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'My Usual Despicable Hold on Life': The View from Sylvia Townsend Warner's Diaries (The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Lecture 2021)

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'My Usual Despicable Hold on Life': The View from Sylvia Townsend Warner's Diaries (The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Lecture 2021)

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Abstract

This lecture draws on published and unpublished material from the 38 notebooks of different sizes, shapes and states of repair archived in the Dorset History Centre to argue that the richly informative diary Sylvia Townsend Warner began to keep in 1927 provides a vital resource for a fuller understanding of the fiction as well as of the life. In particular I aim to demonstrate that melancholy constitutes a defining preoccupation in both. I establish contexts for this preoccupation in Warner's erudition and in the work of Theodore and Llewellyn Powys, while also proposing some instructive broader parallels with the contemporary writings of Walter Benjamin. Both, for example, took a strong interest in the radical Bohemian culture which flourished in Paris before and during the 1848 revolutions: *Summer Will Show* (1936), set in that place at that time, is my main literary text. Other expressions of melancholy examined include diary entries concerning two of the cats in Warner's life and a hitherto unpublished poem provoked by the revival of Valentine Ackland's affair with Elizabeth Wade White in the summer of 1949.

Keywords Sylvia Townsend Warner; Valentine Ackland; Walter Benjamin; melancholy; *Summer Will Show*; cats.

There weren't all that many things in life Sylvia Townsend Warner enjoyed more than a dip into other people's diaries. Her own are quite frank about the ecstasies of snooping, so we needn't hold back. A few weeks ago I found myself sitting at a table in the Dorset History Centre in Dorchester reading the entry for 1 August 1966, in which she describes a day spent sitting at a table in the nearby Dorset County Museum, as it then was, reading the diaries of T.H. White, author of *The Sword in the Stone* and other Arthurian fantasies. 'Calm bliss, sitting in the Museum Library, reading & copying poor Tim's tormented mind.'¹ Calm bliss it is, too, to read and copy the many pages of diary she herself had already filled, and was to continue to fill for the rest of her life. Poor Sylvia she never quite seems, although no stranger to torment.

Claire Harman, Warner's biographer and the editor of her diaries, notes that they began in 1927 as a 'busy, entertaining record, a writer's way of salting down experience', but developed rapidly into a 'part of her life, her soul's debating-ground'.² There are 38 notebooks of different sizes, shapes and states of repair archived in the Dorset History Centre. Harman's indispensable Virago edition, which constitutes my 'text', is necessarily a selection, so I have on occasion drawn upon material she excludes. The diaries, it should be said at the outset, are not a quarry for the fiction. They do provide occasional insight into the process of composition, but for the most part their literary scope is restricted to a humdrum record of progress made or not made. 'Barnarded to p. 153' begins the entry for 28 March 1952, written during the composition of her last novel, *The Flint Anchor*, in which the Barnard family looms large.³ Some of the most influential criticism of the fiction can nonetheless be said to have drawn to illuminating effect on selective quotation from the diaries.⁴ My aim here is to develop the view they might be said to offer both of the life and of the fiction (or, to be precise, the novels). It's in the novels that I first came across the theme of this lecture.

Warner was an erudite writer. Those of you who are fans of *Mr Fortune's Maggot* may well have found yourselves, as I did, Googling the scrap of text which concludes the advice Mr Fortune gives to his disciple Lueli concerning marriage. Lueli will find it to his advantage, he says, to have spent his best days on earth with a faithful companion by his side, 'if it were only, as a celebrated English Divine once expressed it in a sermon, that he might have someone to whom he could say: "How our shadows lengthen as our sun goes down"'.⁵ The erudition is not the point, of course. What matters is the freshness of a connection made across the ages with another mind: in this case, Laurence Sterne's. Like Sterne, Warner exulted

in companionship; or, more exactly, in shared delight. What I want above all as the shadows lengthen, Sterne adds, is the presence of someone 'to whom I may say, How fresh is the face of nature! How sweet the flowers of the field! How delicious are these fruits!'⁶ For both, delight is a feeling to be experienced fully only through an encounter with its opposite. Mr Fortune's trenchant invocation of Sterne, we learn, 'suddenly revealed to him that he was sorrowful, although he had not thought he was'.⁷

There's a more complicated connection across the ages in *The Flint Anchor*. The scene again involves an over-conscientious mentor – on this occasion, a nineteenth-century Norfolk merchant rather than a missionary – and a disciple whose commitment to the whole project we have already begun to doubt. John Barnard – 'sombrelly didactic, earnest and unamused' – reads aloud to fever-ridden Thomas Kettle a passage from Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* about 'a Baker in Ferrara, that thought he was composed of butter, and durst not sit in the sun, or come near a fire, for fear of being melted'.⁸ Thomas Kettle, turning his back on both career and married life, is one of Warner's most intriguing rebels. Confronted by Barnard over local gossip to the effect that he has taken a male lover, he can't be bothered either to confirm or to deny the accusation. 'A local custom, I believe,' he adds breezily. In 1954, the year of the novel's publication, homosexuality was of course still a criminal offence in Britain. Thomas's only real escape from the tyrannical Barnard and his stifling family is among the Norfolk fishermen with their tall tales of 'portents, wrecks, wagers, mermaids, donkeys, highwaymen, sea-serpents and mourning coaches driven by headless men'. Thomas takes genuine delight in the embellishment added to ordinary experience by sorrowful tales of disaster and delusion.

It was as though a new *Anatomy* were being poured into his ears, only with the Norfolk dialect replacing the Latin, and all the authorities cited by nicknames.⁹

Melancholy, Burton explained, is either in 'disposition' or in 'habit'. None of us is so well 'disposed' as to escape altogether the 'smart' of melancholy disposition. In some, that disposition develops into a habit or disease. Neither Thomas Kettle nor his creator should be counted among the latter. But the 'smart' of melancholy disposition did, I believe, widely inform the view Warner took of human experience, both in the diaries and in the fiction. Melancholy, by Burton's account, is the 'character' of mortality. It constitutes both mortality's essential feature and the outward sign

by which it is to be known. Some people get their knowledge by books, Burton wrote, 'I mine by melancholizing'.¹⁰

I haven't been able to find out very much about when, or how, Warner first got hold of the book. Its topic was very much 'in the air' in the circles in which she began to move after the commercial and critical success of her first novel, *Lolly Willowes*, in 1926. Melancholy of a seventeenth-century cast pervades the writing – and conceivably, therefore, the conversation – of the various members of the Powys clan (Gertrude, Katie, Llewelyn, Theo), whose presence in and around the Dorset village of Chaldon Herring had encouraged her to settle there with her partner Valentine Ackland in the autumn of 1930.¹¹ Llewelyn Powys published an essay on Burton in 1937; his wife, Alyse Gregory, one on melancholy, with an epigraph from Burton, in 1938.¹² Warner said that it was reading Theo Powys's novel *Mr Tasker's Gods* in manuscript which persuaded her that the 'English Pastoral' was a 'grim and melancholy thing'.¹³ With good reason. *Mr Tasker's Gods* is ripe for the parodic treatment it was shortly to receive in Stella Gibbons's *Cold Comfort Farm*.

