36; quoted by Claire Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), p. 312.
- 66 Warner, *The Cat's Cradle-Book*, p. 29.
- 67 Leela Gandhi, *The Common Cause: Postcolonial Ethics and the Practice of Democracy, 1900–1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 12, 33 and *passim*.
- 68 See Mulford's introduction to *ADDJ*, p. xiv.

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