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# A geography of ghosts: the spectral landscapes of Mary Butts

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The paper considers the writings of Mary Butts (1890–1937) to explore a geography of ghosts. After examining earlier geographical engagements with the spectral and magical, and outlining the terms of recent scholarly debate concerning spectrality, the paper introduces Butts' life and work, focussing on her ghostly writings in stories, novels, journals, autobiography and an essay on the supernatural in fiction. Butts' discussion of magic and place, and her accounts of the landscapes of Dorset and west Cornwall, demonstrate a version of spectral landscape conveying enchantment, secret meaning and a culturally select geography. The paper concludes by considering Butts in relation to current discussions of spectral geography.

**Keywords:** ghosts • geography • Mary Butts • spectrality

We have been careless lately what spiritual company we have kept; in our choice of ghostly guests. The results are observable. (Mary Butts, 1933)

## I. Introduction

Through the writings of Mary Butts (1890–1937), this paper raises a geography of ghosts. Butts' novels, stories, essays and journals allow an elaboration of spectral landscapes, suggest political variations on the spectro-geographic theme, and indicate forms of cultural authority claimed by the spectrally attuned. Her work also indicates the importance of genre in spectro-geographies, the forms and conventions shaping the ghost and producing it as a character. Butts' phrase: 'our choice of ghostly guests', quoted above, is from an essay on the supernatural in fiction. Butts sought to shape such choices via interventions deploying a sense of the magical qualities of things, places, landscapes, writing in an inter-war Britain where attempts to define, claim and protect magical, sacred geographies were not uncommon. The paper proceeds through an episodic structure, with an introduction to Butts' life and work following discussion of the recent critical currency of the spectral. Sections consider the ghost as literary figure, Butts' own magic places, her tales of ghostly happenings, and geographical claims to exclusive magic. We begin with some neglected items from the geographical past, which will return to meet Butts in conclusion.

## II. Our ghostly, magical, demonic past: three curios

Connecting the languages of geography, the spectral and the magical is not itself novel; Livingstone indeed indicates 'magical geography' as one of themes for his 'conversational conclusion' in *The geographical tradition*.<sup>1</sup> The mystical, the magical and the spectral can be traced as warning signs, boundary markers, temptations, for the academic discipline of geography, and for popular and policy geographical discourse. Three curios from the twentieth century indicate the geographical possibilities of figures of non-reason.

In 1941 Hans Speier, writing in the US journal *Social research* in connection with the Research Project on Totalitarian Communication, entitled an essay on propaganda maps 'Magic geography'. Speier, recognizing the capacity of maps to speak beyond a neutral 'representation of a given state of affairs', noted wartime peril: 'Propagandists... rediscover... symbolic values in maps, and by exploiting them, turn geography into a kind of magic'.<sup>2</sup> This kind of magic is not something to wonder at, rather geography as magical implies deceit, manipulation and the enchantment of a gullible viewer. The scholar's task becomes one of demystification in the service of a non-totalitarian scientific truth, which can be deployed for liberal democratic political ends. For contemporary geographical engagement with the magical, Speier offers an example of critique and scepticism, asserting a hegemony of liberal reason.

In 1927 Montague Summers, literary scholar and Roman Catholic cleric fascinated by the occult, produced a 600-page book on *The geography of witchcraft*, supplementing his 1926 *The history of witchcraft and demonology* with an excursion through Greece and Rome, England, Scotland, New England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Geography here denotes national and local specificity, geographical variations on a general historical theme. Summers enfoldes Satanism, spiritualism and ghost beliefs into witchcraft as a demonic category, and finishes his English chapter with warnings. The Black Mass is 'said in London and Brighton – and I doubt not in many other towns too', Hosts are stolen from London churches and diabolic Eucharists conducted, 'societies of evil' work across the country, 'far-spread' and 'cunningly organized'. Witchcraft appears a kind of magic at odds with civilization: 'To the ordinary man Satanism is incredible, or at any rate a myth of the remote Dark Ages. He does not realize, and he is happy in his ignorance, the evil fires that burn but just a very little way beneath the thin and crumbling crust of our boasted modern civilization'.<sup>3</sup> Summers was no devotee of rationalism, rather some supernatures carried truth while others led astray; Summers' 1938 history of the Gothic novel, *The gothic quest*, would end with a dismissal of Surrealism as an improper and atheistic sensibility: 'They are unmystical, unromantic. They deny the supernatural. Yet everything in the last analysis depends upon the supernatural, since as S. Augustine tells us, God is the only Reality'.<sup>4</sup> For contemporary geographical engagements with the magical, spectral or demonic, Summers illustrates the differential valuation of supernatures, and the consequent associations of fear, evil and burning (of souls, of witches).

In 1916 former Royal Geographical Society Map Curator and Instructor in Surveying E. A. Reeves published *The recollections of a geographer*, an account of a geographical career whose final chapter addressed 'Psychic experiences'. For Reeves this went beyond geography, although recent debates, of which the papers in this journal issue are a part, might gather the psychic back into Reeves' geographical life. Reeves recounts involvement in spiritualism following unexplained or apparently psychic happenings; knockings on doors, premonitions

of the University Boat Race result, visions of Lord Kitchener on his bedroom wall, sightings of possible ghosts. One April Saturday, leaving the RGS at one o'clock and having 'a light lunch' at the A. B. C., Reeves met the ghost of Knightsbridge tube station, 'a tall man in a long old-fashioned black cloak and a round black hat', who he took for an artist or musician, and who walked straight through a white-tiled wall: 'I could not believe my eyes!... Was it possible that there was some hidden door?'. Scrutiny of the wall showed nothing: 'Could it be some hallucination?'.<sup>5</sup> Reeves had only had a coffee at the A. B. C.. Later he hears of a tube station ghost. These defiantly sober recollections set up the psychic as a matter of true experience and reasoned enquiry, though one beyond strictly geographical business. The world of work could however shape psychic experience, as when Reeves encounters deceased explorers to whom he once taught surveying: 'on several occasions some of these have made their presence known at seances and given me messages that could only have come from themselves'.<sup>6</sup> Reeves' example of credulous reason may be borne in mind for any geographical engagement with the spectral, spiritual and psychic.

Speier, Summers and Reeves indicate practices and fields of thought which have grazed the language and discipline of geography. The term 'grazing' can here imply categories feeding off and nourishing one another, or scarring each other through unexpected encounters. If the spectral, the magical, the demonic, the psychic carry a family resemblance which can lead to their being lumped together from without on a common cultural ground, they are often furiously demarcated from within. Geographical movement into more-or-less occult domains, from whatever motivation, entails an appreciation of such commonalities and distinctions, and of the nuances of belief, mockery, deceit, terror, scepticism, credulity and incredulity, which move across the field.<sup>7</sup> With this in mind the paper now turns to the contemporary academic currency of the spectral.

### III. The cultural geography of the spectral

The spectral, rather than the magical or spiritual or demonic, has gained recent scholarly currency. If Buse and Stott begin their collection *Ghosts: deconstruction, psychoanalysis, history* by suggesting that 'to be interested in ghosts these days is decidedly anachronistic',<sup>8</sup> their collection rides academic interest, prompted by Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*: 'Spectrality and haunting continue to enjoy a powerful currency in language and in thinking, even if they have been left behind by belief'.<sup>9</sup> Buse and Stott set up their project as moving beyond histories of a neglected 'outside of reason' (the occult, spiritualism etc.), instead seeking 'to inspect the inside of reason and see how it too is haunted by what it excludes'.<sup>10</sup> This moving beyond continues effectively to mark out properly sceptical scholarship from misguided credulity: 'even though it is now frivolous to believe in ghosts, they cannot shrug off the spectre of belief: it is simply that now they have been consigned to the task of representing whatever is not to be believed'.<sup>11</sup> Mary Butts played on similar cultural terrain, if for different ends, and, as discussed below, her stories of possession echo Buse and Stott's comment that 'where there are disputes over property, we find ghosts, or that where we find ghosts, there are bound to be anxieties about property'.<sup>12</sup>

What might be the geographical currency of the modern scholarly spectre as it grazes disciplinary borders? Byron and Punter's 1999 literary collection *Spectral readings*, subtitled *Towards*

a *gothic geography*, circumscribes its ghost: 'By referring in the book's subtitle to a 'Gothic geography' we are, of course, speaking as always in a metaphor'.<sup>13</sup> The metaphor allows productive exploration of Gothic's limits of mappability, but the phrase 'of course' jars. Is this an embrace for the language of geography while anything smacking of the discipline is put to one side? Speaking 'as always' in a metaphor becomes speaking only in a metaphor, bypassing more complex possibilities of cultural geography. Such possibilities of the Gothic and spectral are more evident in Roger Luckhurst's essay on 'The contemporary London Gothic and the limits of the "spectral turn"'.<sup>14</sup> Asking what it means to place the spectre, Luckhurst pursues a scepticism concerning the 'generalized economy of haunting' informing the 'spectral turn'.<sup>15</sup> Considering the 'newly Gothicized apprehension of London' and the related 'discourse of spectralized modernity', Luckhurst argues that 'the generalized structure of haunting is symptomatically blind to its generative loci',<sup>16</sup> and counters in part via a 'geography of the genre'.<sup>17</sup> Deconstruction is turned on the general hauntology developed in the wake of *Spectres of Marx*, with singularity and the 'resistant residue of untranslatability' aligned with attention to the ghost as a specific symptom at a specific site. The ghost conjures a singular geography of unpredictable politics, rather than general rupturous possibility: 'The spectral turn reaches a limit if all it can describe is a repeated structure or generalized "spectral process" – perhaps most particularly when critics suggest the breaching of limits is itself somehow inherently political'. Luckhurst seeks geographical and historical purchase for spectrality, ending: 'we surely have to risk the violence of *reading* the ghost, of cracking open its absent presence to answer the demand of its specific symptomatology and its specific locale'.<sup>18</sup>

