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SUBVERSION OF MYTH AND BRITISH CULTURAL APPROXIMATIONS TO THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR IN SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER'S *AFTER THE DEATH OF DON JUAN*[1]

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Abstract: This paper aims to discern how Sylvia Townsend Warner in her novel *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938) subverts the transcendental qualities attributed to myth to present it, instead, connected to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). This paper analyses the portrayal of the Don Juan myth, situates the novel in dialogue with the Grail legend and the waste land motif, examining how mythical characters and motifs reflect left-wing British authors' understanding of the Spanish Civil War. Firstly, the introduction discusses the reception of the conflict in left-wing British authors, the understanding of myth in the twentieth century, the mythic method, and the relevant myths. The close reading analysis of the novel recurs, mainly, to myth criticism and historiography, and focuses on: Doña Ana's character, presented as the equivalent of the Grail hero(ine), the depiction of the fictional estate of Tenorio Viejo as the waste land and, finally, the identification between Don Saturno, Don Juan and the Fisher King. This paper argues that the novel presents myth as something artificial that has lost validity in the context of the war; it discusses the understanding of the Spanish Civil War as a class war through the entwinement of agriculture and economics with myth and, finally, it transforms the mechanics of the myths of Don Juan and the waste land to reveal aspects of the Spanish Civil War as understood by left-wing British authors.
Keywords: Don Juan; Myth; Spanish Civil War; Subversion; Sylvia Townsend Warner; Waste land

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SUBVERSIÓN DE MITOS Y APROXIMACIONES CULTURALES BRITÁNICAS A LA GUERRA CIVIL ESPAÑOLA EN *AFTER THE DEATH OF DON JUAN* DE SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER

Resumen: El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar cómo Sylvia Townsend Warner subvierte la trascendentalidad atribuida a los mitos en su novela *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938) y los conecta, en su lugar, con el contexto histórico de la Guerra civil española (1936-1939). Esta investigación analiza cómo la representación de personajes y motivos míticos, en particular, el mito de Don Juan y la tierra baldía, se conecta con la recepción de la Guerra civil en autores británicos con ideologías de izquierdas. En primer lugar, la introducción trata cómo fue recibido el conflicto en estos autores, el entendimiento del mito en el siglo XX y el método mítico, además de los mitos pertinentes para el análisis. Recurriendo a teorías de mitocrítica e historiografía, principalmente, el análisis de la novela se centra en: la representación de Doña Ana como el equivalente al héroe del Grial, la configuración de Tenorio Viejo como la tierra baldía y, por último, la identificación entre Don Saturno, Don Juan y el Rey Pescador. Este artículo defiende que la novela caracteriza al mito como algo artificial que ha perdido validez en un mundo en guerra, que presenta la Guerra civil española como un conflicto de clases mediante la conexión entre mito, agricultura y economía y, por último, que transforma las mecánicas del mito de Don Juan y la tierra baldía para revelar ideas culturales de autores británicos con ideologías de izquierda de la guerra civil.
Palabras clave: Don Juan; Guerra Civil española; mito; subversión; Sylvia Townsend Warner; tierra baldía

1. INTRODUCTION

"I will show you fear in a handful of dust"
T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

In 1923, T. S. Eliot wrote in his review of James Joyce's *Ulysses* that the mythic method would become an essential technique to create art in the modern world (479). Several years later, in 1938, Sylvia Townsend Warner would publish her fifth novel, *After the Death of Don Juan*, in which she resorted precisely to myth to create an allegory for the ongoing conflict of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The parallel between history and myth had already been noted before the publication of Townsend Warner's novel. Myth was considered to reveal "a historical form of life" (Mann 676) that transcended temporal change and connected the present to an archaic past. Despite this link, some novels employing the mythic method exhibited a detachment achieved through deconstruction and subversion, separating them from primeval societies. Townsend

Warner's novel rejects a transcendental link between past and present, instead using myth as a masque that reflects contemporary historical realities. Therefore, this paper argues that *After the Death of Don Juan* presents the subversion of traditional mythical motifs, particularly those of the myth of Don Juan and the waste land, by anchoring them to the historical reality of the Spanish Civil War as interpreted by left-wing British intellectuals. To do so, an interdisciplinary approach, historiography and myth criticism, is used to analyse the different forms of representation of both myths in the novel and discern whether and how they are subverted. The elements analysed are: the hero and his task to restore the health of the Fisher King and the land, identified with the character of Doña Ana, with the help of Don Juan's valet Leporello; the wasteland itself, materialised in the village of Tenorio Viejo and, finally, the Fisher King, the role which Don Juan himself, the one who best connects to the Civil War, and his father Don Saturno incarnate.