The hare died in the gin. The owl tore out the bowels of the rat. In the heath cottage, Molly covered the face of dead Henry.¹⁴

Those are the final sentences of the novel's penultimate chapter. Worse is yet to come. Mr Tasker, it turns out, has been eaten by his 'gods'; namely, his pigs.

Warner's diaries, the most intimate and consciously self-absorbed form of writing she ever undertook, stage the emergence of a distinctive melancholy persona. She certainly shared the Chaldon Herring enthusiasm for sorrowfulness. But there is a broader and more instructive historical context for the uses to which such enthusiasm could be put. I will sketch that context before turning to the diaries and then briefly, in conclusion, to the fiction. 'No-one will believe my book,' Warner lamented of her biography of T.H. White, 'because it is drawn from his diaries, not from what is called life' (*D* 296). My argument here is most definitely drawn from the diaries rather than from 'what is called life'. I hope you'll feel able to believe at least some of it.

Context

During the interwar period, melancholy became a disposition, habit or disease of profound interest to writers, philosophers and

psychologists alike, as Jonathan Flatley has shown. Flatley argues that in defining ‘melancholia’ as a failure to mourn adequately, Sigmund Freud in effect created an allegory for the experience of modern life: an experience ‘constitutively linked’ to loss, whether of a person or an idea.¹⁵ Freud’s formula has remained hugely influential for theorists of melancholy. I don’t think it quite hits the mark where Warner is concerned.

Warner suffered some terrible losses, both individual and collective; and she was certainly intimate with people made melancholy by loss. In September 1949, during a period of bitter crisis in her own life, she went to stay for four days with Alyse Gregory in her cottage on the Dorset coast, close to Chaldon Herring. Llewelyn Powys had died of tuberculosis ten years before. Alyse’s extensive diaries make it abundantly clear that his death continued to shape her life.¹⁶ Warner saw this sustained sorrowfulness as a mood or attitude at once sufficiently like and unlike her own to take careful note of ‘Things Alyse said’ during the visit. Alyse declared that after Llewelyn’s death what ‘sometimes brought her back to life’ was to look at everyday objects and incidents ‘purely, without speculation’, so that they became somehow ‘lifted out of significance’ (*D* 141–2). The diary entry recording this comment has a further sentence, which the published version omits:

For the chief of her time she steadily desires death – and then come waves of apprehension of all the life and beauty sliding away from her, and which she was ready to abandon.¹⁷

At no point in her life did Warner steadily desire death. Her melancholy arose instead out of an acute awareness of both the strengths and the limitations of her own (perhaps over-eager) ‘apprehension’ of life’s beauty. Like Laurence Sterne, she tended to discover too much meaning and value in mere existence, rather than too little.

For Flatley, melancholy is ‘the place where modernity touches down in our lives in the most intimate of ways’.¹⁸ There is, perhaps, a more precise historical context if not for the origin of Warner’s preoccupation with the character of mortality, then for its development as a theme in her fiction: the ‘melancholic dimension’, as Enzo Traverso puts it, of nineteenth- and twentieth-century left-wing culture.¹⁹ Traverso has excavated a ‘hidden Marxist tradition’: a vision of history not as the strategic recall of short-lived triumphs in order to project a utopian future, but as the muted, self-critical ‘remembrance’ of defeat, of a shared oppression not yet overcome. The late-twentieth century ‘eclipse of utopias’ has made it

essential, he argues, to investigate and recover that vision of history as remembrance.

Warner and Ackland joined the Communist Party in the spring of 1935.²⁰ Partisanship, as Harman puts it, became the principle by which they lived. Warner, for example, was keen to ensure that the politically tepid Stephen Spender should not just be purged from the Party, but be seen to be purged, as humiliatingly as possible.²¹ Ackland's *Country Conditions* (1936) adheres strictly to orthodox Marxist theory, both in its strategic recall of the rick-burning and machine-breaking 'disturbances' in Britain in the 1830s and in its unabashed celebration of the utopian future manifest in the social and economic advances made by Soviet agriculture a hundred years later.²²

But it did not subsequently escape Warner that the 'eclipse of utopias' of which Traverso speaks was already under way during her lifetime. In May 1958 she visited Bob and Ida, comrades and friends from way back, at their home in Bournemouth. 'I felt the *nobility* of their manners; yet these old Communists have almost an old-world charm now; social Arcadians, dwelling in a former world of trust in the future & in mankind' (*D* 245–6). She may well have been the only person in Britain sincerely to mourn 'Uncle Joe' Stalin's death from a stroke on 5 March 1953. What she regretted, however, was the loss not so much of a visionary leader as of a voice heard on the radio in the dark days of 1943 (*D* 223). It sounds as though she was already well versed by then in the hidden Marxist tradition of melancholy remembrance. Traverso's account of that tradition is notably lacking in commentaries by or about women. Warner would serve as a useful supplement and corrective to it.

Traverso traces the tradition of melancholy remembrance back as far as the 'tension between ecstasy and sorrow' which by his account shaped radical Bohemian culture in Paris before, during and after the 1848 revolutions.²³ Much of the action of Warner's *Summer Will Show* (1936) takes place within that exact milieu. One of the novel's main protagonists, Bohemian Minna Lemuel, has 'trailed across Europe with a tag-rag of poets, revolutionaries, musicians and circus-riders snuffing at her heels' – only to end up, inevitably, in a shabby-genteel apartment on the Left Bank, as revolution erupts in the street outside.²⁴

Traverso singles out Walter Benjamin as the most illuminating and influential exponent of a vision of history as *Eingedenken*, a term usually translated into English as 'remembrance'. Benjamin had form when it came to melancholy. He had been born, he said, 'under the sign of Saturn – the planet of slow revolution, the star of hesitation and delay'.²⁵

His first book, on seventeenth-century German Baroque drama, argued that the ‘melancholic distaste for life’ these plays so vividly convey was the stimulus to a highly distinctive allegorical habit.²⁶ Losing its attraction, the world becomes for the first time intelligible. Benjamin’s magnum opus, the *Passagen-Werk*, or *Arcades Project*, begun in 1927 and left incomplete at his death in 1940, had as its topic a more modern distaste for life: the ennui of bourgeois experience, especially in its articulation by the waves of artistic and political experiment which swept through radical Bohemian culture in Paris during the 1840s and 1850s.²⁷ Benjamin proved every bit as partisan as Warner and Ackland when it came to denouncing the ‘left-wing melancholy’ – all talk and no action – of his own day.²⁸ The grounds for a comparison with Warner would be that, like her, he wanted to believe in a good left-wing melancholy which could be distinguished from the bad versions by its forceful if intermittent adherence to orthodox Marxist theory.