Luckhurst raises the ghost-in-context. Clive Barnett's caution over context as a device of secure framing, of return to spatio-temporal origin, and subsequent explanatory confinement, is pertinent here, though he echoes Luckhurst in scepticism concerning the politics of liminal freedom: 'One lesson of deconstruction is that the political value of either fixing meaning (of closure or of identity) or of maintaining instability (of ambivalence or of difference) is not open to prior, conceptual determination'.<sup>19</sup> Buse and Stott's comment that 'there may be no proper time for ghosts', that 'haunting, by its very structure, implies a deformation of linear temporality',<sup>20</sup> indicates that the ghost-in-context is nevertheless liable to break narrow frames, indeed the deconstructed ghost becomes a creature of precise if not necessarily linear geographies, histories, temporalities, spatialities, all contributing to its make up. Precision here can release as much as restrain.

In the narrowest subdisciplinary and broadest transdisciplinary sense, then, this article pursues, via the work of Mary Butts, a cultural geography of the spectral wary of either generalized models of haunting, or of ghosts trapped in contexts. Other geographical accounts pertinent to this approach and subject matter include Wylie's recent Derridean engagement with W. G. Sebald as exemplary practitioner of (and late haunting presence for) spectral geographies, and Nash's cultural-historical study of the 'Visionary geographies' of early twentieth century Irish poet and reformer George Russell.<sup>21</sup> Nash shows how, writing as 'AE', Russell aligned two senses of the visionary; a landscape transformed through rural reform, and a mystic vision of folklore, nature and nation. Butts performs parallel visionary geographies, and also echoes themes sketched in Lowerson's essay on 'The mystical geography of the English', moving through religion, folk religion, the parish church, pagan revivals, and the occult, the connection of all to senses of Englishness, and the cultural assumption that

‘the countryside is full of places with permanent spiritual characteristics’.<sup>22</sup> From such work emerges a particular geoaesthetic of the spectral, embracing a geographical cultural politics at various scales. Ghosts work a cultural politics of nation, including versions of Englishness; of region, including in Butts’ work areas such as west Cornwall and Dorset; and of locale, as something to be cherished, defended, retreated to. The combination of the spiritual, the ghostly and the intensely local leads Butts’ spectral work to echo Freud’s definition of the uncanny, ‘that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar’.<sup>23</sup> In Butts’ work the ghost belongs in marvellous or horrible form to the place. If she could also forcefully write against alien presence or influence in her claimed country, her ghosts and spirits were familiars haunting home.

#### IV. Introducing Mary Butts

Mary Butts was born in 1890, growing up in the family home of Salterns, in Parkstone on the edge of Poole in Dorset, in southern England. Salterns as landscape of memory, myth, possession and dispossession shapes Butts’ memoir *The crystal cabinet*, published posthumously in 1937.<sup>24</sup> Nathalie Blondel provides a comprehensive account of her complex life,<sup>25</sup> her studies in London, pacifism in World War One, lesbian relationships, 1918 marriage to John Rodker, an intermittent relationship with her daughter, born in 1920, her subsequent lovers and Bohemian life in 1920s Paris and southern France. Butts moved in high modernist circles, Cocteau illustrating her prose sequence *Imaginary letters* in 1928. Butts’ first story collection, *Speed the plough*, was published in 1923, with her first novel, *Ashe of rings*, written during the war, issued in 1925. *Armed with madness* followed in 1928, *Death of Felicity Taverner* in 1932, with further historical narratives on Alexander the Great (*The Macedonian*, 1933) and Cleopatra (*Scenes from the life of Cleopatra*, 1935). Her many essays and reviews included “‘Ghosties and Ghoulies”” (1933), on the supernatural in fiction, and the 1932 pamphlets *Warning to bikers* and *Traps for unbelievers*.<sup>26</sup> Butts married artist Gabriel Aitken in 1930, moving in January 1932 to Sennen Cove, near Land’s End in Cornwall, living in a bungalow overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. The marriage broke up in 1934, Butts then converting to Anglo-Catholicism. She died suddenly in March 1937, and is buried in Sennen parish cemetery.

Butts’ daughter Camilla Bagg describes the social milieu of her writings well, ‘with their setting of taken-for-granted money, no necessity to find a job, cultivation of the mind, frequent assumptions that the reader was well up in French and the classics, and no interest whatever in ordinary people’.<sup>27</sup> Patrick Wright highlights her intimate connection of family and place; family ‘a transcendent value threatened by its own historicity’, and places of spiritual value threatened by materialism, suburbia, mass leisure, etc.<sup>28</sup> Butts’ high literary modernism could resent modernity, with spiritual and class values merging in the evocation of landscapes of private meaning. Whether Salterns, the isle of Purbeck across Poole harbour, the Dorset earthworks of Badbury Rings a few miles inland, or Sennen and its environs in later life, Butts gave local topography literary form, vulnerable lands and strong coastlines dramatizing a conservative mythic modernism.

Butts claimed authentic measure of land against a supposedly false urban pastoralism driving contemporary country enthusiasms. Myth and magic serve for the critique of





FIGURE 1 Grave of Mary Butts, Sennen parish cemetery (photographs by the author, September 2006). The lower inscription on the gravestone, dating from 1937, reads: 'Mary Butts/Wife of Gabriel Aitken/Born Salterns, Dorset, December 13th 1890/Died Sennen, March 5th 1937'. The additional inscription, added when the gravestone was restored by Butts' daughter Camilla Bagg in 1984–5, and shown in the lower left image, includes a quote from William Blake: 'Mary Butts/writer and poet/I strove to seize the inmost form'.

contemporary culture, marking out a select group of 'special people in special places'.<sup>29</sup> Butts' high European modernist style calls up an authentic green English world through myth and ritual, magic and ghosts, a modernism of ritual held to restore truth against an artificial modern culture. Butts, in common with modernists such as T. S. Eliot, drew on the classical anthropology of Jane Harrison and the Cambridge Ritualists, and Jessie Weston's 1920 *From ritual to romance*, an account of the Grail legends as rooted in primitive nature cults. Butts also explored formal magic through association with infamous occultist Aleister Crowley in the early 1920s, staying at his Sicilian abbey in summer 1921, though she later rejected his methods and views.<sup>30</sup> Psychoanalysis too offered resonant treatment of myth, though for Butts this was a symptom of modern problems rather than a means to their resolution; as Jane Garrity suggests, Butts is 'involved with scientific and psychoanalytical discourses even as she attempts to disavow them'.<sup>31</sup> Butts upheld Jane Harrison against Freud, with ritual presented as the basis of religious value. *Armed with madness* and *Death of Felicity Taverner* work around 'the female protagonist as a kind of living Grail, a genealogical signifier of England's cultural mythology', with ritual practice, cycles of nature and the female body mapping onto one another.<sup>32</sup> The dead Felicity achieves presence in the latter novel as 'a ghost who is the

real link to an authentic England rooted in an idea of ancient and timeless continuity with the rural past'.<sup>33</sup>

As her life proceeded, Butts produced herself as a figure haunting England, a remnant of national essence and a sign of possible redemption. Moving to Sennen Cove, Butts haunts culture from the end of the land, a peripheral spirit set up as a true centre. Early death would help produce the ghost of a neglected modernism, her work later rediscovered as, variously, a lost female pioneer, a neglected seer, a skeleton in the modern cupboard.

## V. Styles and thoughts of ghosts

There was never more curiosity than there is to-day about 'the uncanny' or 'strange things' – 'things' that even in our father's day it was improper to believe in at all.<sup>34</sup>

"'Ghosties and Ghoulies': uses of the supernatural in English fiction" was published in four instalments in *The bookman* between January and April 1933. Butts' essay developed from an unpublished article written in Paris in August 1928 on 'Use of the supernatural in fiction', and is signed as written 'Paris-Sennen 1928–1932'.<sup>35</sup> Various dimensions of the ghost appear.