2. British Writers and the Spanish War

In the tumultuous decade of the 1930s, the Spanish Civil War would gain an "enormous symbolic meaning" (Hoskins XI). British writers that, at the time were particularly involved with politics, used their works to respond to the tensions of the period. In various ways, the otherwise national conflict would acquire an important international force. On the one hand, it seemed to materialise the strain between the ideologies that most notoriously dominated the political and social scene: Fascism, Communism and Socialism (Spender qtd. in Hoskins 3). It also seemed to threaten the tentative peace established in Europe. Yet the atmosphere of mounting tension and impending conflict offered writers and intellectuals the opportunity to develop and implement theories that had been articulated in debates and writings prior to the outbreak of the war (Lehmann qtd. in Cunningham 419).

It was against the backdrop of the politics of Non-Interventionism, a strategy intended to prevent foreign involvement in Spain endorsed by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's government, that these British authors responded to the unfolding conflict. For left-wing writers, the majority of whom defended the Spanish Republic, the war seemed to be the epitome of the coalition between a personal and public crisis (Cunningham 421). Some of them would even go to Spain and participate in the war, either as members of the International Brigades or, more commonly, as reporters (Cunningham 420). Among them, Sylvia Townsend Warner, who travelled to Spain on various occasions as a reporter and a nurse collaborating for the Red Cross (Harman 153).

To understand how left-wing British writers conceptualised the Spanish Civil War in their literature, one must consider that the reception of Spain in Britain was shaped by a perceived dichotomy between the two nations: Spain as a rural traditional society, and Britain as an industrial modern one. In addition to political ideologies, cultural perceptions also influenced them, and so, the ideas of an 'Old' and a 'New' Spain appeared as a means to explain the different sides in the conflict (Buchanan 6-7). The 'Old' Spain, with its rigid hierarchy and great value placed on tradition, was seen as ruled by the principles of supposedly long-gone feudal systems that confined Spain to a "medieval state structure" (Buchanan 7). Consequently, left-wing British writers would instead focus on the possibilities that the 'New' Spain, emerging out of the reforms boosted by the Second Republic, could have brought. It symbolised an idealistic change that disarmed the forces that characterised the 'Old' Spain which, for leftist authors, had not only oppressed the masses but also prevented the country from becoming a "free and progressive" nation (Daily Herald n/p qtd. in Buchanan 8). Therefore, their responses to the Spanish Civil War were rooted in the tensions between two opposing conceptions of a changing nation. On the one hand, the enduring grip of a feudal social structure that benefited a privileged aristocracy (Buchanan 7) and, on the other hand, the ambition to forge a new egalitarian society. Supporting the Republic, then, would come to signify an alliance with the working class (Cunningham 437). In consequence, as Buchanan claims: "it was the apparent timeless struggle between the landlords and peasants on the great estates of Andalusia and Extremadura which caught the imagination of the left in Britain" (6). As a writer deeply involved with politics, Townsend Warner also found in the Spanish Republic and its fight against Fascism the spirit of those left-wing values she felt most inclined to (Harman 153). Consequently, her portrayal of the fictional estate of Tenorio Viejo, located in Andalusia, is informed by these cultural perceptions of Spain that were being developed especially during the conflict.

3. The Mythic Method and the Twentieth Century

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the study of myths was densely linked to the new emerging sciences like psychoanalysis. To explain the processes of the unconscious, manifested in dreams or the imagination, some intellectuals found in patterns and characters from myths the vehicle through which to analyse the more elusive components of the human mind. Hence, the creation of Carl G. Jung's idea of the "collective unconscious". According to him, it was the human psyche that had conceived

"all the images that have ever given rise to myths" (Jung 644) and so, it was also the psyche that had nurtured the contents of the collective unconscious, called archetypes. Due to its connection to the ancient societies and its ability to connect past and present, the collective unconscious was considered to transcend the stages of human life and all temporal change (Jung 641). Understood in its relevance to the human mind, myth acquired a "vital meaning" (Jung 645) that manifested in the form of analogy and metaphors. However, Jung found another characteristic to the archetypes, and that is their formal nature; they are elements that provide only form (Jung 648), and so, its contents could depend on the individual.

To some extent, writers would follow Jung's ideas. The formal nature he found in myths transformed them, as Eleazar M. Meletinsky explains, into masks (312) which writers could consult to structure their narratives, characters and to explore themes they deemed fundamental to their contemporary times (Meletinsky 275). Nevertheless in their works authors would handle myth with a certain degree of irony, exemplified in the interchangeability of archetypes in the characters or the undermining of expectations. The mythic method, as T. S. Eliot named it, corresponds with this conception of myth, and it became the means through which to order and find significance in "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (478) in the twentieth century. These theoretical notions are helpful to understand, precisely, how authors from this period used myth to interpret their own historical moment. So did Sylvia Townsend Warner, who responded to this chaos by playing with myth: her novel directly appeals to the legend of Don Juan and presents elements reminiscent of the Grail legend.