There’s no reason to believe that Benjamin and Warner knew anything at all about each other; and I don’t, of course, want to minimise the differences between them. But they did share at least one extremely important intellectual resource: Marcel Proust’s *À la Recherche du temps perdu*. Benjamin spent several years in the late 1920s translating *À la Recherche* with his Berlin editor, Franz Hessel.²⁹ By happy coincidence, C.K. Scott Moncrieff had already given the title of the English translation a distinctly Benjaminian flavour: *Remembrance of Things Past*. Warner’s turn came in 1960, when she undertook to revise Scott Moncrieff for Chatto and Windus; his executors, alas, had other ideas.³⁰

Familiarity with *À la Recherche* encouraged both Warner and Benjamin to develop their shared interest in discontinuities in time: continuity amounting to progress was the tale relentlessly told, they both felt, by history’s victors. The vanquished had somehow to be brought back to life by connections made across the ages. Proust’s ruminations on ‘involuntary memory’ in *Du Côté de chez Swann* were to prove the catalyst to the development of a concept central to the curious mixture of materialist and messianic thinking that fed into Benjamin’s cryptic definitions of historical method: the ‘dialectical image’. The dialectical image was the means by which the gap between past and present sorrows could be bridged, to revolutionary effect. What Proust experienced directly as an individual in the ‘phenomenon of remembrance’, Benjamin wrote, the historian of nineteenth-century Paris must experience indirectly by studying the material traces deposited by the evolution of tendencies and trends.³¹ Adapting a model derived from a novelist’s meditation on his

own most intimate memories to the materialist history of the commodity-form under capitalism was to prove an arduous – some would say insurmountable – task.³² It's one which Warner, too, had to undertake as an exponent of the genre of materialist historical fiction. The diaries are a different matter. While they do sometimes record the thoughts and feelings provoked by public events of the day, their main focus is overwhelmingly on individual experience.³³

Before turning to a full examination of the emergence of a distinctive melancholy persona in the diaries, I want just to indicate a couple of further differences between Warner and Benjamin. Warner, to a greater extent than Benjamin, was in the business of formulating an aesthetic. We can catch her in a sociable mood, arriving at William Empson's flat on the evening of 13 April 1930. She had been apprehensive, expecting a typical Bloomsbury dinner party. So she was relieved to find instead 'a very untidy room, with bottles and books on the floor, a delicious smell of frying, a saucepan of twopenny soup on a gas-ring and Mr Empson cavalier seul.' They argued amicably about T.S. Eliot and Wyndham Lewis.

He was of the opinion that poets should have a message, should be in touch with real life. I didn't see then, but I do know [now] that they should be so much in touch etc. that they don't want to alter it. It is a drawing-room or study contact with life which wants to move the groundsel off the landscape. (*D* 57)

It's an interesting remark from a writer whose own engagement with the idea that poets should 'have a message' was about to deepen dramatically. Urban Benjamin saw himself as a rag-picker scavenging among detritus; pastoral Warner retained a healthy respect for the resilience of virtually ineradicable weeds such as groundsel and couch grass.³⁴

The Diaries

During the 1950s Valentine's periodic determination to revert to the Catholic faith caused Sylvia a great deal of anguish. The most troubling of the disputes it provoked took place on 23 April 1956. Such was Sylvia's distress that she subsequently tore out the whole of the page on which she had written the entry for that day. By 4 May, however, she was able to claim that compassion for Valentine in her spiritual turmoil had overcome 'any other consideration'. But could a non-believer's attempt

to understand the dilemma a would-be believer found herself in ever amount to more than a feeble compromise? 'Still I have no idea', she wrote, 'whether I am really surfacing, or whether I am acclimatising, with my usual despicable hold on life, to a pis-aller' – a last resort (*D* 228).

The basis of that 'hold on life', as the entry makes clear, was the delight she took in the excess of meaning and value to be found in the world as it is. Sylvia tried to combat her re-acclimatisation to an attitude or habit of mind which she felt to be 'despicable' because it immunised her – to a degree – against other people's agonies and ecstasies. In a fit of self-denial, she 'set' herself to look at the spring flowers with only the 'bare outward' of her senses. But she wasn't capable of taking the world in 'purely, without speculation', as Alyse Gregory had recommended. 'There is the loveliest blackthorn blossom I have seen for a long time – but I dare not impale myself on it' (*D* 228). She already has, in imagination. For the metaphor of impalement immediately invokes the rich religious and folkloric symbolism of the blackthorn. The tree that supplies these lovely blossoms once supplied (it has been said) a crown of thorns. The hold on life enacted in the diaries had melancholy built into it.

The mortality Warner's melancholy persona contemplates is, in the first instance, strictly its own and no-one else's. The relation envisaged is a relation to the world, and the writing which explores that relation amounts to a sort of vernacular ontology, or theory of being. Warner began to think in these terms from an early age. Her theory of being crystallised in the summer of 1922 during a series of visits to the Essex marshes: an ambiguous, melancholy terrain which was to feature in her third novel, *The True Heart* (1929). On one occasion, she ended up on a bank of shingle beside the Blackwater estuary. In her pocket was a cheap edition of François Villon's *Testament*: a book of poems whose preoccupation with mortality at its most unforgiving does not appear to have dampened her spirits. 'I knew that mysterious sensation of being where I wanted to be and as I wanted to be', she was later to recall, 'socketted into the universe, and passionately quiescent.'³⁵

It would be wrong, however, to think of that passionate quiescence as a norm routinely re-established in the aftermath of crisis. To be sure, melancholy is generally thought to take our spiritual temperature as we age. How do we happen to be feeling about the whole grim business? Melancholy conforms to, or inheres in, natural process – as Sterne's metaphor of shadows lengthening as the sun goes down would suggest. Warner spent 8 November 1967, a foggy day, listening to music, 'while a sombre cosy melancholy gathered round'. The atmosphere was like