Butts addresses the ghost as an object of thought, citing Weston and Harrison as setting out 'the *natural* history of so many of our beliefs, in bogey, ghost, daimon, demon, angel or god'.<sup>36</sup> Butts' is a particular kind of modernist ghost. *Traps for unbelievers* states: 'An old ghost accompanies the advances and speculation of man, inexorically, inexorable, materialising at will'.<sup>37</sup> Here are 'receipts which linked the phenomenal world to an eternal',<sup>38</sup> laid to one side in the modern world but never truly discarded. 'Ghosties and Ghoulies' draws from Harrison and Weston conceptions which might come round again, 'a great wheel turned and ground gained – to initiations which will really initiate; not by haphazard; not by fraud or hypnosis or superstition, but inevitably'.<sup>39</sup> Here are 'formulae that are very old', whose ritual origins may be traced and powers known, and from whose various demons and angels a careful choice should be made. The essay ends: 'We have been careless lately what spiritual company we have kept; in our choice of ghostly guests. The results are observable'.<sup>40</sup>

Butts also explores the ghost as literary form, having most time for the evocatory story, authors seeking 'only to produce horror and wonder; or at best, and without explanation, the consciousness of a universe enlarged'.<sup>41</sup> Butts deployed a chess analogy to indicate: 'the first law... of the interaction of other worlds with ours; that it can be somehow described by a parallel with the knight's move in chess. The other moves are comparable with ordinary activities. Only the knights move two squares and a diagonal, on and sideways and can jump'.<sup>42</sup> A clear grid reveals other capacities and dimensions. M. R. James is Butts' exemplary writer, and her own work sought parallel effect. While noting James' 'kind, sceptical disclaimers', Butts suggested 'some experience, apart from his immense scholarship, he must have had'.<sup>43</sup> Butts developed her discussion in a 1934 *London mercury* essay on 'The art of Montague James', emphasizing a 'matter-of-fact' style, not seeking to demonstrate any particular theory of the occult: 'the essence of his art is a sudden, appalling shock of visibility. The intangible become more than tangible, unspeakably real, solid, present'.<sup>44</sup> James' 'matter' is taken 'from his own surroundings and experience',<sup>45</sup> with 'an affection for some very plain, very



subtle, very unambitious English landscapes it takes a long time to appreciate and understand'.<sup>46</sup> Butts then claims country affinity with ghostly magic:

Everyone who has lived much out of doors feels something of what he tells. Not by association with tradition, but by a direct kind of awareness, an impact on the senses – and something more than the senses. It can be a recurrent, almost an overwhelming, experience. Much ancient bogey-lore was a rationalisation of it. To-day we talk of suggestion, exorcise with the magic word 'unscientific.' But I doubt if our ignorant scepticism is any nearer truth than our ancestors' ignorant credulity.<sup>47</sup>

*Traps for unbelievers* similarly defines magic through a geographically-shaped capacity to grasp 'relations between things of a different order: the moon and a stone, the sea and a piece of wood, women and fish', a 'very peculiar kind of awareness, an awareness modified and sometimes lost by people whose life has been passed in towns'.<sup>48</sup>

While applauding the evocatory ghost story, Butts has less sympathy for a second mode, that supporting a theory of life beyond perception, 'authors with a psychic axe to grind'.<sup>49</sup> Third, the 'lowest class',<sup>50</sup> comes 'the vulgar stuff, the sniggerers in the cheap magazines at stories of the appearance of the dead'.<sup>51</sup> Butts also notes purportedly non-fictional works, 'which profess to describe hauntings and disturbances', accounts so far written only by 'third-rate journalists'.<sup>52</sup> Marking out her ghosts of distinction, Butts wonders that the best authors continue to produce 'excellent work on the subjects they are not supposed to believe in at all'. And all this in 'an age when the accepted view is that anything may be true, "that anything may happen," while that none of the explanations – especially the religious explanations – we were once taught, *can* be the right one'. Taking aim at psychoanalysis, Butts suggests that such a perspective 'leads us to describe the beliefs and faiths of our ancestors as science misunderstood; or the visions of saint or artist, profound or fruitful, curious or bizarre, as nothing *more* than a way of externalizing the unconscious'.<sup>53</sup> Butts instead argues that the best ghost stories evoke a truth of experience, the residue left when other explanations fail: 'a question remains, more easy to feel than to ask'.<sup>54</sup> On what she regards as a transhistorical and transgeographical belief in gods and demons, Butts comments: 'all nonsense and misunderstanding of natural phenomena apart, when imaginative writing reaches a certain degree of precision, produces such an effect of reality, it is difficult to see how this is done if the observation implied in the writing is without *some* foundation in experience'.<sup>55</sup>

Transgeographical belief did not however imply a welcome for all geographically specific forms. Butts is dismissive of literary Celticism, chiding (with 'admirable exceptions' including Yeats, A. E. and Lady Gregory) 'shapelessness' and lack of realism:

Things happen as we know they do not happen, and as we do not want them to happen. The magic princesses – for this is just as explicit in their earliest epics – are too magic. Thirty invincible knights fight thirty invincible giants for thirty nights and days; without, as Professor Murray points out, any interval for meals. Not only do these things not happen; we do not care to pretend that they happen.

Butts presents such stories as potentially poisonous: 'an overdose of Celtic "magic" can give one a sense of something very like a special kind of evil'. Contrast is found in vernacular Celtic story: 'Very different are true countrymen's stories, of a small, green, strange, gay, earthy, child-stealing folk'.<sup>56</sup> Butts criticises the national use of the Celtic in Ireland:

This essay is not the place to examine the Celtic field. Ancient or modern, there is too much of it. To-day it can be smug. Can assume, without so much as a polite gesture in the direction of evidence, that it is the mind of

the debased Saxon, lost in materialism, which questions the stories of a supernaturally enlightened peasantry on the existence and nature of the Sidhe. Who exist in Ireland for the Irish; sole inspiration of the only art worth mentioning in Europe. ...

It is cult that is fatal. And the Irish to-day seem to make of their folk-mythology a national asset.<sup>57</sup>

As a counter Butts upholds 'a supernatural story' from the Icelandic Grettir Saga, 'Glam's Ghost', reprinted in a recent ghost anthology, whose telling carries: 'a sober precision ... It might be a report written by an imaginative, simple and accurate person for the Society of Psychical Research'. Butts sums up her own everyday supernatural aesthetic as: '*If it happened at all, it happened like that*'.<sup>58</sup>

## VI. Magic of person and place

Elsewhere in 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', Butts indicates that things may have happened to her.<sup>59</sup> The supernatural in fiction meets supernatural actuality, as Butts evokes enigmatic and mysterious sites and occurrences. So Butts encounters 'a tree, a scarred pine' in a French park, which may have exerted some agency in her loss of an earring and a subsequent sickness.<sup>60</sup> And, 'To quote again one's own experience: there is a part of Lincoln's Inn which does not always "stay put." Also Great Russell Street. But that, whatever it is, is something projected out of the British Museum'.<sup>61</sup> Butts includes sites outside 'the regular places where men went for initiation', beliefs and traditions 'that certain places exist, of themselves and quite unofficially, charged with mana and tabu'.<sup>62</sup> Butts notes a 'transition' observed 'when a place becomes another place; and you know what you have suspected before – that all the time it has been two places at once'.<sup>63</sup>

Half way through the essay Butts turns to the capacity of places to gather holiness: 'In the past certain holy spots, caves and "temenoi" were, at one and the same time, a place on this earth; a place where once a supernatural event had happened; and a place where, by luck or devotion or the quality of the initiate, it might happen again'.<sup>64</sup> Butts then makes 'a personal digression' to 'attempt to explain what is meant by the experience, so often used by writers on the supernatural, that a place can be more than its assembly of wood and leaf and stone visible to us; more than the atomic structure common to all things'.<sup>65</sup> Butts describes an unnamed Badbury Rings, a hill fort in south Dorset, with three rings of earthworks and a central grove of trees:

Not always places you would expect. Explanation or theory apart, a good many sensitive persons have a list of their own. For instance there is a neolithic earthwork in the south of England. It is better not to say where. The fewer people who pollute that holy and delectable ground the better. No shepherd, no farmhand will go there after dark. In mediaeval romance, a place identified with it was a 'temenos' of Morgan le Fay. (The country people have forgotten her.) But there are other earthworks nearby, including Stonehenge, where they will camp out all night at lambing time. Not that one. It is, or was until lately, mana of high potency and, at the same time, strictly tabu. The writer of this essay discovered it when young; and it is no exaggeration to say that a great part of her imaginative life was elicited by it and rests there. Archaeology had begun to interest me, but I knew none of its stories then. It entered into me, 'accepted' me.<sup>66</sup>

Butts presents herself as drawn to the haunted, while the ordinary folk can sense the place but will not engage it. Garrity notes how part of the attraction of mana for Butts was its

implication that things deemed foreign and contaminating should and might be expelled; Wright terms Butts' mana 'a secret rationality which discloses itself on occasion to the initiate'.<sup>67</sup> Contrary to Butts opening statement, an ancient earthwork is perhaps exactly the place you would expect some such thing to happen, indeed the associations of magic and prehistory would again alight on 'the fort of Badbury Rings' in 1936 in artist Paul Nash's *Shell Guide to Dorset*:

It is round rather than oval, and has the dread peculiarity of a crown of dense trees planted in concentric circles. I have read of enchanted places, and at rare times come upon them, but I remember nothing so beautifully haunted as the wood in Badbury Rings. Long afterwards I read of the tradition that King Arthur's soul inhabited a raven's body which nested there – indeed it is one of the last nesting-places of the wild raven in England – but I needed no artificial stimulus to be impressed. Beyond the outer plateau the rings heave up and round in waves 40 feet high. A magic bird in a haunted wood, an ancient cliff washed by a sea changed into earth. There is scarcely anything lacking.<sup>68</sup>

Badbury had long been a key site for Butts, and *The crystal cabinet* gives a similar account of historical and legendary associations, magical qualities, initiation, dream, Butts glimpsing 'the makings of correspondence, a translation which should be ever valid, between the seen and the unseen'.<sup>69</sup> Butts plays on the ring motif to indicate her rescue from variants of modern thinking, contrasting ancient and eternal concentrated meaning with supposed repetitious circularities in modern thought: 'without the Rings, I know what would have happened to me – whirled away on the merry-go-round of the complex and the wish-fulfilment and the conditioned reflex, with Jung and Pavlov, Julian Huxley and Bertrand Russell, in all the consciousness of my group. On those rocking horses I might have pranced for ever, with the rest of us, in a ring we mounted with zest'. Butts then states a credo, with commentary alluding to the Rings and paralleling her warning on the results of ill-chosen ghostly guests:

Without God there can be no man; without supernature there can be no nature; without philosophy there can be no psychology; without theology there can be no science; without mysticism there can be no commonsense.

This is truth, and our age has chosen, clause by clause, to reverse it, make the first of each term dependent on the second. With results we are beginning to appreciate, destroying piece by piece such natures as the war has spared. It is no part of this book to tell the secrets of Badbury Rings, yet it is no exaggeration to say that, in after years, it was because of them that I still remained, however uncertainly, critical of that reversal.<sup>70</sup>

## VII. Spectral encounters

Butts termed one mode of story the "plain ghost," the sober kind, fit for the ears of the Secretary of the Society for Psychical Research, and no less convincing for that.<sup>71</sup> While Butts may not have shared the SPR's search for the reasoned explanation of supernatural phenomena, her straightforward aesthetic of 'If it happened at all, it happened like that' shapes her one formal ghost story, 'With and without buttons', written in 1932.<sup>72</sup>

Butts tells of a narrator and her sister in 'a remote village in Kent', seeking to unnerve their neighbour Trenchard's 'pseudo-rationalizations' via a trick with gloves, yet ending with something altogether more mysterious. Trenchard is presented as 'calling the bluff, in inaccurate language, of God, the arts, the imagination, the emotions'. They seek instead to 'suggest to him an experience – the worse the better – wholly incompatible with the

incredulities of his faith'.<sup>73</sup> The supernatural is triggered by its denial: 'It was only because Trenchard said at lunch that the mass was a dramatized wish-fulfilment that what came after ever happened'.<sup>74</sup> The sisters use old kid gloves, with and without buttons, from a shoe box in the loft. For the narrator the phrase 'with and without buttons' immediately takes on the status of a 'rune'.<sup>75</sup> Hints of witchcraft and female power come through the story, with the sisters aligned with female powers of the earth and attuned to the mysteries of the stars. Their decision to 'haunt him', to 'try his simple faith', is in part an exercise of a female power – 'the pure, not erotic power' – over men.<sup>76</sup>

The loft in their 'very old cottages' extends over Trenchard's dwelling, though his loft access door is bricked up. They rent their cottage from a friend who 'bought it as it stood from a local family which had died out, and of which very little seemed known'. Trenchard also rents, having returned to 'his own part of England to rest, after a long time spent looking after something in East Africa'.<sup>77</sup> The sisters leave gloves around the house in ways confounding explanation, inviting Trenchard to believe in 'a ridiculous superstition in the village that there is Something Wrong with the house'.<sup>78</sup> Before they begin their trick, however, a separate glove appears, as if their thinking of the scheme has triggered some other presence. The narrator asks in the village about the previous resident, Miss Blacken, and is told of her leaving gloves about, and of a petticoat dropped on the green which blew to the sky on a windless day and never came to earth, hanging torn in the trees. As gloves continue to appear, the sisters and Trenchard combine against them, putting the gloves back in the box and locking the loft door. Trenchard knows a smell in the loft from his travels: 'smelt it in Africa in a damp place. Bad skins'.<sup>79</sup> The haunting continues.

Gloves appear on stairs, on clothes, on the food laid out for Trenchard's birthday party. White buttons are sprinkled onto sweet bowls, and a glove ruins a centrepiece:

We went down together into the dining-room, and there my sister screamed. On the top of the centre strawberry pyramid, hanging over the berries like a cluster of slugs, was a glove, yellow-orange kid-skin, still and fat. A colour we had not seen in the box. The wrist and the fingers open and swollen. No buttons.

'What witches' trick is this?' he cried, and stared at us, for we were women. And like a wave moving towards us, rearing its head, came the knowledge that we were responsible for this; that our greed and vanity in devising this had evoked this: that we would now have to show courage, courage and intelligence to put an end to this, to lay this. And we had no idea how.

'The fire must burn,' I said. 'A great fire.'<sup>80</sup>

The sisters are as disturbed as Trenchard. The narrator's perfume turns to a scent of old kid gloves. The sisters burn the haunted material in Trenchard's fireplace; the strawberries and glove are thrown on together, the precious perfume emptied onto flame, the glove box explodes in the fire. The sisters consider they 'came off lightly'; Trenchard cannot shake off the experience: 'Now he cannot think what he used to think, and he does not know what else there is that he might think'.<sup>81</sup> The supernatural, through everyday objects, pulls the rug from the accepted world.

In *The crystal cabinet* Butts outlines parallel ghostly happenings which have happened to her, moving from the speculative to things truer than one could possibly credit. Butts had wanted a ghost at Salterns, something to show the other girls: 'not the tree and wind and leaf and

garden potencies I knew, but a Real Ghost. A Grey Man or a White Lady, with a proper story, who put in regular appearances'.<sup>82</sup> Once, aged about 16, she thought she saw one: 'Left with the memory of a sudden transit of a swift, soundless figure, a small woman in a dark mantle. In the scattered gold of sunset, in a wood, a figure that crossed my path for a second and was gone'.<sup>83</sup> At school in Fife, however, coastal walking aged 18, Butts walked across sand 'into a ghost':

Half-way across the next cove I was stopped short. The sun blazed palely above, but on the dry sand I had walked into a pool. An air-pool, it was grey and whirling ... In dead, spinning cold I turned, not faint, but blind. With an immense effort, *wrenched* myself out of it. Torn on and sank on to a rock on the further side. What had I struck? It looked all right – or perhaps (I know more about it now) as if a patch of air in the mid-beach had gone dead.

Butts' enquiries found 'no story about that beach, no evil meeting that took place and left its mark there'. Of her stepping 'into a *focus*, a column of energy, cold and vile and hateful, spinning there', she never found 'what it was doing on a Fifeshire beach'.<sup>84</sup> This encounter in everyday space, a site which more than Badbury may fit her category of 'not always places you would expect', further claims attunement to and initiation in the supernatural; indicates that her ghost stories and grail renderings might just, for someone like her, qualify as realism.<sup>85</sup>

## VIII. Magic out the ordinary

Butts moved to Sennen Cove in January 1932, from May 1932 occupying a bungalow bought by her trustees. This small modern detached bungalow, 1 Marine View, was renamed Tebel Vos, Cornish for 'House of Magic'. Butts' life in Sennen offers an example of everyday surroundings transfigured, and daily life haunted, by past wonders and present anxieties. The naming of Tebel Vos indicates a dual movement, making the ordinary magical, while marking out a space from the ordinary around. Renaming helps magic out the ordinary, while making something out of the ordinary. Butts' journal entries from May 1932 suggest what Blondel terms a 'transubstantiation' of an ordinary bungalow into 'an extraordinary sanctuary, a kind of shrine';<sup>86</sup> the interior furnished, objects accumulated, the garden lovingly tended as, in Butts' phrase, a 'nature sacrament',<sup>87</sup> the Atlantic viewed from the window. Turning 1 Marine View to a House of Magic, the everyday becomes of value if blessed with a capacity to be transformed, although in *The crystal cabinet*, referring to the 'Tide' of suburban villas and bungalows approaching Salterns in her youth, Butts indicates that Tebel Vos may not entirely have shaken off 1 Marine View: 'Under the scurf of bungalows, like the one on the Cornish cliffs I am at present inhabiting, as utterly, but not as blessedly, as if the sea flowed over it'.<sup>88</sup>