3.1 The Libertine Don Juan

First appearing in the 17th century Spanish play *The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*, attributed to Tirso de Molina, Don Juan has, with time, gained the status of myth (Maeztu qtd. in Weinstein 4). Thanks to the rich imaginative possibilities that he represents for authors, he has managed to make his way into innumerable literary works, inside and outside Spanish borders up to this day. His figure has undergone multiple transformations, but the essential traits to his character that have remained consistent have been his ability for seduction and deception. Consequently, he has been portrayed as "an example of unsavoury behaviour" (Weinstein 130). This is the reason as to why he has typically been identified with religious punishment and the possibility (or lack thereof) of redemption.

However, it is relevant to consider how the portrayal of Don Juan by the French playwright Molière helped advance the understanding of the legend. In his play *Don Juan or the Feast of Stone*, the character is given long monologues in which he argues about his motivations, scorn to religion and even displays bouts of wit and cynicism. In this way, the play seems to represent a change of focus from the original iterations of the legend, as it highlights Don Juan's psychological complexity rather than divine punishment. Thus, Molière is said to have constructed Don Juan as a modern hero (Weinstein 27).

The interest in Don Juan did not seem to waver in the twentieth century. Although the representations of his character became detached from the legend's traditional plot, he still maintained a relevant role, and was used "as an illustration of certain contemporary existential tendencies" (Weinstein 158). This idea is supported by Sylvia Townsend Warner, who presents her Don Juan in the context of the crisis of the Spanish Civil War. Her novel, recognised as an allegory of this conflict, takes place after the traditional events of the legend have taken place, and uses Don Juan as the main antagonist. In a letter to Nancy Cunard, the author refers to him as "the fascist figure" (Townsend Warner 51) of the novel. In this way, she detaches him further from the religious punishment or redemption and presents him, instead, as a political metaphor.

3.2 The Legend of the Grail and the Motif of the Waste Land

It has been complicated to create a whole that, coherently and cohesively, explains all that surrounds the myth of the Grail. This is due to the difficulty of discerning its origins as well as the multiple and sometimes contradicting versions immortalised in literature, particularly in the Arthurian romances. Nevertheless, certain figures seem to lie at the heart of the legend and are, therefore, essential: the motif of the waste land, the ailing Fisher King and the hero tasked with helping both. Experts such as Jessie L. Weston have dedicated various works to attempt to find the possible meaning behind those elements. Her study, *From Ritual to Romance*, provides an analysis of the different symbols of the legend in relation to ancient rituals of nature, which seem to share the legend's focus on healing and restoration.

The focus of the stories shifts depending on the identity of the Arthurian hero that arrives to the waste land; either he is to be more concerned with the desolated land or with the debilitated health of the Fisher King. Yet, the two cannot be truly separated, because

the legend insists on their connection. This idea derives from the past belief that monarchs were the representatives of God on Earth. They were, then, connected to principles of Life and Fertility (Weston 114) which, at the same time, connected them to Nature (Weston 33). However, the close kinship with humanity produces a mirroring effect in the two: the Fisher King is old and, as many versions agree on, infertile, so the land also is. The "suspension of the reproductive processes of Nature" (Weston 23) resulted from the King's infertility seems to be particularly present in certain versions of the legend in which the effect reflected on the land is that of droughts, making it impossible to cultivate it (Weston 20-21). The importance of water in the legend is not only related to its absence, but the Grail castle is also surrounded by it (Weston 48). That the place where the sacred object that could cure the King and revitalise the land is placed near water only attests to the link between the element and properties of life. Moreover, some cultures directly put the responsibility for providing water on the King. Others had a special consideration for the "vivifying powers of the waters" (Weston 36).

On another note, it has been argued that the process by which the Fisher King is restored to youth and fertility is like a ritual of substitution. Among some of the traditions that may have influenced the legend, the Mumming plays performed in the British Isles gain importance, because they featured a process of restoration that may be reminiscent of the Fisher King's. In them, a character played by an old man was to be brought back to life (Jevons qtd. in Weston 120). When the healing was complete, the old actor was substituted by a young one. The play, in consequence, was a dramatic performance of a ritual that presented revivification through substitution. Similarly, *After the Death of Don Juan* presents Tenorio Viejo as a village affected by continuous droughts, where harvesting is almost impossible. At the insistence of the villagers, Don Saturno, the owner of most of the land, starts preparing a plan of irrigation, but the sudden arrival of Don Juan, thought of as dead, begins a process of substitution that is, however, corrupted and brings violence.

4. Doña Ana and the Task of the Hero

The significance that the Spanish Civil War acquired in the contemporary scene was charged with mythological force. For some British writers that were involved in the conflict, to go fight in Spain represented the possibility of participating in a "modern odyssey" (Cunningham 450). That is, to embark on a heroic mission or a traditional quest. After the death – or rather, the disappearance – of Don Juan, Doña Ana, the orphaned

daughter of the Comendador, sets upon herself the task of being the messenger that informs of Don Juan's death to his family. Consequently, Doña Ana also conceptualises herself as the hero of the narrative. This idea is supported by the fact that she connects her missions (to tell Don Juan's family of his death and to order masses for his soul) with her identity as a Catholic woman. Through the link to the divine and the unknown, Doña Ana elevates her self-imposed quest, further fixing her role as the hero who, like Joseph Campbell's, is summoned to his destiny into unknown regions (Campbell 58). Despite this, her intentions are compromised by economic pressures. Although she is an aristocrat, the multiple expenses that resulted from the funeral of her father complicate the fulfilment of her missions. These difficulties challenge the missions' divine nature, by recognising an (economical) limit to them. Because of them, her quest becomes an "ill-advised journey" (Townsend Warner 7) that becomes entrenched in the constraints of material reality.