'a turn-back to my past youth'; with the difference that in those days such dusks were to be enjoyed 'frankly and without suspicion that they might darken with age' (*D* 314). Melancholy expands as life contracts: so far, so organic. But a 'turn-back' is a violent manoeuvre, an unnatural contortion. Warner's melancholy persona crystallised during upheaval. Her understanding of sorrowfulness as the product of crisis, and conceivably its remedy, aligns her with Benjamin rather than Proust. Historical materialism, Benjamin remarked, 'means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger'.³⁶

It's worth examining, from this point of view, the record Warner kept of the most severe of the various crises which punctuated her 40-year marriage to Valentine Ackland. The crisis came to a head during the early autumn of 1949. Its cause was the resumption, after a period of ten years, of Valentine's all-consuming affair with the American heiress, socialite and activist Elizabeth Wade White. The agreement reached, after a summer of agonising debate, was that for the duration of September Elizabeth would stay with Valentine in the house at Frome Vauchurch, a village to the north-west of Dorchester, in which Sylvia and Valentine had lived since August 1937. Sylvia, meanwhile, would retire to the Pen Mill Hotel in Yeovil; although she did in fact remain in regular secret contact with Valentine, as if *they* were the adulterous couple. It was during this abject month that Sylvia paid Alyse Gregory the visit to which I have already referred.

Valentine parked Sylvia at the Pen Mill Hotel at 6.00 p.m. on 31 August; swearing, as she left, that she loved her. 'Now it is 9, and I wonder how I can last out even till tomorrow, when I go back to look after the animals and spend the night' (*D* 136). There follows a detailed description of her surroundings, of a dreary meal in the hotel dining-room and of a demoralising phone call from Valentine. And yet something has happened which restores her, if not exactly to herself, then to a fuller sense of independent being.

For one moment in the dining-room I staggered to life, feeling myself returned to that melancholy saturnine young animal wandering about for Tudor Church Music – at Wimborne, at Norwich, and in Oxford. (*D* 137)

The involuntary memory which 'flashes up' in this moment of danger is a turn-back to the younger self – already saturnine – who had once researched Tudor church music on behalf of the Carnegie Trust. The

shock thus produced is also a form of understanding, a meta-melancholy: a way to think of melancholy as an attitude rather than a mood. Warner understood such interventions as a 'staggering to life' – an 'awakening', the more messianic Benjamin would have said – rather than as a withdrawal from it. The turn-back is the primary means by which the diaries narrate the melancholy persona.

On 1 September Sylvia travelled back to Frome Vauchurch to feed the animals, while Valentine drove to London to collect Elizabeth from the airport. That night she slept gratefully, as was her habit, with Thomas the cat on top of her. The next morning Valentine rang from the airport to say that Elizabeth's plane had been delayed and would not arrive until 2.30:

About 4, just as I was getting ready to go, I had a violent sudden impression of Now they are looking at each other, with passion and desire flashing between them. (*D* 138)

Four p.m. was a bad time for modernist cuckolds, as Leopold Bloom had already discovered. It's very much to my purpose that the letter Sylvia wrote that day before she set off back to the Pen Mill Hotel should mention an edition of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* she had forgotten to pack the previous day.³⁷

The entry for 2 September concludes with a characteristic, and revealing, flourish:

And now I am in my severe little isolation-cell, and – how soon, how tragically soon the feeling of home establishes itself – looking round on it ownerly. (*D* 138)

Warner was a serial homebody, capable of brightening up the dingiest of isolation-cells. 'Ownerly' is a very Sylvia word, not known to the dictionaries. It occurs, for example, in an early poem, 'The Mill in the Valley', from *Time Importuned* (1928), in which the miller's ghost returns to fish in the pond below the mill he once owned.³⁸ She may perhaps have seen in herself what Sophia Willoughby sees in Minna Lemuel, in *Summer Will Show*: 'a joy in possession so absorbing that it was almost a kind of innocence' (*SWS* 105). But it is also characteristic that she should regard this 'feeling of home' as 'tragic'.

While she was staying at Pen Mill Hotel, Warner wrote letters and worked on some translations. She also embarked on a series of

expeditions by train and on foot. On 7 September she undertook a pilgrimage to Pill Bridge on the River Yeo in memory of Llewelyn Powys. His last book, *Love and Death*, a semi-autobiographical novel, had sustained her during a terrible period in May and June when the depth of Valentine's feelings for Elizabeth once again became painfully clear. In the novel's central episode, the narrator rows his girlfriend down the river; just below Pill Bridge is an island on which they disembark in order to make love. Sitting by the river, Warner quite suddenly 'came to life'. She wrote a poem about an encounter on the bridge with a man who may or may not once have rowed his girlfriend down the river. The poem tries to remember Llewelyn trying to remember. Its immediate completion, swiftly reinforced by a dense description of the surrounding landscape and the people in it, prompted Warner to distinguish melancholy from fatigue, on the one hand, and anxiety about Valentine, on the other (*D* 140).³⁹ For melancholy remembrance has once again engineered a coming to life.

Warner's ownerliness was by no means a miserly mood or habit. She exulted in companionship: whether the other animal present was human or non-human made some difference, but not a huge amount. There are more companionable cats in the diaries than you can shake a stick at. We need to talk about Thomas, in particular. For there are moments in her account of the part he played in her life that would not be out of place in Donna Haraway's celebrated *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003).⁴⁰ Writing to David Garnett on 18 June 1973, she wanted to know if his cat Tiber ever fell asleep with an 'ownerly' paw laid on top of him. The letter goes on to recall how one night in bed Thomas had suddenly got up and, advancing on her, 'put out a front paw, and stroked my cheek as I used to stroke his chops. A human caress from a cat. I felt very meagre and ill-educated that I could not purr.'⁴¹ Thomas had at that point been dead for 23 years; but evidently not forgotten.