The commonplace Cornish life and landscape around Sennen Cove could also work magic. In part Butts follows a conventional English embrace of the Cornish as exotic and mystical, within but not of England.<sup>89</sup> Butts' comment in a letter to Hugh Ross Williamson on the renaming follows such a formula, with Tebel Vos, this 'good cornish' name, being 'a translation for what we wanted to call it, which in English would have sounded pretentious'.<sup>90</sup> Butts played on Cornwall, and West Penwith in particular, as a place of mystery, furthering the Grail preoccupations most evident in *Armed with madness*. In the winter of 1932–3 Butts

considers that the church at nearby Sancreed might witness something: 'I think that the Grail might be seen here this winter'/'And I believe the Grail is stirring at Sancreed'.<sup>91</sup> Butts' move to Anglo-Catholicism followed the influence of Father Bernard Walke at the church of St Hilary, near Penzance, 16 miles from Sennen but where she attended Sunday service when possible between 1934 and 1936, drawn by Walke's ritualism and his devotion to the place of art in worship; St Hilary was decorated with the work of contemporary Cornish Newlyn School artists.<sup>92</sup> Blondel notes that in her stories from 1932 'the Cornish landscape reverberates',<sup>93</sup> and her journals too give a series of rapturous and reverent engagements with the place. Butts conveys an ecstatic immediacy in her encounters with sea, moon and landscape, and meets magic on the beach at night:

Returning I met a stone, a rock, about 3 foot high, round, standing on end, the shape and the marks of the face of a little old goddess, an idol, a Notre dame de Sous Mer, this time. Perched on her haunches, not unfriendly but most strongly charged. Not so long ago we would have brought her up from the beaches, wreathed her in weed and shells and been very very careful in our tendance. As it was I saluted her with some reverence.<sup>94</sup>

In December 1933 Butts reviewed nine books for *The bookman* under the title 'Magic of person and place', editor Hugh Ross Williamson noting Butts' own attention to 'the simple "magics" of place': 'Her books are, in a real sense, a self-revelation. Dominating everything is a passion for the actual land of England, not in the "happy country-side" sense, but as a concrete expression of mystical and spiritual forces'. To critics' suggestions that Butts was culturally a Left Bank Parisian, Williamson stated: 'The real Mary Butts is living quietly in a Cornish village'.<sup>95</sup> 'Magic of person and place' includes praise of two books on Cornwall, novelist and Sennen neighbour Ruth Manning Sanders' *The crochet woman*, and archaeologist Hugh O'Neil Hencken's *West Cornwall*:

If it is not their native place, people have need of certain books to elucidate the piece of earth on which they live. For to know it, one must have a private map of one's own in mind. A magic map. Made on foot and by the senses that is usually in no more than two colours, of places which are 'mana' and places which are 'taboo'. They can overlap; and in West Cornwall you are living in a land where culture is overlaid on culture. This year two books have brought out its contours.<sup>96</sup>

Butts hails Sanders' 'exquisite imagination, the complex of stone, water, plants, air and human character on the moor the Ordnance calls Selene, the Moon-Moor'.<sup>97</sup> Hencken's 'scientific precision' equally sparks Butts, showing that 'one is walking among the bones of the First Men.' Butts lays myth onto Hencken's archaeology of megalithic culture: 'A land whose after-history seems nothing but an anti-climax, whose beginning itself may have been an end, supposing Atlantis to be true record; and that what was essential Cornwall perished with it, leaving the place empty for wandering tribes to settle, the tenants of its ghosts.' Hencken's work also helped 'enhance the isolation dwellers here feel from the rest of England. Nowhere else is one so sure that one is in a foreign land, whose significant history was over before what we call England began'.<sup>98</sup> In her House of Magic, Butts was the latest English-in-Cornwall appreciative tenant of these ancient ghosts, but her view of the contemporary native Cornish could be more jaundiced. Early 1932 journal entries note: 'The people of the Cove are all cousins and watchful and hate foreigners'/'There is a brutal, bull-necked, full bodied



blooded type about here... Morals, one hears, to match'.<sup>99</sup> The Cornish place carries more magic than its people, though the place is itself threatened by new kinds of prosaic life. Thus Butts opposes further bungalow development in Sennen Cove on the part of businessman Mr Barton, who had earlier constructed her own bungalow.<sup>100</sup> A journal entry for 9 January 1937 projects subjects for unwritten stories, including 'On Barton (blowing up his houses)'.<sup>101</sup>

The sense of claiming a special place while pulling up the drawbridge to keep others out is echoed in Butts' novels, notably *Death of Felicity Taverner*, published in November 1932. Scylla Taverner, and her friends and relations, resist the plans of socialist Russian Jew Kralin to develop their beloved land with bungalows and leisure facilities: 'he would then build a hotel and a row of bungalows along the low cliff, light the sea lane and drain it. One of the least-known places in England, he would then advertise it'.<sup>102</sup> Scylla defends 'the flawless, clean and blessed, mana and tabu earth; strictly of their flesh, whose birds and beasts and eggs and fish, and fruit and leaf and air and water had nourished their bodies, "composed their beauties"; whose pattern was repeated in them, the stuff of a country made into man'.<sup>103</sup> The Taverners defend their England against multiple forms of the alien; Kralin stands for modernity, Left politics, racial otherness. Kralin is the widower of Felicity, Scylla's sister, and complicit in her death in an unspecified way. Felicity's ghost has a narrative presence, shaping relations between characters via hidden influence, present on the hill as Scylla describes to her friend Boris the ways in which Kralin's plans would transform the land: 'A breeze shivered in the grass beside them, the short grass of the high places that springs out of the earth upright, with a kind of sturdy passion, as the ghost of Felicity Taverner trod their light crest, looking down into the sea-valley over her cousin's head'.<sup>104</sup> Kralin approaches and 'The ghost left them',<sup>105</sup> not staying to hear Scylla damn Kralin to her betraying cousin Adrian as 'the blackmailer, your sister's murderer, the man who would sell the body of our land to the Jews'.<sup>106</sup> Felicity as ghost spirit of the land is addressed at the climax as Boris, an exiled White Russian and Taverner ally, murders Kralin in an island sea-cave, Felicity's own 'precious place'.<sup>107</sup> Kralin's body is left to the sea, though with the delicious possibility that his corpse might shoot from an island blowhole: 'that could only happen if there was a great storm, and the blow-hole worked in a jet with the strength of the Atlantic behind it'.<sup>108</sup>

Wright notes of *Death of Felicity Taverner* that this is not simply an 'innocent pastoral..., drifting into unfortunate but occasional contact with unsavoury attitudes',<sup>109</sup> rather 'the Jew is actively given a meaning which is culturally *necessary* to the valued England which he contaminates'.<sup>110</sup> Commentators have variously diagnosed Butts' work as manifesting and/or dramatizing anti-semitism; her work proceeds through stark categories of race, as of class. Wright places such judgements as central rather than tangential: 'Exclusion and anathema are principles active at the foundation of Mary Butts' sacred geography, and in the writings they take two primary forms: one political, the other racial'.<sup>111</sup> The commonplace, everyday elements of Butts' aesthetic are far from any egalitarian social principle. This is a sensibility of a select few, who places like Badbury can accept and who might transubstantiate an ordinary bungalow. The everyday, the private, the elite and the numinous intermingle, and Butts' writings on the magic of place work alongside a publication such as *Warning to bikers*, where the kind of magic which would disturb those unfamiliar acts as cultural deterrent to

the ordinary urban visitor. Butts ends that pamphlet by evoking a green deeper than the pleasantly pastoral:

For once they have taken one step across the line of protection, the belt of urban needs and values each of them carry strapped tight about them, they will find themselves in a world as tricky and uncertain, as full of strangeness, as any wood near Athens. No friendly greenwood, fixed by poets; no wise gnome-tapped mountain; no gracious sea. *The dragon-green, the luminous, the dark, serpent-haunted*. Will they face it? When the Sirens are back at their business, sisters of the Harpies, the Snatchers? When the tripper-steamer – her bows to the sun – turns into the boat called Millions-of-Years?

Quiet in the woods. They can be very quiet when a wind from nowhere lifts in the tree-tops and through the pine-needles clashing the noise of a harp runs down the trunks into the earth. *And no birds sing*.<sup>112</sup>

Butts here ends with a quotation from Keats' 'La belle dame sans merci', calling up a stern female nature spirit. If both dragon green and classical allusion are, by implication, unknown to hikers, nature knowledge and classical learning might yet combine to repel them, creating, in the divine sense, Panic.