After discarding the masses, the success of her quest lies, then, in the safe arrival of the news of Don Juan's death to Tenorio Viejo. This establishes Doña Ana as a messenger, as well as a quester. The dependence of her mission on the power of words creates a connection between her and Arthurian heroes such as Gawain or Percival, that were expected to ask questions upon arrival to the waste land. In the Grail legend, those questions had the ability to restore the land and the King's health and so, the spoken word was given magical capabilities. Doña Ana, rather than asking, must affirm: Tenorio Viejo depends on a statement that declares Don Juan as dead. The certainty of his death, like the Arthurian hero's questions, is what may put the waste land in order. The result of the claim of Don Juan's death kickstarts the plans of irrigation in Tenorio Viejo and the villagers' ambition to improve their living conditions. It is not until Doña Ana and her coterie arrive in Tenorio Viejo that "talk of revolution" starts (Townsend Warner 99).

Nevertheless, Doña Ana's message is eventually undermined. Leporello, Don Juan's valet, is the one who first tells what happened to his master. From the moment he told Doña Ana to, most importantly, their arrival to Tenorio Viejo, the account of Don Juan's fate becomes a consciously constructed narrative. Don Saturno's answer, once he has heard Leporello's tale, is the following:

> Exactly this legend has been told in the village for three centuries at least. […] This legend of the wicked Don Juan is one of our family traditions, only till now it has always attached itself to the seventh Don Juan not the twelfth. In fact, the story has passed into literature.

> Molière wrote a play on the theme, an uneven work, but not without merit. (Townsend Warner 28)

At that moment, the novel seems to gain awareness of its own playful approach to myth. The long-standing tradition of the story of a Don Juan Tenorio that is carried to Hell may speak of the legend's resistance to the passage of time, recognising the status of its protagonist as an "eternal figure" (Meletinsky 261). However, the explicit presence of literature in the fragment, as well as the reference to a supposedly familiar legacy as a "theme" suggests its artificial component, that encompasses the different versions, like Molière's, of the same story. The fate of the twelfth Don Juan, presented by Doña Ana and Leporello as fact, is none other than a new version that may or may not correspond with reality. Moreover, it is a version that changes, not in events but in tone and poetic merit, depending on who and how is listening to Leporello. There is a contrast present in Leporello being attributed the title of a "natural Homer" (Townsend Warner 76) when he tells the story to Don Saturno, who does not believe him, and what happens when he tells it to the villagers. Even if Don Saturno is Don Juan's father, the ones who most need to hear the account of what happened are the villagers, because of the implications of Don Juan's death for the village. Yet, when he tells them, his storytelling becomes stale. On another note, the artificiality that myth acquires in the novel gains more significance if analysed through the lenses of Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation. According to Baudrillard, referents suffer a process of being turned into copies, called simulacra, that, at their turn, are multiplied into even more copies until they lose all connection with its original reality and are reduced to being signs. Through this theory, it is established that the different accounts of Don Juan's story that appear in the novel become dissolved as they are told, until they become mere simulacra. Baudrillard also identifies four stages of the image/sign. Those relevant for Leporello's story are the second and the third one, because they both are related to the masking of a reality or its absence (Baudrillard 11). On the one hand, Leporello's tale tries to mask reality by obscuring what really happened to Don Juan and hiding it behind a mythical story. On the other hand, it masks the absence of a reality because there is no correspondence between what happened and his tale. Furthermore, to discuss ideas on simulation and simulacra, Baudrillard also mentions the figure of God which, like myths, is understood as transcendental. He explains that, for some religions, the constant reproduction of an intelligible figure in images eventually signifies the "death of the divine referential" (9). This notion is helpful to understand one of the strategies that Townsend Warner uses to

illustrate myth's loss of transcendence. Like the images of the divine referential, the different instances in which Leporello tells Don Juan's story reduces it to mere signs. Therefore, its mythical component is undermined, and becomes, instead, a matter of superstition, whose credibility depends not on the tale itself but on who decides to believe Leporello.

Consequently, Doña Ana's self-conceptualisation as a hero proves futile. Despite her insistence on its divine nature, her quest ends up being entrenched in the constraints of reality: her diminishing wealth after her father's death stops her from fully achieving what she set out to do. Hence, she forgets about the masses and discards, thus, what connected her quest most to religion. Through this choice, she further reveals the detachment between divinity and mythical heroism. In addition, her role continues to be challenged after arriving in Tenorio Viejo. Although her message sparks the hope of improvement in the villagers, the story of Don Juan's death loses the magical capabilities that the Arthurian heroes' questions had. It is, instead, presented as a tale to be told and debated upon.