Animals socket themselves even more assiduously than we do into a universe over which they have little or no control. But they do so in different ways and according to different agendas. It was by making essentially this point that the great Estonian-German biologist Jakob von Uexküll transformed the study of animal consciousness during the years between the two world wars. Von Uexküll had long maintained that all organisms experience life in terms of a species-specific, subjective, spatio-temporal frame of reference uniquely adapted to the environments they inhabit. That frame of reference he termed an *Umwelt* or surrounding 'world'.⁴² To pay close attention to the behaviour exhibited

by other species, as Warner did, is immeasurably to enhance our own hold on life. But we also know that the animals who supplement or in some cases complete our domestic picture are more likely than not to die before we do. Their deaths create a crisis productive of melancholy remembrance. Warner's superb introduction to *The Portrait of a Tortoise*, a selection from Gilbert White's journals and letters, concludes by imagining a funeral sermon for the reptile in question preached by John Donne.⁴³

Thomas was what you might call an epochal cat (Figure 1). Born at Frankfort Manor in Norfolk, where Sylvia and Valentine spent some of the happiest months of their lives from July 1933 to November 1934, he died on 29 March 1950, the day after Elizabeth had finally been sent packing (or so it seemed). He had seen Sylvia through a period in which the very good times had ultimately outweighed the very bad. A little



Figure 1. 'My dear, my true Thomas'. Page from St Valentine's Day booklet handmade by Valentine Ackland for Sylvia Townsend Warner, 14 February 1948. Reproduced with permission from the Sylvia Townsend Warner Archive at the Dorset History Centre: STW: H(R)/5/30; in box D/TWA/A09.

over a year later the entry for 24 September 1951 records a feeling of intense melancholy provoked partly by the 'sense of autumn', partly by the news that Elizabeth was back in England – and once again, despite Valentine's protestations to the contrary, threatening the 'peace' of their marriage. 'My night was haunted by the absence of Tom.' In November 1953, during a further period of stress, she once again found herself 'wishing for Thomas who understood sorrows' (*D* 202). She did in fact have a companion on the night of 24 September 1951: Niou, a Siamese, born on the day Thomas died. Niou, she felt, was at that stage still 'young and inexperienced' (*D* 180). But he, too, became in his turn an epochal cat, eventually earning the right to be described as 'ownerly' in his relation to her.⁴⁴

It was Thomas, however, who continued to feature most vividly in subsequent scenes of melancholy remembrance. On 4 March 1962 Valentine came home to Frome Vauchurch, in excellent spirits, from a religious retreat at Buckland Abbey, in Devon. 'But this evening, while we were talking, I was suddenly reft out of myself, and was in the post-Yeovil evening waiting for her to return from London.' The scene Sylvia found herself back in was that of 30 September 1949, as she waited for Valentine to come home after escorting Elizabeth to London. She recalled it now in exact detail, right down to 'Thomas on the windowsill watching me'. It proved a wrenching turn-back.

There I sat, the same woman in the same house, talking quite placidly about Buckfast Abbey goings-on; and there I was in the autumn dusk & chill. It was appalling – not a pain, but almost an abolition. I waited to hear myself fall in half, as a cleft log does, suddenly, & in surprise. (*D* 279–80)

One final text from the Pen Mill Hotel episode might help to confirm the part played by the idea of melancholy remembrance in Sylvia's staggerings to life. She returned to Frome Vauchurch on 29 September. Missing from the published version of the entry for that day are a set of injunctions to herself headed 'Tomorrow I must'. The most vehement of these – too vehement, perhaps, since she subsequently crossed it out – reads: 'wash with strong Jeyes the swimming-pool, for she has made it stink'.⁴⁵ The revulsion intensified further.

In the evening the smell of the washing-basket upset me so that I went out into the garden to faint or be sick. I was neither, but had to spend a long time with the cold iron rail of the bridge pressed to

my face, and my eyes shut. It was as localised a storm as a cyclone –
from my heart downwards to my knees. (D 146)

This visceral response is evidence that Sylvia was by now willing and able to hate Elizabeth, rather than to put up with her for Valentine's sake. The entry for 22 September concludes with a poem which, although it does not appear either in the published *Diaries* or in the *New Collected Poems*, seems to me one of her most remarkable.

In a dry ground
Whose weeds were dull and rough
Of skin, I sought around
Until I had enough
To brew the deliberate drink[.]
Then by a slow fire
I watched the potion sink,
And thicken and cohere.

Bitter was the odour,
But still it had not
The pure scarlet colour
Of perfect hate.

Until – forgetful me! –
I remembered by chance
The sprig of rosemary –
That's for remembrance.⁴⁶

The purpose of this witch's brew concocted by a reincarnation of Lolly Willowses would seem to be to instil or perpetuate in the speaker herself a 'perfect' hatred – of Elizabeth, presumably, given the circumstances. It's not at all clear, however, that a sprig of rosemary would add anything to the creation of a 'pure scarlet colour'.

What might at first look like a discrepancy is in fact, I think, a change of heart. The degree of formal control exercised in this poem – for example, by the systematic alternation of full and half-rhymes – should alert us to the seriousness of the self-reflection it undertakes. I've quoted its original version. Warner seems to have understood at once that she needed to create in the third stanza the conditions for a change of heart. She struck out the phrase 'Of perfect hate' and replaced it with the less forthcoming 'For which I sought'.

Bitter was the odour,
But still it had not
The pure scarlet colour
For which I sought.

It's not impossible that Warner still wants to induce in herself a perfect, lasting hatred of Elizabeth. In this interpretation the sprig of rosemary is, as it were, a fixative. But we might also think that the hatred she did at one stage appear to be fomenting has in the end given way to some other feeling. She's not really after a colour as pure as hatred.

'That's for remembrance,' Ophelia says, as she hands Laertes a sprig of rosemary: something to remember their murdered father by; something, too, perhaps, to remember her by, should the need ever arise. And then there are some pansies: 'that's for thoughts'. As Laertes's subsequent responses make clear, 'thought' in this context means melancholy. 'A document in madness – thoughts and remembrance fitted!'⁴⁷ Warner may well have felt that she was becoming a document in madness. But it's not certain that Elizabeth was the sole focus of the form the madness looked like taking. The disgust she provoked was more of a brainwashing than a memory: the overflow into her, as Sylvia put it, of Valentine's physical obsession.

Three years later, in May 1952, Elizabeth was once again in England and Valentine – looking radiant – set off to meet her. Waiting for Valentine's return to Frome Vauchurch, Sylvia reflected on her own obsession with Elizabeth's voice and smell. 'It is not remembrance, I think' (*D* 188). Rosemary would not be much use in the manufacture of a potion – part witch's brew, part Jeyes fluid – strong enough to purge Elizabeth from her system. Benjamin aligned *Hamlet* with German Baroque drama rather than with classical tragedy on the grounds of its dedication to sorrowfulness. The 'princely life' lived by its protagonist should be understood as melancholy 'redeemed' through a confrontation with itself.⁴⁸ Warner's allusion to the play may conceivably announce a similar resolve on her own part. The virtue of the rosemary come across by accident is that it will enable her to resume the melancholy remembrance of a wide experience of life, including but not restricted to Valentine.