## IX. Conclusion

Mary Butts draws out cultural consequences of ghosts, the magics which might be worked, the claims to authority which might be made, the effects of one spectral aesthetic over another, the conventions through which ghosts perform, the thought which they might enlist. Alerting us to such matters, Butts can serve, in a time of academic fascination for the spectral, to direct us beyond the obvious dead (obvious for their anticipation of contemporary concerns or their clear theoretical antecedence), opening up the choice of ghostly guests who might fill any geographical ghost box. If ghosts notionally manifest at will, uncannily beyond the control of the haunted, there are evidently various strategies which invite their appearance, devices making haunting likely. The cultural history of ghosts shows the spectral as a carefully constructed and contrived field of pleasures and anxieties, with a range of investigative methodologies and techniques. Sensibilities of spectral retrieval include: genial folkloric gathering, the scavenging of found objects, delight in arcane scholarship, the tracing of lines of influence and descent, the identification and registering of things out of time (pre-supposing the ability to diagnose and juxtapose temporalities), connoisseurship of the strange antique, the pursuit of effects from terror to whimsy. The episodic structure of this paper has in part sought to echo Wylie's call that 'spectral geographies should themselves be spectral',<sup>113</sup> setting dimensions of ghostly work alongside one another, laying out material carrying resonance for the contemporary if without clear lessons to be learned or instruction to be imbibed, presenting in Mary Butts a person fit to haunt a contemporary geography of ghosts. To conclude, the paper returns to the geographical curios which opened the account. Introducing Mary Butts to Hans Speier, Montague Summers and E. A. Reeves indicates further possibilities.

Butts and Speier take their magic for different ends; Butts to search for select knowledge, Speier to deposit the magic of Nazi propaganda maps into a trash can, a gesture

unsurprising for a refugee from Germany finding haven in the USA. Butts might also have put propaganda maps alongside official Celticism as a myth constructed narrowly for state power, yet seeks throughout her work to give belief foundation, reserving scepticism for what she might have regarded as a cult of reason. While her work shows fascination for a potential 'science of mysticism',<sup>114</sup> the latter is a term implying not sceptical explanation but the elevation of mystery. Psychoanalysis could for Butts sit as a practice drawing on myth and mimicking science yet ending as a symptom of rather than solution for modern dilemmas. Suspicion towards the claims of reason leads Butts towards an embrace of a truth defined as in essence supernatural. Magic ultimately points the way.

Not all magic though. Summers' Catholic discrimination is matched in Butts' rejection of the once-admired Crowley, whose magic is rejected as misguided or even charlatanry. Butts can pursue a comparative religion via Frazer, can suppose insights proceed from the mythic mutuality of different traditions, yet is always ready to dismiss myths deemed of lower order. Present in the very high modernist circles anathema to Summers, and with rather more sympathy for witchcraft, Butts nevertheless echoes his desire for foundation, her experiments in artistic life leading in the end to an embrace of Anglo-Catholicism. Butts' March 1935 description of her Sennen Cove garden as a nature sacrament is no pagan evocation: 'Yet today I praised God and Our Lady from my soul for this afternoon's gardening. A nature sacrament with the flowers and the earth and the quickening sun'.<sup>115</sup> Butts works across supernatures to end in orthodoxy.

It is doubtful that Butts ever haunted the RGS, though she might have unknowingly shared an underground carriage with E. A. Reeves. To approach ghosts and the occult via psychic research carries in Butts' work an aura of worthy yet futile scientism, a respect for the supernatural expressed through a misguided desire to search it out and pin it down. The consolations of spiritualism, of conversations with grandmother via ectoplasm over the suburban table, miss the wonders of mana and tabu. The sensibility which takes Butts to Badbury rather than the séance, which entertains the possibility that an approach to the Grail might be discerned, signals another distinction between Butts and Reeves. Studies of spiritualism indicate the ways in which magic circles draw from particular social circles, with the psychic pursuits appealing to Reeves via séances or domestic experiments in his Surrey home being associated with the middle or upper working classes.<sup>116</sup> Butts and Reeves show in their different ways how magic as social practice works through cultural distinction. Pursuing the occult with Crowley during her six weeks at his Abbey of Thelema at Cefalu in Sicily in the summer of 1921 was one thing; one doubts Butts would have been seen dead at a suburban séance. The supernatural for Butts acts as the supersocial, a device to mark out an elite, elect crowd.

Remarkable writings follow. Butts retains a presence through her novels, stories, essays and journals, works worthy of remark if not, for everyone, things to delight in. Labelling Butts as an 'acquired taste' would however be to exhibit precisely those judgements of aesthetic value which she sought and lived through; the assumption being that most people would neither wish nor be able to acquire such taste. Butts' rarefied modernism of high style, like her essay on 'Ghosties and Ghoulies' – whose title, gesturing to the popular and amusing, simply gives it house room while seeking to go much further – helps highlight her aesthetic of the ghost, always a geoaesthetic of haunted sites, spatial encounters and arcane claims to

places deemed special. We should not however thereby assume that such self-evidently magical style exhausts a ghostly geoaesthetic. To use Butts' own already-cited phrase, 'it is cult that is fatal', and questions of aesthetic value do not only pertain through Butts' claimed aesthetic values. If Butts' work is distinctive and remarkable, it carries no unique capacity. Any person calling up ghosts, through whatever modes of expression and experience, might receive similar treatment to that given in this essay, whether 'third-rate journalists', 'the vulgar stuff', 'authors with a psychic axe to grind', fatal cultists. Speier, Summers and Reeves play out their own geographical aesthetic of the spectral, the magical, the demonic, the religious, whether through an aesthetic of clearly supreme reason, discriminating veneration, or credulous enquiry concerning visions of Lord Kitchener on a Surrey bedroom wall. A world of geographic possibility becomes apparent. Mary Butts' choice of ghostly guests can, in its distinctive elective manner, help alert us to a geography of ghosts beyond anything she might have imagined.

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## Biographical note

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> D. Livingstone, *The geographical tradition* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992), pp. 349–50.
- <sup>2</sup> H. Speier, 'Magic geography', *Social research* 8 (1941), pp. 310–30, quotation p. 313; Speier was a Jewish émigré political sociologist who left Germany to join the Graduate faculty of the New School for Social Research in New York. Between 1942 and 1948 Speier carried out US government service, including for the State Department, before joining the Rand Corporation as head of their Social Science Division.
- <sup>3</sup> M. Summers, *The geography of witchcraft* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1927), pp. 184–5; M. Summers, *The history of witchcraft and demonology* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1926). For a more consciously sober enquiry into witchcraft in a specific geographical historical context (sixteenth century Essex), carefully mapping events and prosecutions, see A. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: a regional and comparative study* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

- <sup>4</sup> M. Summers, *The gothic quest* (London, The Fortune Press, 1968), p. 412; first published 1938.
- <sup>5</sup> E. A. Reeves, *The recollections of a geographer* (London, Seeley, Service and Co., 1916), pp. 190–1.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- <sup>7</sup> Relevant cultural histories include: J. Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British society between the wars* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000); A. Owen, *The place of enchantment: British occultism and the culture of the modern* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004); A. Owen, *The darkened room: women, power and spiritualism in late nineteenth century Britain* (London, Virago, 1989); A. Owen, 'Occultism and the "modern" self in fin-de-siècle Britain', in M. Dauntton and B. Rieger, eds, *Meanings of modernity* (Oxford, Berg, 2001), pp. 71–96; R. Luckhurst, *The invention of telepathy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002); W. de Blecourt, R. Hutton and J. La Fontaine, *Witchcraft and magic in Europe: the twentieth century* (London, Athlone, 1999); M. Warner, *Phantasmagoria: spirit visions, metaphors, and media into the twenty-first century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006).
- <sup>8</sup> P. Buse and A. Stott, 'Introduction: a future for haunting', in P. Buse and A. Stott, eds, *Ghosts: deconstruction, psychoanalysis, history* (London, Macmillan, 1999), pp. 1–20, quotation p. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3; J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (London, Routledge, 1994); S. Freud, 'The "uncanny"', in S. Freud, *Art and literature: the Pelican Freud library volume 14* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985), pp. 339–76. For a fine reflection on spectrality in recent music, through the work of the Ghost Box label and others, see S. Reynolds, 'Haunted audio', *The Wire* 273 (November 2006), pp. 26–33.
- <sup>10</sup> Buse and Stott, 'Introduction', p. 5.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>13</sup> D. Punter, 'Introduction: of apparitions', in G. Byron and D. Punter, eds, *Spectral readings: towards a Gothic geography* (London, Macmillan, 1999), pp. 1–10, quotation p. 4.
- <sup>14</sup> R. Luckhurst, 'The contemporary London Gothic and the limits of the "spectral turn"', *Textual practice* 16 (2002), pp. 527–46.
- <sup>15</sup> Luckhurst, 'The contemporary London Gothic', p. 534.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 528.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 536; cf. D. Pinder, 'Ghostly footsteps: voices, memories and walks in the city', *Cultural geographies* 8 (2001), pp. 1–19.
- <sup>18</sup> Luckhurst, 'The contemporary London Gothic', p. 542. See also R. Luckhurst, '"Something tremendous, something elemental": on the ghostly origins of psychoanalysis', in P. Buse and A. Stott, eds, *Ghosts: deconstruction, psychoanalysis, history* (London, Macmillan, 1999), pp. 50–71. Here Luckhurst explores the 'ghostly origins of psychoanalysis', suggesting that 'what haunts Freud is haunting itself, both in its transgressive structure and in the many contemporaneous psychologies fully imbricated in ghosts, ghost-hunting and other communications outside recognized channels' (p. 52). Luckhurst discusses Freud's own anxious writings on the occult, noting Derrida's discussion of the occult as 'an exemplary instance of liminal anxiety' for psychoanalysis (p. 56), but suggests this may have been less about fear of association with pseudo-science than worry that occult thinkers, especially in England the Society for Psychical Research (for whom Freud wrote a paper in 1912), may have been more orthodox and rigorously close to dominant orthodox psychology, from which Freud was being marginalized. Luckhurst argues that Freud sensed something about the ghostly which could add to psychoanalysis: 'In this, Freud is like many of his fin-de-siècle contemporaries, who underwent the strange experience of working with a de-mystificatory positivism that actually helped produce a disturbing, remystified and occulted supplement that exceeded "rational" science' (p. 65). Mary Butts' writing sought in part to offer contemporaneous dramatizations of such argument.
- <sup>19</sup> C. Barnett, 'Deconstructing context: exposing Derrida', *Transactions of the institute of British geographers* 24 (1999), pp. 277–94, quotation p. 285. Kneale notes Barnett's arguments in his essay on the horror writing of H. P. Lovecraft, suggesting that while 'contextual, historicist readings of Lovecraft'