5. Tenorio Viejo and the Geography of the Wasted Land

If Doña Ana's insistence on travelling to Tenorio Viejo is her own self-imposed quest, it could be expected that her journey would also align with the conventions of the traditional hero's journey. In truth, apart from the mythical significance that the Spanish Civil War acquired, it appears that expectations for adventure in Spain seemed to populate the imagination of the first half of the twentieth century, to the point that the country was advertised as a space in which "romance, adventure [and] health" (Buchanan 3) awaited. The preconceived British stereotypes that configured Spain as an exotic country only reinforced this. Even if Doña Ana is not strictly a foreigner, she and her circle are still outsiders in the context of Tenorio Viejo: they are aristocrats from metropolitan Seville that come to a peasants' village amidst mountain ranges. In addition, Doña Ana's identity as the quester requires that she traverses to the unknown (Campbell 82) and so, she and her companions mirror the role of outsiders coming into an unfamiliar land, like those who travelled to Spain looking for a heroic mission. However, the Road of Trials they must go through is somewhat different to that conceptualised by Campbell, in which torment and delight coexist (58). The territory full of romance is substituted by a landscape that is "dreary and unpicturesque in the extreme" (Townsend Warner 14) and, moreover, boring. The pastoral images of joyful workers labouring the land are opposed

to the reality that Doña Ana's cortege finds: old impaired women, crying infants and a persistent bad odour from the animals that roam the roads. Exoticisation, then, is projected onto other foreign countries. Among them, England: "No songs, no dances, no sounds of happy industry! How different from Italy! […] Or England" (Townsend Warner 12). It could be said, then, that Spain is once again presented in contrast to other European countries, if only to disregard the romantic veil it had been assigned.

Despite the dullness of the landscape, its geography becomes crucial in the depiction of Tenorio Viejo's decay, aligning it with the traditional images of the waste land. Furthermore, some critics have noted how British literature of the Spanish Civil War is deeply conscious of geography, resulting from their experiences as witnesses of the transformation of ordinary locations into places of war (Cunningham 432). The path to Tenorio Viejo has not yet been turned into a battlefield but, using Cunningham's term, its geography is already animated (431). The presentation of the mountain ranges and the roads they travel through is reminiscent of that of a beast or a monster. Its hostility is materialised through the endowment of body parts that can injure or inflict pain, like the "reddish fangs of the roots of trees," or "the crag that looked like a rotten tooth" (Townsend Warner 15). Moreover, the natural elements seem to enable the threatening character of the landscape. Thus, the characterisation of the geography that surrounds Tenorio Viejo is a hostile one. It appeals to fear and insecurity and, because they seem to augment as Doña Ana's cortege nears the village, it could be said that it not only hints at the poor condition of the village but also, because Tenorio Viejo is surrounded by those mountain ranges, frames it. Furthermore, and although already announced by this cruel landscape, there is a dissonance between the reality of Tenorio Viejo and the idealised village promised by Leporello. Still, in that promise lies the first association between Tenorio Viejo and myth. The valet's exaggerated accounts present the village as a rural paradise from the Golden Age (Townsend Warner 13) but, instead, they find an agonising one. Tenorio Viejo is not frozen in time by the glory of a transcendental past; it is a place subjected to the passage of time and, most importantly, to decline. Rather than a rural paradise, it is a waste land. According to Jessie L. Weston, in several versions of the Grail legend, "the misfortune which has fallen upon the country is that of a prolonged drought" (20-21). Similarly, Tenorio Viejo has gone through three consecutive seasons of drought, which not only hinders the process of harvesting but also manifests in an array of images that suggest illness or lack of health: the olive trees are described as old and so their

production is irregular, and mildew is found in the vines, to name a few. What is more, the garden that surrounds the castle of the Tenorio family is referred to as a "miscarriage" (Townsend Warner 77), hinting at the Grail legend's ideas on infertility. In that context, there is also an insistence on the notion of the "vivifying power of the waters" (Weston 36), rooted in the villagers' dependence on the land to work, earn money, and survive.