The Fiction

We're used to thinking of Warner's writing as a whole in terms of 'bi-location', a term she used to describe a woman's capacity to multi-task

or be in more than one place at the same time.⁴⁹ The diaries narrate the melancholy persona differently: as the capacity not to be in more than one place at the same time, but to be in the same place at more than one time. Bi-temporality, we could say, rather than bi-location. The Essex marshes, visited long before Sylvia had met Valentine, continued to resonate for her as a figure for the state of bi-temporality. On 24 October 1958, driving across Norfolk, they passed the side-road leading to Frankfort Manor.

I felt the same sort of hapless disturbance that the muddy ditchwater in the Essex marsh must feel, rising with [the] rising tide beyond the sea-wall, the salt sea from which it has so long been cut off, differentiated, alienated – *not estranged*. It was as though some part of me, some separate me inside myself, were going back to Frankfort with Valentine, quite naturally, quite normally, from some ordinary expedition. (D 251)

The ‘hapless disturbance’ provoked by involuntary memory is for Warner, as it had been for Proust, a way to tell the story of a life. Even when provoked by moments of danger, such disturbances made it possible for her to understand that life as a process of self-differentiation which for the most part stopped short of self-estrangement. It’s worth bearing this emphasis on cumulative discontinuities in mind as I turn in conclusion to *Summer Will Show*, the novel written in the first flush of her commitment to the revolutionary cause as a companion (or perhaps counterpoint) to the orthodox Marxism of Ackland’s *Country Conditions*. Warner’s reluctance to think in terms of self-estrangement did not conform easily to the abrupt and often violent ‘going over’ into a ‘new life’ so loudly demanded at the time of bourgeois converts to Communism.⁵⁰

The biographers agree that there’s something of Valentine in the tall, aristocratic Sophia Willoughby, who enlists in revolution to the extent of collecting scrap metal for the manufacture of ammunition and distributing copies of the *Communist Manifesto*; and something of Sylvia in the older, uglier, wilier, Jewish Minna Lemuel, the spell-binding storyteller perfectly at home in her ‘shabby Bohemia’ (SWS 263).⁵¹ By no means the least of the spells in which Minna binds Sophia is that cast by her potent sorrowfulness. Minna, serving spiced wine to a fading Sophia towards the end of their first encounter, tells her that she looks better already.

A creative possessiveness, a herb-wife’s glorying in the work of healing, glowed in the words, and in the melancholy attentive gaze. (SWS 115)

Ownerliness, the herb-wife's glorying in her work, the melancholy attentive gaze: these are attitudes we come across again and again in the diaries. One of their effects on Sophia is to give her a way to narrate her life. Minna's shabby Bohemia has created for her a 'new existence', a 'fantastic freedom from every inherited and practised restraint'. And yet what she feels most intensely of all, in Minna's presence, is a desire to describe or 'recount' herself:

as a drowning man sees his whole life pass before him, and recognizes as authentically his a hundred incidents and scenes which had lain forgotten in the un-death-awakened mind, her childhood, her youth, her womanhood rose up crowded and clear before her, and must be told – even to the day when she lay under the showering hawthorn watching the year's first scything of the lawn and eating, with such passionate appetite, the sweet grass-clippings, even to the old beggar-woman in Coblenz whose dry lips had grated in a kiss on her casual charitable hand. (SWS 128)

The death-awakened mind recounts to itself a life re-lived by turn-back and understood as a process of differentiation. Sophia seems to have become fully attuned to Minna's interweaving of sorrow and ecstasy.

There is more to be said about the novel's steady association of Minna with melancholy. What are we to make, for example, of her Jewishness? Jewishness bestows on Minna outsider status, and something to recall sorrowfully: the brutal pogrom in Lithuania in which her parents were killed. She is, as Glyn Salton-Cox puts it, 'a figure of seductive (at times problematically exoticized) difference'.⁵² We might note in passing that Theodor Adorno was to attribute Benjamin's melancholy not only to his 'nature', but to a specifically 'Jewish' awareness of the 'permanence of danger and catastrophe'.⁵³ My feeling is that Warner knew what she was about. Sophia's initial perceptions of Minna are filtered through racial stereotype (SWS 103, 105). But intimacy de-exoticises each of them equally in the eyes of the other. All the more shocking, then, that the soldier who stabs Minna to death in a skirmish at the barricades should scream 'Jewess!' as he does so (SWS 311).

A queer woman constitutes an historical anomaly in representations of melancholy, ancient or modern. Heather Love has argued persuasively that the growing intimacy between Minna and Sophia itself also acts as an incentive to political radicalism. By her account, *Summer Will Show* gives shape to two 'impossible desires': queer desire and the desire for

revolution. There is evidence for the argument in another of the connections Warner delighted to make across the ages: in this case, an unattributed quotation from Andrew Marvell's 'The Definition of Love'.

My love is of a birth as rare
As 'tis for object strange and high:
It was begotten by despair
Upon Impossibility.⁵⁴

Revolution and same-sex desire are both begotten, Love argues, by despair upon impossibility. The very welcome attention Love pays to the novel's representation of the 'darker feelings' could have encompassed melancholy, but doesn't; although she does mention Benjamin's 'melancholic utopianism' in passing. However, her eagerness to prove that queer desire informs and reinforces the desire for revolution leads her to an over-emphasis on the degree to which Sophia becomes 'more and more' like melancholy Minna until 'she finally takes her place'.⁵⁵

This is to underestimate the care Warner took to distinguish between the February uprising, which resulted in Louis Philippe's abdication and the formation of a bourgeois republic, and the June blood-bath, during which the army and the Mobile Guard overran barricades set up in the working-class quarters of the city. She used the interval between uprisings to establish a sharp distinction between the only kind of revolutionary Minna could ever have been and the kind Sophia might conceivably yet become. Minna initiates Sophia into revolution, in February; Sophia will leave her behind, literally and figuratively, in June. Minna's explicit refusal to join the campaign which results in the June uprising creates a clear distinction between the two kinds of revolutionary impulse (SWS 263).