- are not 'worthless', we might instead 'read his work as *literature* – rather than as biography or history, once removed'; J. Kneale, 'From beyond: H. P. Lovecraft and the place of horror', *Cultural geographies* 13 (2006), pp. 106–26, quotation p. 108. Rather than deconstructing context, however, Kneale seems here only to reinstate a crude opposition of the historical/biographical and the literary. Barnett himself similarly ends falling back into distinction when concluding that 'a geography of texts must be premised upon movement, spacing and difference, rather than upon place, identity and containment', 'Deconstructing context', p. 290.
- <sup>20</sup> Buse and Stott, 'Introduction', p. 1.
- <sup>21</sup> J. Wylie, 'The spectral geographies of W. G. Sebald', *Cultural geographies* 14 (2007), pp. 171–88; C. Nash, 'Visionary geographies: designs for developing Ireland', *History workshop journal* 45 (1998), pp. 49–78. Also see D. Dixon, 'A benevolent and sceptical enquiry: exploring 'Fortean Geographies' with the Mothman', *Cultural geographies* 14 (2007), pp. 189–210.
- <sup>22</sup> J. Lowerson, 'The mystical geography of the English', in B. Short, ed., *The English rural community* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 152–74, quotation p. 171.
- <sup>23</sup> Freud, 'The "uncanny"', p. 340.
- <sup>24</sup> M. Butts, *The crystal cabinet* (Manchester, Carcanet, 1988); first published 1937.
- <sup>25</sup> N. Blondel, *Mary Butts: scenes from the life* (New York, McPherson, 1998); see also N. Blondel, 'Mary Butts', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. A selection of Butts' journals appears in N. Blondel, ed., *The journals of Mary Butts* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002). On Butts' writings see also C. Wagstaff, ed., *A sacred quest: the life and writings of Mary Butts* (New York, McPherson, 1995); R. R. Foy, *Ritual, myth, and mysticism in the work of Mary Butts* (Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, 2000); P. Wright, 'Coming back to the shores of Albion: the secret England of Mary Butts (1890–1937)', in P. Wright, *On living in an old country* (London, Verso, 1985), pp. 93–134; P. Wright, *The village that died for England* (London, Faber and Faber, 2002), pp. 95–108; J. Garrity, *Step-daughters of England: British women modernists and the national imaginary* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003), esp. chapter 4, 'Mary Butts' England'; M. Hamer, 'Mary Butts, mothers, and war', in S. Raitt and T. Tate, eds, *Women's fiction and the great war* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1997), pp. 219–40; J. Rose, 'Bizarre objects: Mary Butts and Elizabeth Bowen', *Critical quarterly* 42 (2000), pp. 75–85.
- <sup>26</sup> Editions of key works by Mary Butts discussed in this essay are as follows: *Ashe of Rings*, in M. Butts, *Ashe of Rings and other writings* (New York, McPherson, 1998), pp. 1–232; *Armed with madness* (London, Penguin, 2001); *Death of Felicity Taverner*, in M. Butts, *The Taverner novels* (New York, McPherson, 1992 – edition also includes *Armed with madness*); *Warning to bikers*, in M. Butts, *Ashe of Rings and other writings* (New York, McPherson, 1998), pp. 267–96; *Traps for unbelievers*, in M. Butts, *Ashe of Rings and other writings* (New York, McPherson, 1998), pp. 297–332; "'Ghosties and Ghoulies': uses of the supernatural in English fiction", in M. Butts, *Ashe of Rings and other writings* (New York, McPherson, 1998), pp. 331–64. *The Macedonian* and *Scenes from the life of Cleopatra* are collected in M. Butts, *The classical novels* (New York, McPherson, 1994).
- <sup>27</sup> C. Bagg, 'Foreword', in M. Butts, *Crystal cabinet*, p. v.
- <sup>28</sup> Wright, 'Coming back', p. 96.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- <sup>30</sup> J. Weston, *From ritual to romance* (New York, Doubleday, 1957). On the influence of Harrison and Weston on Butts see Foy, *Ritual*, pp. 51–8. On Harrison see M. Beard, *The invention of Jane Harrison* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000). For an excellent essay on Butts' relation to such material in her 'adventure of the sacred', and the ways in which this connected to 1920s modernism, see R. Blaser, "'Here lies the woodpecker who was Zeus'", in Wagstaff, *Sacred quest*, pp. 159–224, quotation p. 165. Of Butts' complex engagement with the Grail in *Armed with madness*, Blaser explores how she 'tests the symbol' through its various uses and properties (p. 171), and presents Butts as pursuing, along with writers such as William Carlos Williams, a 'relational imagination' of



- place (p. 162). On Butts and Crowley see Blondel, *Mary Butts*, pp. 102–6, Foy, *Ritual*, pp. 96–7, and Butts' own descriptions in Blondel, *Journals*, pp. 184–7. Crowley is the subject of A. Owen, 'The sorcerer and his apprentice: Aleister Crowley and the magical exploration of Edwardian subjectivity', *Journal of British studies* 36 (1997), pp. 99–133.
- <sup>31</sup> Garrity, *Step-daughters*, p. 189, also pp. 221–4; also Blondel, *Mary Butts*, pp. 83–4.
- <sup>32</sup> Garrity, *Step-daughters*, p. 189. See also A. Radford, 'Defending nature's holy shrine: Mary Butts, Englishness, and the Persephone myth', *Journal of modern literature* 29 (2006), pp. 126–49.
- <sup>33</sup> Garrity, *Step-daughters*, p. 219; also Blondel, *Mary Butts*, pp. 308–11. Felicity is discussed in the context of Butts' wider approach to the supernatural in B. O'Brien Wagstaff, 'The effectual angel in *Death of Felicity Taverner*', in Wagstaff, *Sacred quest*, pp. 224–42.
- <sup>34</sup> Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', p. 363.
- <sup>35</sup> Butts would also send out a questionnaire to various writers on their supernatural experiences in January 1935, a project for a possible collection, which came to nothing; see Blondel, *Journals*, p. 442.
- <sup>36</sup> Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', p. 363.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338. Butts' one formal ghost story, 'With and without buttons', is discussed below. Of contemporary writers Butts also praises E. M. Forster, 'whose special sensibility, curiosity and faith makes him indifferent to any ultimate distinction between pagan and Christian supernatural values' (p. 361), and May Sinclair's *Uncanny tales*, then recently reissued. The latter (billed as *Uncanny stories*) are the starting point of Glover's essay 'The "spectrality" effect in early modernism', in A. Smith and J. Wallace, eds, *Gothic modernisms* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001), pp. 29–43, and are the subject of Seed's essay in same volume, '"Psychical" cases: transformations of the supernatural in Virginia Woolf and May Sinclair', pp. 44–61.
- <sup>44</sup> M. Butts, 'The art of Montague James', *The London mercury* 29(172), February 1934, pp. 306–17. Extracts are collected in S. K. Hall, ed., *Twentieth-century literary criticism, volume 6* (Detroit, Gale Research Company, 1982), pp. 206–8. Quotations here are given page references for the latter collection first, and then Butts' original article; pp. 207, 307.
- <sup>45</sup> Butts, 'Art of Montague James', pp. 207, 307–8.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207, 312.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208, 317.
- <sup>48</sup> Butts, *Traps for unbelievers*, p. 312; Blaser, 'Here lies...', p. 187.
- <sup>49</sup> Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', p. 337.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333–4.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338–9.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354; as with Harrison, Butts was influenced by Gilbert Murray's work on Greek religion. For recent geographical discussion of the Celtic see D. C. Harvey, R. Jones, N. McInroy and C. Milligan, eds, *Celtic geographies* (London, Routledge, 2002).
- <sup>57</sup> Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', p. 353.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354–5.