It is relevant to mention, once again, that at the core of the British understanding of Spain was its identity as a rural nation, and that the fight for the Republic in the Spanish Civil War was associated with that of the working class (Cunningham 437). Hence why the novel seems to dedicate, in its portrait of Tenorio Viejo as a waste land, special attention to agriculture and the relation between workers and land. On the one hand, the process to nurse Tenorio Viejo back to health is intricate: Doña Ana's message impulses the plans for irrigation but it does not magically guarantee the village's restoration. The following extract: "Marl! Marl! That's what the land needs. Water alone cannot nourish the rock. And what else is the land here but the dust of rocks." (Townsend Warner 87) ultimately questions the power of the waters. It is not enough. If poured on itself, the land would turn into a "puddle" (Townsend Warner 77), further complicating the harvest. Moreover, the village is not only burdened by the effects of droughts. It is also full of mortgages and borrowings that Don Saturno has had to place to maintain his economy. Tenorio Viejo, then, is a waste land anchored to its material reality: it is conditioned by the technicalities necessary to properly work the land and its restoration depends on the fragile economy of its ruler, which cannot sustain the funding of the irrigation project, rather than his health. On the other hand, when discussing the nature cults that may have influenced the Grail legend, there is an analysis of the process in which Nature becomes personified in an individual that manifests its processes through ordinary experiences (Weston 33). In Townsend Warner's novel, the closeness between the land and its inhabitants can be perceived without the mediation of the characters that correspond with the Fisher King, as it happens in the myth. As stated by Ramon, one of the villagers, the situation of Tenorio Viejo and the possibility of improvement is equated to "[their] lives" (Townsend Warner 87). The bond between them and the land is further emphasised once the first traces of violence start to happen:

> The life of man has its shape, as a tree has its shape. One grows up, one learns a livelihood, one marries a woman and begets children. As one grows older one grows tired and in the end one dies. He looked at the pale house and the mis-shapen trees, and thought of the dying boy. (Townsend Warner 195)

The description of the different stages of the life of man, as well as the mention of a child that, injured by Don Juan, is dying, establishes a relation of parallelism between the trees and the boy whose life is also rendered misshapen, because he will not be able to fulfil said stages. Likewise, the outbreak of an armed attack against them will also crook their lives. Still, in the last part of the novel, after the attack has started, the land provides some help for them; they traverse Tenorio Viejo until they arrive to the abandoned eastern part of the village. It is there that the territory is explicitly described as "a piece of waste land" (Townsend Warner 230). Its rubble helps some of them to take cover and counterattack, thus becoming an ally in the conflict. Ultimately, the traditional connection between waste land and Fisher King seems to be exchanged for the closeness between Tenorio Viejo and its villagers.

6. Don Saturno, Don Juan, and the Fisher King's Heir

As mentioned, the most important trait of the mythical Fisher King is his sympathetic relation to the land he rules: what happens to the former is reflected on the latter (Weston 23). That results in the land becoming a waste due to either wound or illness. Rather than a king, Tenorio Viejo has a landowner, Don Saturno. As an old man to whom the village is always referred to as his, it could be said that Don Saturno may be related to the figure of the Fisher King. However, it has been previously established that the novel changes the link between the waste land and the Fisher King in favour of creating a bond between the villagers and Tenorio Viejo. This contradiction of the legend's formula is highlighted in the portrayal of Don Saturno. While discussing with Don Juan the plans for irrigation, he tells him: "Perhaps I have concentrated too much on Tenorio Viejo. You too will find it a temptation. One tends to sink into one's native soil, one identifies himself –it is very natural– with the traditional familiar acres" (Townsend Warner 201). From this fragment, it could be extracted that Don Saturno is the one who links himself with Tenorio Viejo. This attachment is a "temptation" and so irresistible, to the detriment of his other properties and, attending to the use of the verb "sink," it could be said that it is something that becomes almost physical, as he imagines himself entwined with the land. Despite these claims, there is a consistent lack of understanding about the realities of Tenorio Viejo. Their relation is consequently presented as the result not of a sympathetic bond but of its complete opposite: there is a total disconnection between the two. Still, as illustrated by the given example, Don Saturno does not recognise this. This allows for a somewhat ironic approach to the mythical figure of the Fisher King who, in

this novel, cannot even realise that he is separated from his land. Moreover, apart from challenging the traditional divine association between ruler and land, the disconnect between Don Saturno and Tenorio Viejo may reflect the political scene in Spain before the outbreak of the war, as understood by left-wing British intellectuals. They believed that there had been a "weakened state authority" (Buchanan 14) that also threatened the survival of the Republic's progressive measures. In the context of the novel, this is mirrored by Don Saturno, whose liberal ideas never get materialised because, through his distorted vision of the changes he wants to bring to Tenorio Viejo, and his lack of commitment to them, he himself weakens his authority. In conclusion, through the character of Don Saturno the Fisher King's mythical dimension is questioned through the loss of two essential traits: he loses the bond that he had with the land, and the authority that accompanies his title (king or landowner) is debilitated.