It is during this interval that Ingelbrecht, a character loosely based on Friedrich Engels, breaks off from composing the *Communist Manifesto* to denounce Minna's brand of radicalism as a theatrical self-indulgence (SWS 219–22). According to Glyn Salton-Cox, the novel's conclusion is shaped by a Leninist dialectic which opposes Minna's romantic spontaneity to Ingelbrecht's stern vanguard consciousness; with Sophia, the only survivor of the June uprising, their *Aufhebung* or sublation.⁵⁶ Salton-Cox's emphasis on the part played by Ingelbrecht certainly allows for a more upbeat account of the novel's conclusion than Love or I would countenance: Sophia incorporates Minna's talent for melancholy remembrance in order to put it to a better political use than she herself could

have conceived for it. But Warner has, I think, understood that talent as something more than an attitude or position to be overcome through dialectic.

The most spectacular performance of sorrowfulness to be found in *Summer Will Show* is one not easily attributed to Minna or her influence. The opening of the novel's fourth and final part finds her wholly absorbed in a mood of 'melancholy self-control' which irritates Sophia, although she soon joins eagerly enough in the discussion it provokes of the character of mortality (*SWS* 257). Mortality is a matter of immediate concern, because the leader of a notorious Communist cell has been attempting to enlist Sophia in armed revolutionary struggle. The June uprising is imminent, and the prospect of violence leads Sophia to reflect on Minna's age, a perennial mystery. The elderly should be deferred to, she feels, spared any unpleasantness, settled in the easiest chairs. 'On this last count, at any rate, she had nothing to reproach herself with. Suavely as any cat Minna always planted herself in the best chair – unless she reposed on the floor.' The apparently casual association of Minna with a cat prompts one of the most astonishing passages in the whole of Warner's fiction.

Suavely as any cat. Even cats age, though so imperceptibly that no one agrees on the natural span of a cat's life, some saying ten, some twelve, some a score of years. But age and die they do, dying of heart-failure, dying in their sleep before the kitchen embers as a ripe apple falls on a windless afternoon, or throwing themselves down exhausted, after a rat-hunt through the barton, never to rise up and hunt again. For all their nine lives, their guardian cunning and their whiskers, the wariest, the sleekest cats grow old and die. Or of a sudden, in their practised prime, a sore on the neck will make them peevish with life, they will turn from their food, exploit their wholesome talent of vomiting, spew up in the end nothing but froth and slime, sit gasping for breath with their blackened gaze fixed on some familiar piece of furniture as though, at long last, they recognized in it the furtive enemy of a lifetime, the unmasked foe. (*SWS* 266)

Where on earth does this thrillingly unapologetic threnody or funeral hymn for an entire non-human species come from? It's consonant with the diaries: although they make no mention of the event I suspect lies behind its most graphic detail, the devastating 'murrain' or plague which killed several of the Frankfort Manor cats in March 1934.⁵⁷ Unacknowledged by either character, serving no purpose as a reality-effect, the threnody

puts the literary conventions of the novel to the test of remembrance. Benjamin remarked in his essay on ‘The Storyteller’ (1936) that it is the novelist’s ‘melancholy’ task to remember the otherwise unremembered: people like the dead woman in Arnold Bennett’s *The Old Wives’ Tale* (1908) of whom it is simply said that ‘hers had not been a life at all’.⁵⁸ Warner’s threnody significantly extends and deepens that responsibility. Martin Heidegger, a careful reader of Von Uexküll’s work, differed from him in supposing that animals, unlike humans, cannot transcend their ‘captivation’ by the *Umwelten* they inhabit; and therefore cannot know death ‘as such’.⁵⁹ The fairly obvious implication of Heidegger’s view is that animals can be ‘light-heartedly killed’ because, after all, they ‘merely perish’.⁶⁰ Warner’s description of the dying cat whose blackened gaze recognises in some familiar piece of furniture the ‘furtive enemy of a lifetime’ is based on the assumption that species other than the human are able to know death as such.

The threnody occurs at a crucial moment in the plot. No sooner has it ended than Sophia sets out on her own to visit the Alpine Laundry, which conceals in its cellar the Communist munitions factory. Here she will receive her commission to collect scrap metal and so ally herself with the revolutionary proletariat. The threnody for a non-human species might be regarded as a final statement made, if not by Minna, then on her behalf. For anyone who has taken to heart its powerful assertion of melancholy remembrance as a fundamental human responsibility – active within but extending beyond politics – there will be no easy resolution, either to the novel or to the struggle it describes. Melancholy remembrance persists, as a challenge to be met, even after Marxism has begun to do its work through Sophia’s distribution of the *Communist Manifesto*; it may indeed prove hard to separate from that work. In October 1937 Warner gave a speech at the opening of the Dorchester Labour Party Fayre. She dwelt at length in this speech, as she later told Valentine, on the ‘struggles and sacrifices’ made by those who had created the Labour Party and kept it going through thick and thin. Her account of the event ends with some characteristic self-deprecation.

Minna herself could not have bettered the melancholy candour and simplicity of my tone. In fact it was perfect except that overcome by my own effect I sat down having forgotten to say the Fayre was open.⁶¹

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Note on Contributor

David Trotter is Emeritus Professor of Literature at the University of Cambridge. He has written widely on aspects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature in English and on the history and theory of cinema and other media. Among his recent publications are *The Literature of Connection: Signal, Medium, Interface, 1850–1950* (2020) and *Brute Meaning: Essays in Materialist Criticism from Dickens to Hitchcock* (2020).

Declaration and Conflicts of Interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Notes

- 1 Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Diaries*, ed. Claire Harman (London: Virago, 1995), p. 304. Henceforth *D*.
- 2 Claire Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A biography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2015), p. 74.
- 3 Warner, diary entry for 28 March 1952: Sylvia Townsend Warner collection, Dorset History Archive, STW: D/TWA/A27.
- 4 I am thinking in particular of Gillian Beer, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner: "The Centrifugal Kick"', in *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, politics and history*, ed. Maroula Joannou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 76–86. For a systematic analysis of the diary as a genre or form of writing, see Anna Jackson, *Diary Poetics: Form and style in writers' diaries, 1915–1962* (London: Routledge, 2010). Jackson has chapters on Antonia White, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf, among others, as well as on specific devices such as the dash and the sentence fragment.
- 5 Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot* (London: Virago, 2011), p. 104.
- 6 Laurence Sterne, 'The Levite and his concubine', in *Sermons*, 2 vols, ed. Melvyn New (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1996), i.167–76 (p. 170).
- 7 Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, p. 104.