- <sup>59</sup> In December 1933 Butts reviewed nine books in *The Bookman* under the title 'Magic of person and place'; see below.
- <sup>60</sup> Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', p. 335; see also Blondel, *Journals*, pp. 370–3 for Butts' October 1931 account of her 'Personal experiences of supernormal perception'.
- <sup>61</sup> Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', pp. 350–1.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342. Butts is here praising Scottish and Border poems and Thomas the Rhymer.
- <sup>64</sup> Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', p. 349.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349–50.
- <sup>67</sup> Garrity, *Step-daughters*, p. 229; Wright, 'Coming Back', p. 117.
- <sup>68</sup> P. Nash, *Dorset: a shell guide* (London, Architectural Press, 1936), p. 10; Nash's book includes a watercolour of Badbury Rings, p. 20.
- <sup>69</sup> Butts, *Crystal cabinet*, p. 266; Blondel, *Mary Butts*, pp. 113–4, notes a poem written in her early twenties, 'On Badbury Rings', and a magical 1922 visit there with friends.
- <sup>70</sup> Butts, *Crystal cabinet*, p. 265.
- <sup>71</sup> Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', p. 357.
- <sup>72</sup> Page references here are given to the story's appearance in the collection M. Butts, *With and without buttons* (Manchester, Carcanet, 1991), pp. 85–99. The story also appears in M. Butts, *From altar to chimney-piece: selected stories* (New York, McPherson, 1992), pp. 22–38. 'With and without buttons' was first published posthumously in 1938 in *Last Stories*. From a journal entry on 23 October 1932 discussing the draft of an essay on 'Use of the supernatural', it would appear that the story was completed before the essay, but the two evidently developed together; Blondel, *Journals*, p. 403. Butts sought to dedicate the story to M. R. James (with whom she had correspondence in 1922), and her journal for 21 September 1932 included a draft of a letter to James: 'I've at last managed to write a ghost story myself which should come out soon – in *The Adelphi* or something like that – anyhow in a book – and given any quality it may have it owes to your influence, I want to be allowed to dedicate it to you'. Butts says that if she does not hear from James she will assume a dedication is in order; Blondel notes that the journal does not mention any response from James. The story was eventually published without a dedication; Blondel, *Journals*, p. 401.
- <sup>73</sup> Butts, 'With and without buttons', p. 86–7.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86–7. The narrator states that the point of this power is 'that it shall have nothing to do with sex. We could have made him make love, to either or both of us, any day of the week', p. 87.
- <sup>77</sup> Butts, 'With and without buttons', p. 88.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- <sup>82</sup> Butts, *Crystal cabinet*, p. 150.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152; allusions to ghosts also come when a ghost of a suicide girl who saw her lover hang is said to walk the sand-hills, p. 161, or when the dining room, the last room untouched after her father's death, is described: 'at any time one might meet one's father's ghost', p. 159.
- <sup>84</sup> Butts, *Crystal cabinet*, p. 192.
- <sup>85</sup> See also Butts' description of an encounter with a male 'full size figure I wish I could forget' at Sennen in March 1935: 'I had, I think, been repeating a psalm, and there was a protection round me'; Blondel, *Journals*, p. 445.

- <sup>86</sup> Blondel, *Mary Butts*, p. 288. For a reverent appreciation of Butts in Sennen, see D. Hope, 'Mary Butts, fire-bearer', in Wagstaff, *Sacred quest*, pp. 21–4. Hope's essay was first published in 1937, after Butts' death, as number 1 in a 'Sennen Pamphlet Series'; this would seem to have been the first and last pamphlet. See also Harcourt Wesson Bull's memoir, 'Truth is the heart's desire', in the same volume, pp. 53–88, including a possible meeting with Butts' ghost at Sennen soon after her death, p. 80.
- <sup>87</sup> Blondel, *Journals*, p. 444, also quoted in Blondel, *Mary Butts*, p. 290.
- <sup>88</sup> Butts, *Crystal cabinet*, p. 251.
- <sup>89</sup> Butts writes in her journal on 12 March 1933 of the strength of the sun in a Cornish early spring: 'No longer can one say "England" here'; Blondel, *Journals*, p. 420. On the imaginative geographies of Cornwall see E. Westland, ed., *Cornwall: the cultural construction of place* (Penzance, Patten Press, 1997); P. Payton, *Cornwall – a history* (Fowey, Cornwall Editions, 2004), A. Hale, 'Whose Celtic Cornwall? The ethnic Cornish meet Celtic spirituality', in D. C. Harvey et al., eds, *Celtic geographies*, pp. 157–70; E. Westland, 'D. H. Lawrence in Cornwall: dwelling in a precarious age', *Cultural geographies* 9 (2002), pp. 266–85.
- <sup>90</sup> Quoted in Blondel, *Mary Butts*, p. 287.
- <sup>91</sup> Blondel, *Journals*, entries for 11 December 1932, p. 407, and 7 January 1933, p. 410.
- <sup>92</sup> See Blondel, *Mary Butts*, pp. 365–7, pp. 407–10. The reputation of St Hilary and Walke was furthered when the church was the object of physical attack by a Protestant sect in August 1932. On Walke see D. Allchin, *Bernard Walke: a good man who could never be dull* (Abergavenny, Three Peaks Press, 2000); C. Phillips, 'Mystical geographies of Cornwall', University of Nottingham PhD thesis, 2006.
- <sup>93</sup> Blondel, *Mary Butts*, p. 291.
- <sup>94</sup> Blondel, *Journals*, p. 468, entry for 29 January 1937.
- <sup>95</sup> Williamson, editorial note at the beginning of M. Butts, 'The magic of person and place', *The Bookman*, vol. 85, December 1933, pp. 141–3, quotation p. 141.
- <sup>96</sup> Butts, 'Magic of person and place', p. 141.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141–2.
- <sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142; Hencken was an American archaeologist who moved to live in Cornwall; his *The archaeology of Cornwall and Scilly* (London, Methuen, 1932) was the first major orthodox professional archaeological work on the subject.
- <sup>99</sup> Blondel, *Journals*, entries for 29 January 1932, p. 379, and 1 February 1932, p. 380. Notwithstanding Butts' own unconventional 'morals', the latter would seem a straightforwardly negative comment.
- <sup>100</sup> Blondel, *Mary Butts*, pp. 394–5.
- <sup>101</sup> Blondel, *Journals*, p. 467, entry for 9 January 1937.
- <sup>102</sup> Butts, *Death of Felicity Taverner*, p. 249.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259. In *The crystal cabinet* a parallel narrative of the magic of dwelling place liable to erosion shapes Butts' story of Salterns and its subsequent 1923 sale and break up for development into 'the maggot-knot of dwellings that was once my home' (p. 16): 'Place I shall never see again, now they have violated it, now that body has been put to vile use, such uses as men from cities do to such places as these; such uses as its own people do not know how to prevent' (p. 15).
- <sup>104</sup> Butts, *Death of Felicity Taverner*, p. 343.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356; Boris addresses Felicity's ghost on p. 358.
- <sup>108</sup> Butts, *Death of Felicity Taverner*, p. 364.
- <sup>109</sup> Wright, 'Coming back', p. 124.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119; see also Wright, *Village*; Radford, 'Defending'. Garrity, *Step-daughters*, pp. 196–201 discusses *Warning to hikers*, including Butts presenting the country as a feminized landscape violated and prostituted by modernity.
- <sup>112</sup> Butts, *Warning to hikers*, pp. 294–5. On Butts' evocation of green see Wright, 'Coming back', p. 109. On forms of green see P. Bishop, *The greening of psychology* (Dallas, Spring Publications, 1990). Foy, p. 93, would seem to misread this passage on lack of bird-song as an anticipation of Rachel Carson. The motif of harp sounds from wind in trees also accompanies the terror of a mock-sacrificial scene at a thinly disguised Badbury Rings in *Ashe of Rings*, helping to protect heroine Vanna from her attacker Peter as she lies on the stone in the centre of the ring, Butts, *Ashe*, p. 189. The phrase 'The dragon-green, the luminous, the dark, serpent-haunted sea' appears in James Elroy Flecker's 1913 poem 'The Gates of Damascus'. Butts also quotes this in her journal for 12 September 1918; Blondel, *Journals*, p. 104. Other parts of the poem are quoted in her journal for 26 October 1917; Blondel, *Journals*, pp. 89–90.
- <sup>113</sup> Wylie, 'Spectral geographies', p. 184.
- <sup>114</sup> See for example Butts' journal for 1 February 1930, where she writes at length on the possible components of a 'science of mysticism'; Blondel, *Journals*, pp. 341–3.
- <sup>115</sup> Blondel, *Journals*, p. 444; entry for 2 March 1935; the same entry records acquiring an ashtray with her sign of the zodiac, and an encounter with a ghost at Sennen; Christianity had not entirely taken over her mythic imagination. For a parallel case of Christian nature theology by a strikingly parallel figure see D. Matless and L. Cameron, 'Devotional landscape: ecology and orthodoxy in the work of Marietta Pallis', in M. Conan, ed., *Sacred gardens and landscapes: ritual and agency* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2007, pp. 263–294).
- <sup>116</sup> Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism*; Owen, *The darkened room*.