It has already been mentioned that the restoration from illness to health of the Fisher King could be related to rituals of nature in which its representative, old or dead, is replaced for a youthful figure that would become its successor (Weston 121). Likewise, the novel presents its own forced substitution, when Don Juan ties Don Saturno to a chair to restrain him, so he cannot prevent him from doing as he pleases (which will result in the attack on the villagers). The insistence that Don Juan puts on his father's old age before he restrains him, "No old men leave this house. […] No old men run to the window, either. […] Sit down in your easy-chair, father." (Townsend Warner 225) further suggests he is relegating Don Saturno to the margins, making himself inherit the control over the family land. Furthermore, this episode is perhaps the least subtle reference to the Spanish Civil War and the coup d'état that started it. Symbolising a corrupted version of the ritual of substitution, this does not make Tenorio Viejo bloom into health but instead bleed. Yet, it is also relevant to consider that, in some novels of the twentieth century that follow the mythic method, mythical roles may be interchangeable. In Sylvia Townsend Warner's novel, the archetype of the Fisher King is shared by both Don Saturno and Don Juan, up to the moment of the former's replacement, when his son claims the role for himself.

Unlike his father, Don Juan as the Fisher King does affect the land, if only because he haunts it. Ultimately, he is seen as the reason for its deterioration, suggested by the following conversation between the villagers: "'The third drought running.' 'What can you expect, when the world is full of such wickedness?' 'Such wickedness as [Don Juan's]? He was certainly a great sinner.'" (Townsend Warner 88). Consequently, the

verb "to haunt" gains importance, because the constant doubts about his death, the characters' superstitions and even his descriptions after his reappearance in Tenorio Viejo all transform Don Juan into a spectre. He becomes a preposterous figure and, like a ghost, he is absent but forever present, in a state of in-betweenness of life and death (Davis 53) that impacts the land. He is mainly conjured in climactic phenomena, which serves two purposes. In the first place, this reinforces the idea of the cruel animated geography that was first announced in Doña Ana's journey. It also foreshadows the reality of his fate: he is not dead, but alive and on his way to the village. The focus of these climactic apparitions is always on the destruction it brings to vegetation and urban structures which, once again, reveals what will be Don Juan's attitude once in the village, violent and absolutist. In that way, he deviates from his father, who is separated from the land. The central point that lies at the root of the relation between Tenorio Viejo and Don Juan in the role of the Fisher King is that it is an asymmetrical one. There is an unbalanced mutuality in their connection, and it is inharmonious: Tenorio Viejo's improvement depends on Don Juan's death and, likewise, the assertion of his life descends the village further into decay.

7. The Ordinary 1930s Don Juan

However, what happens after the ghost is given a body? The question must be considered in two ways: how his eventual reappearance undermines the grandeur of the mythical character of Don Juan and how his physicality approaches readers, more than anything else in the novel, to the context of 1930s Spain.

Because Don Juan is a ghost for most of the novel, Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology helps in the understanding of his character on two levels. Firstly, in the treatment that the myth receives in the novel, and in the culmination of the power that Don Juan gains by its end. Moreover, its reminiscence of Baudrillard's simulacra can better illustrate this myth's decadence in the novel. Before proceeding with the analysis, it must be briefly explained that Derrida's hauntology focuses on the figure of the spectre, and the different ways in which it becomes a haunting force that affects the present (Blanco and Peeren 14). Derrida explains that "for there to be a ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever." (Derrida 157) This process, which consists in the incorporation of ideas and systems to a material body that simultaneously claims its own uniqueness, ends up creating "the absolute ghost." Layer after layer, it becomes a simulacrum (Derrida 158). In this case, it is not the account of

Don Juan's story, the legend, that is devoid of mythical meaning— it is the character of Don Juan who turns into a copy of himself. The mystery that surrounded him prior to his reappearance is completely erased by the real account of what happened after the Comendador's death, and is told by Don Juan. It has been studied that, in other versions of the myth in literature, it was necessary that the protagonist was surrounded by a certain solemnity that would justify his divine punishment and chance at redemption (Weinstein 131). However, Townsend Warner's Don Juan loses this dimension. His journey to Hell becomes instead an attempt to flee Seville because, prompted by Doña Ana, Don Ottavio and Doña Elvira, he has been "pestered, harried, goaded, teased, pricked and jabbed like a bull that won't fight, tormented and plotted against and held up to a ridicule." (Townsend Warner 162). He suffers a reversal of roles. Consequently, he loses one of the traits that characterised him: whereas in myth he tricks others, in this novel, he is the one being made fun of. Furthermore, he develops nettle rash in his face and body out of this constant persecution, which makes him hide. He does not visit Hell and so, he does not transcend any notions of life and death. Instead, as a reduced version of the original character, Don Juan in *After the Death of Don Juan* becomes a "discredit" (Townsend Warner 164) who has lost most aspects that had guaranteed the immortalisation of his figure. Additionally, the Don Juan that the reader eventually finds is distanced from the mythical one not only because of its degradation, but because he is transferred from the present. Following the analogy of the emperor in Derrida's work, by incorporating in a material presence those ideas and fears that surrounded Don Juan, the scope of his power becomes a tangible reality (163). At the same time, he materialises the historical context of the Spanish Civil War. Understood as the Fisher King's ritual of substitution, Don Juan taking over Tenorio Viejo is also the clearest reference to the ongoing conflict. Throughout this analysis, the importance that material conditions (those aspects related to work and money) acquire in the novel has been insisted upon, based on the perceived connection between the war and the workers' fight. Accordingly, left-wing British intellectuals were concerned about the vision of Spain as a country entrenched in a feudal system, where the higher classes accumulated land and power and the working class suffered. Don Juan's embodiment of the Fisher King reflects this preoccupation. The Grail legend and the focus on Spain's feudal system converge in Don Juan's acceptance of the project of irrigation. Yet, he conceives it as a means of regaining back all the land. Thus, he situates himself alongside the values that characterised the 'Old' Spain, by directly aspiring to become a feudal landlord that removes the workers' rights to the land.