- 8 Warner, *The Flint Anchor* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2021), p. 110; Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Angus Gowland (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2021), p. 393.
- 9 Warner, *Flint Anchor*, pp. 203, 193.
- 10 Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, pp. 148, 23.
- 11 Warner, 'T.F. Powys and Chaldon Herring', in *With the Hunted: Selected writings*, ed. Peter Tolhurst (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2012), pp. 49–65. On the Powys clan in general, see Judith Stinton, *Chaldon Herring: Writers in a Dorset landscape* (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2004).
- 12 Llewelyn Powys, 'Robert Burton', in *Rats in the Sacristy* (London: Watts & Co, 1937), pp. 185–95; Alyse Gregory, 'Melancholy', in *Wheels on Gravel* (London: John Lane, 1938), pp. 102–16.
- 13 Warner, 'The Way by Which I Have Come' (1939), in *With the Hunted*, pp. 13–23 (p. 16).
- 14 T.F. Powys, *Mr Tasker's Gods* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 306.
- 15 Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the politics of modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 2.
- 16 Alyse Gregory, *The Cry of a Gull: Journals 1923–48*, ed. Michael Adam (Brushford: Ark Press, 1973).
- 17 Warner, diary entry for 12 September 1949, STW: D/TWA/A26.
- 18 Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, p. 3.
- 19 Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, history, and memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. xiii–xvi.
- 20 For highly informative accounts of their political activism, see Wendy Mulford, *This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, letters and politics, 1930–1951* (London: Pandora, 1988); and Glyn Salton-Cox, *Queen Communism and the Ministry of Love: Sexual revolution in British writing of the 1930s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 77–112.
- 21 Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner*, pp. 144, 173.
- 22 Valentine Ackland, *Country Conditions* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936), pp. 9–10, 120–6.
- 23 Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, pp. 120–50.
- 24 Warner, *Summer Will Show* (New York: New York Review Books, 2009), p. 29. Henceforth SWS.
- 25 Benjamin, 'Agesilaus Santander (First Version)', trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings*, 4 vols, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996–2003), ii.712–13 (p. 713).
- 26 Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), p. 140.
- 27 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). See also 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, iv.3–92.
- 28 Benjamin, 'Left-Wing Melancholia', trans. Ben Brewster, in *Selected Writings*, ii.423–7.
- 29 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), p. 32.
- 30 Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner*, pp. 270–1.
- 31 Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, pp. 462, 403, 393. See also 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, iv.313–55.
- 32 Max Pensky, 'Tactics of Remembrance: Proust, surrealism and the origin of the *Passagenwerk*', in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, ed. Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 164–89.

- 33 Sylvia and Valentine meanwhile kept a comprehensive record of public events in the scrapbook of newspaper cuttings they had begun to compile early in 1935: Mulford, *This Narrow Place*, pp. 55–7.
- 34 On Warner's war against couch grass, see 'The Way by Which I Have Come', pp. 18–19.
- 35 Warner, 'The Essex Marshes', in *With the Hunted*, pp. 29–32 (p. 32).
- 36 Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, iv.389–400 (p. 391).
- 37 *I'll Stand by You: Selected letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland*, ed. Susanna Pinney (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. 242.
- 38 Warner, 'The Mill in the Valley', in *New Collected Poems*, ed. Claire Harman (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), pp. 132–3.
- 39 In the published version, the people – two sunburned young men in a ditch – have disappeared: Warner, diary entry for 7 September 1949, STW: D/TWA/A26.
- 40 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, people, and significant otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003). See also *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
- 41 *Sylvia and David: The Townsend Warner / Garnett Letters*, ed. Richard Garnett (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), p. 175.
- 42 Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, trans. Joseph D. O'Neill (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); first published in 1934 as *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen*. On Warner's proximity to these developments, see David Trotter, 'Posthuman? Animal Corpses, Aeroplanes and Very High Frequencies in the Work of Valentine Ackland and Sylvia Townsend Warner', in *Brute Meaning: Essays in materialist criticism from Dickens to Hitchcock* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2020), pp. 305–23 (pp. 316–23).
- 43 Warner, 'The Portrait of a Tortoise', in *With the Hunted*, pp. 66–78.
- 44 Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner*, p. 281.
- 45 Warner, diary entry for 29 September 1949, STW: D/TWA/A26.
- 46 Warner, diary entry for 22 September 1949, STW: D/TWA/A26.
- 47 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), pp. 387–8.
- 48 Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 158. I owe this point to Greg Dart.
- 49 Warner, 'Women as Writers', in *With the Hunted*, pp. 231–41 (p. 234). See, for example, Maud Ellmann, 'The Art of Bi-location: Sylvia Townsend Warner', in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920–1945: Vol. Eight*, ed. Maroula Joannou (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 78–95; and Jane Garrity, 'Encoding Bi-location: Sylvia Townsend Warner and the erotics of dissimulation', in *Lesbian Erotics*, ed. Karla Jay (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 241–68.
- 50 See, for example, Edward Upward, 'Sketch for a Marxist Interpretation of Literature', in *The Mind in Chains*, ed. C. Day Lewis (London: Frederick Muller, 1937), pp. 39–55 (pp. 52–3). By 1937 Warner had got to know Day Lewis well: Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner*, p. 169.
- 51 Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner*, p. 149; Frances Bingham, *Valentine Ackland: A transgressive life* (Bath: Handheld Press, 2021), p. 274.
- 52 Salton-Cox, *Queer Communism*, p. 101. Gillian Beer has drawn my attention to a magnificent late poem which associates melancholy remembrance with Jewish mythology: Warner, 'Azrael', in *New Collected Poems*, p. 361.
- 53 Theodor Adorno, 'Introduction to Benjamin's *Schriften*', in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical essays and recollections*, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

- University Press, 1988), pp. 2–17 (pp. 15–16). For a sharp account of just how damaging such attributions can be, see Françoise Meltzer, ‘Acedia and Melancholia’, in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, pp. 141–63.
- 54 Andrew Marvell, ‘The Definition of Love’, in *The Oxford Authors: Andrew Marvell*, ed. Frank Kermode and Keith Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 35–6.
- 55 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the politics of queer history* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 142, 140.
- 56 Salton-Cox, *Queer Communism*, pp. 102–6.
- 57 Warner described the arrival of this ‘killing disease’ in a letter to Llewelyn Powys of 24 March 1934: *Letters*, ed. William Maxwell (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), p. 30.
- 58 ‘The Storyteller’, trans. Tess Lewis, in *The Storyteller Essays*, ed. Samuel Titan (New York: New York Review Books, 2019), pp. 48–73 (p. 63); Arnold Bennett, *The Old Wives’ Tale*, ed. John Wain (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 585.
- 59 Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, finitude, solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 267.
- 60 Paola Cavalieri, *The Death of the Animal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 11.
- 61 Quoted by Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner*, pp. 171–2.

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