Don Juan, ultimately, mirrors the greedy aristocracy that, as per left-wing British authors, threatened the survival of the Spanish Republic (Buchanan 14). The act of substitution that relegates Don Saturno is forced upon by Don Juan, and fixes him as the Fisher King. This does not result in the waste land's restoration; it culminates with the violent attack on the villagers that further harms Tenorio Viejo.

Hence, the shrivelling map of Tenorio Viejo, confined to the outskirts of the village, appears like the "map of pain" (Spender qtd. in Cunningham 432) of Spain during the Civil War. Nevertheless, Sylvia Townsend Warner seems to be benevolent towards the villagers of Tenorio Viejo. In a novel full of mythical characters and motifs, the focus of its ending is placed on those unrelated to myth. The waste land has no hope of restoration and has been plunged into violence, the quester Doña Ana has exited the narrative and Don Juan, traditionally a solemn figure of punishment and redemption, receives neither. Only Tenorio Viejo's villagers, some of them on the brink of death, who "looked at each other long and intently, as though they were pledged to meet again and would ensure a recognition" (Townsend Warner 256) are given the possibility of transcendence. Thus, Sylvia Townsend Warner's *After the Death of Don Juan* challenges the traditional representation of myths that, in a war-torn world, lose all transcendental components.

8. Conclusion

After the Death of Don Juan by Sylvia Townsend Warner interrogates and challenges the transcendental component of myths to anchor them to the Spanish Civil War. Firstly, as an outsider travelling to Tenorio Viejo that insists on the divine nature of her self-appointed missions, the novel puts Doña Ana in a similar position to the foreigners that travelled to Spain during the war expecting a heroic quest in a country of romance. Furthermore, her quest turns her into a messenger, calling back to the Grail heroes that, through the use of the word, restored the waste land. However, her mission is undermined by two factors: the burden that it represents to Doña Ana's economy, which brings it back to material reality, and the message itself. Unlike the heroes, she does not have to question but to affirm Don Juan's death. Nevertheless, the acknowledgment of the different versions of his myth, as well as the multiple instances in the novel where the story is dependent on its storyteller's ability, reveals that myth is recognised as an artificial narrative that, becoming a simulacrum, loses its transcendentality. Secondly, the setting of the novel, the Andalusian village of Tenorio Viejo, aligns with the interest left-

wing British intellectuals had in the tensions between workers and the higher classes in a country they perceived as fundamentally rural and entrenched in feudalism. Spain's rurality acquires a particular importance in the novel, because the nature that surrounds Tenorio Viejo further configures it as a wasteland, announcing its deplorable state and future demise. Regarding Tenorio Viejo itself, its depiction is in harmony with the traditional portrayal of the barren land, the focus on droughts being its strongest point of association. Yet, as a sign of the importance that the working-class acquired in the reception of the Civil War in Britain, the novel rejects a divine connection between the waste land and the Fisher King, creating instead closeness between Tenorio Viejo and its villagers. On another note, the role of the Fisher King becomes divided between Don Saturno and his son Don Juan, whose attitudes towards Tenorio Viejo differ considerably. While Don Saturno reinforces the separation between land and ruler, which hints at the perceived weakened authority in the Spanish government prior to the war, Don Juan, transformed into a ghost, haunts it. However, they share an asymmetrical bond, because they do not function in parallel: if Don Juan is dead, the land can be restored; if he is alive, as it turns out to be, Tenorio Viejo further decays. As the equivalent of the fascist figure in the novel, his involvement with the waste land becomes corrupted, because the traditional act of substitution that may help the land is reminiscent, instead, of a coup d'état that brings readers back to present history. Besides, his character, becoming another layer of the simulacrum, loses the grandeur that had made him an eternal figure to represent, instead, a ridiculed copy of the mythical character. In conclusion, by engaging with the myth of Don Juan and creating a dialogue with the Grail legend, especially through the recurring imagery of the waste land, Sylvia Townsend Warner responds to the Spanish Civil War from the perspective of left-wing British writers and intellectuals. This interplay of myth and history reveals myth as a construct bound to the present and devoid of transcendental meaning. In that way, Sylvia Townsend Warner positions herself within the broader tradition of inter-war writers that employed the mythic method to examine the history they were living in and interrogate myth's validity in times of war.

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